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SUDAN STUDIES

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EDITORIAL NOTE

I must apologise to all members for the late arrival of this, the sixteenth issue of *Sudan Studies*. As I remarked to those members of the Society who were present at the AGM and one-day symposium in September, up to that time I had not received enough material to fill an issue of anything like the normal length. However matters have improved somewhat since then, and the picture also looks better for issue No. 17, which I hope to have prepared by the end of January, thereby getting back to our normal publication schedule. However I must as ever repeat my plea to all members to provide material for inclusion.

Please note my new address, to which all correspondence relating to *Sudan Studies* should be sent:

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This issue contains a useful balance of articles and features, including two accounts of the proceedings of the Third International Meeting of Sudan Studies, and more soberly, the full text of a recent Amnesty International report on the Human Rights situation in the Sudan, together with a selection of book reviews.

Paul Wilson



THE UNITY OF SUDAN: THE FADING HOPE

We knew that the slogan of 'One Sudan' voiced by the Northern intelligentsia, has no foundation. It is but the accident of Western rule that has brought peoples so completely different under one rule (J.S Trimingham, 1949)¹

Introduction

Whatever Trimingham's motives were, this statement is right. For had the common good, and consent of the people been recognised by the international community as the only conditions for any different people to stay together, it is almost definite that the Sudanese people would not have remained in one country today. At least we could have had two sovereign states, one in the North and the other in the South; a possibility which is now more eminent than any time in the past. For what divides these two parts is almost everything, apart from the name that they both inherited from their historical masters. The geography, the demography, the culture, the language, the religion, the customs, the way of living, the aspirations,...you name a difference and it is there.

Having said that, however, I must add that nothing can prevent any people, no matter how different they are, from forming a united civil society if two elements of governance are met; the common good of the society, and the mutual respect of its members, and here lies the problem of Sudan. For what really enflamed the division is a constant disregard of these two essential elements of governance, on the part of the dominant North coupled by a history of abuse, that did not only deny the people of the South their rights as citizens of the state, but also their worth as human beings.

Indeed, we must also state that similar, but not equal, denial of rights and worth has also marked the political conduct within the North. This is evident in the relation between the centre and the peripherals, the matter which has alienated the North's regional entities. Such alienation found its expression in the regional political movements which tried to alert the centre, as early as possible, and by peaceful political means, to the dangers lying ahead. Darfur Development Front, the Nuba Mountains Union, and the Beja Congress have been struggling for economic development and a kind of federalism or regional autonomy. However, their struggle was shrugged off by the centre after they were dubbed *Harakat Unsuriyah*, that is {racist movements}². The lint that these regions have resorted to arms after



four decades of political persuasion is a blatant proof, to many, that adopting peaceful means in the struggle with the centre is no more than being futile. Military action has at least given the Southern cause national and an international recognition, and a ticket to the negotiating table with whatever government was in Khartoum.

On the whole, the problem of Sudan in essence is a crisis of governance that emanates from a crisis of identity. The North, represented in its political parties, have always looked for its identity beyond the borders of Sudan. Either to the Arab world, or to the Islamic world. This phenomenon is not new. It characterised a historical period that is much celebrated by the North, namely the Mahdist revolution. To the Mahdi, however, Sudan is only a transitional place that he happened to be in when he started his movement to return the whole Islamic world to the pure basins of Islam. His eyes were set on Mekka, and he never mentioned the name 'Sudan', in all his writings, except once or twice³, wherein he gives it a feminine gender, probably following the early Arabs who first gave the country its name by referring to it as *Biladassudan*, which means the land of the blacks, and to which the gender reference in Arabic language is feminine.

In the same manner, those who inherited the rule from the British never tried to find their pride in what they share with their country folks. On the contrary, they always looked for their pride in what they share with their Arab brothers, despite the fact that what they share with those is little, if not precarious, and more importantly that they are looked down upon, as inferior 'brothers', if not *Abeed*, that is slaves.

Peculiarly enough, now, with the advent of the rule of National Islamic Front (NIF), the formula of al-Mahadi was reproduced. The old brew is reheated again and again, mixed with some imported bitter, and served to the poor Sudanese people in sundry. Sudan now is merely a liberated land from the would-be Islamic caliphate. And to those who were astonished by the transformation of the war in the South to a *jihad*, i.e., Islamic Holy war, and shocked by the scene of non-Sudanese fanatics carrying guns in the streets of Khartoum, and massacring innocent Sudanese people, whether in the war zones in the South, the Nuba Mountains, and the foots of Jabal Mara in Darfur, or in Umdurman, (where people were killed in mid of their prayer)⁴, the answer is so simple. The Sudan government takes its pride in the tie of Islam, not in that of citizenship of Sudan. Consequently, the government regards only the Muslims, as deserving the right of citizenship, and sets out rallying them from all over the Islamic



world, to conquer and control the rest of the Sudanese people. Of course there is a proviso here, in this transitional phase of the pan Islamic dream of the International Movement of the Muslim Brothers. The proviso is that not all Muslims are considered true Muslims. Only those who share the movement its version of Islam, i.e. the fanatics, are the true ones. So, no wonder that the government has granted the Sudanese citizenship to these fanatics whether from Iran, Afghanistan, or the Arab world, whereas it withdrew this natural right from the Sudanese whose ancestors have lived in this land for thousands of years.

It is my thesis, here, however, that whenever you identify with people outside Sudan you are bound to despise those Sudanese who do not identify with you, and to suppress them if you happen to hold the rein of power. Thus the problem does not really lie in the South, or in the other regions. The people in these regions never found it difficult to take their pride in themselves as Sudanese. The problem lies in the North. It is in the souls and minds of the ruling class. Hence, the real solution to this problem is not to be sought only in any prescription of government, but in a change of mentality and morality, and in a search of identity within the borders of our country.

If the North didn't create the 'so-called' Southern problem, it aggravates it, and ironically, when at last a theoretical solution was available, it is the South that was to provide it. The SPLA/SPLM went to address the problem at its deep roots, and suggested *Sudanism* as a foundation of the building of our nation. If we take pride in ourselves as Sudanese first and foremost, we will be inclined to respect our other fellow Sudanese, and recognise them as our equals. From here we start to devise our political and social system to fulfil this end. The American model was offered as an example after which we can mold our own system. The Americans came from different backgrounds, but they formed a nation in which all the people have equal constitutional rights. This doesn't prevent any American individual to be proud of his or her origins. We can do this in Sudan⁵, so rightly they say.

The Unity of Sudan

The 'unity' of Sudan is basically a Northern banner under which all the political parties in the North have marched. To these parties, the word 'unity' meant nothing else than denying the South its political demands, which traditionally ranged from 'federation' to 'self



determination'. On the other hand, the South has always been, either suspicious and reluctant to endorse this 'unity', or met it with outright rejection. Nevertheless, it can safely be said that never did the Northern parties unite upon a single political issue, be it internal or external, like they did on the Southern issue. This was the norm from Juba conference in 1947, to the Round Table conference in 1965, right down to the Kurmuk short-lived occupation by SPLA forces in 1987, during which all the parties of the North displayed a kind of 'unity', in supporting the army against the rebels, that has amounted to a wave of insanity. In the following lines, we will elaborate on each of these incidents.

The Juba conference

The Northern parties claim that the Southerners accepted the unity in Juba conference in 1947. The South, on the other hand, questions the whole affair on basis of inadequate representation of the South in the conference, if not misrepresentation. However, there are a couple of historical facts which should be mentioned. The first historical fact is that the fate of the South had already been determined by the 'New Southern Policy' of the British coloniser, in favour of the 'unity' with the North two years before the conference was convened⁶. The second is that the conference was convened in conditions that rendered the Southern representatives defenceless against their superior counterparts, the British and the Northerners. At the opening speeches of the conference the British officials made it clear to the Southern delegation that their official policy was that there was no longer consideration for the South as a separate entity or as part of some 'East Africa Federation', and that it had to remain an integral part of Sudan⁷.

Thus the only room of manoeuvre left to the Southerners was to reveal their many apprehensions towards that unity and to sound their demands for safeguards that maintain their cultural and social integrity. The British officials themselves felt that their position was unfair to the South, but they justified it to themselves on the strange hypothesis that "it is not beyond possibility that the Southern Sudanese may not, in the end, choose differently when they are able fully to appreciate all the issues"⁸. All that is conveniently overlooked by Northerners whenever they refer to Juba conference.



The Round Table Conference

In this event, where some conducive circumstances for the Southerners availed themselves in Sudan, and enabled them to voice their views, they did not choose the unity, to Sir Robinson's disappointment. In that conference the Northern leaders came to realise that they were viewed by the Southerners as nothing more than the descendants of Arab slave traders and colonisers⁹. There was not a united Southern position regarding the relation with the North, but none of the parties was prepared to produce proposals that would exclude separation or independence, or even to meet the Northern proposals of some sort of autonomy in the South within a united Sudan, halfway¹⁰. On the other hand, the unity of the Northern parties on the issue was displayed by choosing Dr. Hassan al-Turabi to present the Northern point of view on their behalf¹¹. Nevertheless, it must be said that the Round Table Conference itself would not have taken place had not the dispersed progressive forces in the North made their mark in the political events during and shortly after the 1964 October revolution.

The Kurmuk Occupation

During this event, the unity of the Northern parties was remarkable, and very telling to the Southerners indeed. There was a complete hysteria that spared nobody. The two main ruling parties, the Umma and the Democratic Unionist (DUP) both turned to their Arab brothers for support against this 'foreign-inspired' attack against '*Urubat Assudan*', the Arabic nature and Characteristics of the country. Sadiq al-Mahadi contacted Libya and the Gulf, whereas Sayid Mohammad Uthman al-Marghani went to Iraq and brought with him a huge armament. The NIF was rallying its supporters in the streets, raising funds for the army that was let down by a weak government, and throwing accusations of 'fifth-columnists' in all directions. The Communist Party, either been engulfed in this hysteric atmosphere, or desperate to take itself off the hook of 'fifth columnist', decided to join in this myopia, and sent its leader, Nuqud, to give the army their support in words and in kind, while their paper criticised this uncalculated move by the SPLA/SPLM.

This reaction was very telling to the Southerners because just before the Kurmuk operation, the SPLA occupied a number of government garrisons, namely Yirole, Lanya, and Jokaw¹².



The last of these was occupied a short time before Kurmuk, but none of them has aroused such reaction. The only explanation that offers itself is that because Kurmuk is part of the North, not the South. Therefore, it is much more dearer to the government than those in the South. A distinction between towns that symbolised a distinction between people. Some towns are more important than others, some people are more precious than others. In the case of Jakow, it is the army's problem and it was left to it to deal with alone, but in the case of Kurmuk, nay, it is the North's problem, and the North must deal with it. Where does the separatist behaviour and mentality lie then? Whatever might be said about the SPLA occupation of Kurmuk, it essentially reflects the national and unionist, i.e. not regional, and separatist, objectives of the movement. Whereas the Northern parties' reaction, reflects exactly the opposite, and the implied message to the Southerners is that; 'do not, even in your remotest dreams, contemplate the idea of playing any major role beyond the boundaries of the South'.

Major Developments in the North/South Relations

Three major developments have left their mark in the North/South relations. The emergence of the SPLA/SPLM in the South in March 1983, the NIF coup d'état in the North in June 1989, and the Washington Declaration in October 1993.

The Emergence of the SPLA/SPLM

Traditionally, the political and military Southern movements have struggled for self-determination from the start. They failed to achieve that mainly because the old World order did not permit it. The inherited borders of all countries were honoured and protected by the UN, and by the two superpowers. Also the Organisation of African Unity (OAU), by its nature, was not ready to allow such a serious violation to its own objectives to take place and set an alarming precedent in a continent lying in so many time bombs. However, in such a situation, the word 'separatists' became an effective propaganda weapon in the hand of the North against the South¹³. Such weapon was not only used against the real separatists who were seeking an independent state in the South, but also against those who called for federation.



However, by the appearance of SPLA/SPLM this weapon has lost its efficacy. The new organisation was committed to the ‘unity’ of Sudan. Not only this, but it fought those who called for the separation of the South within the movement, defeated them completely, and united the whole South behind the ‘unity’ option. Dubiously enough, despite the significance of the event the North was not enchanted. It is the first time in the history of the conflict that a military and political Southern movement called for the unity of Sudan, and to prove its commitment by fighting for it, yet the North remained cool. Not only this, but questions started to be raised about the movement, ranging from its alleged communist nature, its connections with Israel, to its objectives and slogans. Prominent among these questions is that related to the movement’s concept of the liberation of Sudan. The question raised was; from whom did they want to liberate Sudan, with the implication that it was the Northerners that they want to liberate the country from¹⁴.

The negative attitude of the North towards the movement’s commitment to the unity of the country says a great deal against the political sagacity of the North, but has an important result. The North was now stripped from all its masks, and its real intentions stood naked, and the hollowness of its ‘unity’ cries was clear enough, even to the blindest eye. From the Southern point of view, it was obvious that it was a special kind of ‘unity’ that the North was after, a unity through subjection. A unity which is created by “the spread of Arabic and Islam in the South” as Sadiq al-Mahadi has perceived¹⁵.

The contribution of the SPLA/SPLM to the political life in Sudan is multi-faceted, and is yet to be objectively looked into by the neutral Northern elites. The ideas they held, the ideal they cherished about the future of Sudan, the deep understanding of the country’s problems, the accurate analysis they applied regarding the political situation in every major turn of events in the country, the logical conclusions they arrived at, the practical and innovative solutions they proposed, the consistency they maintained in their position, all that is just unique to them. But, as far as the North is concerned, significant among the contribution of the SPLA/SPLM is the quality of leadership it presented. A new breed of Southern leaders that the traditional North would never want to see, or deal with; self-assertive, self-assured, and above all immune to political bribery, the only game that the North is good at. However John Garang might be seen in the South, to the Northern eye, he is not just another Southerner, one of those spineless creatures Khartoum is used to and happy to nurture and embrace though with



contempt. Not one of those opportunists, who are ready to sell their cause and people for the mere sight of a ministerial job, and a house in Khartoum. On the contrary, he rejected with dignity the biggest bribe ever to be given to a Southerner by a ruler in the North, namely Nimeiri. He is the first Southerner that dared to declare that if we were to remain one nation, he would not content himself with the position of second best in his own country. He is the first Southerner to act as a Sudanese whose concern extends from Haifa to Nimule, in the same footing as any Northern politician¹⁶. And on top of that he is an intellectual leader who has courage and vision in an arena infested with thoughtless and aimless politicians.

In the prime of his movement (1985-1989), John Garang's dealings with the successive governments in Khartoum illustrates the general contrast characteristic of the times: while these governments were feeble, incompetent, run by committed-to-nothing self-seekers, and totally without any policy beyond that of momentary expedients, his movement was vigorous, able, and guided by men who have a cause and enlightened by the movement's high objectives, and with a policy so far-sighted that, when the North was finally able to appreciate, it was about to bring victory and real unity to all the Sudanese. This opportunity was lost, and the responsibility of that loss lies squarely on Sadiq al-Mahadi's shoulders. Hadn't it been for his mediocracy and dodgery, the momentum created by the Sudan Peace Initiative would have drifted the NIF like the froth in front of the flood, and would not have given them the amble time they needed to carry out their plot to assassinate liberty and tolerance in Sudan.

The second major development in the North/South conflict was brought in by the success of the NIF to usurp the political power in Khartoum, and to maintain it till the present day. The impact of this unfortunate incident on the problem is that it displayed the Northern scheme for the South in its extremest, and crudest form: total denial of rights and worth, together with the widest and gravest use of violence under the banners of Islamic Jihad. Cruel as they may be in the North, in the South the NIF's cruelty was beyond words description. It is a kind of jihad that is unrestrained by any heavenly, or worldly laws or conventions. "It is as if, in accordance with a general decree, frenzy has openly been let loose for the committing of all crimes"¹⁷ if one may borrow Grotius' words describing the religious wars of Europe in the sixteenth century.



These crimes committed by the NIF, along with their firm control on the government, and the failure of the Northern opposition to pose any real challenge to them, has created a new reality which required a new thinking in the South. Also the collapse and disintegration of the Soviet Union and the whole eastern block resulted in a new world order in which redrawing of borders became a solution to many ethnical problems. And even closer to home, such policy was adopted in the horn of Africa to put an end to the Ethiopian/Eritrean problem. As a result of all these internal and external factors, the hopes of embodying a united Sudan faded again in the South, and with them the idea of self-determination resurfaced.

The third major development in the problem is the Washington Declaration which marked the SPLA/SPLM new approach to the problem. In the first point of that declaration the two factions of the Southern movement SPLA/SPLM and SPLM-United agreed on the right of self-determination for the people of Sudan. In the third point they agreed to set an agenda for peace, reconciliation, unity, and democracy. In the seventh point they agreed to oppose the policies of the NIF government in Khartoum, and other subsequent regimes that deny the right of self-determination of the people of Southern Sudan, Nuba mountains, and other marginalised areas¹⁸.

While the first point of the declaration signifies a major departure of the SPLA/SPLM from its traditional line of policy, the second two points contain their original ideas. For them the possibilities of building a new Sudan, based on unity and democracy, though look slim in the near future, are still there, and could be realised whenever conducive circumstances avail themselves. It is clear to me that their approach to the 'unity' of the Sudan, unlike the Northern parties, is not based on mere sentiments, but rather on realistic thinking; that a country based on healthy unity is for the common good of all its people, North, South, West and East.

Now let us look at the North's reaction to the declaration. Of course the NIF reacted through its government in a predictable hostile manner. To them the whole affair was an American plot against Islam. The American government wanted to unite the rival rebel forces in order to bring about the overthrow of their regime, and to separate the South from the North¹⁹. In their talk of separation of the South they paid no heed to their paradoxical position in collaborating with the faction of rebels that calls for separation against the other faction that calls for the unity of the country. Actually the NIF needs neither of them, and aims to



manipulate their differences by using SPLM-United against the SPLM main stream, in order to weaken them both, and to eliminate them together in the end.

The DUP rejected the declaration, because, as a unionist party they believe in unity. In their own words they “uphold the unity of the Sudanese land and people, and will not accept the carving-up of our country and people under unnatural circumstances such as those imposed by the al-Turabi dictatorial Front”²⁰. The only way, they see, to solve the problem, is “firstly to rid the country of this dictatorial regime, and then to hold a national constitutional conference....

The Umma party registered its reservations about the declaration. While they accept it in principle as a democratic right to which the South, and all other relevant areas, are entitled, they see the restoration of democracy in the country as the only prerequisite for this principle to be exercised. The current conditions in Sudan are unnatural, and no self-determination under them will make sense. To quote them, “Self-determination must be conducted under conditions of national legality and legitimacy”, and preceded by a transitional period during which many relevant issues must be addressed. In the end of this transitional period a referendum shall be held to allow Southerners to decide between a ‘New Just Sudan’, or ‘Separation’. And they add that they will honour the democratic choice of the Southerners, if they choose to secede²¹.

The response of the Communist party is almost identical to that of the Umma party. They accept the right to self-determination in principle. But if the Southerners are to practice this right under the present conditions, it is obvious that they will choose separation. This, accordingly, will be unfair for those who call for the unity of the country. The solution, then, is first, to bring down the NIF government, and second, to establish the conditions for a fair game to both those who want unity and those who want separation to campaign, and persuade the people for their causes. They warn that separation of the South under the current situation, will not solve the problems of Sudan, will not bring stability to the South, and more importantly will not put an end to the ethnical and religious conflicts, and will open the door wide for external interference²².

There are some points to be observed in the position of these parties regarding this issue. First, all of them maintained their traditional commitment to the unity of Sudan, with



differences among them in that. For the Umma and the Communist parties, unity through democratic means, and for the DUP, presumably, unity by all means. Second, the position of the Umma and the Communist parties marks an important change of policy; it is for the first time since independence, that a Northern party declares that it does not mind if the South has chosen to go its own way. If we compare the new position of these two parties with their position in the Round Table conference in 1965, in which they set the limits for any agreement reached with the Southerners, to be “within a united Sudan, and should in no way generate separatist forces”²³, we see how important this step is, and how costly and slow their process of learning is. The scheme that SANU and the Southern Front presented in that conference called for a referendum in the South supervised by African observers to ascertain what the majority of the Southerners wanted as between federation, unity with the North, or separation. “The scheme was rejected by the Northern parties on grounds that it amounted to self-determination”²⁴.

Third, neither the Umma, nor the Communist party has actually addressed the real reasons that forced the SPLA/SPLM to adopt the new policy of self-determination. Consequently, no body asked or answered the question of what should the Southerners do if the NIF was to remain in power for the next ten, fifteen, or twenty years, especially in the current absence of any serious challenge to them? It is as if the implied message of these parties to the Southerners is that; ‘we want you to carry on fighting under the ‘unity’ banner, whatever that takes you, any way you have been fighting for thirty years, why not carry on in the same manner till we succeed to overthrow this regime’. If the Southerners ask what for? the answer is because when we restore democracy you can freely choose whether you want to remain with us or go your own way. If they ask what is the difference then, if we are to choose why not now? The answer is that because we like you to stay with us, and under democracy you may choose that.

I think this position is neither logical, nor reasonable. It is clear that these parties found themselves in an embarrassing situation. On the one hand they acknowledge that the feelings of separation have grown fast in the South, and that the SPLA/SPLM must accommodate for these feelings in its programme of action unless it wants to commit suicide. On the other hand, being entrapped in their old sentiments about the unity of Sudan, it is impossible for them to give their consent to any action that may lead to separation.



Thus, the most convenient way out of this dilemma is to accept and reject the declaration at the same time, that is to accept it in principle and reject it under the current situation. By accepting it in principle, they show their democratic nature, to the Southerners, and to the outside world. By rejecting it, 'under the present circumstances', they maintain their traditional position towards the unity of the country before themselves, their supporters and the Northern public opinion at large. Also by adopting this position, they protect themselves from the potential accusation of treason by the NIF propaganda machine. So, these are the benefits of saying much without saying anything. If the unity of Sudan is going to be determined democratically, this can happen in any time there is democracy in both the South and the North. More importantly, if the unity of Sudan is necessary for the common good of its people, it will ultimately happen, even if the South is to secede tomorrow. The DUP is more logical, with itself, than the former parties, in its outright rejection of the declaration, and in its emphasis on the unity of Sudan, in all circumstances, though they look irrelevant.

The logical conclusion that the new position of the Umma and the Communist parties leads to, and from which both of them fall short is: First, to strengthen the position of the SPLA/SPLM because: a/ it meets with them in perceiving the unity of Sudan as necessary for the common good of the Sudanese; b/ it managed to include the agenda of unity and democracy in the declaration; c/ it was driven to its new policy by necessity, and necessity knows no laws.

Second, following from that, the issue of self-determination should be open to the Southerners unconditionally, i.e. prior and posterior to the overthrow of the NIF government. This is because; a/ the Southerners have endured unspeakable sufferings, and spilt a lot of blood, both before and under the NIF regime, and they have every right to try to put an end to that. b/ These parties actually did little, if any, to weaken the NIF grip on power, so the least that they can do is to display some sensitivity towards the Southerners' calamity, and this is only possible by accepting the declaration unconditionally. c/ If the regional and international conditions become ripe for the realisation of self-determination in the South, nothing can prevent it. If this happens it is better to put emphasis on and support the third point of the declaration which commits the Southerners, to the unity and democracy, which means in this case, that the door must remain open for the reconsideration of the situation in the future when democracy is restored in the North. On the whole, I do not think one can combine the



acceptance of self-determination as a democratic and human right on the one hand, with conditions that prevent the people from exercising it on the other hand, and at the same time remains consistent.

Also, a word must be said on the proposition, held by many Northerners, that the separation will not bring stability to the South, and that war will continue in it on tribal basis this time. Regardless the unpleasant paternalistic attitude that this proposition reflects, it lacks internal logic. It is as if we ask Southerners, to protect themselves against polecats and foxes, but be content, and think it safe to be devoured by lions. And in the end, even if this prophesy proves to be true, it is a Southern problem, and should be left to the Southerners to deal with. It will serve the North a great deal if it concerns itself with its own problems instead of hiding behind the South.

Finally, I don't think the question facing us now is: should or should not Sudan be united? Of course the obvious answer to most of the Northerners is yes, and to most of the Southerners is no. I think we have to ask a number of questions and to answer them all negatively, and to start working from the final answer upwards. The first question is: will Sudan remain united? the answer is no. The second question; can we do anything to prevent the separation of the South? the answer is also no. The third question what do the advocates of the unity in the North do in order to keep their objective alive? The answer is to work positively and seriously for the liberation of the country from the NIF. Southerners are already fighting in the South, and Northerners have to start fighting in the North. When people fight together, and bear equal share of the burden, they establish the way to unity by their blood and sacrifices. Otherwise, it is better for both the North and the South to go their separate ways now and to spare themselves more undesired grievances.

Albaqir A. Mukhtar

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22. The Communist Party, Qadayah Sudaniyah, article on Self-Determination, issue No.3, February, 1994.
23. Beshir, M. Omer, ibid.
24. ibid.



THIRD INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF SUDAN STUDIES ASSOCIATIONS

-1994-

April 20-23

Boston, Massachusetts

The Third International Conference of Sudan Studies Associations was held in Boston earlier this year in April. There had been a splendid response from Sudanists around the world, which resulted in about 100 papers and 25 panels being available for the participants.

The theme of the meeting was 'The Sudan: History, Polity and Identity in a time of crisis'. It is impossible, especially for an ecologist not well versed in the political and social sciences, to summarise in a precise manner, the many and varied strands of all the papers. The panels ranged from such topics as Sudanese Antiquity, Refugee Issues, Language and Linguistics, Colonial History through to Health and Environmental Issues. This report highlights a number of personal impressions gained through attending the meeting along with a number of other members of SSSUK.

Even before the start of the meeting a number of logistical problems arose. For example, Dr Anisa Dani had great trouble in obtaining her visa from the American Embassy on time. Two faxes from the Chairman of SSSUK made no impression what so ever. In the end, through the good offices of the International Department of Manchester University and their efforts with the Embassy she just managed to catch the flight from Manchester. We were then delayed in Amsterdam for three hours with hydraulic problems in the plane. However, we made the conference opening with 30 minutes to spare after a rapid taxi journey through the rush hour in down town Boston.

After the formal opening, the first evening set the scene for the rest of the conference. A number of additional events had been organised outside the formal panel sessions. The first of these events was a Sudan exhibit at the National Centre of Afro-American Artists. A number of paintings by the Sudanese Artist, Rashid Diab (Madrid) were on display along with an exhibition on the War in the Sudan: Relics of the Mahdist Era 1883-1889. We also had an



interesting preview of a model of Aspelta's Tomb. The Director, E. B. Gaither made us all most welcome.

The programme started in true American style at 8:30 am the next day, Thursday with three panels running concurrently. At one of these panels, two papers were presented by Jane Hogan and Leslie Forbes on the Sudan Archive, University of Durham. Both the overview by Jane and all the material visually presented on slides by Leslie were very well received.

There was no relaxation even at lunch time with Dr Mahasin Abdel Gadir Al-Safi, Director, Institute of African and Asian Studies, University of Khartoum presenting a luncheon paper on Current Research in the Sudan.

Three panels on Thursday afternoon on Colonial History, Language and linguistics in the Sudan and Non-Arab Peoples of the Sudan completed the papers for the day.

Traditionally, at Boston University, there are a series of Distinguished Lectures throughout the year. This year the Bradford Morse Distinguished Lecture was given by the famous Sudanese novelist, Tayib Salih on the Thursday evening. It was a brilliant lecture which captivated a wide audience.

One of the first panels on Friday morning covered Sudanese Health and Environmental Issues. Jack Davies presented a joint paper on 'Historical Changes in the Flood Hazard at Khartoum: Lessons and Warnings for the future'. 'Sudan Ups and Downs: An Ecological Perspective' was given by Dr N Hussein from the University of Durham and Juba. It was most enjoyable meeting an old friend, Dr Salah Hakim, formerly from the Institute of Environmental Studies, University of Khartoum, who is currently working at the Smithsonian Institution, Washington, D.C. He gave a concise overview of current environmental problems in Sudan.

There were more sessions on Colonial History and Sudanese Antiquity as well as a panel on Women's Strategies for Survival in the Sudan.

The Boston Museum of Fine Arts had organised a special tour and reception at their Nubia Exhibit for conference members. This enjoyable tour and reception at 5.00 pm was the start of a busy evening. A banquet followed at 7.30 pm with the Guest Speaker, Bona Malwal, Sudan Democratic Gazette in London giving an intense and memorable speech on 'Self-Determination is not Incompatible with Unity'. The evening finished with a Business



Meeting of Associations of Sudan Studies: SSA, SSSUK and IAAS/U of K. It was still in session when the SSSUK contingent retired just before midnight.

Another full day on Saturday brought panels on Southern Sudan, Sudan and its Neighbours, the Sudan and its Survival as a Nation, Sudan since Independence and International Perspectives on the Sudan.

The organisers dedicated this conference to the quest for peace, justice and democracy in the Sudan. Much information, opinion and ideas on these key topics were all exchanged at this highly successful and intensive conference. The thanks of all the SSSUK contingent are due to members of SSA and in particular to the programme organisers, Dr Richard Lobban and Dr Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban for all their efforts and hard work at making this conference such a success. My own thanks are due to all the members of the SSSUK contingent who made the great effort to attend this conference. I know it was much appreciated by our American friends.

D K Lindley

Chairman, SSSUK

Footnote:

A full set of abstracts was given to each conference member on arrival. Papers that were received before the start of the conference are available on a subscriber-cost basis. The costs cover photocopying, mailing envelopes, and postage. Details about the Abstracts and the papers are available from the Chairman. The Conference Organisers believe that many of the papers are of high quality and that they will make every effort to publish these in thematic volumes. Further information about this project will be forthcoming in the SSA Newsletters.



THIRD INTERNATIONAL MEETING OF SUDAN STUDIES

The World Cup was by no means the only major international gathering in the USA this year. Weeks before Jack Charlton led his team of variegated Irishmen to the East Coast, our Chairman, David Lindley, and a pleasing number of other SSSUK members, staged a smaller and equally peaceful invasion of Boston, a city keen to remind us that it has not always been welcoming to visitors from Britain. Following the successful conferences in Khartoum and Durham, the American Sudan Studies Association hosted this third meeting in the triennial series at the Mid-Town Hotel, Boston, from 20 to 23 March; and once more the venue was reflective of the occasion. In 1988 the Institute of African and Asian Studies, (IAAS), University of Khartoum, had entertained us in its then new Sharjah Hall; that most appropriate of British location, the University of Durham, had hosted us in the Castle; while the Americans kept to the custom of most conferences in their country by making it an hotel-based gathering. The use of the Mid-Town Hotel — owned by the Christian Scientists — and (some would say) appropriately dry — tended to raise the price deterring some people, but did provide a functional central location in Boston which was looking at its very best in the fine Spring weather.

The title of the conference, however, reflected the more difficult conditions of contemporary Sudan — 'The Sudan: history, polity and identity in a time of crisis'. That crisis was reflected in the participants themselves. A considerable number of Sudanese took part, but the large majority of those present reflected the diaspora of recent years. They came from various Middle Eastern countries, as well as from Britain, while a growing number are now living and working in North America itself. And while those at the Conference were predominantly academics, many formerly on the staff of the University of Khartoum, the evening of music and dancing which concluded the conference attracted scores of other Sudanese families now living in the greater Boston area. I was delighted that a small band of colleagues still working in the Sudan was able to attend the conference and updated us at first hand on current conditions.

This brief report cannot begin to review the numerous papers presented to the wide range of panels (almost all of which attested in various ways to the range and depth of Sudan's current crisis), but the keynote addresses were particularly memorable. Mahasin Al-Safi, the current Director of IAAS, spoke of the current situation with regard to research in Sudan, and the continuing efforts of those still in the country in spite of the difficulties. Tayeb Saleh gave an engaging plenary address and then embarked on a lengthy and highly entertaining exchange with his audience loosely around issues of the novel and identity. The most contentious of the speakers was Bona Malwal who gave a full and trenchant presentation of the case for self-determination for southern Sudan. Coming after the conference dinner his remarks formed the basis for heated discussion well into the night.



There were also more contemplative moments, especially those provided by the two conference receptions. Boston University's art gallery hosted an excellent display of contemporary Sudanese art as well as an historical presentation of the late nineteenth century; while the city's major museum showed its outstanding collection on ancient Nubia, a welcome counterpoint to the present crisis.

The thanks of all who participated are due to our hosts in the Sudan Studies Association, and particularly to Carolyne Fleuhr-Lobban and Richard Lobban who bore the brunt of the organisation. I arrived at their house shortly before the conference to find them both immersed in last minute preparations, and their efforts were rewarded by the success of the whole event. At the end participants were looking ahead to a further conference in 1997, with tentative discussion of the possibility of Bergen, or perhaps even a return to Khartoum once more.

Peter Woodward

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

From Mr. Henry Keown-Boyd:

Sir,

As a matter of historical interest, I think Mr. P.E. Winter (*Sudan Studies* No. 15 - That Fatal Fascination) underestimated British Casualties in the Sudan during the Condominium.

By my count, thirteen British officers/officials (in the early days the two were synonymous) and at least one NCO were killed on active duty in the period 1902-24. About double that number died of disease or were killed accidentally (including one who was mauled by a lion, another trampled by an elephant and a third who fell off a roof while grappling with a burglar!)

Also quite large numbers of Egyptian and Sudanese officers and men of the British-led Egyptian Army were killed in action or died of wounds. For example, in one operation alone, against the Anuak in 1912, the 13th Sudanese lost five officers (two of them British) and 42 other ranks.

After 1924 the casualty figures fell dramatically and, apart from the Police Commandant mentioned by Mr. Winter who was killed in anti-Egyptian rioting in the 1950's, there seems only to have been the murder of Fergusson Bey by the Nuer in 1927.



SUDAN

OUTSIDE THE WAR ZONES: SECRET DETENTION AND TORTURE IN NORTHERN SUDAN

Introduction

The civil war between the Sudan government and both factions of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), which is being fought mainly in southern Sudan and adjacent areas, continues to cause immense suffering. The human cost of this conflict stands condemned in world opinion. The violation of human rights, as Amnesty International has detailed in previous reports, lies at its heart¹. One of the quickest ways of reducing the scale and frequency of gross human rights violations in the Sudan would be to end the war, with international human rights safeguards built in to the peace agreement.

However, human rights violations are also taking place in Sudan far from the conflict zones for reasons largely unconnected with the war. Since June 1989 when the current government seized power the authorities have dismantled civil society in Sudan and reshaped it according to their own interpretation of Islam. The civil service, trade unions, the judiciary and educational institutions have all been purged to ensure that political supporters of the government have overwhelming influence. The government continues to repress the population in all parts of the country. Political activity remains forbidden; opposition of any form leads to detention without charge or trial and, often, torture.

This dimension of the human rights situation in Sudan is serious and must not be forgotten. Ending the war will not put a stop to human rights violations unless it also puts a stop to the repressive conduct of the government in *all* parts of the country. This report describes the continuing pattern of detention, torture, release and re-arrest of suspected political opponents in northern Sudan by focusing on the first six months of 1994. The information is largely about the capital, Khartoum, but arrests have also taken place in other towns and cities in northern Sudan. What is described here is only a part of the total number of people who were arrested between January and June 1994 about which information is so far fragmentary and difficult to confirm.

¹ For example, *Sudan: The ravages of war: political killings and humanitarian disaster* (AI Index: APR 54/29/93), and *Sudan in Amnesty International Report 1994* (AI Index: POL 10/02/94).



Amnesty International has the names of 78 people who were arrested and detained without charge or trial in the first six months of this year. Some were held for a mere 24 hours. Others spent several months in detention. At least 50 were individuals from trade unions or banned political parties suspected by the authorities of being opposition activists. The report also gives details of torture by security officials of prisoners arrested in 1993 who were charged with conspiracy to engage in acts of sabotage and tried in early 1994. Their testimonies of torture were confirmed by medical examinations ordered by the court.

Since the government of Lieutenant-General Omar Hassan Ahmad al-Bashir seized power in June 1989 hundreds of prisoners of conscience from all sectors of society have been detained without charge or trial. They have been held for periods ranging from a few weeks to nearly two years. Many released prisoners are re-arrested. The majority are held incommunicado in “ghost houses”, or in the security headquarters in Khartoum. Neither detainees’ families nor, often, the detainees themselves are told where they are held. Many are subjected to torture and ill-treatment. In some cases this has led to deaths. Detention is, by and large, short-term, making it difficult at any one time due to the rapid turnover of prisoners, to be certain about total numbers of detainees. In addition the authorities have introduced a system of physical restriction tantamount to detention which consists of making individuals suspected of opposing government policies report daily to the security headquarters or a security office. They are then made to wait until the evening, normally without being questioned or provided with food or water. This form of restriction on an individual’s freedom of movement has lasted from a few weeks to several months.

Political Detainees January to June 1994

Suspected activists from banned political parties

Sadiq al-Mahdi, the leader of the opposition Umma Party and Ansar order of Islam, and a former Prime Minister, was held for 24 hours in April and then for 13 days in June and July. Other members of the Umma Party were arrested at the beginning of February. At least two, **al-Fadil Adam Ismail**, secretary general of the banned party’s youth wing, and **Abdallah Barakat**, an Imam in the Ansar order of Islam, had been arrested on several previous occasions. Other Umma Party members were questioned at the end of the month. In April **Sarah Nugdallah**, a member of the Umma party’s women’s and executive committees, one of those questioned in February, was detained. She was held for 10 weeks in Omdurman Women’s Prison before being released in late June. **Abdel Rasoul al-Nur**, a former governor of Kordofan who had spent long periods in detention in previous years, was also detained in



early April, released after a few days and then re-arrested in late May. He was again released in late June after falling ill. More Umma Party members were arrested in late May. **Fadlalla Burma Nasir**, former Minister of State for Defence was released after 20 days. In May, **Hamad Omar Bagadi** and **Abdel Rabman Farah**, a former security adviser to the previous government, were arrested after being accused of involvement in a supposed plot to blow up government installations and to assassinate prominent political figures. Hamad Omar Bagadi was released after two months although Abdel Rahman Farah was still believed to be in detention in mid-August 1994.

Members of other opposition political parties were also arrested during the first half of 1994. In February **Osman Omar al-Sharif**, a former Minister of Justice and prominent member of the Democratic Unionist party (DUP), was held for 11 days at security offices in Wad Medani before being transferred to a “ghost house” in Khartoum. He was reportedly released in April. He had previously spent two years in prison between 1989 and 1991 after being convicted at an unfair military trial on charges of corruption which appear to have been brought for political reasons. In late 1993 he was detained for a month on suspicion of instigating a strike by merchants in Wad Medani.

Activists from the Sudan Communist Party (SCP) have also been regular targets for the security services. **Mahjoub Mohamed Sherif**, popularly known in Sudan as “the people’s poet”, was arrested in May 1994 with **Bushra Abd al-Karim**, the secretary general of the Sudanese Youth Union, a pro-SCP organization, and **Salah al-A’alim**, a trade unionist. Mahjoub Mohamed Sherif was previously in detention between 1989 and 1991.

Trade unionists

In addition to banning opposition of political parties since seizing power in 1989, independent trade unions have also been targeted by the government. Although not illegal, the unions have been re-formed by the government to try to ensure they are under official control. Intimidation and arrests of activists opposing the authorities in advance of trade union elections in 1992 ensured that only supporters of the government were elected. In the first six months of 1994, trade unionists have continued to be a target of the government. Many have been similarly arrested, questioned, held uncharged, released and then re-arrested. **Magdi Mohamedani**, a doctor active in the banned Sudan Doctors Union, was arrested in December 1993 and detained until 6 April 1994. He was previously arrested in August 1992 when he was held until November 1992, and in April 1990 when he was detained until November 1990. On all three occasions he was held without being charged or tried. In March



1994, **Kamal Abdelwahab Nur al-Dayem**, active in the banned Sudan Teachers Union, was arrested and held until May. In late 1993 he had been made to report daily to a security office in Khartoum North. In June 1994 **Ali al-Mahi al-Sakhi**, president of the Central Foundry Workers Union, was among six activists arrested near Khartoum. This was at least his third time to be taken into detention.

Journalists

Journalists are another professional sector which continues to face repression under the current government. Immediately after the coup in 1989, all newspapers except the pro-government armed forces publication *al-Quwal al-Musalla* (Armed Forces) were closed down. The independent press remained banned until January 1994 when Sudan's first independent newspaper since the government seized power was allowed to start publication. The existence of the paper, *al-Sudani al-Doulia*, edited by **Mahjoub Mohamed al-Hassan Erwa**, a member of the government-appointed Transitional National Assembly (TNA), was short lived. Although in overall support of the government's political ideology, *al-Sudani al-Doulia* followed an independent editorial line and did not shrink at times from criticising government policy and the manner of its implementation. On 24 February 1994 **Moatisim Mahmud**, the paper's news editor, was arrested and detained until 19 April 1994. Articles critical of government policy continued to appear and in early April the authorities used the emergency regulations to ban the newspaper for "raising doubts about the purpose and struggle of the armed forces and People's Defence Forces" and for having the aim of "destroying the revolution". Mahjoub Mohamed al-Hassan Erwa and two other journalists were detained. The Minister of Justice and Attorney General had earlier announced that they were to face charges under article 66 of the Penal Code for "propagating false news", an offence which carries a six month prison sentence. However the two journalists were freed on 18 April and Mahjoub Mohamed al-Hassan Erwa was freed in June. The newspaper remained banned.

On 23 June 1994 **Mohamed Abdulsid**, a journalist with *al-Khartown* newspaper published in Cairo, was arrested shortly after he had interviewed Sadiq al-Mahdi, the leader of the opposition Umma Party and Ansar order of Islam, and a former Prime Minister. The journalist is reported to have been accused of involvement in a conspiracy with Sadiq al-Mahdi and other members of the Umma Party who were also detained (see above). Mohamed Abdulsid is reported to have been kicked and beaten in his office before he was taken away. Previously, in early 1993, when he worked as the Khartoum correspondent of the



international daily paper *Asharq al-Awsat*, he had been held for two months at Khartoum security headquarters and in a “ghost house”. As of mid-August 1994, Mohamed Abdulsid was believed to be still in detention.

Employees of church-based relief agencies

Baha’ Zaki, Ashraf Adli and Magdi Chelata, Egyptian Christian aid workers working on an education project for southern Sudanese displaced in Khartoum by the war, were arrested on 18 April 1994. The next day **Kamal Tadros**, an Egyptian Roman Catholic deacon in charge of the aid project, was also detained. They were all employed by the Roman Catholic Church to work on an education program for persons living in squatter camps on the edges of Khartoum. Kamal Tadros was held for one week and the others were released in May.

Torture and Ill-treatment

The Government of Sudan has denied that torture and ill-treatment are official policy. Indeed, they point out that under both the Penal Code and the National Security laws torture is a criminal offence. The reality is that torture by security officials is systematic.

Amnesty International has received numerous testimonies from former detainees which detail the torture and ill-treatment to which they have been subjected by security officials while in detention. Methods include brutal beatings, being made to lie on hot metal plates until their skin is badly burnt, being made to stand for long periods of time in the sun, various forms of physical contortion or repetitive exercise as well as degrading treatment.

The authorities rarely bring suspected political opponents to trial and therefore it is rare for prisoners to have the platform a trial provides for them to be able to describe their torture publicly. But in one unusual case, ten men arrested in April 1993 on suspicion of conspiring to cause acts of sabotage testified at their trial in January 1994 that they had been victims of brutal torture. Medical examinations ordered by the court confirmed torture in the cases of five. One man, **al-Hassan Ahmad Saleh**, lost an eye due to a blow received during interrogations after his arrest. Other defendants gave statements about how they were beaten with whips and hosepipes while bound hand and foot, sometimes naked.

Osman Mahmud Ali testified that he sustained head wounds after having been badly beaten, after which he was subjected to karate beatings. He told of being forced to lay naked on hot iron sheets until his skin burned, and of being forced to lie on spent cartridge cases (bullets) which had been heated by the sun, while a security official stood on his back. Where the



cartridge cases had been placed horizontally, he received skin burns; where they were vertical, he was cut. His testimony continued:

“then someone came with pins and began pricking my ears and inserting them until my ears were full of pins...after that they told me to take the pins out of my ears and to put them back into a box...”

The government does not appear to have taken any action to bring the perpetrators of this torture to justice, despite confirmation of torture by medical examinations ordered by the court.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Outside the war zones - where massive human rights abuses are still occurring - other serious human rights violations are routine. Political repression continues in Sudan. Suspected political opposition leads to incommunicado detention. The claim that torture is not tolerated is hollow. Despite severe criticisms by the international community about its appalling human rights record, the Government of Sudan continues to evade its responsibilities to protect human rights throughout the country. It flouts international human rights standards and appears to ignore criticisms and demands for change.

Amnesty International is again now calling for the Government of Sudan to put an end to the use of detention without charge or trial in secret detention centres. It is calling for all political detainees to be released without delay unless they are to be charged with a recognizably criminal offence and brought promptly to a fair trial, in line with international standards.

Amnesty International is also calling on the Government of Sudan to demonstrate opposition to torture by taking every measure possible to stop the use of torture and ill-treatment of detainees, including investigating all reports of such abuse and in bringing to justice those responsible.



IN WHOSE IMAGE?

POLITICAL ISLAM AND URBAN PRACTICES IN SUDAN

by T. Abdou Maliqalim Simone.

Chicago and London, University of Chicago Press, 1994. 0-226-75870-2 pbk.

This is a most unusual book, as well as being of considerable interest. The author teaches clinical and social psychology and African studies at the City University of New York. In the late 1980's he was recruited by the 'Islamic Movement' in Sudan to act as consultant in its project 'to unite Muslims and non-Muslims in Khartoum's shanty towns', and he concentrated his numerous interviews and sharp observations on Umm Baddah in particular. It is this combination of time, place and purpose that makes this a significant book.

That said, it is not an easy book to read. For all that it is laid out in three main parts - 'Struggles for the familiar', 'Out of bounds; Islam and transformation', and 'A reference from another Africa' - it is complex, sometimes confusing, and at times prone to factual error. Nevertheless it can be viewed as a contribution to understanding what was being attempted by the 'Islamic movement' in Sudan - later identified with the National Islamic Front (NIF); was has taken place in its rise to power; and the limitations on its achieving its supposed objective.

In terms of its intentions, Simone can be criticized for exaggerating the extent to which an explicit ideology had been developed by the Muslim Brotherhood before 1989. While centrally attached to the promotion of *Sharia*, to which emphasis is rightly given here, in other areas the MB's were relatively undefined. Instead one saw the growth of an organisation which in practice was to be akin to political Leninism (Simone's analogy), while economically using the opportunities afforded by the introduction of the Islamic banking system to take a strong grip on the always politically important Sudanese commercial sector. The coup of 1989 ensured that the NIF's agenda would be pursued not through the ballot box, to which it had at one time appeared committed, but by forcible imposition from above which Simone rightly deplors.

Once in power 'Turabi's revolution', as one sympathiser entitled his own book, was to be put into effect; and there is no doubt that Simone, who interviewed Turabi as well as many others in the NIF, thinks that he is where the buck stops, for Turabi is described as 'the present de facto head of state'. But instead of revolution it has been a new conservatism. The political elite, according to Simone, has been abandoning a played-out system in which the 'traditional' *turuq* had in the past increasingly become vehicles for political and commercial careerism. Instead a growing section of the elite moved over to an 'Islamic "direction"' in order not to lose its 'privileged position'. Politically this has meant repression of those elite segments that opposed it; and for many ordinary people, especially in the shanty towns, a society in which 'forced and enticed conversations are the order of the day'. Economically it has meant substituting businessmen loyal to the NIF for those who have retained their allegiances with the previously similarly exploitative *turuq*. I find all this at least partially convincing, what interests me here is less the thrust of the argument than the source from which it springs and the manner of its presentation through contact with the people of Umm Baddah.

That the NIF has fallen into the apparent paradox of revolution and conservatism will come as no surprise, indeed the former will be seen by many critics as simply a piece of cynical rhetoric on Turabi's part. Simone however goes on to speak from his numerous interviews of the growing alienation of many of the people, and of the increasingly desperate survival strategies



that they are forced to adopt. In this context in which there is so little prospect of an agenda for genuine national development (as opposed to the advancement of the NIF elite) it is not surprising that ethnicity and regionalism grow rather than diminish under attempts to impose an identity upon an increasingly impoverished society. In the final part of the book he contrasts this briefly with the grass roots activities of the Islamic movement in South Africa, especially in the Western Cape. But that is not only a grass roots endeavour, rather it is one that is being undertaken in a political context which is exactly the reverse of the Sudan's recent experience. At one point Simone comments 'The strength of Sudanese culture was once that people and ideas circulated; people were highly generous with what they extended outward': it is precisely such an approach on which South Africa has been embarked since February 1990 and which is personified by President Mandela.

Recently the present regime in Sudan chose to celebrate its five years in power. This book is a further useful and thought-provoking contribution to how little rather than how much has been achieved; and in particular the impossibility of imposing an Islamic identity from above on such a diverse, fragmented and increasingly traumatised society as Sudan's. I doubt if the author was invited back by the 'Islamic movement' to join in the celebrations.

Peter Woodward



INA BEASLEY, BEFORE THE WIND CHANGED: PEOPLE, PLACES AND EDUCATION IN THE SUDAN, Ed. Janet Starkey

Oxford University Press, 1992, 483 pages, including text, appendices, maps, and indices.

Dr. Ina Beasley wrote *Before the Wind Changed* on the basis of over ten years' experience (1939-50) as a Sudan Government official involved in girls' education. She based her memoirs on her own diaries and letters which are now stored at the Sudan Archive in Durham. Janet Starkey edited this volume in association with a British Academy project, directed by P.M. Holt, for the purpose of publishing British archival materials related to the Middle East and Africa.

Ina Beasley's book chronicles more than educational development alone. In her capacity as superintendent and later controller of girl' education, Beasley travelled extensively throughout the Sudan. *Before the Wind Changed* relates her observations on the varied landscapes she viewed, the people she met (famous and obscure, women and men), and the schools she examined all over the country. Beasley was a sharp observer of the Sudanese social and political scene. Her richly detailed book will be of great interest to students and scholars of Condominium-era Sudanese history. It should be added that *Before the Wind Changed* is also a pleasure to read, since Ina Beasley writes in a style which is at once crisp and colourful.

Beasley's memoirs are anecdotally driven. Even so, there are two related themes which bind the book together. *Before the Wind Changed* is above all the story of the fight for educational rights on the part of Sudanese women, and of the upward social mobility that education entailed for such women. Beasley makes it clear that the fight for girls' education was led by women and by men, both British and Sudanese. She paints detailed portraits of several Sudanese women who pioneered girls' education, including Sitt Madina Abdulla, Sitt Batul Muhammad Isa, and others (some of whom were also involved in the fight against Pharaonic "female circumcision"), while also paying tribute to some of the Sudanese men pioneers. The most obvious individual falling into the latter category is, of course, Babikr Badri, the great champion of girls' education. Yet in spite of the active support given by many men, it appears that Beasley occasionally felt as though she were struggling against a double patriarchy, not only from Sudanese men, but from British men (Condominium officials) as well. An example of the latter was the Red Sea Hills District Commissioner, who voiced his scorn for and disapproval of Beasley's efforts to promote the emergence of "independent women" through the creation of girls' schools (p. 253).

Janet Starkey, the editor of this volume, endeavoured with noteworthy success to enhance the historical value of Ina Beasley's memoirs. She added numerous appendices; a glossary of Sudanese terms used throughout the text; a bibliography; regional maps indicating the places which Beasley mentions in the text (including small villages); and two indices, with one for places and groups, and the other for people. She also produced sub-headings within the text



and inserted relevant excerpts from Beasley's diaries. In addition, she added copious footnotes, which provide dates for the events discussed in the narrative (something that Beasley had largely omitted), as well as biographical information on the British and Sudanese (male and female) officials mentioned.

Its many strengths notwithstanding, this volume has two shortcomings. First, neither Beasley, as writer, nor Starkey, as editor, indicates when these memoirs were written—a minor point which would nonetheless be of interest to a historian. (Since Beasley mentions on p. 263 that al-Hadi al-Mahdi was the spiritual head of the Ansar at the time of writing, it appears that she wrote her memoirs sometime in the 1960's.) Second, there is no subject index. Although Starkey's indices for places and people are commendably thorough, the lack of a subject index means that scholars cannot track down specific topics without skimming through the whole text. For example, just a few of the topics which Beasley mentions here and there and which might have warranted inclusion in a subject index are: the influence of World War II on the Sudan, female genital mutilation, domestic architecture, the legacy of slavery, clothing styles, and transportation.

Before the Wind Changed is not a history book, but it is an important tool for historians. Ina Beasley's fiery remarks in favour of social change and her bold opinions on the strengths and weaknesses of Condominium policy testify that she was no impartial observer to the Sudanese scene. It is this very candour, together with a smooth literary style, which makes such good reading out of Beasley's memoirs.

Heather J. Sharkey
Princeton, New Jersey



SUDAN STRUGGLE FOR SURVIVAL 1984-1993

Graham F Thomas

Darf Publishers Ltd. London. 1993. 263pp. £14.95. (ISBN 1-85077-118-9)

The ‘judicial’ murder of Mahmoud Mohammed Taha on 18th January 1985 signalled to Graham F Thomas that the regime in Sudan was in the throes of its own death. He described the Taha episode in his first book, *Sudan Death of a Dream*, as the outrage which “removed the last vestige of credibility from the Numeiri regime” and indeed, that regime was overthrown within three months of Taha ‘a death.

As leader of the moderate, Islamic, Republican Brothers movement, Taha had been incarcerated by ex-president Numeiri, then released, rearrested, charged with heresy and sentenced to death by hanging. The septuagenarian had been ‘guilty’ of distributing pamphlets which criticised the government.

As a teacher in northern Sudan I was shocked. The day after the death sentence was carried out, I found a diagram of a corpse suspended from a gallows, scrawled on the blackboard in my classroom. Incensed to the point of apoplexy, I persuaded the culprit in my class to identify himself and he compliantly, though I suspect unrepentantly, wiped the offensive graffiti off the board.

In London at the same time, Thomas was staging a protest meeting against Taha’s execution in the Grand Committee Room at the House of Commons.



This act was a typical manifestation of the concern Thomas has shown for Sudan throughout his 44 year association with the country.

Born in Glamorgan in 1921, Thomas first encountered Africa's largest country when he joined the Sudan Government Service, just before independence, in 1950. An acutely political being, Thomas soon became a close friend of Sayed Abdel Rahman Al Mahdi, then leader of the Ansar sect, which remains, in the shape of the Umma Party, one of the most powerful political forces in modern Sudan. Abdel Rahman's father was Mohamed Ahmed Al Mahdi, the nemesis of General Gordon, who freed Sudan from Turco-Egyptian control in 1885 and was later portrayed in dubious taste, as 'the expected one', by a 'blackened-up' Laurence Olivier, in the 1966 film, *Khartoum*. It is the continued close relationship between Thomas and the Mahdi family, currently in the person of the late Abdel Rahman's grandson and former Prime Minister, As Saddig Al Mahdi, which forms the bedrock of Sudan Struggle for Survival.

The book is a natural continuation from Death of a Dream which covers the period from 1950 to 1985. Picking up the story in the second volume, with Numeiri's 'dethronment' by popular coup, Thomas provides a unique commentary on current events in Sudan. This is not the dessicated analysis of a scholarly historian, far removed from the action. Thomas draws for material, on 'organic' conversations, as opposed to interviews, between himself and the major players, as well as letters and diary manuscripts.



To a large degree, Thomas has played a bit part in both the surface and subterranean machinations of Sudanese government masters and opposition politicians in exile and Roy Jenkins was accurate in his description of Thomas as “a sort of supplementary ambassador for Sudan in Britain. He seems tireless in his efforts, arranging accommodation for As Saddig on visits to London, advising him on his next move, putting suggestions forward to President Mubarak of Egypt, visiting political prisoners in Khartoum’s notorious Kober jail and communicating with MPs in London on Sudanese matters. It’s remarkable that a man who never held a government post in Britain, has had access to such a wide range of leading political figures in Britain, Egypt and Sudan. When Margaret Thatcher invited As Saddig Al Mahdi to Downing Street in 1986, Thomas was automatically included on the guest list.

As Saddig Al Mahdi’s second spell as Prime Minister was short-lived. His democratically elected government was forcibly overthrown in 1989 by General Omar Al Beshir, whose military regime has since presided over the country’s accelerated decline into a state of bloody internal division. Links between the regime and the National Islamic Front and by association therefore, militant violence in Egypt, have earned Sudan international pariah status. There are little-known allegations too of ethnic-cleansing by Beshir’s administration in the Nuba Mountains.

Struggle for Survival and its predecessor stand outside that tradition of colonial memoirs which encompasses the tomes of unknown British soldiers and more famous works such as Slatin Pasha’s *Boys Own-style*, Fire and Sword in the Sudan. Thomas’s personal involvement

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in the political plot as it unfolds makes Struggle for Survival a surprisingly gripping read, which Sudan-watchers would be ill advised to miss. Thomas writes as a firm friend of Sudan at a time when Sudan needs every friend it can muster.

Iain Marshall



Kwama

You saved us; you paid
the price of disability.
Your wrists amputated,
living you groaning and disabled;
for refusing to be bribed,
for refusing to disclose,
the hiding place of
your people, the Abegi.
Over my deadbody, he said;
No one be sold here!

A sacrifice that will be
reiterated to and by
all generations to come.
At the foot of Mount Wotogo,
he swore; Abegi don't ever
avenge; it was for you !
My legacy: defend the land
for my unborn descendants,
sustain our heritage.

Hundred and eighty years on,
the legacy of his sacrifice
is alive as of yesterday.
Sounds like a myth isn't it?
Yet a factual, bitter history
remembered by all his descendants.
You will be re-incarnated, among
your descendants who will inherit
the name, Kwama ! You're brave

Dinah Köjö



Scarlet Ink

All I want Lord?
Give me that fountain pen
filled with scarlet ink,
which runs from the Cross
that never dries up.
So that I can inscribe
the words from my heart:
history of our captivity
in the land where we belong.
So that, our oppressors can
read their atrocious records
which they profit and pride over.
So that the world can read
the history of my people !
written in calligraphy
with scarlet ink which
only You can erase.

Dinah Köjö