

# Sudan Studies

for South Sudan and Sudan

Number 62

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*Front cover photograph: : A composite of photos of revolutionary art, taken in Khartoum in June 2019 (Credit: Imogen Thurbon).*

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## Editorial

Welcome to Issue 62 of *Sudan Studies*. We hope you and your families are safe and well in these difficult times. Sadly, during the period since the last journal was published six months ago, there have been many deaths of people who were well known in Sudan and South Sudan studies, as well as Sudanese health workers who gave their lives helping to fight the pandemic in the UK. We pay tribute to them here in the **Obituaries** section.

We have also lost the veteran politician Dr. Mansur Khalid, who launched his book *The Paradox of Two Sudans* at the SSSUK Symposium in October 2015. A friend and former colleague pays tribute to him.

Like all other organisations, SSSUK has adapted to the changing conditions of the pandemic and this year, there will sadly be no Annual Symposium or AGM at SOAS. Although we will miss meeting old friends, browsing the bookstalls and listening to interesting presentations (as well as the lunch!), we have already hosted a seminar about the pandemic (the link is still available on our website) and we are planning more in the near future. There is a report on the online seminar compiled by **Rebecca Bradshaw** in this issue and to view the webinar itself, please visit our website, [www.sssuk.org](http://www.sssuk.org)

As members are well aware, the Society needs to stay solvent and pay for all its activities, including the printing and postage for this journal. At the AGM last year, members voted to increase the annual membership fee by a modest amount but unfortunately, many people have still not amended their payments. For those of you who have yet to do so, **PLEASE** update your Standing Order/Pay Pal payment (see form below) so that you are paying the full amount agreed.

This is a bumper issue of *Sudan Studies* as we wanted to include important and timely contributions about the pandemic, its effects, and responses in Sudan, South Sudan and the UK. In addition to the report on the SSSUK online seminar, **Yasir Arman** presents a short satirical essay on Lord Kitchen-er's thoughts about Sudanese doctors in the UK; **Imogen Thurbon** contributes a photo essay outlining the responses of women in literacy circles which she wrote about in *Sudan Studies* 57; medical doctor **Ahmed Hashim** looks at the role of graffiti art in Sudan's battle against Covid-19.

This issue also contains the usual eclectic mix of articles spanning history, culture, politics and archaeology. Last year's Sir William Luce Fellow at Durham University, **Philip Winter**, presents the first part of an illustrated paper on the Ilemi Triangle between South Sudan and Kenya. **Amira Osman**, who spoke at our last Symposium on the Sudanese diaspora in the UK, writes here about their role in the December Revolution in Sudan, based on her current research.

**Tohamy Khalifa** and **Rebecca Bradshaw** write about their research into the relationship between the important archaeological site of El Kurru in north Sudan and the folklore surrounding it. Meanwhile, **Daisy Abboudi** has written ‘A Short History of the Jews in Sudan’ for this issue based on her research for a forthcoming book and illustrating her article with some fascinating photographs.

**Ricardo Preve**, the film maker whose work in and about Sudan has featured at a past Symposium and also in Issue 53, has written a short report about a recent film workshop held in Khartoum. His article on Sudanese cinema will appear in our next issue. This is followed by **Rebecca Bradshaw**’s report on our webinar.

There are five Book reviews: **Jacob Akol** reviews **Douglas Johnson**’s book on South Sudan; **Sarrah El Bushra** reviews diaspora author **Jamal Mahjoub**’s book on his search for identity; **Peter Justin** reviews academic **Rachel Ibreck** on South Sudan’s justice system; **Gill Lusk** reflects on **Raffi Berg**’s tale of Israeli agents smuggling Ethiopian Jews to Israel 40 years ago; and finally, **Aly Verjee** presents **Luka Biong Deng Kuol** and **Sarah Logan**’s edited volume on security and state formation in South Sudan.

As always, we have **Francis Gotto**’s newsletter from the Sudan Archive in Durham.

We would like to thank all the contributors and particularly the SSSUK members who have helped make this such a vibrant and interesting issue. If you have an idea for a book review, article, photograph essay, memoir etc. then please don’t hesitate to get in touch: we would love to hear from you!



# Society for the Study of the Sudans (UK)

## Subscriptions

### PLEASE MAKE SURE THAT YOU ARE PAYING AT THE CORRECT RATE

The Society's increased activity over the past few years has been very welcome. It has, however, meant greater expenditure and a deficit in our annual accounts. To address that, members agreed at the 2019 AGM to increase the subscription rates. We are very grateful to members who have paid at the new rates (see below), but to everyone else I am making a special plea: please increase your bank or PayPal standing order.

If you use online banking, it is usually simple to change a standing order.

On PayPal it should be possible to use the following procedure:

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If that does not work, the alternative is simply to cancel the automatic payment and set up a new one.

Details of our NatWest bank account, if needed, are:

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<i>New rates agreed at the SSSUK AGM in 2019</i>	<i>UK</i>	<i>Europe</i>	<i>Elsewhere</i>
Individuals – paying via PayPal or bank standing order	£18	€28/£25	US\$30/£25
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Students (with identification)	£12	€18/£16	US\$20/£16
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I am very happy to advise anyone who has difficulties in increasing their payment. You can contact me at [treasurer@ssuk.org](mailto:treasurer@ssuk.org)

**Adrian Thomas**, Hon. Treasurer, June 2020





# Obituaries

## Mansur Khalid

### *Death of an icon*

Following his remarkable entry into the Sudanese political and social scene in the early seventies of the last century, Dr Mansur Khalid became an iconic figure: he stood out by his originality and non-conformism, as well as by his powerful intellectual and leadership qualities. He appeared as an innovator whose thoughts, actions and apparel were perceived as going against the grain of a society which, at that time, was indolent and laid back – mostly insipid and monotone – and ill-prepared to accommodate novel ideas and modes of thinking and exuberant dress codes imported from foreign lands.

Dr Mansur was a reformist who advocated change through evolution, not revolution. I heard this from him personally many times during my first encounters with him when he was Assistant to President Jaafar Nimeiry in 1977. This was probably one point that caused heated discussions between the two of us at that time: me, a young hothead advocating revolution, without having a clear idea as to how it could be achieved, and he, a mature and mundane technocrat defending the *status quo*, but not for too long. He was quickly confronted with his own untenable status: a reformist within a deceptively revolutionary set up, a liberal and a democrat working under the leadership of autocratic leaders; an intellectual denouncing the shortcomings of the Sudanese *intelligentsia* while himself being caught in the cobweb of an inextricable socio-political environment which left little room for that *intelligentsia* to excel. Regrettably, he himself was falling short of achieving his dreams of freedom, emancipation and modernity. From serving one military dictator in Khartoum he had to switch camps and join another military leader in “the bush” who was fighting that same dictator. His itinerary epitomises the predicament of the Sudanese intellectual who is often entrapped within a social and political situation heedless of any initiatives for meaningful and sustainable change.

### *The reformist and the global diplomat*

In the closed Khartoum society of the early 1970s, Dr Mansur was perceived by many as an outsider and a socio-cultural phenomenon – not to say a curiosity. He quickly became an object of admiration and awe, by some, and of trepidation and resentment by others; depending on which side of the sociopolitical divide you stood. The global diplomat, French-educated, American-trained, who espoused the ways and means of modern bureaucracy with the United Nations Secretariat in New York and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation in Paris quickly imprinted his own style of



*Mansur Khalid  
with Gill Lusk,  
SSSUK Annual  
Symposium,  
October 2015.*

management wherever he went. It was particularly in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (where he was Minister in 1971-75) that he left long standing marks of his ingenious reforms, that not even the folly of *Tamkeen* was later able to eradicate completely. *Tamkeen* was the process adopted by the former Islamist regime to purge its opponents from the civil service and productive sectors, and replace them by its supporters with the intention of controlling all the resources of the state.

Mansur's action as Sudan Permanent Representative to the UN from 1971 remains unequalled to this day. Then as Education Minister, he attempted, among other things, to remedy the decline of English-language skills brought on by Nimeiry's school reforms and launched the English-speaking teachers' scheme in 1975. His attempts to introduce reforms at the presidency, as Assistant to the President of the Republic in 1977, were quickly thwarted by his adversaries who coalesced around the President to see to it that the good old anachronistic and inefficacious state apparatus remained intact. It still is to this day.

It is interesting to see how Dr Mansur managed through his political acumen, intellectual audacity and vast network of connections within and outside Sudan to make a real impact on the political, intellectual and social situation in Sudan. He became a central figure in the political and intellectual scene thanks to the large number of books, and articles he authored in Arabic, English, sometimes even French. He remained loyal to the fundamentals of his political and social thought, throughout the some fifty years of his itinerary as international functionary, minister, Assistant to the President of the Republic, Advisor to the Chairman of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army, even if

he occasionally exercised some flexibility in the application of those principles. His detractors often wondered how he accommodated his adherence to liberal ideals of freedom, democracy and justice with his serving under autocratic leaders such as Generals Nimeiry and Omer al Bashir. Serving under Colonel John Garang can be excused, albeit with some reservation, by the fact that he was fighting on the side of the oppressed against their perceived oppressors.

Dr Mansur's dilemma is shared by many of those who find themselves in a situation of "*addiction to failure*", an expression coined by him to describe the predicament of the Sudanese intelligentsia that consistently fails to achieve its aspiration for democratic change and sustainable socio-economic wellbeing.

But Dr Mansur was a visionary and a man of action whose action was constrained by the indomitable and unabated and recurring crisis of his own country; a country that stubbornly keeps dreaming of freedom but is continuously pulled down to harsh reality by the more abrasive and unscrupulous forces of the society that keep dashing those dreams. It is a Sisyphean struggle that intermittently uplifts the society and its intelligentsia to the heights of revolutionary euphoria, followed by long spates of dictatorship and oppression.

Dr. Mansur's struggle is that of the Western-educated intellectual who came into the convoluted arena of political intrigues with nothing else than the power of his mind, his determination and his deep conviction of the ineluctability of social change. For him, modernisation of the state and emancipation of the people was only a matter of time. But that was not to reckon with the formidable forces that monopolised the state apparatus and manipulated social change by reversing the wheel of time and driving the society backward in compliance with their own narrow and obsolete interpretation of history, and more often than not, of the precepts of Islam.

### *The peacemaker*

Dr Mansur contributed, in different ways, to the two major peace agreements in the history of modern Sudan: the Addis Ababa Agreement of February 1972 and the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of January 2005. Both were intended to bring to an end the civil war in South Sudan and reconcile the two warring parts of the country. But neither of them achieved those two objectives due to the same resistance of centrifugal social and political forces that persisted in being myopic to the reality of the Sudanese situation, a diverse country that cannot be governed according to the ideology of a single group that exercises the monopoly of power to the exclusion of the diverse regional, sociocultural and political components of the society. Having played a key role in the talks leading to the conclusion of the Addis Ababa Agreement, Dr Mansur ended by being evicted by General Nimeiry from the government that ensued from it; as

Advisor to Dr John Garang, he played a role in engineering the CPA, only to see that agreement lead to the separation of the two parts of Sudan.

*The art lover and collector*

Dr Mansur left an impressive collection of paintings and art works in his beautiful residence in the centre of Khartoum. He had the intention of establishing a Mansur Khalid Cultural Centre. A proposal for converting his residence into a museum is being considered by his friends. It is hoped that that idea will materialise, with the agreement and support of his next of kin.

*The writer, the scholar and the erudite*

What was amazing about Dr Mansur was his ability to combine classical and modernistic modes of thought and expression at the same time. He was a powerful thinker and a prolific writer and an erudite. For him, writing was like a life support system, a means of keeping his balance in a sociopolitical situation which was the negation of all the ideals that he stood and fought for. He created his own intellectual world that helped him to survive the absurdity and adversity of that situation: a way of avenging himself and staying aloof from the mediocrity of a political class that ruled Sudan for too long, even if he had, occasionally, to ford the muddy waters of that same situation. From his disavowal of the Sudanese Intelligentsia in the mid-1960s to his elegy to the Revolution of Dis-May, his critique of the Arab vision of Southern Sudan, and finally the greatest triumph of them all: his colossal autobiography dubbed, in all humility, *Havamish and Shazarat* (Marginal Notes and Fragments), and all his other fifteen or twenty books and hundreds of articles in Arabic and English, he created a compensatory mechanism for not having the required weapons to stand up to the formidable powers that he resisted all his life.

That was also his legacy to future generations. He was gratified to witness, as his forces started to fade away at the end of his long and rich life, how young women and men revolted against tyranny and oppression to put Sudan along the path of freedom, peace and justice, ideals for which he had fought all his life. He drew great satisfaction from that revolution, which vindicated him. He certainly saw that as the culmination of his long and uphill struggle.

Dr Mansur will be greatly missed, especially at this particular moment when the revolutionaries of Sudan are called upon to navigate the dire straits of murky Sudanese politics. His wisdom and vast experience in dealing with political dinosaurs and younger crocodiles of all shades and attires would have been of great help.

May Allah Almighty bestow His Mercy and Forgiveness upon him.  
Amen.

Mansour Khalid, born Omdurman, 17<sup>th</sup> January 1931, died Khartoum, 22<sup>nd</sup> April 2020.

**Nureldin Satti**

Dr Nureldin M.H. Satti is Sudan's Ambassador-Designate to the United States. He was Ambassador to France and has worked on conflict resolution in various situations. Volume 1 of his memoirs appeared in Arabic in 2019 and publication is due in French and English.

## Lesley Forbes

Lesley Forbes was an outstanding librarian in the field of Middle Eastern and African studies, and a key figure in the foundation and development of the Sudan Studies Society of the UK (SSSUK).

Lesley was born in London on 24<sup>th</sup> May 1943, and after a peripatetic early life, the family moved to Plymouth where her father was a hospital consultant. She was sent to a boarding school in Winchester which proved an unhappy experience and she left after GCE O-Level exams to work in Plymouth Public Library. However, Lesley was determined to continue studying and after taking an A-Level by correspondence and a spell at school in Switzerland, she was admitted to Durham University in 1961, completing her undergraduate degree in 1964.

After Durham, Lesley moved to London to study librarianship, which led to her appointment to the Library of the School of Oriental and African Studies (SOAS). This gave her opportunities to travel extensively in Africa and the Middle East to acquire books for the Library. In the evenings, she worked part-time as a dresser for the ballet dancers at Covent Garden. There she developed a love of ballet, as well as an appreciation of classical music more broadly.

In 1973, Lesley returned to Durham as Keeper of Oriental and African Books, and also assumed responsibility for the Sudan Archive. In 1978, she obtained external funding which enabled the appointment of an archivist for four years, during which time the Archive was organised into collections and catalogued. Lesley also co-organised the Durham-Sudan Historical Records Conference in 1982, which was the last major gathering of former colonial Sudan Government officials. This event led to a substantial influx of new material to the Archive, much of it collected by Lesley personally and involving a good deal of travel around the country. She also came to know the many international scholars, including Sudanese academics and students, who went to Durham to use the Archive where Lesley gave them a warm welcome.

Throughout her time in Durham Lesley worked tirelessly to promote the



Archive, speaking at international conferences and making visits to Khartoum and Juba. It was due to her energy and vision that the Archive thrived to become a nationally designated collection. Lesley also found time to publish, writing about the archive in a number of journals and collections, and in 1994 she co-edited (with Martin Daly) a delightful volume of photographs from the Archive.

In 1987 Lesley was one of the founders of SSSUK along with Professor Neville Sanderson, Tony Trilsbach and myself. We met in her house in Durham and she was to play a key role in the Society, especially through her contacts with the former Sudan Government officials. When SSSUK was established, some of them had concerns that it might be unduly critical of their legacy and were reassured that the new committee contained someone they knew and trusted. For many years after SSSUK's foundation, Lesley continued to play a leading role on the committee, including the organisation in Durham of two of a series of international conferences in which the Society was involved.

Another Sudan-related committee on which Lesley served as a Trustee, was the Gordon Memorial College Trust Fund, established by Lord Kitchener in 1899. The Fund supported Sudanese research students and her knowledge of the Archive was particularly important in assessing applicants seeking to visit it; in addition to which she kept a wary eye on the gender balance of awards.

Lesley's involvement with Sudan continued after her move to Oxford in the prestigious position of Keeper of Oriental Collections at the Bodleian Library, and Professorial Fellow at St. Cross College from 1999 to 2008. Colleagues from those years remember a warm welcome when visiting her book-filled office. Her many acquisitions included, *The Book of Curiosities of the Sciences, and Marvels for the Eyes*, a previously unknown document in Arabic which included two significant world maps.

In retirement, Lesley continued to serve as a Trustee of the Mohamed Ali Foundation, which owns the Abbas Hilmi papers in Durham University Library. She also continued as a Fellow by special election of St. Cross College, where she was Arts Registrar, responsible for the organisation and documentation of its art collection. In her later years, Lesley struggled against cancer, while continuing her work in St. Cross as well as travelling widely, particularly in Asia and the Middle East.

Lesley will be much missed by SSSUK and she leaves an important legacy in both Durham and Oxford.

Lesley Forbes died on 18<sup>th</sup> March 2020. Her two sons, Robin and Nicholas, survive her, together with her five grandchildren.

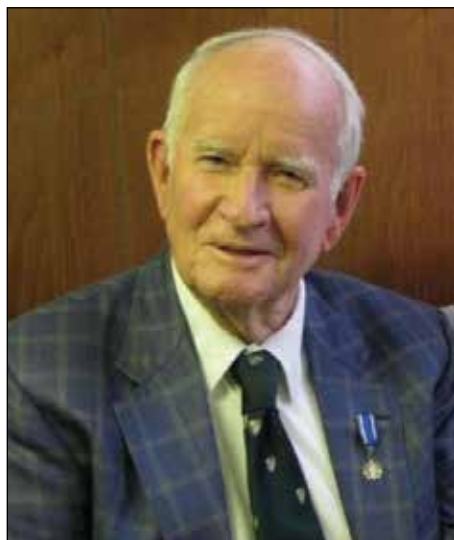
**Peter Woodward**



## William Yewdale Adams: An Appreciation

A great light in the study of the Sudanese Nile Valley went out in August 2019 with the loss of Professor William (Bill) Y. Adams, who passed away aged 92 in Lexington, Kentucky.

Sadly I didn't have the opportunity to get to know Bill personally, but he was always incredibly kind and encouraging when he shared his research with me, particularly on the subject of Nubian ceramics on which he was an expert. I fondly remember his visit to the British Museum in May 2018 for the opening of the W. Y. Adams Library: the result of his generous donation of his personal library to the Sudan Archaeological Research Society, for which he held the role of Honorary



*William Yewdale Adams, wearing  
The Order of the Two Niles medal.  
(Credit: University of Kentucky).*

President for 19 years. After the formal opening of the new library, Bill was surrounded by a crowd of his friends and colleagues at the wine reception who seemed to be hanging on his every word throughout the night. I will always be grateful that he made time that evening to look over the new museum displays which I had recently curated in the British Museum's Sudan, Egypt and Nubia gallery with me. It meant a great deal to know that he was pleased with them.

After studying at the University of California, Berkeley, and gaining his PhD from the University of Arizona, Bill took up the role of Professor in the University of Kentucky in 1966 where he spent most of his long and successful career. In 1955, Bill married Nettie Alice Kessler, an anthropology student and skilled archaeologist in her own right. The couple moved to Sudan in 1959 when Bill worked as an aerial photographer for UNESCO, surveying for archaeological sites in advance of the construction of the Aswan High Dam. Bill and Nettie's two children, Ernest and Edward, also lived with their parents in Sudan and became well accustomed to life on an archaeological excavation from a young age.

Bill went on to direct the Sudan Antiquities Service West Bank Survey of Sudanese Lower Nubia between 1960–1963, locating a vast number of previ-

ously unknown sites and excavating several of them, including Faras, before they were flooded when the Dam became operational in 1964. His publication record is prolific: during his career Bill wrote 26 books including the seminal work *Nubia: Corridor to Africa* in 1977, which remains a core text for the study of ancient Nubia and importantly was translated into Arabic in 2004. Many of these works are publications of Bill's own excavations including at the sites of Meinarti, Qasr Ibrim and Kulubnarti, which set the standard for archaeological publication from the 1960s onwards and remain highly relevant today.

Bill and Nettie continued to travel the world, including a recent period of teaching in Beijing, China and in Almaty, Kazakhstan. He leaves a significant teaching legacy at the University of Kentucky, where he became Professor Emeritus after his retirement, and was their first faculty member inducted into the College of Arts & Sciences Hall of Fame in 2009. In 2005, the President of the Republic of Sudan presented Bill with The Order of the Two Niles, Sudan's highest civilian award, in a ceremony at the presidential palace in Khartoum. This prestigious award recognised his many contributions to the archaeology and anthropology of the Sudanese Nile Valley, and his lifelong interest in the country and dedication to its people. Bill's legacies will live on in Sudan and in the study of the Nubian region in Africa, and he will be greatly missed around the world by all who knew him.

SSSUK wishes to offer its condolences to Nettie Adams, Bill's widow, and family.

William Yewdale Adams, born Los Angeles, California, 6<sup>th</sup> August 1927; died Lexington, Kentucky, 22<sup>nd</sup> August 2019.

**Anna Garnett**

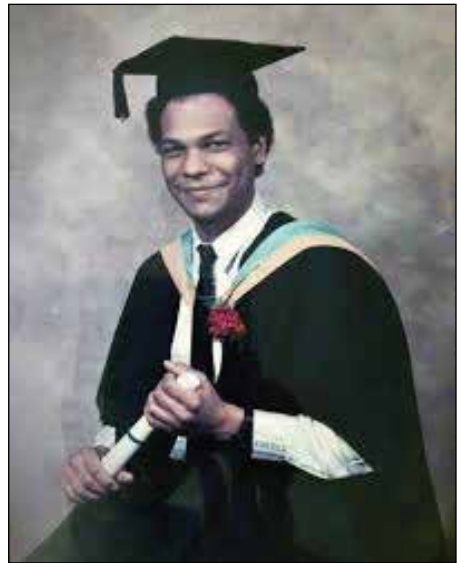
## Tribute to Sudanese health workers

“Coming 5,000 miles to die for the NHS”, said a BBC website headline when two Sudanese British doctors, Adil el Tayar and Amged el Hawrani, tragically became nationally famous as the first working medics in this country to die from Covid-19 in the last week of March 2020. As we go to press at the end of June, the two consultants have been joined by three more Sudanese medical workers – two more doctors and an ambulance worker.

At a time of increased xenophobia in the UK and a rising awareness of racism, Islamophobia and other prejudice, they have all not only shone a light on how much our National Health Service depends on staff from overseas but also helped trigger investigations, including by the British Medical Association and by the Sudan Doctors’ Union UK, into why people from Black, Asian and Minority Ethnic (BAME) groups seem more susceptible to the Coronavirus than others.

### *Dr Amged el Hawrani*

Dr Amged el Hawrani, 55, was an ear, nose and throat specialist in Burton-on-Trent, Staffordshire. His family moved from Khartoum to Taunton when he was eleven, so he lived most of his life in Britain, though like Sudanese over many decades, he had done surgical training in Ireland. The graduation photograph of a young man full of hope must be stamped on many minds and his achievements were indeed many, in addition to medicine. Not many Sudanese go climbing in the Himalayas but Amged did, to raise money for a CT scanner at the hospital where he worked. He also paid for the stadium of one of Sudan’s two leading football teams, El Merrikh, to be refurbished. He is survived by his wife and 18-year-old son, Ashraf, who told Sky News: “He taught me the significance of respect and equality. He also stressed the importance of not worrying about the things I cannot control, which he displayed to me right up until the end of his life”.



*Amged el Hawrani at graduation.  
(Credit: family photo).*



**CORONAVIRUS**  
COVID-19

**Sudan Doctors' Union**  
UK branch

## UK Sudanese healthcare workers who lost their lives during COVID-19



**Dr Amged El-Hawrani**  
ENT consultant  
University Hospitals of  
Derby and Burton



**Dr Muhannad Eltayib**  
Cardiothoracic surgery  
registrar  
Royal Victoria Hospital



**Dr Abdelwahab Yousif  
Babiker**  
Consultant Physician  
Scarborough Hospital



**Dr Adil El-Tayyar**  
NHS Transplant Surgeon



**Mr Hafiz Jalal**  
London NHS Patient  
Transport Worker



| sdu\_uk

| A tribute to our NHS heroes

#NHSHeroes  
#clapforourcarers  
#thankyouNHS

*Sudan Doctor's Union UK, Tribute.*

Over 200 miles away in Belfast, Dr Muhanad Eltayib soon found himself self-isolating with suspected Coronavirus, alone in his flat, for nearly a fortnight. He was young and sky-diving fit, and didn't feel he had to go for treatment to the hospital where he worked. When friends didn't hear from him, they called the police, who broke into his flat and found him dead. His father, Eldawi, a surgeon in Saudi Arabia, received the tragic phone call just before he was due to operate on the children of friends injured in a car crash. He wrote movingly about his loss in Arabic on social media and Al Jazeera circulated his words.

Below, we publish tributes to Sudanese medical staff struck down by the Coronavirus in the UK.

*Dr Adil el Tayar, transplant surgeon, Hereford County Hospital*

"My father just died", came the voice down the phone. Time immediately slowed down. It was Dr Osman, Adil's eldest son.

It was a Wednesday evening and I had just, one hour earlier, finished a phone conference call with Osman and the consultant intensivist, the critical care physician looking after Adil that day. That was a type of conversation that I was used to having regarding patients I had looked after before in my own practice. This time, I was on the receiving end and images of the faces of my patients' relatives expressing their fear and absolute desperation for their loved ones flashed before me. I knew exactly what was coming. "Dr Adil is critically unwell and we are struggling to maintain his oxygenation, despite our best efforts".

Earlier that day, the family had been scrambled to the unit where Adil was being treated. They had received a call from the consultant that suggested an end-of-life approach was the consensus of opinion reached by the team and that we should let Adil go. The three of us concluded our phone conference, having discussed interventions that had not been tried and which we agreed to apply, reassessing the situation after 48 hours.

I called Adil's siblings, my cousins, in different parts of the world to reassure them and I made my way home. The phone rang again: "My father just died".

Born in Atbara, Adil was a self-made man, the eldest son and second child amongst twelve. His whole life would be affected by the loss of a younger brother, who in later years he would bring back to life by naming his own eldest son after him, Osman. They were a typical pious Sudanese family, with a strong sense of community. They thrived together in the midst of plenty – in terms of people, not material assets. Adil recognised early on that if you wanted to go far in life, then you needed to go together, in partnership with



*Dr Adil el Tayar. "To me, pointing at the sea embodies his approach to life: nothing can stand in the way of your dreams".  
(Credit: family photo).*

your family, with your community, with people.

He chose medicine as a career fairly early on and before many of his peers had decided what to do with their lives. After all, it was about people and he was well suited to it. This was a relationship that brought one complete stranger together with another stranger for healing. It allowed him to see immediately, amongst other things, how too little or too much of a "sweet thing", i.e. a good thing, could hurt you and push you to seek help: balance was needed. It taught him that expensive assets made you exist but not live. It taught him that material assets eventually depreciated with time and that building human beings was a more valuable investment. In the end, when you leave this world, you take nothing with you to the next. He always talked about that when he spoke about those who had passed away.

He built a life experience seeking to help people and in a strange way, the act of 'seeking to help others'

usually found its way to him, even when there was no one to help: "What do I do with this now? Who can benefit from this?"

Adil was a doer and decided on a career in surgery. Somehow, it made that intimate relationship between strangers far more unique, allowing him to get physically inside to help. He immediately gravitated to transplant surgery, where he could facilitate not only helping one patient but provide a life-long bond between two patients through the act of giving. He had found his vocation.

In any society, we are conditioned to measure success in terms of where we have arrived in our lives or how much money we have amassed over the years. Somehow that takes away from the journey, which frequently takes many years

of travel but also does not reflect the ups and downs, or the “scars” that our body or minds have sustained and how they have healed if they ever have. In a way, there is a greater meaning to success when it’s not expressed by an end point in time but rather by the cumulative points in a journey with all its imperfections that gives us humans the characteristic of resilience so much needed to deal with change. Adil and many other Sudanese diaspora doctors who arrived in the UK share that resilience, which makes each journey independently successful and unique.

**Hisham Elkhider FRCS**, General surgeon and first cousin.

*Abdel Hafiz Gellaladin Abdel Hafiz, 3<sup>rd</sup> August 1966-9<sup>th</sup> April 2020.*

Ambulance driver and care assistant, Kingston Hospital, Surrey.

Hafiz was a loved uncle, father and brother. He was born in Khartoum and came to the UK in 1989. Throughout all his life, he had a connection with Sudan and appreciated the people and the culture in both places. He settled here with his wife and three children, and worked endlessly to provide service to others. He was loved by the community and those around him as his selfless attitude was always present.

His last job, working for the NHS and providing for the elderly, was not only a job but a passion of his.



**Ashraf Amin Mohammed, LLB**  
University of Exeter, nephew.

*Abdel Hafiz Gellaladin, patient  
transport, Kingston.*

*Dr Muhanad Eldawi Nowar Eltayib, 14<sup>th</sup> May 1984-20<sup>th</sup> April 2020.*

I got to know Dr Muhanad in 2011, when he came from Saudi Arabia to Ireland, where it was his first job as a surgical senior house officer. At that time, I was a surgical registrar in the busy Our Lady of Lourdes Hospital in Drogheda, northeast of Dublin. From the minute Muhanad joined us, I knew he was different from all the juniors who worked with me. He had a passion for surgery and had a clear plan of what he wanted to do in Ireland. “I have an old dream that I want to do cardiothoracic surgery”, he told me one day.

Muhanad was such an intelligent, talented, young Sudanese doctor. He spoke English like a native though he had never before been in an English-speaking country. His academic knowledge was far deeper and sounder than the rest of his peers. One day I asked him, when he was operating under my supervision,

from where he had got all this hand skill, though he was my junior. And he told me, “It was my dad, who is a senior surgical consultant in Saudi Arabia.”

I got to know that Muhanad’s father, Eldawi, was not only his dad or his trainer, he was also his closest friend. It was such a unique relationship that was reflected in Muhanad’s personality and added much more to his natural talent and passion. Muhanad had been academically outstanding since he was a medical student at El Gezira University in Sudan, which was the best university after the University of Khartoum and in some years, ranked first. “Muhanad used to teach us anatomy when we were medical students”, one of his close friends told me.

Muhanad managed to finish the membership exams for the royal colleges of surgeons in record time while he was still in Sudan. Being academically outstanding didn’t affect his social life or his hobbies. He had a lot of friends and a unique selection of hobbies. He was a good athlete who spent an hour in the gym most days of the year. He was a musician, with his guitar with him by the bed every night. He had a passion for sky diving and had a licence for that, and he joined sky diving clubs in Dublin and Belfast. He was a vibrant young man, full of life and ambition. He bought his clothes and toiletries from the top fashion houses. Even when he wanted to buy his first car in Ireland, he was not looking at ordinary cars, he got a German Porsche, which was costly to run and to service.



*Dr Muhanad outside his hospital  
in Belfast.*

After his six months in general surgery, he pursued his dream and got a job as an SHO in a cardiothoracic unit in Mater Hospital in Dublin. That job was the start of his passionate career; he gave his job all that he had in time, dedication and effort. Within a short time, he was promoted as a registrar in cardiothoracic. He was so happy with that progress and continued to work even harder. He spent five years in Dublin, a city that he loved so much and he had so many friends there.

In the same year that he got an Irish passport, he started to think about moving to the United Kingdom, a country that all successful and famous Sudanese doctors got trained in from the start of independence to this day.



His love for Dublin pushed him to take a job not far away at the Royal Victoria Hospital in Belfast, the biggest hospital in Northern Ireland and one of the biggest in Europe. He went to Belfast so as to be close to his beloved city and his friends in Dublin.

He continued his hard work in Belfast but he wasn't as happy as he was in his comfort zone in Dublin. Nevertheless, he was determined to finish his fellowship exams and to get registered as a consultant in cardiothoracic. He got the books and started studying in the short time he had at a busy hospital and in a very demanding speciality. In one year, he gained the trust of his senior colleagues and the love of his junior colleagues and nurses.

Muhanad's sudden death from Covid-19, all alone in his apartment on the 14<sup>th</sup> floor of the "Dream Towers" in the heart of Belfast City Centre came as a heart-breaking shock to everybody who had got to know him. His friends and colleagues are still grieving.

I speak every second day with his family, who are locked down in Saudi. Forgive me as I don't have the words which can describe their condition; his beloved Mum is still in shock and thinks he may still be alive and it's merely a terrible nightmare. On other days, she starts crying from the beginning to the end of the phone call.

Muhanad will remain in our hearts till the day of judgement.

**Nezar Mahmoud**, Surgeon, Ireland East Hospital Group.

*Dr Abdel Wahab Yousif Babiker, 1<sup>st</sup> January 1950-18<sup>th</sup> May 2020,*  
consultant physician, Scarborough Hospital.

Dr Abdel Wahab, a neurologist who shares the unfortunate accolade of those brave fallen doctors who succumbed to the Covid-19 virus while working in the NHS, came to Britain in the 1990s. He was born in a small village, El Gebeliah, on the outskirts of El Meselamiah in the Gezira, once a jewel in the imperial British crown and the largest agricultural project in the world under one administration. He made his home in England and like many Sudanese, found ways to maintain a tight social and academic link with his homeland.

Abdel Wahab was a frequent visitor to the Sudan and ensured that his immediate family maintained those links. He was a



*Dr Abdel Wahab salutes  
Sudan's Revolution.*

proud member of the Society for the Study of the Sudans, UK and frequently encouraged his country folk to become members. He spoke very highly of SSSUK and recognised its importance in familiarising and linking second and subsequent Sudanese generations with Sudan.

Dr Abdel Wahab's eldest son, Dr Omer, also works for the NHS. He was the only member of his family with him when he passed away. His mother and five siblings were subject to the international lockdown following one of their regular visits to Sudan.

**Hisham Elkhider**

# The Sudanese Doctors Who Are Growing Basil Around Our Country<sup>1</sup>

Yasir Arman\*

Lord Kitchener stroked his heavy moustache and felt a little puzzled after restarting his smart phone and going through the backlog of messages. His phone hadn't worked since the disastrous shipwreck on 5<sup>th</sup> June 1916, which had cost him his life and that of 737 others when a mine struck their ship off the coast of Scotland. News of his death was seen at the time as little short of a national disaster and many British people feared that the war might have been lost.

Field Marshal Horatio Herbert Kitchener, the experienced Minister of War, who had been to many war fronts in different parts of the British Empire, including Sudan, Egypt, South Africa and India, could hardly believe his eyes when he went through his messages, including those in the Arabic language which he had mastered. He was surprised at how the world had changed since



*Kitchener of Khartoum in First World War  
recruitment poster, September 1914.*

1916. He had been a colonialist of the first order who had helped to build the glory of the British Empire in military campaigns and was known for his scorched earth policies.

Despite the sad messages on his phone, he felt proud when he remembered that it had been his idea to build the Gordon Memorial College in Sudan. He picked up the Guardian newspaper and looked at the headlines praising Sudanese doctors on the front lines of a war that he was not aware of! It was the first time he

<sup>1</sup> A longer version of this article was published in *Sudan Tribune* on 6<sup>th</sup> April 2020.

had heard about the coronavirus pandemic. He switched on the television, which was carrying a report about two Sudanese doctors (Dr Amged el Hawrani and Dr Adil el Tayar) who had been waging a war to protect British people. He recalled the war that he had fought against the Sudanese in Omdurman and reflected on what could have brought Sudanese doctors to Britain. He consoled himself with the thought that his idea of building the Gordon Memorial College had finally paid off. That initiative had borne fruit in Britain, perhaps to a greater extent than in Sudan itself. He discovered from Google that nowadays there were thousands of Sudanese doctors living and working in Britain. Perhaps he had intended to show mercy to the Sudanese after the British invasion but instead, they had shown mercy to his country.

The Gordon Memorial College was officially opened in Khartoum in 1902 by Lord Kitchener, who had left Sudan in 1899 to fight the Boer War in South Africa. The Kitchener School of Medicine was later established in his memory by Sir Reginald Wingate and became one of the best medical schools in Africa. Since its foundation in 1924, many well-qualified medical doctors, scientists and politicians had graduated from it, including El Tijani el Mahi, Omar Beilel, Khalida Zahir, Amer Mersal, Ahmed Abdelaziz, Taha Talat, Justin Yac Arop, Abdul Halim Mohamed, Richard Hassan, Taha Ahmed Basher and Taha Othman Bilya. The late Dr Izzeldin Ali Amer, who had an office in Harley Street, the heart of London's medical district, was involved in both politics and medicine until he came to London after the 1989 coup and followed his profession as a doctor until his death.

Dr Amged and Dr Adil waged a great humanitarian battle against the coronavirus and have raised the name of Sudan high in the glorious heavenly firmament and in Humanity without Borders and Doctors without Borders. Adil el Tayar was a retired organ transplant surgeon who returned to work in the NHS when he heard about the deadly virus. Amged el Hawrani was an ear, nose and throat consultant in the NHS who still had much of his life ahead of him but who chose to put his duty first, even at the cost of his life. When the pandemic is over, medical doctors and British and Sudanese people will light candles in their memory. Maybe racism will disappear, together with the pandemic, and their names will be given to roads and medical districts in Britain!

Human life is short and transitory and we should use it to serve humanity, as Dr Adil and Dr Amged did. Glory to them and condolences to their families.

What doctors and their teams of nurses, technicians and administrative staff are doing makes them heroes at the time of a pandemic. They deserve to be applauded not only from the balconies of people's homes but also from their hearts.

Doctors were at the forefront of Sudan's Revolution which began in Decem-

ber 2018 and led to the overthrow of President Omer el Bashir's regime on 11<sup>th</sup> April 2019. They were wounded and killed because they were searching for a New Sudan, as Steve Biko, a medical student and anti-apartheid campaigner in South Africa, was searching for a new country. The South African police thought that Biko had died under torture but Biko's spirit never died. Indeed, it reappeared when apartheid disappeared.

Dr Ali Fadl, who was tortured to death by Bashir's security services, awoke from his silence with the cheers of the glorious December Revolution and the Doctors' Movement was born again. Thanks to Ali Fadl, the death sentence that the Bashir regime issued against Dr Mamoun Mohamed Hussein, the Secretary General of the Doctors' Union, was a stray shot that did not damage the doctors' movement but instead increased their courage, commitment and patriotism. Lawyers, legal professionals and judges have often formed the active part of the political movement in our country. But the doctors who worked closely with the people were more conscious of their suffering, although there were also some doctors who turned medicine into a commodity governed by profit rather than humanity.

Many of those who control our lives in today's world are more concerned with 'saving Wall Street' than with humanity itself. They care more about buildings than human values. But when values disappear, their buildings are empty. The coronavirus crisis has exposed the impotence and bankruptcy of the global system. The free world has been deprived of its freedom and the pandemic has revealed much hypocrisy about human values. Because of the pandemic, people now resemble the living dead.

These days, people flee from their brothers, sisters, mothers and fathers and the great cities of the world have turned into ghost towns. Those who possess weapons of mass destruction are impotent to combat a mass virus. And many dreams of the powerful have turned into nightmares. There are lessons to be learned from all this: modern life lacks a lot of the things that would make it worthy of a human being and, despite scientific progress, human beings are still ignorant of many things. Progress should be focused on human beings rather than on machines. We should work tirelessly to make life more human.

Lord Kitchener woke up after being deep in thought and reflected on the meaning of life and human values, on the many people who had lost their lives in his wars and on his short-lived glory in the land that he had invaded and which had come back to invade his land. He stroked his moustache again and contemplated how much life and the world had changed and what had happened to the Empire on which the sun never set. He realised that his real glory came from having established the Gordon Memorial College rather than from the honours bestowed on him for the battle of Omdurman, the Boer War

and his war against the poor of India, and he wished that he had built more Memorial Colleges. He thanked God for the Kitchener College of Medicine and other similar colleges which had sent thousands of Sudanese doctors to Britain, who were now working in the front line of the war against coronavirus. He decided to send a message adding his voice to those honouring Dr Adil and Dr Amged. Perhaps this would ease some of the pain of the battles he had fought in the past.

Lord Kitchener got up and put on his military uniform. He took a last look at his phone and found a picture of Dr Adil and Dr Amged with “A message from the people of Sudan” written on it, saying “Amged el Hawrani and Adil el Tayar, Sudanese doctors who grow basil<sup>2</sup> around our country”.

Kitchener smiled and, while his ship was sinking deep into the sea off the Scottish coast, he departed for eternity. As he stood on the foredeck, he realised that, after winning all his military battles, he was going to drown just because an invisible German mine had struck his ship. And the world in front of him was almost drowning from an invisible virus.

\* The author is Deputy Chairperson of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement-North/Sudan Revolutionary Front.

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<sup>2</sup> In many cultures, basil is regarded as a symbol of love, holiness, purity and healing.

# Covid-19 Prevention in Sudan – Scenes from the Front Line

Imogen Thurbon\*

## *Introduction*

The ladies said they have no information. They never see TV and there is no electricity. They even stopped listening to the radio because the battery price is too high. So they lack all information and so they cannot protect themselves. They don't imagine the risk or the danger they face. They are not ready for lockdown because they don't understand what's going on. They depend on day-to-day work. If they fall sick, they will not know what to do. As they say, "We have nothing but Allah".

Literacy coordinator Adila Osman for Women's Education Partnership, on visiting Jebel Aulia, near Khartoum.



*Outside our literacy centre in Jebel Aulia, 2019  
(Credit: Women's Educational Partnership, WEP).*

With little or no electricity, no running water, high levels of poverty-related disease and illiteracy, Jebel Aulia is desperately vulnerable to Covid-19. The homes of our literacy participants are sadly a world away from that shown in the national Covid-19 prevention campaign poster below.



Women's Education  
Partnership



*Sudanese Ministry of Health Coronavirus prevention poster: “Stay at Home”. This containment approach faces profound challenges when set against Sudan’s economic and cultural realities (Credit: Ministry of Health, Sudan).*

In March this year, the Women’s Education Partnership responded to an appeal issued to Sudan-based International Non-Governmental Organisations (INGOs) by Sudan’s Ministry of Health and the Humanitarian Aid Commission to undertake urgent Covid-19 awareness and prevention outreach. Their work, carried out among some of the most deprived communities in Khartoum in mid-April this year (just before lockdown was imposed in Khartoum on April 18th) is a testimony to their personal courage and a sense of community responsibility that far exceeds their job descriptions.

In this article, I begin with an overview of Covid-19’s potential health



impact on Sudan, followed by a brief discussion of the challenges involved in implementing effective lockdown measures in the country and finally I consider the impact of those measures on Sudanese women and girls. I provide photographic testimonies of the Covid-19 prevention work we carried out in Khartoum. More detailed discussion of all these issues can be found in my blog.<sup>1</sup>

### *Covid-19 in Sudan*

The United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) reported that as of 13<sup>th</sup> May 2020, there were 1,818 confirmed Covid-19 cases in Sudan, including 90 fatalities, and that Kassala was the latest state to impose containment measures.<sup>2</sup>

### The Health Context

Pandemics are not equal-opportunity events. The poor bear a disproportionate burden of morbidity and mortality. (The Yale Review: Pandemic Inequality, The two worlds of social distancing, by Octávio Luiz Motta Ferraz).

During the 2009 swine flu pandemic, wealthy countries secured large advance orders for vaccines, but despite the efforts of The World Health Organization to negotiate donations, poor countries were crowded out – receiving vaccines more slowly than rich countries.<sup>3</sup>



*Jebel Aulia has little health infrastructure (Credit: WEP).*

<sup>1</sup> <https://womensliteracysudan.blog>.

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.unocha.org/sudan>. For daily updates also see: <https://africanarguments.org/2020/05/15/coronavirus-in-africa-tracker-how-many-cases-and-where-latest/>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/future-development/2017/06/19/pandemics-and-the-poor/>

The statistics are stark: in a country where 47% of the population live below the poverty line, there are only seven doctors for every thousand inhabitants, 80-odd ventilators in total and only 40 of the 200 critical care beds are in public hospitals.<sup>4</sup> It is estimated that 10% of Sudanese infected with the virus will die from it. Sudanese hospitals, blighted by decades of under-investment and the brain drain of qualified medical workers to the Gulf, face a daily struggle to operate amidst frequent power outages and the lack of the most basic sterilisation equipment and medicines. The country's health resources are concentrated in the capital and health facilities in Sudan's periphery are even more acutely vulnerable and under-resourced.

Africa imports 94% of its pharmaceuticals. At least 71 countries have banned or limited exports of certain supplies deemed essential to fight the disease.<sup>5</sup>

Civil society movements that were so effective in mobilising grassroots support for last year's revolution are marshalling their forces to fill the gap, providing voluntary medical and health support and awareness campaigns but their capacity will be quickly overwhelmed by a large-scale outbreak.

Although Sudan's population is young, it is also one suffering from high levels of malnutrition, the prevalence of chronic diseases such as malaria and dysentery, and the lack of any form of economic and health safety net for the poor; all factors which mean an uncontrolled outbreak of Covid-19 would be brutal and deadly. Bill Gates is reported as estimating the death toll in Africa if the disease goes unchecked as a staggering ten million people.

While Western countries struggle to meet ambitious testing targets, there is as yet little reliable mass testing or contact tracing in Sudan. Both the urban and rural poor can ill afford or easily access testing and a lack of hard currency makes purchasing tests and other vital equipment painfully slow and prohibitively expensive. Although the government moved swiftly to seal Sudan's vast borders, they remain porous to those who have not been tested – smugglers, undocumented returnees from neighbouring countries such as Egypt, many of which are suffering from rapidly rising infection rates, and refugees. "It's like the Titanic not having enough rescue boats. If the country is hit, it will definitely sink," said a Sudanese clinician.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> <https://mg.co.za/africa/2020-03-24-coronavirus-reaches-sudan-one-of-the-countries-least-equipped-to-cope-with-it/>.

<sup>5</sup> [https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-africa-unidUSKBN21Z1LW?utm\\_campaign=trueAnthem%3A+Trending+Content&utm\\_medium=trueAnthem&utm\\_source=facebook](https://www.reuters.com/article/us-health-coronavirus-africa-unidUSKBN21Z1LW?utm_campaign=trueAnthem%3A+Trending+Content&utm_medium=trueAnthem&utm_source=facebook)

<sup>6</sup> Quoted at <https://mg.co.za/africa/2020-03-24-coronavirus-reaches-sudan-one-of-the-countries-least-equipped-to-cope-with-it/>

Isolation centres were swiftly established in February this year and some earlier, both on borders and in key towns, but they lack basic equipment and monitoring systems and services for those who are quarantined. Radio Dabanga reported that Sudanese who had been quarantined after entering Sudan from Egypt complained of water and food shortages and of having no beds to sleep on. Some isolation centres appear to lack the consent and trust of those quarantined there, as reports of a mass exodus from quarantine centres and Khartoum hospitals would indicate.<sup>7</sup>

Isolation protocols, which were initially criticised as being too heavily based on voluntary compliance, have evolved to include force and compulsory detention, causing unrest, violence and mistrust, and undermining containment strategies that are dependent on consent; the credibility of Sudan's fragile post-revolution democracy is also undermined by this approach.

Tilal, a resident of the Kober neighbourhood near Universal Hospital, told MEE [Middle East Eye]:

that he saw hundreds of people fighting with police that night as they attempted – and succeeded – to exit the hospital .... There was huge chaos, people refused to stay in the isolation centre and even clashed with the police when they tried to prevent them from leaving.<sup>8</sup>

Sudan is home to more than a million refugees, as well as vast numbers of internally displaced persons (IDPs), living in crowded and often desperately insanitary conditions and with only rudimentary access to water, health care and basic food supplies. A Covid-19 outbreak in any of Sudan's numerous camps would be devastating.

### The response

The overview above makes for grim reading but all over Sudan, government agencies, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), trades unions and civil society movements are actively working to initiate and coordinate Covid-19 prevention and containment programmes. The sense is that there is still time.

Civil society organisations, in collaboration with government bodies, have launched awareness and prevention campaigns, and community health workers, whose front-line knowledge proved key during the Ebola epidemic, have been mobilised.

The authorities are implementing recommendations for the installation of safe water points in public spaces such as markets and toilets, and on city out-

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<sup>7</sup> <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/coronavirus-sudan-confusion-reigns-hundreds-escape-quarantine>

<sup>8</sup> See the same report as footnote 7 above



*Ministry of Health poster explaining how to prevent the spread of the virus through hand washing (Credit: Ministry of Health, Sudan)*

skirts as well as in areas without reliable water supplies.

Much progress has been made<sup>9</sup> but the need is enormous and the acquisition and distribution of medical supplies have been hampered by border closures, disruption of China-Sudan trade and the lockdown. The price of medical masks rose from 80 Sudanese pounds to 200 Sudanese pounds in the space of just a few weeks.

There are also alarming reports of violence against medical staff leading to widespread strike action:

<sup>9</sup> <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/news/coronavirus/hand-washing-more-accessible-covid-19-vulnerable-homeless-khartoum>



*Ingenious and simple solutions – seen in Khartoum village (Credit: personal contact).*

The Central Committee of the Sudanese Doctors, one of the syndicates that led the protests ending the rule of president Omar el Bashir in April 2019, said attacks on medical teams by security forces and civilians had become a common phenomenon, especially in emergency units across the country.<sup>10</sup>

### *The Complexities of Lockdown*

We started to make bread at home to avoid the crowds after my husband yesterday waited in the row for two hours and in the end he couldn't get it because it had run out. So, we decided not to

purchase bread although it is cheaper than making it at home because we have to buy commercial flour. The priority now is to keep ourselves safe and eat anything which will keep us away from any gathering...

Our country Coordinator, Neimat Issha, on her family's everyday dilemmas as curfews and lockdowns bite.

Another source reports:

How come the government wants us to stay at home while there is no power and water? The weather is too hot and we need to clean ourselves and wash our hands... We have children and elderly people. How can they bear this?<sup>11</sup>

A video circulating widely on Sudanese social media shows a market stall holder, with the punchy aplomb and perfect timing of a born salesman, plunge

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/coronavirus-responding-crisis-sudanese-doctor-still-under-attack>

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/coronavirus-sudan-khartoum-three-week-curfew-covid19>



*A prayer cap vendor in Souq el Arabi, Khartoum in 2019.  
Can she still support her family during lockdown? (Credit: WEP).*

his head into a sack of chilli peppers in a theatrical bid to back up his claims that they were a cure for Coronavirus as “they draw out poisons”. The broadcaster *Al Jazeera* has reported on similar false cures and denial campaigns, some of which are politically motivated, undermining the Minister of Information, Faisal Mohammed Salih’s war on misinformation.

Sudan, as everywhere else during the Covid-19 crisis, has seen a proliferation of myths and false claims surrounding both the propagation and prevention of the virus, as fear and desperation grow. “Many are anxious from hearing daily fatality reports from better-resourced countries and are concerned that their communities will be next.” (Quartz Africa). The government’s Covid-19 containment campaign also faces resistance and rejection from political and religious quarters.<sup>12</sup>

Lack of access to accurate Covid-19 guidance was painfully obvious to our Coordinator when she visited Jebel Aulia; myths surrounding the virus hamper prevention campaigns. Sudanese are also being asked to make profound

<sup>12</sup> See <https://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article69230>

changes in their social interaction. Refusing to shake hands when greeting is a mark of profound discourtesy in Sudan. Sudanese generosity dictates that meals are shared with a stranger as a matter of course and weddings, funerals and circumcisions are events that all family members and friends are honour-bound to attend. It will take time and determined media campaigns for these deeply engrained communal customs to be suspended, if only temporarily. International health workers in Sudan have noted that in mid-March, large funerals and weddings were still being held (personal communication).

### *The Impact of Lockdown on Women*

The women's organisation Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) reported that:

60% of the gross domestic product relies on the informal sector, and estimations indicate that women, who are simultaneously responsible of their nuclear and expanded families, make more than 80% of the informal labor in Sudan.<sup>13</sup>

Most women work in invisible sectors such as domestic work, factory workers, or itinerant saleswomen....<sup>14</sup>

In a country where the average local food basket accounts for at least 75% of household income, and where the United Nations predicts severe food shortages as a result of Covid-19 containment measures, families are faced with the terrible choice of protecting themselves from Coronavirus or feeding their families.

As containment measures start to bite, hitting the most vulnerable hardest, many fear that women's position during the pandemic is being overlooked. "A conversation amongst the privileged" is how SIHA describe measures imposed without consulting the women making up over 70% of Sudan's informal economy, the vast majority of whom have no access to clean running water, soap or reliable disease prevention information.

Without consultation and consent, lockdown is an even cruder weapon against the spread of disease when applied in refugee settlements:

In many cases, Covid-19's impact on refugees and IDPs will be felt disproportionately by women who often form the majority of displaced populations in conflict-afflicted regions. These women's

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<sup>13</sup> <https://sihanet.org/dos-and-donts-coronavirus-response-advice-does-not-see-the-reality-of-women-in-sudan/>

<sup>14</sup> <https://sihanet.org/the-state-policies-in-sudan-continue-to-undermine-women-and-marginalized-communities/>

access to services and ability to feed their families are already deeply constrained by stigma relating to their ties (real or alleged) to armed groups.<sup>15</sup>

Even when governments strive to minimise the most damaging consequences of lockdown on the poor, as is the case with Sudan's transitional pro-democracy government, their efforts can misfire. SIHA has documented numerous testimonies from Sudanese women who are unable to register for Covid-19 relief payments because they simply did not have the civil registry papers required to qualify for them. Those from ethnic and tribal groups which are traditionally subject to prejudice in Sudan fall victim to a discriminatory registration system that was inherited from the former regime.

Women were told to appear in front of the national records officers with male guardians or the ID of their male guardians. It is worth noting that 75% of the Sudanese population reside in the states, villages and outskirts of the city and they were not among the priorities of the current civil registry...<sup>16</sup>

Structural discrimination such as this compounds the impact that lockdown measures are having on women's prevailing role as carers. Already estimated to be doing three-to-four times more work in the home than men, women everywhere find their unpaid domestic and caring work increases exponentially as they care for children who are now not attending school and for older or frail relatives who are highly vulnerable to the virus. At the same time, those relying on income from the informal economy to feed their families have lost their source of income, hitting families headed by women the hardest. This applies with even greater force to Sudan, where there is no social safety net.

Buying and distributing food among their extended families and queuing to collect water from public pumps without sufficient soap places Sudanese women at high risk of infection. Lockdown may further limit women's access to menstrual, contraceptive and antenatal care, as essential protective supplies for midwives and health workers may become scarce. Maternal and infant death rates are predicted to rise; and throughout the world, the incidence of domestic and gender-based violence is soaring:

Domestic violence is already widely under-reported, with less than 40 per cent of women who experience violence seeking help, and the

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<sup>15</sup> <https://www.crisisgroup.org/global/sb4-covid-19-and-conflict-seven-trends-watch>

<sup>16</sup> <https://sihanet.org/the-state-policies-in-sudan-continue-to-undermine-women-and-marginalized-communities/>



pandemic is making reporting even harder, because of limitations on women's and girls' access to phones and helplines and disrupted public services like police, justice and social services.<sup>17</sup>

The impact of lockdown on girls' educational and later life opportunities can be profound in communities where they already lack access to education: cultural norms may give precedence to schooling sons and child marriage and Female Genital Mutilation (FGM) can disrupt or inhibit girls' attendance at school. Incidence of early pregnancy, sexual violence and forced labour increase sharply during crises and all can lead to girls being forced to abandon their schooling. Schools act as safe spaces for girls where they are less likely to be forced into marriage. During this pandemic, however, schools are not there to protect girls.<sup>18</sup>

Thirteen of 15 countries in the world where more than 30% of primary school-age girls are out of school are in sub-Saharan Africa.<sup>19</sup> Based on lessons learned from the school closures in response to the Ebola epidemics of recent years, the UN Children's Fund (Unicef) maintains that the longer children stay away from school, the less likely they are ever to return.<sup>20</sup>

Speaking on the same subject, Adila Osman from the literacy project spoke about the likelihood of children not returning to education:

This is highly expected to happen for both boys and girls. Boys enter the labour market and earn money which influences them to leave school and few think of saving money to pay for school. But among girls the probability is even higher, as they become familiar with domestic duties and the family in turn then encourages this.

Minimising the impact of lockdown on girls' education will need concerted and consistent measures to be put in place; closing the gender data gap will be key, as will tracking the number of children not attending school and providing gender disaggregated data to ensure that action can be taken if significant numbers of children do not return to school. When lockdown ends, governments should develop measures to identify and assist those who have not returned, for example by providing financial assistance programmes. Yet it is questionable, given the economic strain Covid-19 has put on an already fragile economic infrastructure, whether Sudan will have the resources to achieve this.

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<sup>17</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/04/1061052>

<sup>18</sup> <https://africanarguments.org/2020/04/15/how-girls-education-and-safety-will-be-harmed-by-the-covid-response/>

<sup>19</sup> Same source as in Footnote 18 above.

<sup>20</sup> <https://news.un.org/en/story/2020/03/1060402>



*The odds are already stacked against these children from Jebel Aulia either attending or continuing school. Girls are disproportionately affected by interruptions to their schooling (Credit: WEP).*

### *Our Covid-19 Awareness and Prevention Work*

The government's national Covid-19 prevention campaign involves the provision of soap, sanitiser and masks. House-to-house outreach work is undertaken to distribute these materials and to explain prevention posters and guidelines; the posters were designed by Unicef Sudan. The targeted communities are among the most deprived in Khartoum; they are also home to our existing women's literacy circles: Jebel Aulia, Hajj Yousif, Sharq el Nil, Umbadda, Wad Bashir, and El Fatih, Karari. Our staff, literacy workers and Ahfad University volunteers took part in the campaign. The aim was that participants from our literacy circles became Covid-19 prevention ambassadors in their communities, spreading the word to their families, friends and neighbours, and saving lives. Below are some scenes from our work.

The beneficiaries came on their own initiative and had a huge interest in what was explained by our literacy workers and discussed what they were doing and what new information they learnt. They all said they would pass the information to their families and the people around them.<sup>21</sup>

<sup>21</sup> WEP end of project report.



*A literacy facilitator in Jebel Aulia hands out Ministry of Health prevention guidance (Credit: WEP).*

*A member of our local partner, Tawafug, talking about the Coronavirus with local children while masks are distributed (Credit: WEP).*



*Salma, one of our literacy staff, explains when and how to disinfect hands using sanitiser where soap and running water are not available (Credit: WEP).*

*Thoraya, one of our literacy workers, during a Covid-19 awareness session for women of our literacy circles in Wad Bashir and Dar el Salaam (Credit: WEP).*



*Attendees learning the correct way to make and use face masks to reduce transmission from asymptomatic or symptomatic wearers (Credit: WEP).*

*In Wad Bashir and Dar el Salaam, 195 women received masks, sanitisers and awareness training (Credit: WEP).*







*Dr. Leila Bashir, our local partner and colleague, is an expert in REFLECT, a participatory teaching methodology known in full as Regenerated Freirean Literacy Through Empowering Community Techniques, devised by the late Brazilian educator Paulo Freire. Here she welcomes women to an awareness session (Credit: WEP).*

*Literacy worker Sumia explaining Covid-19 prevention to women from our literacy circles, pictured with materials ready for distribution (Credit: WEP).*



*We are committed to following up with all the communities we have worked with and know that there is much more to be done. We are acutely aware that action now will save lives in the future (Credit: WEP).*

Scientists have found that even homemade, cloth masks can reduce droplet spread from the wearer by 90% if worn and washed correctly. They also help to protect against infection in situations where social distancing is impossible. Mass testing for the virus is costly and logistically problematic in Sudan, as it is for so many other developing countries. Low-cost preventive options are key.

\* Imogen Thurbon (Dip.Trans. Arabic, MA Linguistics/ELT) combines her teaching work for the British Council in Madrid with her voluntary work supporting Arabic and English literacy projects for women in Sudan and South Sudan.

## **Sudan's Battle Against Covid-19: From social and economic challenges to the use of graffiti art**

**Ahmed Hashim\***

The coronavirus disease 2019 (Covid-19) pandemic has had widespread impacts on humanity as a whole, leading to an unprecedented and dramatic transformation in the perception of global health concerns. The rapidly spreading Covid-19 catastrophe, which began in China, has seriously disrupted the entire world, with hundreds of thousands of deaths. Even countries with sufficient financial resources and well-established health infrastructures struggle to contain it.

Sudan, like many African countries with limited resources, lacks economic resilience and large portions of the population have poor access to the health-care system; Sudan therefore faces a potentially devastating crisis as the virus begins to spread vigorously across the country. According to the Directorate General of Emergency and Epidemic Control in Sudan, as of 21<sup>st</sup> June 2020, 8,889 Covid-19 cases had been confirmed and sadly, 548 individuals had died.

The Sudan Ministry of Health (MoH), operating under the direction of a supreme ministerial committee, has endeavoured to slow the spread of Covid-19 throughout the country, implementing various preventive strategies. It launched a large national health education campaign and established a 24/7 hotline to handle public enquiries and provide advice and guidance to concerned citizens. The main international airport in Khartoum and all land borders have been closed since March, and a lockdown was gradually introduced, during which the public was strictly advised to stay at home and refrain from public gatherings. Additionally, the Sudanese diaspora living abroad have been constantly and generously donating aid to the MoH, purchasing essential testing kits and oxygen supplies and the much needed personal protective equipment (PPE), facilitating the ready availability of these important tools for frontline health professionals. These fundraising campaigns also support the government in its efforts to equip sufficiently recently established isolation and quarantine centres.

### *Information versus misinformation*

Despite these early and worthwhile efforts, the country continues to face great challenges, including widespread misinformation and rumour. Many Sudanese people initially believed that Covid-19 represented a social propaganda mechanism that did not truly exist, despite the existence of laboratory-confirmed cases. Much public scepticism stemmed from the misconception that the virus

would not spread or even survive in hot weather, such as that found in Sudan. Others have falsely reassured the public, disseminating misleading information suggesting that Covid-19 could be easily treated with local herbal remedies. Furthermore, some opposition groups have made politically motivated accusations against the transitional government, claiming that Covid-19 fear and anxiety were used for political means, to distract the public from more pressing national concerns, such as the economic recession. The possibility that people might hide their symptoms, due to the social stigma associated with Covid-19, is a growing concern. Beyond social misconceptions and financial constraints, managerial disagreements between the MoH and groups representing health professionals have added to the complexity of the mix, pouring more oil on to the fire. Finally, given the drastic economic repercussions of the lockdown, many Sudanese are struggling financially, which may jeopardise their willingness to comply with lockdown orders over the long term.

Communities have begun to explore innovative methods to fight misconceptions and boost public awareness, and some groups of artists across the country have begun to use graffiti art to achieve this aim. Graffiti and murals were a major highlight of the revolution which began in December 2018 and eventually succeeded in terminating 30 years of dictatorship and corrupt rule. Hundreds of wall paintings appeared, both inside and outside the capital, reflecting the principles and slogans of the revolution, and commemorating fallen martyrs. One year later, as people were preparing to celebrate the first anniversary of the ousting of the previous regime, and perhaps as an extension of the successful revolutionary graffiti and the growing popularity of street art, Sudanese artists began to replicate that positive experience by painting elegant Covid-19 public awareness murals. Paradoxically, these advised the public to stay at home and follow social distancing, in contrast with the revolution graffiti, which had encouraged people to take to the streets and participate in mass gatherings.

April this year marked the first anniversary of the removal of the dictator Omer el Bashir, which coincided with a dramatic rise in the number of Covid-19 cases and the official entry of the country to the “community spread” phase. Sadly, this important political milestone in the modern history of Sudan could not be celebrated because plans were halted to prevent the further spread of Covid-19.

A well-known artist who specialises in portrait graffiti, Assil Diab, has enthusiastically joined in the Covid-19 graffiti art campaign. She previously commemorated the martyrs of the revolution by painting their faces on the walls of their homes. She has been using her majestic talent to fight Covid-19 by drawing faces combined with health advice in different local languages. Her





*Encouraging people to wear masks; original sketch by Mustafa el Nasri, painted by Assil Diab.*



*'Stay at home' in different local languages: faces of Sudanese from different parts of the country.*

own signature is 'Sudalove'. In one work, she compared the ousted President, Omar Bashir, with the coronavirus, suggesting that the two are comparably dangerous. In another, she painted portraits of two Sudanese doctors who were on the NHS frontline and were among the first to die of Covid-19 in the UK, Dr Adil el Tayar and Dr Amged el Hawrani.



*The ousted dictator Omer el Bashir depicted by Assil Diab as a coronavirus: to show the potential danger of Covid-19 is akin to the damage caused by the fallen regime.*



*Portrait graffiti by Assil Diab commemorating the first two British Sudanese doctors who died in the UK fighting Covid-19, Dr Adil el Tayar (left) and Dr Amged el Hawrani. (Credit: Assil Diab).*

Sudan's battle against Covid-19 continues. Many have praised the MoH for its proactive approach to the outbreak, despite a grossly limited budget, and for the unprecedented transparency provided to the public, through daily updates by the Minister. Others have voiced their concern regarding the suboptimal coordination between the Ministry and health professionals, criticising the lack of clear strategies for sustaining care provision and staff safety at both public and private hospitals. These lack the appropriate infrastructure for handling suspected Covid-19 cases, raising further concern that the healthcare system might be approaching collapse. Several Sudanese diaspora medical groups are proposing 'telemedicine' projects to help lift the pressure on health services in Sudan through virtual consultations or multidisciplinary advisory panels. However, preventive strategies, addressing anxiety about Covid-19 among both public and health cadres, and fighting disease stigma remain the main focus at this critical time. Hence, community efforts to mobilise young people and volunteers who have lead awareness-raising initiatives, such as the unique Covid-19 graffiti campaign, should be encouraged, to help the country combat this horrible disease.

\* Dr Ahmed Hashim is a specialist registrar at the Royal Free Hospital, London, and an Academic Secretary at the Sudan Doctors' Union UK. He writes in a personal capacity.



## BARO SALIENT AND ILEMI TRIANGLE

*Ethiopia/Southern Sudan boundary, from Douglas Johnson, When Boundaries Become Borders, Rift Valley Institute, 2010 (Credit: RVT).*

# A Border Too Far – the Ilemi Triangle Yesterday and Today: Part 1<sup>1</sup>

Philip Winter<sup>2</sup>

The question of the maintenance, or amendment, of an administrative frontier is, we suggest, one for negotiation by the Kenya Government with the Sudanese Government of the day and so far as we can see nothing in any Instrument (of independence) could in fact bind a future Sudanese government to the indefinite continuance of an administrative boundary.

Sir William Luce, when Constitutional Advisor to the Governor General of the Sudan, to the Chief Secretary Kenya, 03/01/54.<sup>3</sup>

## *Introduction*

The purpose of this paper is not to settle the border between Kenya and South Sudan. As Luce pointed out 66 years ago, that is for the governments and the citizens of those countries to do. Rather, it is to explain the historical dynamics which led to a situation whereby an international boundary in a remote part of Africa appears to follow three, four or even more different lines, depending on which map you consult.

In normal circumstances, a state will be anxious to assert and define its boundaries, the limits of its jurisdiction and the ownership of its resources. For island states or groups of islands this is not so difficult. In Africa however, state boundaries were largely drawn by foreigners, who are often assumed to have been unaware of local views. They did not however always ignore

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<sup>1</sup> This is an abbreviated version of the paper by Philip Winter (2019) 'A border too far: the Ilemi Triangle yesterday and today', Durham Middle East Papers, Sir William Luce Fellowship Paper, No. 20. The second part of the abbreviated paper will appear in Issue 63 of *Sudan Studies* (January 2021)

<sup>2</sup> Philip Winter O.B.E. was the 2019 Sir William Luce Fellow, Durham University. He wishes to express again his thanks to the Sir William Luce Fund for granting him the 2019 Luce Fellowship, which allowed him to spend a term at Durham University. He would also like to thank Francis Gotto of the Sudan Archive at Palace Green for his assistance with the fellowship and John Ryle, Douglas Johnson, Justin Willis and Cherry Leonardi for advice and support to an amateur treading on the tricky ground of historiography.

<sup>3</sup> From Douglas Johnson, *British Documents on the End of Empire, Series B, Vol. 5, part II* (HMSO 1994) number 328.



*Mount Naita on the South Sudan/Ethiopia border at the northern apex  
of the Ilemi Triangle (Credit: the author).*

them. (see section “The Boundary Commission Gives Up’ below, for General Wingate’s border instructions.)

In Sudan and its successor state, South Sudan, governments, imperial, colonial or current, have never fully addressed or resolved the question of their border with Kenya. The Ilemi area has been judged to be too remote and of too little value. South Sudan too has been preoccupied by internal conflict for most of the period since 1955. In Kenya by contrast, the colonial administration organized *de facto* flexibility in their boundary with Sudan, in a series of local arrangements, but their successors have so far not devised or obtained a *de jure* boundary settlement.

The Government of Kenya changed its approach in 1988, perhaps because at the time the Kenyans suspected there might be reserves of oil in the Ilemi Triangle and perhaps because they felt obliged not only to defend their citizens against raiders from Sudan but also to afford their growing population more land for their herds. In fact, both colonial and independent governments in Kenya have invested time and effort to build a presence in the Triangle. The governments of Sudan and then South Sudan by contrast, have never taken very seriously the local interests of the residents of Ilemi, to the extent that

the Condominium government in Khartoum actually paid the colonial government in Kenya to police a portion of the area and even gave its officers powers as magistrates across their border, a significant abdication from normal ways of ruling.

In Sudan, as soldiers gave way to civilians in the administration, administrators began to ask people from the new discipline of anthropology to help them. But in this area the Condominium Government of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, as it was known, bit off more than it could chew, so to speak, leaving a vacuum in the Triangle and uncertainty in the maps.

The colonial powers have departed, but the Ilemi area continues to be the scene of a certain investment by the government of Kenya, which has in the last few years devolved political power to its forty-seven counties. Today, as a result, the Governor of Turkana County, which contains oilfields now being exploited, is more likely to be listened to in Nairobi than any Turkana politician was before devolution. The Government of South Sudan meanwhile is still preoccupied with its internal conflicts and has not proved able to make similar investments.

The peoples of the area, who share a common language and culture, have rarely had much chance to have a say with regard to their future, their governance and their needs. It is true that they have been summoned to many peace meetings and requested the same things time and time again – public security, water-points, grazing rights, roads, schools and clinics. For most of the time no one has paid much attention and no authority has had the necessary resources to change the status quo or provide such benefits. Today that may be changing, but the history of the Ilemi Triangle will continue to form the foundation upon which any changes yet to come will have to be structured.

### A Disputed Area?

In 1987, one could buy in Nairobi bookshops a “World Travel Map” dated that year. On it, two lines of Tipp-Ex are clear, with some Tipp-Ex erasures too. One line obliterated the horizontal line that marked the formal international boundary as originally defined in 1914. The other covered a line that followed an uneven course north of that boundary – a line that had at one time been called the Provisional Administrative Boundary, or PAB – and a new line had been drawn in, also by hand. This extended the border, on paper at least, as far as the area north of the Tepes Hills, which lie just south of the Ethiopian border with South Sudan. (See “Current Kenyan Claim” in map above.)

This author, in buying that map, had been preparing for a trip to the Turkana district of Kenya to try to climb a mountain called Lorianatom. In the event, we reached a place called Lokomorinyang, at the foot of the mountain,

where Kenyan security forces detained us and escorted us back to Lodwar. Here, the District Security Officer was polite but firm. We had to return to Nairobi. And, in future, “would another mountain not do?” We did in fact climb Lorienatom some years later, with other members of the Mountain Club of Kenya, without any further hindrance, but greatly to the surprise of some local Turkana, who saw our campfire light in the evening and visited our camp early the next morning, armed but under a white flag, to investigate who we were and what we were doing there.

Research in the history books and archives revealed that the international border may have been delineated, i.e. drawn in on a map, and may even have been recognized by the peoples living in the border area, but had never been demarcated, i.e. indicated physically on the ground (with the exception of the PAB.<sup>4</sup> British officials had left it to their successor governments in Sudan and Kenya to sort it out – which they never did. The result is not so much an actual dispute as an area of uncertainty, both physical and conceptual, a no man’s land in a distant corner of two countries, a cartographic curiosity in a far place not much visited by senior officials from either capital, if at all.<sup>5</sup>

### Where is the Ilemi Triangle?

In 1931, at an Inter-Departmental Conference between the Foreign Office and the Colonial Office, the Governor General of Sudan, then Sir John Maffey, included in his statement the assertion that “Turkana only started to move north to use the grazing grounds inside Ilemi Triangle in 1915”.<sup>6</sup> Later, the then Governor of Kenya, in a letter to the Secretary of State for the Colonies, described the Ilemi Triangle as “the area North of the Kenya-Sudan boundary which is referred to as the Ilemi or “Ilembi” Triangle, formed by lines drawn from Mt. Tomadur in a South-Easterly direction along the Sudan-Abyssinia boundary to Sanderson’s Gulf on Lake Rudolf, thence in a westerly direction along the Kenya-Sudan boundary to Mount Mogila North then North Easterly to Mount Tomadur”.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> See section ‘Colonial Administration: the worlds of Whitehouse and King, Zaphiro and de Robeck’ in the second part of this paper which will be published in *Sudan Studies* 63, January 2021

<sup>5</sup> See R. O. Collins *Shadows in the Grass* (Yale University Press, 1983) p. 411. “In time the British were but a footstep on the soil, but their stride was long. They drew a frontier – rather badly – and left it more peaceful but pretty much as they has found it for those who, in the end, must determine and rule it.”

<sup>6</sup> United Kingdom National Archives (UKNA) CO 533/406/8, cited from Muaz Tungo, *The Ilemi Triangle*, Khartoum University Press, 2008), p. 29.

<sup>7</sup> UKNA CO 533/395/2, cited from Tungo, p. 39. Mount Tomadur is also shown on some maps as “Matarba.”)



The first published reference to the Ilemi Triangle that the author has found came two years later:

In the Southern Sudan, between the Ethiopian, Kenya Colony and Sudan administered areas there is a vast tract of country entirely uninhabited except during the rains, when members of the Taposan, Turkana and Ethiopian tribes drive their herds of stock into this area, as they have done since time immemorial, for grazing purposes. In official circles this immense uninhabited area is known as the Ilemi or the Ilemi Triangle.

The author, R. C. R. Whalley, once the British Consul in the Ethiopian town of Maji, went on to describe the extraordinary numbers of wild animals that could be found there at that time. (This was, incidentally, the first published reference to the migration of the white-eared kob). A settlement in this area called Ilemi also appears on a British map from 1914. Some seventy five years after his first note in *Sudan Notes and Records*, Whalley's posthumously published letters<sup>8</sup> describe his discussions with an Anuak chief called Alemi, son of a Boma Murle mother and an Anuak father, who died not long after Whalley's visit, at the hands of the Kichepo.<sup>9</sup>

Whatever the origins of its name and whatever the definition of its Northern apex point, Mount Tomadur or Mount Naita, the Ilemi Triangle has been a source of periodic concern to its administrators, firstly British and later Kenyan and Sudanese, and then to others working there more recently, precisely because its borders were never demarcated, even if at times they were marked by different lines drawn on different maps for different purposes. Since then, uncertainty about the exact location of the borders has been compounded by a confusion between the greater area, as described above by Whalley, and the smaller, more or less triangular area within the PAB, which has also been called the Ilemi Triangle.<sup>10</sup>

For the purposes of this paper, the author will use the term Ilemi Triangle to refer to the larger area, as described by Whalley originally and as shown in

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<sup>8</sup> See Cynthia Salvadori, *Slaves and Ivory Continued*, (Shama Books 2010) pp. 287-292.

<sup>9</sup> Salvadori, *Slaves and Ivory Continued*; Robert Collins, *Shadows in the Grass* p. 90 n. 7 and p. 388. The Anuak live to the north of the Boma Plateau in South Sudan and across the border in Ethiopia. The Murle live in and around Pibor and also on the Plateau. The Kichepo used to straddle the border between Ethiopia and Sudan but more recently are said to have been pushed away by their Nyangatom neighbours.

<sup>10</sup> See for example Gerald Blake, *Imperial Boundary Making* (Oxford University Press for British Academy, 1997), p. xxiii and the map in the PAX report "Sustaining Relative Peace", 2017, pp. 12-13

more recent maps of Kenya. This area is enclosed by a line running northeast from the northern slopes of Mount Mogila, the mountain above Lokichogio in Kenya, to join the Sudan-Ethiopia border somewhere on the foothills of Mount Naita, or slightly further to the north west, at Mount Tomadur. The eastern side of the Triangle, the border with Ethiopia, runs west-east for some distance, from there or from Mount Naita,<sup>11</sup> and then turns south until it reaches the shores of Lake Turkana. The base of the triangle would be the horizontal line from Mount Mogila's northern slopes east to a point on or near Lake Turkana, the original, presumed border line which I shall refer to as "the 1914 Line." (See Map above).

This horizontal line forming the base of the Triangle is the nearest one can find to a *de jure* international boundary between Kenya and South Sudan. There has been no real dispute, as such, since the Ethiopians challenged the British drawing of their boundary with Sudan in 1906 – when Ethiopia was Abyssinia and Sudan the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium. The British line prevailed and was shown in all subsequent maps until the 1980s. To compound the picture, what is today Turkana County in Kenya, was once part of the Uganda Protectorate and was, as Lake Rudolf Province, only transferred to what was then Kenya Colony in 1926.<sup>12</sup>

### Who Goes There?

At this time, the Turkana people in Kenya, the Toposa in South Sudan and Dassenetch in Ethiopia all live adjacent to the borders of their three respective countries while the Nyangatom live astride the Sudan-Ethiopia border on the eastern side of the Triangle. All these groups may be found in the Triangle but borders are not marked on the ground and so people cross them without hindrance, whether in pursuit of water, grazing or their neighbours' cattle. There is little settlement in the Triangle itself, except where Kenya is extending its presence.

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<sup>11</sup> Writing in 1975, in *Sudan Notes and Records*, no. 56, the Sudanese scholar Faisal Abdel Rahman Ali Taha quotes a dispatch from the Governor of Kenya to the Foreign Office dated October 16<sup>th</sup> 1930, (FO 371/14594) in which he suggests that Mt. Tomadur, a mountain on the Sudan-Ethiopia border some 40km north west of Mt. Naita is the northernmost point of the Triangle. The author climbed this mountain in 1998 and found no sign of any presence of any government whatsoever, Sudanese, Kenyan or Ethiopian, no trig point and no beacon. When the author climbed Mt. Naita some two years later, there was also no trace of any previous visits by anyone at all, let alone of any beacon or a marker.

<sup>12</sup> See section, 'From Uganda to Kenya: The Kitgum Conference and the Battle of Kangala Robeck' in the second part of this paper which will be published in *Sudan Studies* 63, January 2021

In the case of the peoples in and around Ilemi, the Toposa, Jie, Nyangatom, Karamojong and Turkana speak mutually intelligible dialects of a common language, trace their origins to common ancestors and refer to themselves as Ateker. Also Ateker speakers are the Teso and Dodoth in Uganda. (In the past, outsiders often referred to these peoples as the “Karamojong Cluster”.) The Dassenech, also known as Merille and, long ago, as Gelaba, speak an unrelated language, as do the Murle and the Kichepo, but they too herd livestock in search of pasture, whilst farming, hunting and fishing when they can.



*Nyangatom cattle on the move (Credit: the author).*

The Toposa and the Turkana are probably the most numerous groups in and around the Triangle. Lack of a recent census makes it hard to know.<sup>13</sup> The Condominium government of the then Anglo-Egyptian Sudan brought the Toposa under administration only in 1928, setting up the station of Kapoeta for this purpose and installing Geoffrey King, an officer in the King’s African Rifles, as the District Commissioner in 1931. That appointment would last

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<sup>13</sup> The Kenya Data Portal, <http://kenya.opendataforafrica.org/#>, reports 855,000 inhabitants of Turkana in 2009 but leaves the area of the Ilemi Triangle grey, without data.

until 1953. In Kenya, the Turkana were only brought under civil administration in 1929, after eight years of military rule.<sup>14</sup> To the east of the Toposa are found their “uncles”, the Nyangatom (known also as the Bume in Ethiopia and in Kenya as the Donyiro). To the southwest, along the eastern borders of northern Uganda, are the Karamojong. Along and east of the Boma Plateau, into Ethiopia, are the Kichepo, also known as the Suri. To the west of the Toposa in South Sudan lie the lands of the Didinga. Lastly, the Dassenech, also known as the Merille, come into the Triangle from Kenya and from the Omo Delta area of Ethiopia.

All these peoples are to a greater or lesser extent cattle-keepers. They all cultivate too, if and when they can, but remain mobile in the constant search for dry season pasture for the animals on which they depend. However close they may be linguistically, ethnically or culturally, these groups fight each other for pasture and cattle if necessary. They also inter-marry, practising what has been called in other contexts “intimate enmity.” The Toposa do not however fight with the Nyangatom, with whom they sometimes live, whereas they have both raided the Turkana as long as written records have been kept, just as the Turkana have raided them and continue to do so today. This reciprocal raiding has also been interspersed with periods of peace.

This sketch of the people who live in, enter or cross the Triangle is of course cursory and lacks the necessary dimension of time. As noted above, for example, the then Governor General of Sudan, Sir John Maffey, included in his statement the assertion that “Turkana only started to move north to use the grazing grounds inside Ilemi Triangle in 1915.”<sup>15</sup> After World War I, the Merille (Dassanetch) pushed the Ngwatela Turkana southwards beyond the mountains of Lorianatom and Lokwanamur (also known as Kaitherin),<sup>16</sup> while the territory of the Toposa extended to the south of the Mogila Range. Again, before Sudan’s second civil war, it is said, the Toposa did not go east of the Lopotokol River. Now they are to be found living with the Nyangatom in settlements at the foot of Mt. Naita as well as in Ethiopia. In more recent times, the Ethiopian government asked the authorities in South Sudan to take back those Toposa and Nyangatom who have taken land in Ethiopia from the Mursi. This is because they are well armed and expansionist, having suffered at the hands of the SPLA early in the second Sudan civil war and then reached an agreement with them later, which left them free to pursue new grazing and

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<sup>14</sup> See John Lamphear, *The Scattering Time*, (Oxford University Press, 1992) and Nigel Pavitt, *Turkana* (Harvill, 1997).

<sup>15</sup> UKNA CO 533/406/8, cited in Tundo, *The Ilemi Triangle*, (Khartoum University Press, 2008) p. 29.

<sup>16</sup> Collins, *Shadows on the Grass*, p. 103

land to the north-east, given that they could not easily expand southwards amongst the Turkana.

On the northern borders of Kenya, the Toposa and Nyangatom are feared. To listen to the Turkana there, one would believe they are innocent victims of Toposa raiding. Some no doubt are, but if you ask the Nyangatom or Toposa you meet inside South Sudan, they will say they live in constant fear of Turkana raids. Intimate enmity is reciprocal. These neighbours know each other and share a common language and culture. They have been the subject of innumerable peace initiatives and meetings over the years and will cooperate when it suits them. Currently South Sudan's weakness is an opportunity for the Turkana and they have pushed into the Triangle, where the Kenya government has established administrative offices in Kibish and maintains the colonial police posts which run roughly along the PAB (Koiasa, Kaimothia, Lokomorinyang, Liwan, Kokuro and Namoruputh.) The Government of Kenya is also beginning to build roads and the missionaries of St Paul, since 2001, to dig dams and drill boreholes for the people.<sup>17</sup>

In colonial times on the other hand, the British administrators were clear in their view that the Turkana were Kenya's responsibility and the Toposa that of Sudan, while the Nyangatom were held at bay and told to pay their taxes in Ethiopia.<sup>18</sup> The Turkana themselves have for long claimed dry-season grazing and water in the valley between Lokwanamur and Lorienatom, the area they fled to in 1924, which was allocated to them in 1938 by the delineation of the PAB. When on the other hand a Turkana chief stated, in the 1990s, that his people had always grazed the land to the north of the provisional boundary, a Nyangatom elder responded that this was not so: he had been born in this area, his father had been a chief in it and is buried there.<sup>19</sup> When the Italians occupied Abyssinia, they told their British counterparts that the Merille had always grazed between Kibish and Lorienatom and could not do without this resource.<sup>20</sup>

So the question of who is using which pasture – or who has home areas

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<sup>17</sup> See <http://mcspa.org/our-missions/>, Kenya, Lobur: "Overlooking the horizon from that spot, in full view of the Ethiopian border, they agreed that this would be an ideal place for the establishment of a new mission station within the Eleme Triangle, in order to reach out to the nomads all the way to Kibish, 85 km further north."

<sup>18</sup> Denis Zaphiro (formerly a Sudan Defence Force officer at Loelli, in South Sudan, from where he patrolled into the Triangle), pers. comm., Ulu, Kenya, 1985.

<sup>19</sup> George Echom, MP for Lotimor, S. Sudan, pers. comm.

<sup>20</sup> See K. D. D. Henderson's translation of the Italian Aide Memoire to this effect, in SAD 534/5/1-30.

where – is always subject to a time qualification. And borders are fluid where no government rules, rains are variable and all herders are armed. In this context, one might find useful the – possibly apocryphal – saying of a Somali herdsman when asked the limits of the grazing land available to him. His answer: “The limits of my grazing lands are where the furthest of my animals is found.”

### Ecology and Pastoralism

Such is the climate and such the soils of this semi-arid part of East Africa, that it could be said that its main products are grass and thorn trees, food for both the grazing and the browsing animals upon which human life in the area depends. The dry season lasts, approximately, from November to April and the rains fall any time between April and October. Ilelmi has thus been characterized as both waterless and as a swamp, the judgement depending largely on the time of year. This climate and habitat, as elsewhere in Africa, has given rise to a livelihood system and a cultural outlook which value livestock above all else, not principally as a source of meat, but rather as a source of milk, a store of wealth, a means of exchange and a means of binding families and clans together in marriage, through the exchange of bridewealth. Of course, some food is grown too, but the search for water and feed for livestock is a defining feature of human existence in and around the Triangle – and a source of conflict also.

There is today a threat to the regional ecology, including that of the Ilelmi area, from Ethiopia’s construction of the Gibe III and Gibe IV dams in the Omo Valley. The Omo River is responsible for up to 90% of the inflow of water and nutrients to Lake Turkana, at the south eastern corner of the Triangle. When the Omo flooded naturally, some of its waters would flow overland, collecting in depressions and also the former Sanderson’s Gulf, thereby contributing to a recharge of underground aquifers. Although the dam sites are up to 600 kilometres upstream from the lake, as Gibe III filled in 2015 to 2016, it lowered the level of the waters of Lake Turkana by two metres, albeit temporarily. Gibe IV will reduce the lake level a lesser amount but will emulate the flow regulation of Gibe III.<sup>21</sup> If this were all, its effects could perhaps be accommodated, but the dams will not only provide electricity for Ethiopia’s development, but will also create a regulated flow downstream to provide relia-

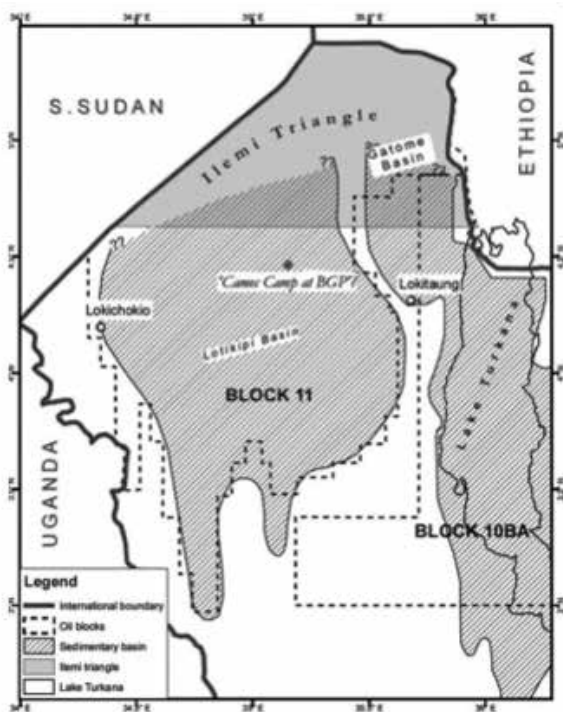
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<sup>21</sup> Sean Avery, <https://theconversation.com/fears-over-ethiopian-dams-costly-impact-on-environment-people-80757>; see also Sean Avery, *What Future for Lake Turkana?* (Oxford African Studies Centre, 2013); also Sean Avery, *Lake Turkana & The Lower Omo: Hydrological Impacts of Major Dam and Irrigation Developments, Vol. I*, (African Studies Centre, 2012).

ble year-round water to enable the development of irrigated commercial farming on a large scale in the Omo Valley. A new artificial regime of water release will be the result. It is also likely that the interests of power generation and irrigated commercial agriculture will be given precedence over the re-creation of some kind of natural cycle of inflows into the lake. The probable loss of half of the lake's inflow from the Omo is predicted eventually to reduce Lake Turkana to two small lakes. Yet there is still no comprehensive environmental impact assessment of this development that takes into full consideration the impacts both in Ethiopia and over the border in Kenya. One possible consequence could be “environmental refugees” – pastoralists moving further into the Ilemi Triangle, seeking grazing and water there, with unknown ramifications on the dynamics of conflict in the area.

### Minerals

An oil concession map that the National Oil Corporation of Kenya (NOCK) has produced shows the Kenyan border as a line from Mt. Naita to Mt. Mogilla, (see map below). In fact Block 11 is partially in South Sudan and partially in Kenya, if one accepts the 1914 line. Clearly, if oil were found within the Ilemi Triangle and exploited by a company operating out of Kenya, using this concession map, and if there were disagreement over borders between Kenya and



*Oil exploration in the Ilemi Triangle  
(Credit: National Oil Corporation of Kenya).*

South Sudan, the risks of conflict would rise.

A mining company called CAMEC and White Nile carried out seismic surveys in the area in 2008. Since then the Block was split into two parts and a Spanish-run company called CEPSA worked out of Lokichiggio in the western part, Block 11A. Their Operations Director reported to the author in December 2014 that they did not go north of the 1914 Line, which is shown, without explanation, on the NOCK concession map. It was later reported, in 2017, that CEPSA and US oil company EHRC had withdrawn from Block 11A, explaining that their well Tarach-1 had proved to be dry.<sup>22</sup>

The eastern part of the concession, 11B, covers 14,000 km. sq. and was, in 2012, granted to a relatively new Scottish oil and gas company called Bowleven, which otherwise works mainly in Cameroon. This company carried out surveys south west of Kibish, according to its annual report, working with a local company called Adamantine, and was expected to report the results of its ongoing seismic survey before its concession was reviewed by NOCK in May 2015. Bowleven's 2016 Annual Report records:

The Group also allowed its exploration licence in Kenya (block 11B) to lapse at expiry on 26 May 2016. With the financial obligations under the initial licence phase for this block met it was concluded that further investment in the licence was not merited.

It is of course possible that there is oil still to be found under the pastures and swamps of Ilemi, but no major surveying or drilling has been conducted there of which there is public record and thus no clear conclusion can yet be drawn, however promising the geology may appear. Gold however, in both alluvial and reef deposits, is artisanally mined in several parts of South Sudan, including the lands of the Toposa, so it would not be a surprise if there is gold in the Ilemi Triangle too. From time to time there are also reports of diamonds coming out of the area. There are also often rumours of a mythical substance called "red mercury" in South Sudan, which locals used to try to sell foreigners.<sup>23</sup>

### *Treaties, Maps, Local Knowledge and Administration*

The impact of the Berlin Conference of 1884-5, the arrival of European powers, their ideas about landholdings, the wars of the twentieth century and the departure of the Europeans have led to a profusion of claims, cartographic confusions and areas of discontent. In 1964 therefore, the then Organization

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<sup>22</sup> See <http://www.oilnewskenya.com/cepsa-withdraws-kenyas-block-11a/>

<sup>23</sup> Red mercury seems to be a hoax. See [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red\\_mercury](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Red_mercury)



of African Unity adopted the principle that colonial boundaries should be left intact, since any revision was likely to raise more problems than it was designed to solve.<sup>24</sup> This approach is often summed up in Latin *uti possidetis, ita possideatis* (what you hold so you may continue to hold).

At risk of simplification therefore, the collectively-agreed African approach after independence was based upon treaties written by colonial powers, sometimes with other powers, sometimes with local leaders, using the maps the colonial powers made as supporting documents. Hence, when examining the status and origins of a modern African border, the colonial treaties are usually the first documents to which any claimant has to make reference.

### Maps

Next come maps. A map can be drawn by anyone, can be altered and can be wrongly drawn, or over-simplified, or based on incorrect information. It is important therefore that interested parties understand the provenance of any map, its date, its authorship and its purpose. A map by itself is not a sufficient witness to a border – hence the increasingly common portrayal on Kenyan and other maps too of a 45 degree line from Mt. Mogila north east to Mt. Naita is not proof that that is a recognized international border. Rather it is an assertion that Kenya would like it so to be.

A map that illustrates the agreements in a treaty, on the other hand, is a useful witness. Maps are also useful in that a given area can be visualized and appreciated in its different sections and features, something which is much harder to do through the dry, legal prose of the average treaty. Maps imply knowledge and understanding and they also suggest control. In the colonial era, the Survey Department of any colony or territory was an important cog in the wheels of government.

In post-secession South Sudan, there is no longer a survey department, and few maps have survived the years of war and loss. When the two countries separated, the Survey Department in Khartoum carried on, with its collection of maps of what had been one nation, which were based largely on the extensive series of maps produced by British Surveyors. In 2011 the Office of the Vice President in Juba even produced a map that showed the same alignment of the south-eastern border as found on recent Kenyan maps. When officials realized what they had done, they had hastily to issue a corrected version, which now showed the alignment of 1914 once more.

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<sup>24</sup> See the Cairo Resolution of the OAU, 1964, AHG/Res. 16(I), [https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/9514-1964\\_ahg\\_res\\_1-24\\_i\\_e.pdf](https://au.int/sites/default/files/decisions/9514-1964_ahg_res_1-24_i_e.pdf) and the Constitutive Act of the African Union 2002, <https://au.int/en/constitutive-act>

Nonetheless in South Sudan today, it is possible to visit a small UN unit in Juba in which a collection of maps is kept on paper and digitally. A catalogue can be consulted and the map chosen can be called up on screen, or found on paper, and then reproduced on a large-scale printer, or transferred to a flash drive. (That said, however sophisticated the digital display on a screen, however beautiful the printed copy, there remains a need for “ground truthing.” Thus the University of Berne Topographic Base Map series for Southern Sudan, impressive and detailed as they are, are a palimpsest of the maps that precede them, and show roads where none exist and villages whose name no one today recognises).<sup>25</sup>

There is one further implication of the availability of hand-held GPS devices. If international colonial borders can be traced on colonial maps by their latitude and longitude, along with such geographical features as remain identifiable today, as most sections of the international borders of South Sudan can be, then they and their key inflexion points could in turn be identified relatively easily and then marked on the ground too.<sup>26</sup>

### Borders and local knowledge

Where Europeans and Americans usually have recourse to written records, Africans will often still consult their elders and their memories. Where did your family graze its herds? Where are your grandparents buried? Where do you buy your supplies? Do you vote? Do you pay taxes? If so where and to whom? etc. Whether the answers of respondents match official records or not, perception is all. It is thus perfectly possible for both claimants of a border area to believe they are its rightful owners, whatever long-forgotten archives may reveal. So if border settlement agreements are to have credibility, local and international, and therefore to be more likely to last, all opinions must be consulted.

### Effectivité

A legal concept that needs to be explained here is perhaps that of effective administration. This concept appeared after the Berlin Conference, since the would-be colonizing powers had to act to establish administrations in the spheres of influence they had allotted themselves, failing which other powers might regard them as *terra nullius* – land belonging to no one – and move in. Claimants in a border dispute may be asked to produce evidence of effective administration: provision of services, such as security, water, health or educa-

<sup>25</sup> See [www.cde.unibe.ch](http://www.cde.unibe.ch)

<sup>26</sup> The question is more difficult for internal administrative borders of Sudan. See for example Dr N. Kindersley's blog: <https://internallydisplaced.wordpress.com/2013/01/08/maps-of-the-sudan-border-the-endless-conversation/>

tion; registration of births and deaths; payment of taxes; mineral concessions; or local administration. There is a caveat to this idea: in international law, the use of force to conquer or annex territory is unlawful, unless sanctioned by the UN Security Council.

### *The Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, 1898-1955*

The British Empire employed a variety of terms to refer to the different legal regimes used to administer the territories it controlled – colonies, protectorates, mandated territories and, twice, “condominium”, according to the circumstances that surrounded their acquisition.<sup>27</sup> The oddities of imperial nomenclature reflect the varied ways in which this empire was built. These did not follow some grand strategy as sometimes supposed, but were rather determined by victories, defeats and compromises both with other imperial powers and with indigenous leaders, over a long period. Thus for example Kenya was a colony, Uganda a protectorate, Tanganyika a mandated territory, Canada a dominion and Sudan a condominium.

The result in this case was that Sudan was not governed like a colony or a protectorate. Its administrators were not members of the colonial service and did not report to the Colonial Office but directly to the Foreign Office through the Governor General. British administrators of Sudan were not allowed to buy or own land there, nor were British settlers allowed to acquire and farm land there. Thus the economic history of Sudan followed a different course from that of, for example, neighbouring Kenya, a settler colony. Both however employed District Commissioners (DCs) as the key local representatives of British rule and it was these DCs who had to deal on the ground with the consequences of the officials of a British colony – Kenya – having protracted discussions with those of the neighbouring Anglo-Egyptian Condominium – Sudan – about groups of people whose principal economic interests were grazing for and the security of their cattle, who knew little of arcane imperial distinctions. Neighbouring administrators may have served different masters in London, but they came essentially from the same culture and usually understood each other well enough, even if they did not always agree.

### The Boundary Commission Gives Up

British officials in Uganda had succeeded in making a boundary agreement with Abyssinia in 1907, which was signed by Emperor Menelik, but was contested in 1910 when the Abyssinians asked the British to remove the boundary markers placed by the British Boundary Commissioner at the time, Major C.

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<sup>27</sup> The New Hebrides, now Vanuatu, was jointly governed as a condominium by Britain and France from 1906 until 1980.

W. Gwynn. This the British did not do, on the strength of the signed agreement they had from the Ethiopians, but they still had to make an agreement on the boundary with the Sudan. It was in this context, in 1912, that a certain Captain Kelly makes an appearance, as Chief Commissioner of the Sudan-Uganda Boundary Commission.<sup>28</sup> Kelly was a soldier from the British Royal Engineers who had been seconded to the Egyptian Army in Sudan since 1903. He had also worked on the Sudan-Abyssinia and Sudan-Congo frontiers. For the purposes of the Commission, he was teamed with one Captain Tufnell, the District Commissioner of Lake Rudolf Province, as it was then termed, in Uganda.

The Boundary Commissioners were charged by Reginald Wingate, the Governor General of Sudan, with the establishment of a border which “did not divide any single tribe between Sudan and Uganda”, between the third and the fifth degree latitude north of the Equator, in the area from Nimule, on the White Nile, to Lake Rudolph (today Lake Turkana).<sup>29</sup> The British wanted the riverine post of Nimule to be in the Sudan, because the area of the White Nile to its south is navigable as far as Lake Albert. They also wished the border to terminate at Lake Rudolph, where they envisaged a possible steamer link with what was then British East Africa. Thus, for the purposes of future trade, they wanted to allow for connections between the Sudan and both Uganda and Kenya. Kelly even talks in his diary of a possible railway line between Gondokoro, just north of Juba today, and Nimule.

Kelly had to produce a basic map and measure distances, all the while being responsible for a convoy of more than one hundred men, fifty camels, three hundred and twenty donkeys and twenty mules. He and Tufnell only traversed the first 120 of the approximately 400 mile boundary they were trying to establish between the Protectorate and the Condominium. This took them thirty-two days, at the end of which they made draft recommendations and Tufnell apparently went on leave, after a tour of duty of two years without a break. It is clear from Kelly’s diary that he thought Tufnell’s appointment unfortunate, not only because he was very tired but also because he was unwilling to comply with Kelly’s request that no force be used against any of the people they encountered en route, since he wanted their cooperation, not their hostility.

Kelly carried on for about three hundred miles without Tufnell, as far as Jebel (Mount) Mogila, the twin-summitted hill north of Lokichoggio in what is

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<sup>28</sup> See Blake, *Imperial Boundary Making* (British Academy, OUP, 1997) and the Diary of Captain Kelly for 1912-13, in SAD 133/1/1-52 .

<sup>29</sup> Blake, op. cit. Introduction, pp xx-xxi

Kenya today - travelling perhaps a hundred miles as the crow flies. The difference is explained by his need to explore and make notes on the country and peoples en route. Kelly climbed Mogila, on 28<sup>th</sup> February 1913, but decided to turn back thereafter, having only enough fodder for his pack animals for three days and being unable to ascertain with any accuracy where water could be found between there and Lake Rudolf. (It was still the dry season, although within three days of turning back the party experienced a sudden heavy rain-storm.)

What in the end did this Boundary Commission achieve? Despite the early departure of Tufnell, Kelly felt that he and Tufnell had gathered enough information and understanding of the terrain and the people that they could with some confidence suggest a boundary between Sudan and Uganda, from the Nile to Lake Rudolph. This was written up in 1913 in two sets of recommendations which can be read today.<sup>30</sup> The parts that recommend the border in the area of what is today the Ilemi Triangle are as follows:

From here [north of Mt Mogila (appr. Lat. 4 deg 15 N and Long. 34 30 East)] a theoretical line to the north of Mt. Lubur on Lake Rudolf is assumed, but if the northern portion of the lake proves to be navigable, a strip of territory should be reserved to the Soudan, affording a port on the lake. East of Mt Harogo<sup>31</sup> it has proved impossible for the joint Commission to investigate owing to the unfavourable season and the lack of water supply. Between this mountain, therefore, and the lake the exact limits remain for further consideration when the limits of the Turkana and Dabosa [Toposa] grazing rounds are more accurately known.

The Commissioners recognize that owing to the intermixture of the various tribes, it is impossible to determine a hard and fast tribal boundary and suggest that when the territory on either side of the frontier comes to be closely administered, any small alterations which will facilitate administration can be effected.

Kelly and Tufnell then added some “rectification notes” which discuss the distribution of the Acholi, Toposa and others at the time, as they saw it.

Their findings were eventually codified in an “Order in Council” in 1914. An order in council is a mechanism used in the UK and its former territories

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<sup>30</sup> Blake, *op.cit.*, pp 95-100

<sup>31</sup> Another name for Mount Lotuke, at the southern end of the Didinga Hills. This is the mountain into which John Garang’s helicopter crashed in 2005, killing him and thirteen others.

still, whereby a decree is made with the assent of the Privy Council, a body of senior advisors to the head of state, typically at the request of a cabinet minister. In this case it was the Secretary of State for the Colonies, one Lewis Harcourt. Thus was the borderline fixed, and later delineated with a caveat as to its eventual course “a straight line or such a line as would leave to Uganda the customary grazing grounds of the Turkana tribe.”

### *Postscript*

Part 2 of this article details events during the Condominium period when responsibility for the border moved from Uganda to Kenya and later after independence in 1956 until the present day. Part 2 will appear in the next issue of *Sudan Studies* (number 63), which will be published in January 2021.

### **A Note on Sources**

A surprising amount has been written about the Ilemi Triangle in the last century. The colonial records are extensive as might be deduced from the text above. For the period since, I have had to rely of on my own personal experiences, interactions with officials and others from the area and the press reports, maps and publications I have collected over the last forty years or more. For a full list of sources used please see the full version of this paper which can be accessed at: [https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/sgia/imeis/luce-fund/Luce-Fellowship-Paper-2019\\_Ilemi-Winter\\_final.pdf](https://www.dur.ac.uk/resources/sgia/imeis/luce-fund/Luce-Fellowship-Paper-2019_Ilemi-Winter_final.pdf)

# **The Role of the Sudanese Diaspora in the UK in the 19<sup>th</sup> December Revolution: Reflections, challenges and the way forward**

**Amira Osman\***

## *Introduction*

This article is based on on-going research about the challenges and opportunities facing the Sudanese diaspora in the United Kingdom and their activism during the 19<sup>th</sup> December Revolution in Sudan that toppled Omer al Bashir's dictatorial regime. It relies on informal observation, informal discussions and in-depth interviews. The article is intended to contribute to our understanding of the role of the Sudanese people in the UK during the Revolution, the challenges they faced and their coping mechanisms, and to make some observations about the way forward. The broader aim is to contribute to the Diaspora literature about the Sudanese in the UK.

## *Background: Statistics and geographical locations*

For a long time the UK has been one of the most favoured European destinations for Sudanese people. During the 1960s and 1970s, a few came as businessmen, professionals and/or students. This trend started to change after the military coup in June 1989, when thousands of people headed to the UK seeking asylum, many getting refugee status or Indefinite Leave to Remain, and then British citizenship if they met the criteria. Some of these asylum seekers were unaccompanied minors and single mothers. However, it is difficult to obtain an accurate estimate of the number of Sudanese people in the UK.

According to the 2001 Census, there were 10,671 Sudanese people in the UK (Office for National Statistics, 2001). This number had risen to 18,381 in 2011, as shown in the 2011 Census data (ONS, 2011). A different source estimates that there were 16,200 Sudanese living in the UK as of 2019 (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UNDESA), cited in Graham-Harrison, 2019). However, a much higher figure comes from the International Organization for Migration (IOM), which suggests that in 2006, between 10,000 and 25,000 Sudanese people were living in London alone.

Sudanese people in the UK live in many places but they are concentrated in cities such as London, Brighton, Birmingham, Nottingham, Manchester, Cardiff and Glasgow. Studies that reveal the experiences of Sudanese people in the UK and their contribution to the political affairs of their motherland, notably their role in the December Revolution, are lacking. This article hopes to contribute to bridging this gap.

### *Barriers and challenges*

Many of the Sudanese in the UK had intended to stay temporarily, hoping to go back when the situation in Sudan improved but they have remained for almost 30 years.<sup>1</sup> However, after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA)<sup>2</sup> between the Government of the Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) in 2005, some headed home, hoping to stay and contribute towards peace, democracy and stability. For many, staying at home did not last long because the political and economic situation did not improve.<sup>3</sup>

In the UK, many Sudanese found that 'the grass was not greener' as they faced many challenges and barriers, including difficulties in speaking the language of their host country, especially the new arrivals and the less educated. Not speaking English could lead to people feeling isolated and lonely, and feeling a lack of belonging. The development of a sense of belonging is regarded as an important factor in a successful integration process and social cohesion (Wille 2011), while its absence limits people's ability to integrate within the local community. Lack of kinship support is another barrier experienced by many people, notably unaccompanied minors and single mothers. Racism, discrimination and a hostile environment towards immigrants and refugees perpetuated by the right-wing media aggravate isolation (Osman 2007). Lack of awareness of the host culture and its laws, notably for the less educated and new arrivals, makes integrating and settling down a challenge.

Being in the Diaspora also has its own economic difficulties and challenges. Many Sudanese people are struggling to make a living but they work hard and invest their time and resources to get a decent job. In this situation people may not have time for politics. In other words, political involvement is not necessarily a priority. Here it is worth mentioning that some became pessimistic, lost hope and believed that Al Bashir's regime would never go and so did not want to waste their time getting involved in political activities, such as demonstrating in front of the Sudanese Embassy in London.<sup>4</sup>

The second generation of Sudanese in the UK have their own challenges that include lack of a sense of belonging, lack of knowledge about Sudan and its culture, lack of interest in politics, blurry ideas about Sudan mixed with myths, memory and story-telling from parents that glorify the life they left behind in Sudan. Some parents are struggling to pass on their culture to their children.<sup>5</sup> Also, the negative media representation of Sudan did not help

<sup>1</sup> Informal discussion, London, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> For more on the agreement see <https://peacemaker.un.org/node/1369>.

<sup>3</sup> In-depth interview, London, 2019.

<sup>4</sup> Informal discussion, London, 2019

<sup>5</sup> In-depth interview, London, 2019



the second generation to get a clear vision of the country. Some parents and relatives regarded the second generation as more British than Sudanese and commented that they are unable to build strong ties with Sudanese people and the community in the UK.<sup>6</sup> Despite this, the second generation show their activism in several ways and have done their share in helping to bring down the regime from the Diaspora.

### *Coping mechanisms*

To deal with these difficulties, barriers and challenges, Sudanese in the UK have developed their own mechanisms of survival. These include keeping their ties with the motherland. Living thousands of miles away in a foreign city is difficult for many and keeping in touch with people in Sudan helps to relieve some of the loneliness they feel, particularly new migrants who have yet to settle down. Getting in touch with relatives back home has become possible with the increasingly easy access to social media and mobile phones. People contact relatives to socialise virtually and to get updates about the economic and political situation in Sudan, notably during the street demonstrations of 2019. Here it is worth mentioning that using social media to stay connected with people at home was not commonly the case a few years ago. People also desperately search for news about Sudan by reading online newspapers and listening to international media channels, such as *Al Jazeera*, *Al Hadath* and BBC Arabic.

Social gatherings, i.e. weddings, funerals and other social occasions (e.g. the Eid), are also common and on some occasions, Sudanese food and drinks are served, with Sudanese music and dance. Although there seem to be few Sudanese restaurants in the UK compared with Mediterranean restaurants, for example in the Edgware Road in London, a few have managed to open shops and restaurants that sell Sudanese food. This gives people a sense of connection to their motherland and the cultural practices they have left behind.

Sudanese have also invested in their social capital and developed informal and formal networks across many UK cities. The formal networks include *jalyat* (community groups), women's groups, professional associations and political groups/parties. Some *jalya'* and other civil society groups are meant to serve their members. However, they later became involved in activism against the dictatorship of Al Bashir's regime, as I will discuss later. Volunteering with different charities, such as the British Red Cross, is also undertaken by some Sudanese so as to gain practical experience in the host country and to offer their expertise. It is also a way to get connected with the host community and other Diaspora communities which also volunteer.

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<sup>6</sup> Informal discussion, London, 2019

<sup>7</sup> *Jalya* is the singular of *jalyat*

## *Activism*

Before the 2012 demonstrations in Sudan, the Sudanese on the UK's political map involved a few political figures with sporadic activities that included debates, talks and demonstrations in front of the Sudanese Embassy. All these activities attracted a few people, notably peace activists, human rights defenders and those with political affiliations (Communist, Umma and Ba'ath parties, Freedom and Justice Movement etc.). Women's groups, notably the Sudanese Women's Union, have also mobilised women to participate in political events. However, after 2012, continuous human rights abuses and the escalation of the conflict, notably in the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile and Darfur, which included the raping of women and bombarding of civilians, made many people more willing to get involved in activism against such brutal practices. These include attending talks organised by political organisations, professional associations or women's groups, and participating in protests in front of the Sudanese Embassy or at No. 10 Downing Street.

All these political activities were promoted during the Revolution of 2019 as participants aimed to support the protests in Sudan and to bring down Al Bashir's regime: *Tasgot Bas!* – “just fall, that's all!” In fact, the political map revealed no visible young people's political organisations before 2012, although there were some efforts by *jahyat* to organise social events, such as sports, that were led by the youth, for the youth. Despite their former invisibility, young people have taken an active part in Sudanese activism in the UK, sparked by the protests and Revolution in Sudan.

As in Sudan, where the protests and Revolution spread in a domino effect to many cities such as Atbara, Khartoum, El Fashir, Wad Medani, Kosti, El Obeid, El Dueim etc, a similar effect happened in cities including London, Manchester, Birmingham, New York, Paris and Vienna. Non-Sudanese people and organisations in the UK such as Waging Peace also joined the campaign, supporting and taking part in demonstrations in London and other cities.

By January 2019, the Sudanese in the UK, including those who had never shown an interest in politics before, had demonstrated their activism in several ways to support the revolution, including donating money, lobbying and internationalising the Revolution.

### Donation of money

Sudanese people in the UK have a history of sending remittances to relatives and friends at home. This financial contribution is a way of showing solidarity and keeping a tie with the homeland. Sending money is an obligation that binds people with their relatives and community and makes them feel satisfied that they are doing something. People use official and non-official means to

The Alliance of Sudanese Political Forces in UK & IR  
along with  
Sudanese Associations and Trade Unions UK&I (SATU)

You're invited to join us to support the Sudanese  
Uprising and to condemn the shooting, killing &  
detention of peaceful protestors.

**9**  
**February**



**Tasgot Bas**



**Venue:**  
**Trafalgar Square**

**14:00 - 17:00**  
**Date: 9/02/2029**

*designed by Mutaz Badawi*

*Poster for a protest in London, February 2019  
(Credit: Amira Osman).*

send remittances. Non-official methods include sending money with relatives and friends.<sup>8</sup> This is seen as cheap, quicker and easy. However, it is difficult to calculate how much money is sent this way.

Money sent home is normally used to promote the welfare of the family or the community (e.g. to contribute to the building of a school or hospital) and/or spent on social occasions such as weddings, or funerals, on education, medical issues, to repay debt etc. Van Hear (2003) argues that remittances sent by migrants to their motherland are crucial to the survival of communities, notably those that suffer from conflict and forced displacement. According to the World Bank (2005), the financial remittances of diaspora communities make an important contribution to their families, local communities and to the overall financial position and foreign exchange situation of their home country. Highlighting the significant remittances sent to Sudan, a Sudanese in the UK said, “We would be one of the richest migrant communities here if we did not have to send so much money back home to our families” (Akuei 2005).

The positioning of Sudan as a country that assisted terrorists, after the September 11<sup>th</sup> attack in the United States in 2001 has affected the way money is transferred and made people rely more on informal means. Akuei (ibid.) points out that before 9-11, Sudanese people used the Midland Bank (now HSBC) to send money to the Ivory Bank in Khartoum. Funds would arrive in 2-3 days, and the recipient did not need a bank account. Unfortunately, this is no longer the case.

During the Revolution, people used their experience of sending remittances and they donated generously to support the protestors. Some sent their money through professional organisations and others through political groups. Others preferred to use individual means.<sup>9</sup>

### Lobbying

Sudanese in the UK used different means to lobby local and international communities and to draw their attention to the events in Sudan, such as the use of live ammunition against protestors, targeting of activists, arresting and torturing of protestors, and abuse of women and girls. They also managed to highlight the scale of the protests, their continuity and the domino effect. To make the host community aware of the situation in Sudan, some sent letters to their MPs asking them to support the people of Sudan by calling on the British Government to condemn the Sudan Government’s inhuman and brutal response to the peaceful protestors and to put pressure on it by, for instance, reviewing British diplomatic relations or recalling the British Ambassador.

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<sup>8</sup> Informal discussion, London, 2019.

<sup>9</sup> In-depth interview, London, 2019

Others met policy makers and some spoke to the media explaining the use of excessive force and live ammunition against the peaceful protestors. Women's groups organised activities supporting the Revolution and highlighting the bravery of women, who led many demonstrations risking their lives. *Jahyat* organised events and fundraising. Political parties/groups organised political talks/debates and protests. Human rights defenders also organised talks highlighting human rights abuses in Sudan. Actors, singers and artists organised events and exhibitions. Students and young people were innovative and organised youth-led events that challenged the negative image of them as youngsters with little or no interest in Sudanese political affairs. Individuals who had been largely detached from politics also became active and participated in demonstrations and other activities. The lobbying resulted in many actors from the UK supporting the on-going protests in Sudan by, for example, joining demonstrations outside the Sudanese Embassy, 10 Downing Street and Trafalgar Square,<sup>10</sup> and other places outside London.



*Sudanese Women's Union–UK choir performing in London, November 2019*  
(Credit: Amira Osman)

### Internationalising the Revolution

Amid a lack of international media coverage of the protests, abuses, detention and murder of activists in Sudan, Sudanese in the UK gave talks to academic, voluntary and political bodies explaining the political situation. Others talked to the media, including Channel 4, BBC, Russia Today and *Al Jazeera*. In this way, they were able to internationalise the revolution, making it visible internationally, notably in the UK and European Union.

To highlight negative broadcasting about the protests, some demonstrated

<sup>10</sup> Personal observation, London, 2019.

in front of *Al Jazeera's* London office. They were complaining about Al Jazeera Arabic's arguably biased coverage of the protests and the abuses committed by the regime. Other demonstrations took place in front of the Saudi, Egyptian and United Arab Emirates embassies, where demonstrators chanted "hands off Sudan, stop acting against the will of the Sudanese people". These actions are believed to have helped inform the international community about the peaceful protests.

International support for the Sudan government started to fade and some countries (notably the Troika of the UK, USA and Norway), released a statement in January 2019 expressing deep concern about the Sudan government's response to peaceful demonstrations and the detention of activists; they emphasised the rights of the Sudanese people to demonstrate peacefully. Sudanese actors including youth and women became much more involved in these demonstrations than in past protests, which used to be dominated by activists and those with political affiliations.

Sudanese in the UK have also benefited from its technological connections and facilities, and were able to disseminate important messages about the schedules of the protests in Sudan, notably when the internet was cut off there. They sent images of the protests and news to the international media and spread messages from the Sudanese Professionals' Association and the Forces for Freedom and Change.

### *The way forward*

Despite these positive contributions, a lot remains to be done. Money gained by corruption in Sudan is allegedly kept in some UK banks. Is there any possibility of returning this money to Sudan? In this respect, it might be useful to network with different Diaspora organisations from Latin America, Africa and Asia in order to exchange ideas on, for instance, legal actions that could be taken to get this money returned.

Sudanese living in the UK also need to develop other practical ways to support the Revolution and its slogan 'Freedom, Peace and Justice'. Continuing to lobby the international community including the EU, IOM and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees is vital, so that these organisations contribute generously to the reconstruction of war-torn areas and to the safe return of refugees and Internally Displaced Persons.

Networking and coordinating among different actors, including civil society and political figures, has proved effective in escalating activism. Promoting coordination and networking among these actors and bringing more civil society and political groups together will help consolidate what has been achieved so far and lay the foundations for future co-operation. Donating generously

is also important for reconstructing the country and its poor health facilities, particularly during the current Covid-19 crisis.

Developing a plan to use the skills and knowledge of Diaspora Sudanese in Sudan, including in research, technology, disaster management, medicine, engineering etc., is important. Experience elsewhere has shown the positive contributions that Diaspora communities can make to the reconstruction of their home countries. For example, in Sweden where many Somalis have settled, many Somali women have gone home for a few months to offer their expertise in different fields, including teaching and capacity building programmes for women's non-governmental organisations (Osman, 2007). The African Union has recognised diaspora contributions to their home country and agreed to amend its charter to "encourage the full participation of the African Diaspora as an important part of the continent".

Organising events that include discussions on how to support the Revolution in Sudan, such as the Symposium held in September 2019 organised by the Society for the Study of the Sudans UK is a great way for the Sudanese Diaspora to discuss issues of concern, including their activism, so as to continue supporting the Revolution.

### *Conclusion*

Sudanese people have been living in the UK for many decades, however, since the 1990s their number has increased significantly due to human rights abuses in Sudan that forced many to seek safety in the UK. Many of them have encountered barriers in their host community and tried to employ different mechanisms to cope that included keeping connections with Sudan and volunteering in the host country.

In terms of politics, many initially seemed unwilling to be involved in activism. This has changed dramatically since the protests and revolutionary activities started in Sudan in 2019. Some civil society groups, including professional organisations, became actively involved in coordination and networking to support the Revolution in Sudan. People have shown great interest in the political affairs of their country and an increasing number of them, including women and youths, attend political talks, debates and demonstrations. Through these activities the Sudanese in the UK, despite living thousands of miles away from Sudan, were able to make a significant contribution to the 19th December revolution; an act they are proud of.

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\* Dr. Amira Osman is a researcher with an interest in diaspora communities, gender and forced migration, humanitarian intervention, conflict resolution and peace building, conflict and disaster, social capital and the use of evidence to inform policy-making.



# The Contemporary Significance of Archaeological Sites in Sudan: A case study of folklore at El Kurru

Tohamy Abulgasim Khalifa and Rebecca Bradshaw\*<sup>1</sup>

## Introduction

As the third largest country in Africa and the 16<sup>th</sup> largest in the world, Sudan is characterised by great geographical and cultural diversity. Hundreds of different social groups live in Sudan's deserts, plains and mountains, where they pursue a wide variety of livelihoods and practice a mosaic of customs and traditions. Amidst this great diversity, some customs and traditions are shared across the country. The hot red colour used in a bride's marriage robes (*tob*) and the ceremonial objects (*rabaa*) used during the post-wedding *jirtig* ceremony; the words spoken at religious celebrations; as well as coming-of-age customs such as circumcision, are good examples of common cultural threads that bind the country's inhabitants together.

The folklore surrounding archaeological sites is another example of diversity and commonality: each site is the subject of folklore (understood as a set of popular stories and associated activities) and various themes and subjects may be found across the country. One common idea is that archaeological sites are inhabited by spirits (*jinn*). *Jinn* are not intrinsically malign but they are thought to dislike sharing their space with humans and to affect adversely the souls of those who live around them; for this reason, walking through the sites at night is seen as dangerous. Belief in the presence of *jinn* is found across sites in Sudan but the precise nature or function of these beings differs from site to site.

Before embarking on a case study of this phenomenon, it is important to understand that one factor affecting and sustaining belief in the supernatural in Sudan is the widespread adherence of Sudanese Muslims to Sufism. This is one of the country's oldest Islamic traditions and the many different orders (*turuq*, sing. *tariqa*), all have stories about the supernatural abilities wielded by its saints and holy men. They are "believed to be protected by God, thanks to his grace and honour" (Trimingham 1988, 127) and are endowed with powers that they can use to effect change on the surrounding environment: places,

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<sup>1</sup> The research for this paper was conducted by Tohamy Abulgasim (TA) and was written up by him and Rebecca Bradshaw. Great thanks are due to TA's assistants in El Kurru: Mohamed Awad, Mansour Mohamed Ahmed, Waleed Ali, Mohamed el Badri, and Basil Kamal Bushra. We also thank Geoff Emberling for providing feedback on this manuscript. Any errors remain the authors' alone.

people, animals and plants. Although it seems counter-intuitive to an outsider, belief in supernatural beings is therefore not contrary to Islamic tradition but rather a part of it.

With this in mind, this paper discusses the relationship between folklore and archaeological sites using the case study of El Kurru.<sup>2</sup> It is based on long-term observation and 32 interviews with local residents in spring 2017.<sup>3</sup> It focuses on one popular story known as the Daughters of Sheikh El Aghbash (*Banat el Sheikh el Aghbash*, abbreviated to '*Banat el Sheikh*' (or 'the Sheikh's Daughters')). The paper seeks to analyse this story and offer some preliminary conclusions about its social and cultural significance. It also aims to show how an ethnographic understanding of folklore can make a useful contribution to archaeology, particularly as traditional and scientific archaeological methods cannot always provide an understanding of how sites have a cultural significance for contemporary communities that is distinct from their archaeological or historical reality (see Bradshaw 2017; 2018). We humbly suggest that further efforts might be made by archaeologists to engage in this type of study, resulting in more culturally sensitive archaeological fieldwork and site management.

### *El Kurru*

El Kurru is a small village in northern Sudan on the east bank of the Nile, about 450 km north of Khartoum and 15 km west of the town of Karima. It is mostly inhabited by different branches of the Shaigiyya tribe (*gabila*) as well as by members of the Danagla, Kababish, Hawawir and Hassaniya peoples. Like most villages along the Nile, its economy is based on agriculture (particularly onions and dates) and trade. Sufism is a major part of religious life and the village is known for the domed tombs (*gibab* sing. *gubba*) of its saints.

El Kurru archaeological site sits on a sandstone plateau above the Nile. It is enclosed by the village to the east, north and south while to the west is the desert and the main road that runs parallel to the river (photo 1). El Kurru is one of the country's most important sites and forms part of the broader World Heritage Site of Jebel Barkal and the Napatan Region, as declared by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO). The site consists of a large necropolis (photo 2) that contains the tombs of the earliest known kings and queens of the Kingdom of Kush (8<sup>th</sup> century BCE to 4<sup>th</sup> century CE). Wadis (seasonal river beds) divide the site into three sections

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<sup>2</sup> Another source on folklore and archaeology in this region is Bashir (2003). For a comparative study of folklore and ethnography at Sudan's other UNESCO World Heritage Site at Meroe, see Bradshaw (2017; 2018).

<sup>3</sup> This paper has been several years in the making due to both authors' considerable educational, work and family commitments.



*Aerial image of El Kurru village and archaeological site (Credit: Google Earth).*

and it seems that the ancient Kushites used this natural division to organise the cemetery. The middle section is the oldest part of the cemetery and contains the tombs of most of the kings of Kush who conquered Egypt and ruled there as its 25<sup>th</sup> Dynasty in 750-653 BCE (Dunham 1950). The southern section contains the tombs of the primary queens. In the northern section, one group of tombs contains minor queens and another group, the kings' horses.

The first archaeological work at El Kurru was conducted in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century by George Reisner, with sponsorship from Harvard University and the Boston Museum of Fine Arts. Reisner is credited with discovering and documenting the site and for suggesting an historical sequence for the burials



*Aerial image of the archaeological site at El Kurru (Credit: Google Earth).*

(Reisner 1919). The site is currently under investigation by collaborative teams from the universities of Michigan, Copenhagen and Dongola, led respectively by Geoff Emberling, Rachael Dann and Abbas Sidahmed Mohamed Ali (Emberling *et al.* 2015).

### *The Story of Banat el Sheikh*

Over time, several stories about El Kurru archaeological site have been retold by the local residents, who often said they were told the story by their “grandmothers and grandfathers”. Of these, the story of *Banat el Sheikh* is arguably the most frequently cited. It is a history-cum-myth about a group of seven daughters<sup>4</sup> whose father, Sheikh El Aghbash, was an important sheikh from the famous Sufi Diwehia family and whose mother was a *jinn*. Based on the history of his brothers, Mohamed, Abdullah and Dewaim Wad Haj, all of whom have famous *gubba* in the El Kurru area, Sheikh El Aghbash seems to have been an historical personage who lived in the village during the end of the Funj period but before the Turco-Egyptian invasion in 1820.<sup>5</sup> His eldest daughter was called Seeha, a beautiful woman with long black hair. The second was called Meeha, who was also said to be very beautiful. The others were called Saleeha (from the name Salah, meaning ‘being good’), Hajwa, Najwa, El Batoul (the virgin), and Sit el Nafar Umm Shotoor (with the large bosom).<sup>6</sup> The prior relationship between Sheikh El Aghbash and his wife, the *jinn*, was not made clear by the residents but some mentioned that she had come from Old Dongola (*c.* 175 km to the south-west) to see Sheikh El Aghbash so that he might give her a remedy for *jinn* possession. In any case, the story goes that they fell in love, got married and lived in El Kurru village with their daughters, the Banat. The home they are said to have shared still stands abandoned in the village (photo 3) and has helped to perpetuate the story of the Daughters, who are said to have been *jinn* and inherited the supernatural nature of their mother.

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<sup>4</sup> In some retellings of this story only four daughters were mentioned; other respondents said three, but most agreed that there were seven.

<sup>5</sup> Like many forms of folk tale, the story also acts as a community genealogy that mixes fact and myth: the origins of Sheikh El Aghbash begin with two cousins, named Sheikh Ali Wad Haj and Sheikh Ali El Diweihi, whose tombs are also in El Kurru. Sheikh Ali El Diweihi’s father was Sheikh Hammad bin Hamad, and he was also the brother of Sheikh Ali Wad Haj. Sheikh Ali El Diweihi had a daughter called Fatima, who married Sheikh Mohammed Wad Haj and gave birth to his two sons, Abdelrahman and Sheikh El Aghbash.

<sup>6</sup> These are the most common names given, but in total interviewees provided more than thirty names for Banat el Sheikh.



*The house of Sheikh El Agbbash, El Kurru  
(Credit: Tohamy Abulgasim Khalifa).*

### Sightings and rituals

To outsiders (and even some insiders!) the existence of *Banat el Sheikh* may seem far-fetched but to residents of El Kurru, they can constitute part of life's sensory and spiritual experience. Sightings made and rituals undertaken by modern residents (described below) arguably provide evidence – albeit not 'scientific' evidence – of this reality. This is particularly true for members of the Diwehia family, many of whom still live in El Kurru and who consider themselves related to *Banat el Sheikh*. The Diwehia claim that they see the Daughters in white dresses and that, even when they cannot be seen, they can feel heat from their presence or feel them stroking their hands to comfort them when they are ill. They say that if one dreams of the Daughters, it means that something bad has happened to one of the family. Sheikh Ibrahim el Ony, a close friend of the Diwehia family, Sheikh of the area and *imam* of the mosque, also interacts with the Daughters directly and in fact said that they had been with him only a minute before the interview with this author (Tohamy).

The effect of the Daughters is not confined to the Diwehia family or Sheikh el Ony; it is felt more broadly across El Kurru society, particularly by women. For example, according to respondents, at every festival or occasion,

food is prepared first for *Banat el Sheikh* and secondly for the guests. Even outside big social events, some residents put food on top of walls or at the side of the road as offerings to the Daughters. If they don't accept the food, it is interpreted as a bad omen. Another common anecdote is about 'seeing' and 'feeling' the Daughters, for example glimpsing them in pictures or photographs, or even in the guise of animals such as cats. General respect is thought to be necessary when talking about the Daughters: no one is allowed to speak about them in an inappropriate manner, nor should their existence or abilities be doubted. One female respondent, Hajja Fatima, said that she witnessed the Daughters punishing a man who doubted them: it happened that women were preparing food at an event in El Kurru when the owner of the house came and asked them to hurry up and bring food for his guests. Upon being told by one of the women that they were preparing food for the Daughters first, the man became angry and exclaimed that the Daughters were fantasies. However, as Hajja Fatima explained, before he had finished speaking, the Daughters flipped all the saucepans upside down.

### *The Archaeological Site*

Many anecdotes about the Daughters centre upon their sudden appearance and disappearance at the archaeological site, in a location called the 'shrine' (*bayan*). The *bayan* is a spoil heap (a mound of excavated archaeological material) that was left by Reisner in 1919; located between the grave of Queen Qalhata and Grave Ku.2, which belongs to an unknown person (Reisner 1919). Due to the Daughters' seeming habit of visiting the *bayan*, it has become the place that people go when they need the Daughters' help. During the school exam season, for example, a grandmother might take her grandchildren to the *bayan* and ask the Daughters for support, taking the pens that the children will write their exams with. If not an object of direct relevance, such as a pen, people will often leave sweets or dig small holes and put money inside as an offering (see photo 4 below).

One female respondent, a well-known woman called Ajba, told us that she had been to the Daughters for help when she was going through a difficult phase in her life. She recounted how her husband had got married to another woman and brought his new wife to their house. When Ajba contested the arrangement, her husband forced her to leave the house and told her to take her children with her. Looking for help, she told the local government authorities but no help was forthcoming. So late one night, Ajba went to the *bayan* to see the Daughters. She explained her problem to them and begged for help, threatening to come the next day and pour *marisa* (a local beer made of sorghum) over the *bayan* and never visit them again if they did not help her.



*The bayan, view to north-east, with the pyramid Ku.1 to the back left, and Ku.2 to the right. Note the holes in the surface of the bayan  
(Credit: Tobamy Abulgasim Khalifa).*

In the early morning, she was surprised by a man who had been sent from the local court, who told her, “Ajba you can keep the house, it’s all yours”. Some Sudanese apparently visit El Kurru specifically for the purpose of sighting the Daughters or practice one of the rituals associated with the site, in order to produce an outcome such as this.

The *bayan* area of the archaeological site is not the only locus of these events: there are a number of relevant tales to tell about the Sheikh’s house, which is rumoured to be made of sandstone taken from the archaeological site (photo 3). Several interviewees recalled seeing fires there at night and smelling the food that people were cooking. Other royal Kushite burials at El Kurru have also become intertwined with the story of *Banat el Sheikh* e.g. the early subterranean tombs that were excavated by Reisner and have lain exposed since then. These would have lain beneath pyramids that have since disappeared, so from the outside (photo 4) and certainly from an aerial perspective (photo 2), they look like long tunnels (*ghar*, in formal Arabic; *gantour*, in colloquial Arabic). The Daughters have, therefore, become known as the *El harem el gantour* (the women who live in the tunnel) or *El sabaa harem el gantour* (the



seven women of the tunnel).<sup>7</sup> When people are in need and visit the *bayan*, they might summon the Daughters by chanting the words: *Harem el ghar ummat faẓa'an bar*, which means 'the women of the tunnel who lend a hand and help anyone in need'. During these events, respect might be shown to the Daughters by complimenting them and describing them as *abda wa shada ummat fershan makbda wa ummat senunan fidab* ('those who lie in luxurious coffins with teeth of shining silver'). This is clearly a material trope that indicates that the Daughters are people of great material wealth. As a form of etiquette and an additional sign of respect, women might take off their shoes and roll seven times around the *bayan* before making their requests.

### Discussion

The ethnographic material briefly provided above is only a fraction of that collected during the fieldwork but there is nevertheless a lot to unpick here. For reasons of brevity and because this material will hopefully form part of a larger study in future, we will simply make a few preliminary comments regarding three themes of interest to these authors: gender, human security and archaeology.

The interview material, as well as the gender and age of the respondents, suggests that outside the male and female members of the Sufi Diwehia family and its close friends and associates such as Sheikh El Ony, the residents who see and contact *Banat el Sheikh* are predominantly (but not exclusively) women, who are often over 60. This suggests generational differences between women i.e. women over 60 are more likely to hold such beliefs and/or participate in such activities than women under 60. It certainly limits conclusions about active male participation in seeking help from the Daughters (though not about their beliefs), and thereby suggests a gender difference between men and women. Perhaps most interestingly of all, it highlights the complexity of Sudanese women's beliefs – particularly as women tend to operate across and between the boundaries between 'Islam', 'spirituality' and 'tradition'.

The Daughters are nevertheless a powerful construction of both male and female consciousness. That they are described as having dark hair; being beautiful, good and virginal; having large bosoms and wearing white, is a powerful commentary on both feminine aesthetics and the male gaze. Furthermore, that

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<sup>7</sup> The description of El Kurru burials as tunnels echoes ethnographic data collected by Rebecca Bradshaw at the Kushite site of Dangeil in 2013-14. She found that some residents hold the belief that the site connects to subterranean tunnels that run under the Nile (see Bradshaw 2017). For more information on Dangeil see the website of the Sudan Archaeological Research Society and its journal, *Sudan & Nubia*.



the Daughters are wealthy, with ‘silver teeth’, and act as spontaneous providers of help and assistance during times of sickness and death, confirms them as a composite image of the ideal Sudanese woman; even if as *jinn* their behaviour is not governed by the same rules as human women.

Problems with which the community ask for help also tap into cultural norms about gender. A review of interview material suggests that, like Ajba, most women visit the *bayan* if they are struggling with marriage and childbirth or divorce. In Sudan, as in many other modern countries, people can be culturally conservative and the idea that women function primarily as home-keepers and child-bearers remains prominent, particularly in this rural context. Anecdotes such as Ajba’s, in which the Daughters intervened to allow her to fulfil her prescribed role, may help to explain why the practice of seeking the Daughters’ help still exists.

This phenomenon takes place in the context of pervasive human insecurity. Fifty-seven per cent of Sudan’s rural population live below the poverty line (CBS 2011) and state-funded services and social safety nets are all but absent. In this context, the community is a powerful support and a tool for resilience. Female community members actively call on the Daughters to help with their problems and the Daughters are seen to intervene actively in their favour; thus they play a particularly important role in safeguarding human security in the absence of effective government support.

It is, therefore, in the context of human insecurity that the archaeological site, particularly Reisner’s *bayan* and the Kushite-era tombs, gains its contemporary meaning. These stories and rituals also provide important connections for women to the archaeological site. This is extremely important as women usually have less physical contact with the site(s) than men, who are more likely to be engaged in work outside the house and who often form part of archaeological excavation teams (see Bradshaw 2017).

Finally, these stories in their present form are approximately one hundred years old and while they fit into a broader category of belief i.e. that *jinn* live in archaeological sites, the stories have adapted to the specificities of El Kurru and the development of the excavations there. For example, while the reason for the *bayan*’s location is unknown, its placement on Reisner’s spoil heap gives us a reliable date for the formation of the *Banat el Sheikh* rituals (at least in their present form) of the early 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### *Conclusion*

Folklore, stories and associated activities are intrinsically valuable and can teach us a lot about people, culture and values across time and space. The stories of *Banat el Sheikh* for example can provide insights into Sudanese ideas

about food and hospitality; gender; Sufism and Islam; human (in)security and community resilience; interaction with landscape and built environment; sensory and spiritual experience; and the relationship between the ‘material’ and ‘immaterial’. The site-specific stories of Nisaira Bint el Jebel at Jebel Barkal and Fatima Deffufa at Kerma (see Al Nassir 1996 and Osman 1992, respectively) as well as the spirit (*zur*) of an archaeologist called ‘Mr Prinze’ in Meroe (Boddy 1989; Bradshaw 2017) suggest that the analyses offered here might well apply, at least in part, to other archaeology-rich regions in Sudan’s Nile Valley. As such, this folklore sits firmly in the realm of intangible cultural heritage<sup>8</sup> which, being:

transmitted from generation to generation, is constantly recreated by communities and groups in response to their environment, their interaction with nature and their history, and provides them with a sense of identity and continuity... (UNESCO 2003, Article 2).

The collection and analysis of stories such as those outlined here is, therefore, important in their own right.

For archaeologists, there is an even more important finding, however, that intangible cultural heritage<sup>8</sup> can be used to understand tangible, material cultural heritage, such as archaeological sites. As stated above, the *Banat el Sheikh* story shows that one of the primary ways in which the El Kurru archaeological site is significant to its modern residents, particularly its women, is the presence of *Banat el Sheikh*: the site’s meaning is therefore not defined solely by its ancient Kushite history and origins. Indeed, such is the mutual importance of the immaterial presence of the Daughters to the material site, that when the University of Dongola archaeological mission began implementing plans for site protection in February 2017, they were confronted by residents who believed that they wanted to destroy the *bayan*. The University’s Professor Abbas Sid Ahmad told this author (TA) that it was only when he explained to the residents that the University wanted to maintain and protect the site and not destroy it, that they backed down.

This anecdote, when considered alongside the key finding that the site’s modern significance emanates at least in part from the *Banat el Sheikh*, can have a direct bearing on archaeological policy if it is used to help practitioners form more sustainable site management and protection plans, even if they do

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<sup>8</sup> The practices included within UNESCO’s categorization of intangible heritage are oral traditions and expressions comprising language, performing arts, social practices, rituals and festive events, knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe, and traditional craftsmanship. See UNESCO (2003).

not believe these stories themselves. Archaeologists and heritage practitioners might consider:

- **Undertaking people-sensitive site management planning.** From a site management perspective, local people are often identified as the biggest threat to archaeological sites (Hinkel 1992). It would therefore make sense for archaeologists discreetly but directly to engage with residents so that they know about sensitive areas of the site and can discuss them accordingly. Stories and rituals associated with *Banat el Sheikh* may be private, so it would be appropriate if trained women were assigned this particular role. Direct engagement with residents would also provide archaeologists with a channel to explain to them their need to protect sites from man-made degradation, by emphasising the long-term nature of archaeological development and the possible economic dividends of preserving sites for future visitors.
- **Working with local communities to protect sites.** Site protection is a constant source of concern for archaeologists and goes beyond the threat posed by local communities. Threats include natural and man-made factors: from wind erosion to antiquities trafficking and the extensive construction projects that accompany modern development. Archaeologists are often unable to protect sites alone without diverting all of their funds to conservation; national governments such as Sudan's are chronically under-funded. Yet the lesson from the incident with the University of Dongola staff at El Kurru is that archaeologists can involve local communities as allies in the fight to preserve sites. This is because while certain community activities can destroy sites (grazing, farming), others, such as *Banat el Sheikh*, generate a desire to protect the sites, even if it's due to a rationale that does not align with that of most archaeologists.

Overall, this study points to the value of intangible cultural heritage such as folklore in increasing our understanding of the significance of archaeological sites in modern communities, whether in Sudan or elsewhere. Archaeologists often neglect this source of data but this short study suggests that an integrated approach, combining both archaeology and folklore, can yield important lessons for sustainable archaeological site management and protection.

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\*Tohamy Abulgasim Khalifa has been working as an archaeologist for over five years with institutions such as University College London Qatar, the German Archaeological Institute, the University of Barcelona, the British Institute in Eastern Africa and the Polish Centre for Mediterranean Archae-

ology. He works as an Inspector for the National Corporation for Antiquities and Museums (NCAM) and as a freelance tour guide. Tohamy is currently doing his Master's at the University of Khartoum.

\*Rebecca Bradshaw is a researcher, writer and broadcaster focusing on the conflicts and cultures of the Middle East and Africa. She has worked on and off in Sudan for the past ten years and her diverse outputs have appeared in *The New York Times*, *Al Jazeera* and America's Public Broadcasting Service, among others.

## A Short History of the Jews in Sudan

Daisy Abboudi\*

The Jewish community of Sudan was at its largest, with approximately 200 families, between 1945 and 1955. It is a community that is most often placed within a colonial narrative and whilst this is true to an extent, it is not the full story. The problem of piecing together a history of Jews in Sudan before 1898 is the primary reason this period has been overlooked. There are few sources that mention Jews in Sudan and those that do, do so primarily in passing.

Whilst scant references to Jews living in Sudan can be found prior to 1885, a few survive. The 16<sup>th</sup> century Jewish explorer David Reubeni documents Jewish merchants living in Sinnar (Lobban et al. 2002, 142).<sup>7</sup> There are hints that there were Jewish traders in central Sudan exchanging goods with Tripoli during the 18<sup>th</sup> century (Hirschberg 1981, 166) and Isachetto Morpurgo is known to have been at least temporarily living in El Obeid in 1848 (Hill 1967, 230).

Oral accounts can lend additional details. Yass Khogaly, who grew up in Sudan and was interviewed in 2017, spoke at length about his family history. His curiosity was piqued after a home DNA test revealed a large proportion of Jewish ancestry and he started questioning his elderly relatives and carrying out independent research. Yass discovered that his paternal great grandfather had been killed by Mahdist forces and his wife ‘given’ to the Khalifa when his grandmother was seven years old. His maternal grandparents were, he believes, Iraqi Jews:

I have a skull-cap, a *kippah*, it goes back to I don’t know how long ago.  
I have a prayer shawl from my family, a *tallit*, inherited from my mum’s uncle – the one who spoke Aramaic. His kids didn’t know what it was and when I went to my mum and asked her, they sent it to me.

Whilst the claim cannot be verified, Khogaly asserts that there are ‘many, many’ other families like his in Sudan, although none are willing to speak on record about their families’ past experiences.

The most fruitful of the few written sources that reference Jews in Sudan pre-1898 are the memoirs of Father Joseph Ohrewalder, translated into English from the original German by Major F. R. Wingate. An Austrian Catholic priest, Ohrewalder was captured by Mahdist forces in 1882 and held in the Khalifa’s camp for the next ten years. In his memoirs, Ohrewalder makes several references to the Jewish *masalma* (converts) living in Omdurman during

the Khalifa's rule. He describes the inhabitants of Omdurman as a "conglomeration of every race and nationality in the Sudan [...] Egyptians, Abyssinians, Turks, Mecca Arabs, Syrians, Indians, Europeans, Jews; and all these various nationalities have their own quarters, and marry into their own tribes and sections" (Wingate 1882, 283). While this cannot be taken to mean that there was a thriving Jewish quarter, it does show that there were enough Jewish inhabitants in the city to justify naming them as a distinct ethnic group. In fact, when the British forces entered Omdurman in 1898, they found 36 Jews remaining in the city (Lobban et al. 2002, 143).

Of these, only a small number can be named and even fewer are well documented. Moshe Ben Zion Koshti is one who appears in a disproportionately large number of written sources, including Ohrwalder, who mentions a "Jew, named Passioni" (Wingate 1882, 360). Moshe Ben Zion Koshti was renamed Musa Bassiouni by the Mahdi. He was born in Palestine in 1842 and arrived in Sudan at some point during the 1870s with his wife, Bukhara. Like all those compelled to convert to Islam during the Mahdiyya, Bassiouni was required to take a Muslim wife. He married Manna, the daughter of a Coptic father and Muslim mother whose sister, Luli, subsequently married a senior commander in the Khalifa's army. This advantageous familial connection meant that Musa Bassiouni was able to build a comfortable life for himself as a trader, with greater freedoms and higher social status than many of the other *masalma* (Kramer 2015, 100).

Whilst most of the 36 known Jews living in Omdurman returned to Judaism once the Mahdiyya ended, some did not and their descendants, all practising Muslims, continue to live in Sudan today.

### *The Condominium period*

The historical evidence for a Jewish community in Sudan becomes much firmer with the arrival of the British Army in 1898. Bassiouni almost immediately set about establishing a formal Jewish community. He set up a synagogue in a room in his house, purchased land for a Jewish cemetery and set about arranging for a rabbi to come to Sudan (ibid, 101).

Rabbi Solomon Malka arrived in August 1906 at the behest of Bassiouni and under the jurisdiction of the Egyptian *Beth Din* (religious authority). Born in Morocco, Malka had trained to become a rabbi in Tiberius, where he found himself with a wife and two children but little income (Malka 1997, 30). His original plans were to spend two years in Sudan, help establish the community and then move on. When these two years were over, he returned to Tiberius, collected his wife, daughters and a *Torah* scroll [of the Bible, usually the first five books], and then returned to Sudan as a rabbi for another 40 years. There,

he also established a successful food production business to support his rapidly growing family (ibid. 32).

The *Torah* that Malka had brought from Tiberius was supplemented by several more from Cairo and the synagogue was moved into his house. Amongst his first acts as rabbi was the conversion of the so-called ‘Mahdiyya Jews’. These included Manna Bassiouni, Rosa Hakim (the wife of another Jewish merchant and member of the *masalma* community, Shalom Hakim) and the children from these marriages. Following this, Rabbi Malka established links in the meat market and slaughterhouses of Omdurman, which meant that he was allowed to provide kosher meat for the new community.

By this stage, the only thing that the community lacked in order to be completely self-sufficient was a *mohel*, a Jew trained in the practice of circumcision). Rabbi Malka had no formal training for this medical procedure but as the much-repeated legend goes, he had divine inspiration. His wife Hanna was pregnant with her third child, her first to be born in Sudan. Malka was wracked with nerves and worried about who would perform the circumcision if the baby was a boy. One night, in his anguished state, he dreamt that the prophet Elijah came to visit him:

So this holy person in the dream told him, ‘What are you scared of? I’m gonna [*šii*] teach you how to circumcise and you’ll do the whole thing, the procedure that I will show you’. And he showed him exactly how to circumcise a baby.<sup>1</sup>

Following this dream, the young rabbi wrote to his father, who was a trained *mohel* in Tiberius. His father believed that he could cope with the task at hand and sent him the kit he would need to carry out the circumcision. The baby was indeed a boy and Rabbi Malka successfully circumcised his son. In his book, the said son, Eli Malka, writes that he ‘survived the procedure with no apparent ill effects’. Rabbi Malka was entrusted with all subsequent circumcisions and became the official *mohel* of Sudan (ibid. 31).

The new British colony with its newly-established Jewish community started to attract young men. Arriving on the newly built railroad connecting Wadi Halfa – and by extension, Egypt – to Khartoum, young Jewish men seeking their fortunes arrived in Sudan. These early arrivals were predominantly travelling merchants trading in textiles and gum arabic and they came from Egypt, Syria, Iraq and elsewhere in the Ottoman Empire. They settled in Omdurman, established small shops and started families. However, by the late 1920s, the social and cultural centre of Sudan began to shift over the Nile, to the rapidly

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<sup>1</sup> Interview with Betty Mizrahi (2017).





*Rabbi Malka, c. 1935*  
(Credit: Shalom Abboudi).

expanding and modern Khartoum. As Omdurman was gradually relegated to a residential and industrial suburb, those families seeking a more fashionable and cosmopolitan lifestyle moved to Khartoum. This included the majority of the Jewish population of Sudan.

This cultural and geographical shift meant that Khartoum became the most obvious location for the community's first purpose-built synagogue. Using funds raised by the community and to a lesser extent by appeals for donations from abroad, the new synagogue was opened in 1926. Located on Victoria Avenue, now El Qasr

Avenue, it was a powerful statement of a community comfortable with its place in Sudanese society.

The Jewish community was, on the whole, culturally conservative and traditional, although not overly observant. Whilst dietary laws were kept at home, in many cases they were not observed when visiting restaurants. Sabbath was observed on a Friday night at home, although not all attended synagogue on Saturday. Those that did often drove there. Major festivals, such as *Rosh Hashanah* (Jewish New Year), *Yom Kippur* (the Day of Atonement) and *Pesach* (Passover) were observed fully by all members of the community; however more minor festivals such as *Hanukkah* were either small affairs celebrated at home or ignored completely.

Rabbi Malka was well known for being open minded and accepting of his congregation's level of observance and he went to great lengths to ensure Judaism was open and accessible to all Jews in Sudan:

When he read the *Torah* on *Yom Shabbat* (the Sabbath) he would also say whatever was in the *Talmud* (the book of rabbinical law) that week in Arabic. Every Saturday when he gave his sermon and he spoke, he would explain the *Torah* portion in Arabic and translate what had happened that week. He did everything in Arabic and in Hebrew, even the Song of Songs.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Interview with David Malka (2015).

In fact, the Rabbi was so well regarded that his funeral in 1949 was a large, public affair attended by the heads of all the political parties and representatives of the Catholic Church. After his death, the community renamed the synagogue *Ohel Shlomo* (Solomon's Tent) after him (ibid. 45).

Replacing this much-loved rabbi was a difficult task and two men were considered but deemed unsuitable before Rabbi Massoud Elbaz arrived in Sudan from Egypt in 1956. He was similarly accessible in his approach to ministering to the small community:

My father was a very simple, very modern Rabbi. Very likeable, always joking and everybody liked him a lot. The prayers were in the Egyptian style. [...] The songs, the tunes [of prayers], were mostly after the Egyptian songs, sometimes they just pick the tune, like Farid el Atrash – I'm sure you know him – and they go with it.<sup>3</sup>

Rabbi Elbaz served in Sudan until 1964, working without pay in his final year, until the community became too small and finances became too tight to allow him and his family to remain.

### Community Life

By the mid-1940s, the community had grown so large that the small synagogue hall was no longer feasible as a community centre, and so the Jewish Recreational Club (JRC) was opened in 1946. Festivals such as *Succot* and *Purim* could now be celebrated communally, with annual parties for the latter becoming a highlight of the year. The large courtyard meant that children could play hide-and-seek, teenagers could play basketball and adults could play cards, whilst people of all ages could buy a Kiti-Cola and sandwich from *Am Ali* (Uncle Ali), who ran the tuck-shop.

The highlights of the social calendar were the annual winter balls. Each community in Khartoum had their own club. In addition to the



*Rabbi Elbaz c. 1965*  
(Credit: Rachel Abboudi).

<sup>3</sup> Interview with Rachel Abboudi (2015).

Jewish Club, there was a Greek Club, a Syrian Club, an Italian Club, an Armenian Club, an Egyptian Club, two British Clubs (The Sudan Club and the less elite Khartoum Club), and The Labour Club (open to all but mostly catering to the Sudanese population). Every winter each of the clubs would sell tickets to a ball. It was an opportunity to fund raise and more importantly, to see and be seen:

They would import bands from overseas and people dress in tuxedos, people went dancing and they played all kinds of music. Most of it dancing music, America, Spanish, samba, *paso doble*, waltz.<sup>4</sup>



*A Party at the Jewish Recreational Club,  
c. 1961 (Credit: David Osmo).*

By 1946, when the JRC was opened, the Jewish community was not the same hodgepodge of travelling merchants and shopkeepers it had been in 1920. By the 1930s, many of the original immigrants had built successful businesses and in some cases had even opened factories. By the late 1940s and early 1950s, their sons had taken over or joined the family businesses. Several Jewish families had established large, international businesses producing and trading in all manner of goods, including skins, textiles, pharmaceuticals, beauty products and even hibiscus. Others decided to pursue careers in the professions. Over the course of its history, the community could boast three

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<sup>4</sup> Interview with Solomon Sasson (2015).



*Shalom Abboudi at a university lecture for medical students in 1963  
(Credit: Shalom Abboudi).*



*Jack Tamman (second from left) and school friends at Comboni College, c. 1959  
(Credit: Jack Tamman).*

doctors, one civil engineer, several bank managers and many senior managers in large British companies.

The vast majority of Jewish children living in Sudan attended Comboni College, Unity High School or the Catholic Sisters' School. This meant that their social circle was largely confined to the upper echelons of Sudanese society – politicians, governors, businessmen and diplomats. Social circles varied by family. Whilst some were close friends with their Sudanese neighbours, others were more comfortable socialising with other 'foreigners' or exclusively within the community itself. What is universal, though, is that nobody socialised with the British, who were referred to in more than one interview as 'snobbish'.

Despite the overall wealth of the community, there were always exceptions. While some families of ten or twelve struggled to survive on the single salary of a middle manager, others suffered as a result of bad business ventures.

We were poor, and beside that we had my grandmother, a mentally ill woman, living with us. [...] There was no Doctor for such a thing in those days. In Sudan I never saw a Doctor or a Dentist, there were a few, but to see them you had to be rich! That's why my teeth are so bad now, we never brushed our teeth – we didn't even have a toothbrush [...] It really wasn't an easy life. We had clothing, but the clothes go from one brother to the other brother. I remember I had very worn shoes. They became so bad that I couldn't wear them anymore but my father wouldn't give me money to buy new ones.<sup>5</sup>

Impoverished families were often supported by wealthier relatives or a community bursary fund. From 1948, when the State of Israel was established, poorer members of the community were encouraged to leave Sudan and seek their fortunes in this new land. Those who could not afford to pay the airfare themselves had their passages paid for by the community. As a result by 1956, when the political mood in the country began to change after Independence, only those Jews who had stable salaries and businesses remained in Sudan.

### *The Suez Crisis and its Effects on the Community*

The lead-up to the Suez Crisis and the breakout of war in October of 1956 meant that in northern Sudan, public support for pan-Arabism, and by extension antisemitic sentiments, grew exponentially.

In 1960, two Jewish brothers were falsely accused of poisoning meat supplied to the hospital in Khartoum and jailed for two months until they were

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<sup>5</sup> Interview with Chaim Gavrielli (2015).

proved innocent in court.<sup>6</sup> Articles in the newspapers accused the Malka family, and by extension all Jews, of being Zionist spies, with one even stating, “if you cannot put them to death, torture them and make them suffer” (Malka 1997, 117).

David Eleini described the mood of the country between 1956 and 1964:

It was a strange situation. We were close to so many Sudanese people and we felt absolutely no hostility at all from day to day contact with people [...] we never hid we are Jewish, all my friends knew that I was Jewish. I used to go to their houses, they used to come to my house, we used to eat together. Everything.

But there was this other element, the political element, because Sudan was part of the Arab League against Israel and all of that. There was a little hostility that you felt from time to time. Sometimes at school you get insulted as a ‘bloody Jew’, or that type of thing. As I said I never hid I was a Jew... but I never, ever said I was pro-Israel. I would never go as far as being an open Zionist or anything like that.

Most of the time though it was a different level that was hostile, more subtle. It was a really weird attitude that you get from all anti-Semites, they will come to you and say, “You’re different, you’re not a bad Jew, it’s the other Jews who are the bad ones. You’re different [...]”

You are told all the time that you are different but deep down you know you are not different, you are the same. I mean, I was as Jewish as everybody else, you know?<sup>7</sup>

This general unease and low-level hostility meant that most salaried workers began to leave the country. Whilst those who could afford to settled in the UK or the USA, those who could not emigrated to Israel.

### *Another turning point*

1964 marked a second turning point in the story of the Jews of Sudan. The death of student Ahmad al Qurashi during the October Revolution led to the end of General Abboud’s military rule and the establishment of a civilian government. The new coalition government allied itself more closely to Egypt, prompting a second wave of Jewish emigration (Howell and Hamid 1969, 301).

My grandfather, Eliaho Abboudi, was one of the first business owners to leave Sudan. In late 1964, he returned home to Sudan having been on a busi-

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<sup>6</sup> Information from interviews with David Eleini (2016) and Joyce Goral (2017).

<sup>7</sup> Interview with David Eleini (2016).



*Eliaho Abboudi & his wife (who wishes to remain anonymous) on a day trip to the Mogran, 1962 (Credit: author).*

ness trip abroad. On arrival, he was stopped at the airport. His passport, luggage and business papers were all confiscated and he was questioned for seven hours about his motives for travelling because he was a Jew. He decided then and there, as he left the airport building, that he would have to leave the country for good:

The other Jewish people told me that I am stupid. They said that I am making money, travelling with my wife all over the world, why should I go? Stay and maybe it will get better. But I told them, 'You stay, make your money. I don't want to stay', and after forty-eight days we left. We left and everything we had was left in Sudan.

The minds of the 'other Jewish people' soon changed and they too began to leave the country of their birth, settling predominantly in the USA and the UK. They left quietly, afraid that a mass exodus would mean a total ban on exit visas that were already difficult to obtain. They would go on holiday, with what they could fit in a suitcase and never return. Their properties, businesses and assets were abandoned – often entrusted to a neighbour or friend with the understanding that a sale would be made on their behalf and the proceeds sent on to them in their new country. Invariably this sale never occurred.

By 1967 only a few Jewish families, those with the most to lose, were left in Sudan. In June of that year, the Arab League convened in Khartoum and the Six-Day War broke out. The atmosphere in the capital at this time was, by all accounts, unbearable. All of the young Jewish men who did not have the right connections were arrested without charge.

There was a lot of Nasser propaganda, on the radio you hear it, the newspaper talking about the Jews, and... it was hard... it was hard.

They were also targeting the Greeks, all the “Non-Muslim Foreigners” – that’s what they called us. It wasn’t just the Jews targeted. You see the headlines in the newspapers, you know, *The Foreigners will Corrupt our Country*, and stuff like that. And the Nasser propaganda. Graffiti on the walls, “the Jew Dogs”, they called us, rats and dogs and all kinds of... and “Death to the Jews”. You heard that. This is only towards the very end, when it was...it was ‘67 and all you heard on the radio is Nasser whipping every[body] up, riling up everybody. Ah. My god, this brings back a lot of memories... [tears well up].<sup>8</sup>

As soon as the war was over, most of the remaining Jews in the capital left for Switzerland as stateless persons with wealth, obtained visas for entry into the USA or the UK, or settled in Israel.

I gave the keys to a neighbour she was a good friend. We left and we said we are going on a holiday and we didn’t return. Even I had *sonjouk* I was making in the fridge and I left it half finished.<sup>9</sup>

A few businessmen returned to Sudan periodically after the Six-Day War, hanging on to the hope that things would change. Others who had stayed on lived in Wad Medani, away from the political heat of the capital. By the end of 1967 there were not even enough men to make a *minyan* [a quorum of ten].<sup>10</sup>

Whilst President Numeiri’s nationalisation laws in 1970 further hurt the business ventures of those who chose to stay in Sudan, it was not until 1973 and the murder of foreign diplomats in Khartoum by Palestinian gunmen that the last Jews left. The synagogue building was sold in 1986. It was converted into a bank, which has subsequently been demolished; the Jewish cemetery in Khartoum was abandoned.

In 1977 seventeen of the graves in the Jewish cemetery at Khartoum were airlifted to Israel and the remains reburied in Jerusalem. Many more graves are left in Sudan and of these only 14 have whole or partial headstones. The cemetery was used as a dumping ground for car parts after the airlift, and to this day it is littered with broken windshields, wing mirrors and scrap metal. It is only during the last five years that efforts have been made to prevent further desecration.

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<sup>8</sup> Anon. Interview (2015).

<sup>9</sup> Interview with Fortune Shoua (2015).

<sup>10</sup> The quorum of ten men that are needed to say certain prayers. Interview with Ezra Barukh (2016).





*Jewish cemetery in Khartoum (Credit: author).*

The community's ten *Torah* scrolls emigrated with various members of the community and are now homed in synagogues frequented by the former Jews of Sudan.

Today, the majority of Sudanese Jews live in Israel, America, England and Switzerland. On their way to these countries they settled in many different places, building up their businesses and learning their trades. However, they remain a close-knit community – always ready to welcome each other into their homes and offer support in times of need. They remain united by their memories, experiences and the identities they formed in Sudan.

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\* Daisy Abboudi is working on a book on the history of Sudan's Jewish community. More information is available on her website, 'Tales of Jewish Sudan' [www.talesofjewishsudan.com](http://www.talesofjewishsudan.com)

## Documentary Production Master Class in Khartoum

### Ricardo Preve

In January 2020, SSSUK member Ricardo Preve gave a two-hour workshop to more than 20 Sudanese film students, film professionals and people interested in getting an introduction to the production of audiovisual materials to disseminate scientific work.



*The author and participants at the Master Class, Khartoum, January 2020  
(Credit: Ricardo Preve).*

The class, held in Khartoum, was organised by the Sudan Film Factory as part of the activities of the 2020 Sudan Independent Film Festival, where Preve's film "Coming Home" was chosen for the Festival's official selection.

Entitled 'Master Class/Anthropological Documentary Production', the class covered topics such as choosing a story to document, narrative structure in documentaries, camera and subject movement in documentary interviews, working with children and animals, historical recreations, and special effects in documentary film making.

The seminar was a very practical class, wholly based on Preve's 20 years

of professional experience and using five of his documentaries as examples: Emmy Award nominated 'Child Mummy Sacrifice' for National Geographic Television, 'Ghosts of Machu Picchu', which was a RAI Italian National Television/National Geographic Television co-production, 'Chagas/A Silent Killer' for Al Jazeera English, 'The Patagonian Bones', which won Best Production in Argentina's Television Awards for 2015, and 'Coming Home', which was partly filmed in the Red Sea State and was recently broadcast on Sudan National TV.

For each project, there was an analysis of achievements and mistakes, using clips from the films, and backstage and 'making-of' materials (video and set photographs). In particular, Preve showed the students some of the behind-the-scenes complications that arose from the filming of 'Coming Home' in Sudan and shared his experiences in the hope that they would help upcoming Sudanese film makers in their work.

The allotted seats at the seminar sold out, and the students were very involved and participatory during the class.

Preve hopes to return to Sudan for further interaction with Sudan's growing film community.

# Reflections on the Coronavirus Pandemic in Sudan, South Sudan and the UK: A conversation hosted by SSSUK

Report compiled by Rebecca Bradshaw<sup>1</sup>

## *Introduction*

Our webinar on Covid-19 was SSSUK's first, necessitated by the very virus that was its topic. As of 17<sup>th</sup> June, it had been watched on FaceBook over 2,100 times by 1,923 distinct persons. For those who missed it or would like to see it again, the links can be found at:

<https://www.facebook.com/ssruk/videos/170027284440105/>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=M9QGFHobvHw>

The Covid-19 pandemic has been a life changing and traumatic event for millions of people around the globe. Millions of people have died or lost their loved ones, and levels of violent domestic and child abuse have sky-rocketed under lockdown conditions. For many, weeks of isolation and social distancing have created or exacerbated physical and mental health problems while health-care systems, even in strong economies, struggle to cope.

Within this context, SSSUK wanted to focus on Covid-19's impact upon the Sudanese and South Sudanese in the UK, many of whom have lost friends and relations including health workers, and to hear and document some of their experiences. We also hoped to discuss the situation in the two Sudans and discover what challenges they face and how external actors might help.

We therefore hosted a discussion on Facebook Live, titled "Reflections on the Coronavirus Pandemic in Sudan, South Sudan and the UK" on 20<sup>th</sup> May 2020. Our aim was for this to be accessible, engaging and most of all, useful. SSSUK Joint Deputy Chairperson Mawan Muortat moderated the event and our speakers were:

- **Dr Sara Abdelgalil**, President, Sudan Doctors' Union UK (SDU UK) and a paediatric consultant;
- **Dr Eluzai Abe Hakim**, Associate Editor, South Sudan Medical Journal and retired NHS consultant physician;
- **Dr Marwa Gibril**, Darzi Fellow and general practitioner;
- **Dr Nicki Kindersley**, Research Fellow, Pembroke College, University of Cambridge.

**Dr Sara Abdelgalil** was invited to start the discussion and began by noting

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<sup>1</sup> Very special thanks to SSSUK Committee members Mawan Muortat, Fidaa Mahmoud and Aly Verjee for organising this event.

WEDNESDAY

20

MAY

18:00  
LONDON

19:00  
KHARTOUM

20:00  
JUBA

# Reflections on the Coronavirus Pandemic in Sudan, South Sudan and the UK

A CONVERSATION PRESENTED BY THE  
**SOCIETY FOR THE STUDY  
OF THE SUDANS, UK**



**Dr Sara Ibrahim Abdelgalil**  
PRESIDENT,  
SUDAN DOCTORS' UNION UK

**Dr Eluzai Abe Hakim**  
ASSOCIATE EDITOR,  
SOUTH SUDAN MEDICAL JOURNAL

**Dr Marwa Gibril**  
DARZI FELLOW AND NHS GP

**Dr Nicki Kindersley**  
RESEARCH FELLOW, UNIVERSITY  
OF CAMBRIDGE

Moderator:  
Mawan Muortat  
Vice-Chair, SSSUK

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SSSUK, please visit:  
<http://www.sssuk.org/>

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that Covid-19 has presented Sudanese-British health workers with a “double fight”. While the SDU has been involved in delivering humanitarian aid to Sudan for many years, she explained, it had never been required to operate in a situation where Sudanese health workers were urgently needed on the front line in UK hospitals at the same time.

In terms of healthcare in the UK, Dr Sara explained that the SDU works closely with Sudanese communities to: help transfer key medical messages;

- guide people towards services and resources;
- advise how to manage Covid-19 alongside other conditions, such as pregnancy or diabetes.

In Sudan, the Union works with the Health Ministry to help overcome basic challenges posed by the fragile healthcare system. These include a severe lack of facilities and resources, and the international ban on money transfers. She noted that the SDU receives donations and undertakes campaigns, such as those to support the provision of oxygen in the provinces. However, severe economic challenges and the sheer impracticability of social distancing can undermine these efforts.

Dr Sara emphasised that cooperation and collaboration will continue to be the critical elements of any effective response to Covid-19. She noted that the SDU is now part of a global coalition – stretching from Qatar to Canada and the US, Australia and New Zealand, and Ireland and the UK – that shares data and directs donors towards effective means of providing Sudan with assistance.

**Dr Eluzai Hakim** spoke next and focused on South Sudan. Like Dr Sara, he noted that a new virus requires new responses. He commended global efforts to develop a vaccine but emphasised that until one is distributed on a large scale, the focus should be on prevention: isolating, testing and monitoring. The lack of robust and well-supplied facilities in which to do this safely and systematically makes this extremely difficult, however. He highlighted that procuring medical necessities is one of South Sudan’s main challenges, as its lack of port access makes it rely on its neighbours, who all have their own problems.

Dr Eluzai Hakim advised that any international help the international to South Sudan be in kind – such as testing equipment, prefabricated panels for isolation units or solar panels for light and cooling system – rather than in cash. He also suggested that the South Sudan Covid-19 Taskforce include a consultant in Public Health, a practising clinician and enough personal protective equipment (PPE).

The South Sudanese doctor ended with a long-term vision of improving

health services based on: integrated primary health care in rural areas (where he estimates 90-95% of South Sudanese live) along with small, efficient, local hospitals in selected areas to which patients can be transferred if they need hospital treatment.

**Dr Marwa Jibril** was our third speaker and expanded on the uniquely bad situation in her homeland, Darfur. Identifying it as an on-going conflict zone, she outlined key aspects: thousands of people dead over an almost 20-year conflict; approximately three million displaced; and refugee camps in all five Darfur states.

As in Sudan more broadly, Dr Marwa concluded that the Darfur health system is not fit for purpose and is characterised by poor infrastructure and poor distribution of professionals and medicine. What little testing there is can take five to six days to complete as each test is sent to Khartoum for analysis. Despite its population of nine million, there is only one isolation unit per state, with as few as ten beds per unit. The majority of people therefore have to travel extremely long distances to find medical help and safety is not guaranteed: some doctors who tested positive for Covid-19 were working in isolation units.

Dr Marwa explained that social distancing and hand washing – the two most basic tools we have to prevent infection – are almost wholly absent in Darfur, particularly in over-crowded and unhygienic refugee camps with a high number of people and a chronic lack of clean running water and soap. She concluded that Darfur's capacity to cope with Covid-19 infections in any number is severely limited and the situation particularly dire.

**Dr Nicki Kindersley** concluded the presentations with six key findings from the Rift Valley Institute (RVI) South Sudan team's recent research. Lockdown is not likely to be enforceable without violence and famine. A common view is that the poor are paying the price of the elite. Security forces are already profiting from the virus. Community consultation and local action are better methods of mitigating the pandemic.

There was little ability or incentive for people to respond to lockdown requirements, Kindersley said. Moreover, many other urgent medical and practical threats to life – including local violence, locust infestations and famine – are widely seen as more deadly than Covid-19. One woman noted that while famine might kill all her children, Coronavirus might kill only one.

People are offended that the government and international community react to Covid-19 but not to the major economic and social injustices that exist day-to-day. Authentic two-way conversations are required. Amid widespread mistrust in the government and external actors, the little information about Covid-19 circulated is not sufficient to change behaviour and prevent



transmission. Rumours abound more widely than official information. More sound information is needed.

Local epidemic management systems – such as quarantine – already exist in households and cattle camps; many people have effective mechanisms and medical knowledge. These are functional, sustainable and provide a strong foundation upon which to build a broader health system.

### *Questions and answers*

#### Was there a doctor's strike in Juba?

Dr Eluzai replied that strikes had reportedly been called off but were prompted by four-month delays in doctors' salaries. He also urged the government to provide staff with adequate PPE, their "armour".

#### What about the ban on money transfers and the impact of US sanctions?

Dr Sara explained that privately transferring money to Sudan engages the black market, which the SDU avoids. They tried to open an official bank account but were unable to and have since raised their concern with the Troika in the hope that the United States in particular would help. She said sending finance is only one solution anyway, as local production of PPE and other requirements is minimal, resulting in the re-transfer of money back outside Sudan and a critical delay in providing care. PPE shortages also threaten the lives of health professionals already working under extreme stress.

#### How generalised are Dr. Nicki and the research team's conclusions across South Sudan?

This research was based on common accounts found across areas and interviewees but research was continuing. Community responses to Covid-19 depended on place, she said. Government radio messages mainly penetrated urban areas, where many people couldn't take precautions without also taking other risks. In rural areas, the few who had heard of the virus had heard through rumour and believed it was similar to flu or could be remedied by drinking sugar-less tea before 4 am, for example. Most of all, Nicki emphasised the injustice felt by South Sudanese at what they see as a disproportionate reaction to Covid-19 compared to the exploitation they face daily.

#### What about reported attacks on health workers?

Aggression towards health workers is a complication of such a pandemic, said Eluzai, and extreme behaviour such as panic buying and interracial violence were signs of the same condition. Sara reported examples in Sudan of such behaviour and credited it to confusion about what to do, the complications of taking the recommended precautions and frustrations about people's uneven

access to care. She and other doctors have made a video to support their colleagues in Sudan and condemn violence against health professionals. Marwa added that as a deterrent, they are working towards a law criminalising attacks on healthcare professionals.

What is the state of primary health care in the Sudans and can you name possible measures to help?

Dr Marwa highlighted chronic underfunding and brain-drain as primary factors in the shortage of suitable staff and how badly over-burdened the few hospitals are. Healthcare needs a bigger budget, she suggested, but primary healthcare service also needs institutionalising. Small local centres encourage people to live in the provinces rather than migrate to overcrowded cities.

Someone then asked Nicki Kindersley how her research had been received in Juba and she explained that RVI sought to promote its recommendations at the highest levels but it's hard to say how much this is applied to policies. The government response had been "highly centralised" and "governmental, not medical" as well as "Western", and primary health care needed to be focused on the two-way conversations mentioned earlier. More people were now aware that they needed to wash their hands but soap was expensive. Other disinfectants such as cattle urine were already in use.

Eluzai Hakim made the important observation that there was no template for a robust public healthcare service anywhere in Africa and drew attention to the integrated model he has devised with his colleague Victor Vuni Joseph. This is based on public health measures, minimal treatments, anti-natal care and child vaccination, and is cheap and easy to generalise. (See *Further Reading*.)

What do you think of the performance of Sudan's Health Ministry?

Things were better now after a shaky start, said Sara Abdelgalil, and the role of the diaspora was to provide Sudan with advice and technical support. She stressed unity and compassion for the fragile new government.

Should there be more pressure on the government to allocate more supplies

<http://www.southsudanmedicaljournal.com/archive/may-2019/integrated-primary-health-care-iphc-for-developing-countries-a-practical-approach-in-south-sudan.html>

to Darfur?

Dr Marwa responded that she and colleagues had spoken to the government specifically about Darfur and were collaborating with people in Sudan to provide regular training and monitoring, and to build the capacities of midwives, nurses and other carers, as well as doctors.

What are the Sudanese and South Sudanese diasporas doing about the

demonstrable lack of doctors and nurses in-country, and what difference might it make if they went back?

Dr Eluzai underlined the importance of transnational links. Dr Sara agreed and noted the emergence of the Sudan Health Volunteers. Sudan's closed borders make it hard for workers to travel to Sudan now but they were trying to help people use PPE effectively, increase occupational health using webinars and so on.

Why isn't mental health being as highly considered as physical health?

Dr Marwa acknowledged that we don't talk about it as much as we should, and that people are suffering bereavement, loneliness, lost income, uncertainty and anxiety. She advised those struggling to keep in touch with friends and family, and spread the important message of hope that we will overcome this.

What has been the response in the Sudans to the lockdown and social distancing measures?

Dr Nicki observed that the South Sudan government's use of lockdown as an instant measure was based on a European model and actually played to its strengths as a securitised state. Yet, again, it had proved not to work and had created other problems. She praised the efforts of people, especially young people, to use and create hand-washing mechanisms, but stressed that these endeavours were not state-sponsored but rather organic innovations bred in large part by the state's absence.

For Sudan, Dr Sara noted that we needed a reality check: there was no soap or hot water; people couldn't stay at home and eat and drink because there was no food security; they needed to earn to live day-to-day. If there was no economic support social distancing would fail.

### *Further Reading*

Kindersley, N, et al. 2020. Responding to Covid-19 in South Sudan: Making Local Knowledge Count. Rift Valley Institute Briefing Paper, May.  
<http://riftvalley.net/publication/responding-covid-19-south-sudan-making-local-knowledge-count>

Sudan Doctors' Union website: <https://www.sdu.org.uk/>

Sudan Health Volunteers: <https://form.jotformeu.com/93305474093357>

Victor Vuni Joseph and Eluzai Hakim. 2019. Integrated Primary Health Care (iPHC) for developing countries: a practical approach in South Sudan.

# Book Reviews

Douglas H. Johnson, **South Sudanese Past Notes & Records**, Africa World Books Pty. Ltd., P. O. Box 130, Wanneroo, WA 6065, Australia, 2015, ISBN 978-0-9943631-2-1 paperback, £9.36.

This work, “dedicated to South Sudanese historians, past, present and future”, has a foreword by the eminent South Sudanese-Ugandan writer and scholar, Professor Taban Lo Liyong, who asked two pertinent questions: “...in the writing of history, *our* history, have we got native sons and daughters who have become authoritative? The answer is [a] resounding No!

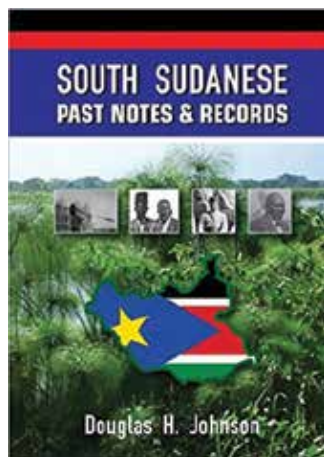
In the collection of archival materials that had been so painstakingly collected together, chiefly by Douglas? No”.

Lo Liyong also pointed out, quite rightly, that the problem of “reading documents about our past but not being able to understand them properly (is) because we lack the proper background and international context into which to situate them”. So, to understand and appreciate *South Sudanese Past Notes & Records*, the reader needs to understand the context in which conferences and policies about the Sudan in general and southern Sudan in particular were made.

Britain was the dominant colonial power in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> century, with expansive territories beyond Egypt, including India, Malaya (today Malaysia), Australia and New Zealand. The importance of the route through the Suez Canal to the Far East made influencing Egyptian politics and economic policies of the utmost importance to the British government. This led to Britain supporting Egyptian interests in the upper Nile regions of the Sudan and into Equatorial Africa; which in turn led to the defeat of the Sudanese Mahdiya forces in Khartoum in 1898 and the establishment of the joint Anglo-Egyptian administration of the Sudan.

The book is conveniently divided into four main sections: ‘Self-Determination and Independence’, ‘People’, ‘Places’ and ‘Legacies’.

In the first section, ‘Self-Determination and Independence’, the author begins with a question that many Sudanese and South Sudanese alike think they know the answer to, i.e. “Just what was the ‘Southern Policy?’ ” The average reader will not only be surprised to find that the so-called Southern Policy was neither unique to Sudan nor confined to southern Sudan but also that it was a short-lived policy that “may have helped to emphasize the differences between the peoples of the South and the people of the North, but it did not create them” (page 7).



The second question the author poses is, “What was decided at the 1947 Juba Conference?” This is the conference that South Sudanese in general credited with being the main event that determined the future of southern Sudan. In reality, the outcome of the conference was irrelevant, since the decisions it appeared to make had already been taken in the wider interests of, firstly Britain, secondly Egypt, and thirdly, north Sudan. What about the interests of South Sudanese and the issue of self-determination? Well, that was decided seven years later at another Juba Conference, one that is usually underrated or overlooked.

The 1954 Juba Conference followed The All Parties Agreement of 11<sup>th</sup> January 1953, in which Egypt for the first time conceded self-determination for the Sudan. However, during the process leading to the APA, not a single southern Sudanese leader was consulted; the APA was later rightly “cited as the first betrayal of the southern Sudan”. The significance of the usually forgotten Juba 1954 Conference must therefore be seen as the background to the APA, “For it was in this conference that the southern leadership of the day announced the conditions on which they would accept a united Sudan, and reserved the South’s right of self-determination” (page 18).

The process that led to the independence of Sudan in January 1956, much sooner than planned, was full of intrigues and betrayals. While Britain extracted Sudan from Egypt’s clutches, it also sought to protect the interests of southern Sudan. Little did southern Sudanese realise that British support for self-determination for the Sudan would undermine their capacity to protect the south; when some southerners rebelled in Torit a few months before independence, it was left to Ismail al Azhari’s first all-Sudanese government to respond, resulting in the rebels being scattered into the bush, with many ending up seeking asylum in East Africa, then under UK colonial rule.

The book traces southern Sudanese struggles for self-determination through democratic means as well as armed struggle, until independence was gained in 2011, the author giving credit where due to various South Sudanese leaders.

The second section ‘People’, offers anecdotal stories of southern Sudanese individuals who have distinguished themselves in many fields, at home and in the Diaspora. If, for instance, you want to know what the Nuer Prophet Ngundeng actually said and did, you will need to read this book so as to separate reality from myth. In addition, you may have heard of Ali Abdel Latif and the White Flag League but who exactly was he? What about South Sudanese missionaries such as Caterina Zeinab, Father Daniel Surur Farim Deng and Salim Wilson, the ‘Black Evangelist of the North’, what do you know about them? This book has it all.

Southern Sudanese particularly distinguished themselves in the field of

military service, first for Egypt, then during the joint Anglo-Egyptian reconquest of Sudan; they also became the backbone of the British East African Rifles. One outstanding career soldier was Fashoda-born Lual Maiker, who later in life became known as Ali Jaifun. Not only did he serve Egypt bravely and faithfully but he equally served during the Anglo-Egyptian reconquest. To cap it all, Ali Jaifun aka Lual Maiker distinguished himself in his 'loaned' service to Napoleon III of France during his campaigns in Mexico. Lual was decorated by the Emperor himself in Paris, on his way back to Egypt after four years of service in Latin America. Later, he was confronted, in his birthplace Fashoda (Kodok), by French Captain Jean-Baptiste Marchand, who had sneaked into southern Sudan in an attempt to forestall the advance of General Kitchener's Egyptian army by making a treaty with the Shilluk *reth* (king); a decision which Ali helped to reverse (page 99). Fascinating stuff!

The third section, 'Places', details some of the many inaccuracies in the maps that were drawn of south Sudan, including the misspelling of the names of people and places. This was due to the fact that there was little or no involvement of southern Sudanese in the writing or editing of these maps, or indeed books or reports. Foreigners who recorded oral information were often unable to accurately transliterate what they heard, even when they were familiar with local names. For example, the site of my old school is 'Kuacjok', which makes sense to a Dinka, but now it is invariably written, even by South Sudanese officials and journalists, as 'Kuajok', which does not make sense. Similarly, Gakrial town is now referred to as 'Gogrial', which renders it totally unrecognisable to my brother or sister in the village nearby. All this should serve to remind local as well as foreign writers to take special care when writing down the names of South Sudanese people and places.

The last section, 'Legacies', also begins with a question: 'Why do we need archives?' Put another way, "Why do we need a room to keep old records?" which was the question put to the author and archivist by a very senior member of the High Executive Council of the then Government of Southern Sudan in the mid-1970s. "The attitude of the official above was widespread," (page 179) notes the author, notwithstanding the fact that he also pays tribute to another South Sudanese leader: "The idea of an archive for the Southern Regional Government originated with late Mading de Garang, then Regional Minister of Information and Culture, Wildlife and Tourism. He established a department of archives in 1977, taking over the responsibility of the closed files kept in the basement of the former Equatoria Province Mudiriyya (now the headquarters of Central Equatoria State)" (ibid.).

When the division of the South was decreed in 1983, responsibility for the archives was inherited by the Equatoria Regional Government, which did not

care about them. The author notes: “It has to be said that this authority failed to perform its responsibility to preserve this heritage for the rest of South Sudan. The archive collection was split up between several buildings, moved about as these buildings were allocated for different purposes, often dumped in disorder in poorly maintained storerooms, left to be eaten by termites, nibbled by rodents, fouled by bats, and soaked in puddles of rain water” (page 180). These documents were apparently, “a big headache” to some regional officials. Documents kept in district headquarters fared even worse, as both the government troops and the Sudan People’s Liberation Army forces “seemed to make war on paper wherever they went” (page 181).

Although South Sudan has not yet got a building to house its archives, the author has noted a change for the better since 2004 when the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Sudan government and SPLM/A was nearing completion. External support to train archivists and digitise documents has become available. As Dr. Johnson concludes, “South Sudan could have a fully functioning archive service: it has the equipment, it has staff who are being trained and are enthusiastic and dedicated to the job... As the South faces a new future, let it also pay attention to and preserve its past” (page 183).

Many educated South Sudanese are curious about the past and look back in order to find answers about now and the future. In that regard the book concludes by answering a question I threw at the author some time back: “Is there a role for amateur historians in South Sudan?” After relating the story that prompted me to raise this question, Douglas’s answer on the last page of this book is that, “the amateur historian does have an important role to play in South Sudan... In some sense all history is local, and the work of amateur historians should be an important contribution to recovering South Sudan’s past. As South Sudan trains more of its own professional historians, let them remember the work of amateur historians as well” (page 192).

Much of the material in this book was first published in the early 1980s as a series of articles in *The Pioneer* weekly newspaper and *Southern Sudan Magazine*, both founded and edited by the author of *Jungle Chronicles*, journalist Atem Yaak Atem.

The articles in this collection were primarily addressed to a South Sudanese audience both at home and abroad. As South Sudan is a country with “no reliable textbook” (page xv), I wholeheartedly agree with the author that this should act as “an open invitation to South Sudanese to research and write more about their own past” (ibid.). This book is a ‘must read’ for students of the history of South Sudan.

**Jacob J. Akol** is the author of *Burden of Nationality* and other books.



Jamal Mahjoub, ***A Line in the River. Khartoum, City of Memory***, Bloomsbury, 2019, ISBN 9781408885451 paperback, £10.99.

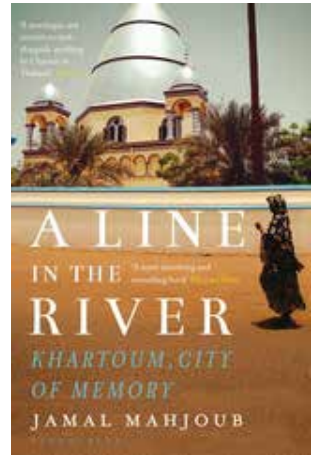
Jamal Mahjoub's search for identity leads him to take the reader on a journey of rediscovery, interspersing personal memories with history and an exploration of present-day Khartoum and the events that have led to Sudan's current situation (as it was at the time of writing: the book was finalised in 2018).

The author's family was exiled after the 1989 coup and he hadn't returned to Sudan for almost twenty years, when the situation in Darfur prompted him to go back. The book is a meditation on how he tries to come to terms with his own relationship to Sudan, a vast and little known country with a complex history and culture; he relates his own search for identity with Sudan's search for a national identity in a country made up of multiple tribes and ethnicities. The book is divided into parts which correlate with the series of visits he made between 2008 and 2012. Weaving through the narrative are musings on the author's relationship with his father and how he didn't take the life paths that were expected of him; he realises that ultimately he and his father shared a love of words and writing.

*A Line in the River* begins with a description of a visit to a Scottish castle where Mahjoub comes across a display of war trophies collected from the Sudan Campaign in the late 1890s. It then moves between periods in history, giving a summary of events that have shaped today's Sudan, from the colonisation by Britain to the secession of South Sudan, through to the more recent oil boom and how this has led to an even greater divide between the oil-rich elite and the poorest communities.

The book explores why "the struggle to create a nation has failed" by examining issues such as the situation in Darfur, the Arabisation of northern Sudan and the denial by Khartoum of the country's cultural and ethnic diversity. A series of observations draws parallels between Sudan and problems in the world today, suggesting that Sudan offers a micro-study of the challenges facing the human race about how to live together and deal with diversity. The book compares global politics to those of Sudan and compares Khartoum to other cities in terms of their culture, politics and literature, which makes it an engaging but also sometimes confusing read.

The author's own observations are interspersed throughout with the stories



and opinions of people he met on his visits, from family members keen to emphasise the hardships that they have been faced with in the years he was away, to optimistic taxi drivers keen to point out the positives.

My own background is similar to the author's and his search resonated with me in many ways, stirring up memories (I vividly remember visiting his mother's shop with my own mother on many occasions, examining the treasures within and picking out gifts from the trove of local handicrafts).

Although I have lived in the Sudan, I learnt a lot from this book (we weren't taught Sudanese history at school in Khartoum), details of historical events and of people that have shaped what the Sudan is today, and it is a fascinating read. But it is, at times, hard work keeping up with the author's meandering thoughts which jump around, back and forth in different chapters between different times; it might have been useful to have a timeline of events to refer to.

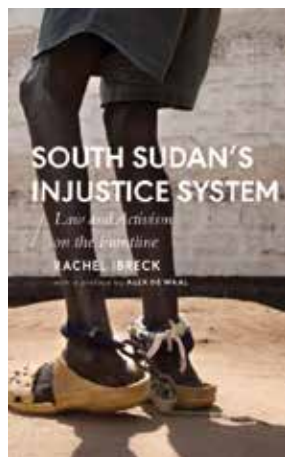
I didn't feel that Mahjoub had really got under the skin or told the story of ordinary Sudanese people and he is quite negative about them – the assertion that the situation in Sudan is unlikely to change because the Sudanese people are 'lazy' (while simultaneously explaining the myriad reasons that Sudan has been fragmented for so long) and that they wouldn't have the resolve to revolt, as other countries did in the Arab Spring, is unfair. This view has been dramatically proved wrong as since the book was published in 2018, the Uprising of 2019 has taken place and resulted in a change of government, brought about by the whole country uniting and coming together as one to depose Omar el Bashir.

However, whether you agree with the author's opinions or not, the book offers an interesting personal portrait of a city and a country which hasn't yet reached its potential.

**Sarrah El Bushra**

Rachel Ibreck, **South Sudan's Injustice System: Law and Activism on the Frontline**, London, Zed Books, 2019, ISBN 9781786993397 paperback, £16.99

This book by Rachel Ibreck makes a substantial contribution to our understanding of the complex justice system in South Sudan. The institutional framework in the country since the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) has been a hybrid form of governance that provides for interactions within and between institutions, and the justice sector is no exception. However, very little was known about how hybrid institutions work within the justice sector and whether they meet the needs of citizens. By making an extensive analysis of court observations and discussions, this book fills that gap in our knowledge, at least for selected urban settings. Importantly, it considers the role of activism and its importance in this sector, thus taking us beyond the usual statutory/customary dichotomy. The author demonstrates how South Sudanese activists continuously challenge attempts by the executive and legislative organs of the government and political elites to manipulate the justice system.



The first chapter, 'Law and Activism in Conflict', gives an overview of the historical development of the justice sector in South Sudan. It shows that, post-CPA, the sector is rooted in the country's history of conquest, discrimination and violence, and shows great continuity with it. The author demonstrates how colonialism introduced a discriminatory justice system that distinguished between South Sudanese **citizens** who were governed by civil law and **subjects** who were governed by customary laws. Building on this colonial justice, post-colonial governments introduced laws that distinguished between Sudanese as Muslims (who were subject to *sharia* laws) and others who were administered under a variety of different regulations. Nevertheless, non-Muslim South Sudanese Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) in northern Sudan were subject to *sharia*.

Similarly, the Sudan People's Liberation Army's pre-CPA legal frameworks were rooted in violence and aimed at controlling the population. SPLA commanders administered justice directly or appointed military chiefs who ruled on their behalf. The author concludes this chapter by arguing that the messy justice system that transpired after the CPA resulted from the limited attention that was paid to the turbulent history that formed it.

The second chapter, 'Inside the Justice System: Domination and Resistance', highlights the complexity of interactions between the judiciary, and the executive and legislative branches of government, and discusses the role that politics plays in shaping these interactions. Ibreck's main argument is that contradictions in post-CPA legal frameworks contribute to dilemmas about how reform in the justice sector should be undertaken and also lead to the manipulation of the sector by political elites. She challenges the notion that the performance of the justice sector can be improved by prescriptively designing activities to bring together the judiciary and the other branches of the government, including traditional institutions. Instead, what emerges from such interactions, she argues, is the consolidation of pre-CPA networks and the patronage relationships that brought the current justice system into existence. As a result, it was difficult in practice for judges to distance themselves from the comrades with whom they had shared the political struggle before the CPA, thus compromising the independence of the judiciary. Members of the executive and legislative branches of government have a vested interest in influencing the judiciary so as to wield control over the state.

The third chapter, 'Makeshift Courts', focuses on the role of customary courts in resolving conflict in urban areas as well as POCs (Protection of Civilian camps that are run by the United Nations). The author shows how customary courts continue to operate and contribute to resolving conflict, despite the ongoing civil war, the resulting fragmentation of society and the dire economic situation. The resilience of the customary courts made a significant contribution to filling the legal vacuum that resulted from a strike by judges in the statutory courts; this began on 2<sup>nd</sup> May 2016 and lasted for about five months. Regarding the POCs, the author details the way in which customary institutions emerge in complex contexts such as that in South Sudan. She shows how the need for a conflict resolution mechanism within the POCs led chiefs and Nuer elders to introduce a unique court system that could address disputes among residents of the POC as well as adhering to the regulations of the UN agencies protecting them. Despite variations in the decisions made by the chiefs, it is clear that for most communities, upholding the sanctity of the family is central to the customary justice sector.

The fourth chapter, 'Legal contestations at the Margins', presents three case studies that are central to conflict dynamics in South Sudan: land rights, women's rights and the right to life. The author draws on these studies to show how the post-CPA justice system works in practice and how dedicated South Sudanese activists have tirelessly attempted to challenge injustices as a way of contributing to a just society. Activists working in these three sectors make use of the hybrid system by creatively drawing from multiple legal frameworks

(customary, statutory, human rights and rule of law) to challenge injustices.

The fifth chapter, 'Citizens for Justice', examines the life histories of a selection of activists, showing how and why they chose activism in a context where this entails high levels of risk. For some, their decision to become activists was influenced by the injustices they had experienced, while for others it was the feeling that there was a need to address the increasing levels of injustice in the country. Interestingly, most of these activists are volunteers, some with paid jobs elsewhere. Through their activism, these dedicated young men and women demonstrate that despite the challenges the country faces regarding the justice sector, there is a glimmer of hope as they are willing to put their lives on the line so as to contribute to a just and fair society.

'Brokering survival', the sixth and final chapter, discusses the strategies that activists in South Sudan employ to build 'justice from below'. Ibreck illustrates how they engage at different levels in negotiations to help them pursue their goals. In addition to their use of customary, statutory and international law, they also make use of their various networks within government institutions.

In conclusion, this book offers a detailed and timely analysis of the justice sector in South Sudan, suitable for a wide range of audiences, including academics and practitioners. As a result of the civil war, the author has understandably restricted her analysis to selected urban areas, which is a limiting factor for those interested in understanding the dynamics in rural areas.

**Peter Hakim Justin**

The African Studies Centre, Leiden, the Netherlands.

Raffi Berg, **Red Sea Spies: The true story of Mossad's fake holiday resort**. Icon Books Limited, London, 2020, ISBN: 978-178578-600-6 hardback, £16.99.

It's not every day that you find yourself reading a book on Sudan with an Afterword written by a former boss of Israel's foreign intelligence agency, the Mossad. The shadow of Efraim Halevy regularly appears in this book. Yet this story has nothing to do with the meeting in February 2020 between the head of Sudan's Sovereignty Council, Lieutenant General Abdel Fatah Abdel Rahman el Burhan, and Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu. The story in this book happened 40 years ago, when Halevy was the overall commander of the operation to smuggle Ethiopian Jews to Israel through Sudan.

This was the time of an even more covert Sudan-Israel relationship that goes back to the early 1980s, under the late President Jaafar Nimeiri. Indeed, the story told here begins even before that, in the late 1970s, when Israeli special forces arrived secretly in a country that was (and still is) officially at war with theirs. Halevy was one of those fleeting clandestine visitors, the book reveals. His Mossad operatives however came and stayed, under deep cover and some for years.

*Red Sea Spies* is the story of how Mossad intelligence officers organised and implemented the smuggling of over 7,000 Ethiopian Jews to Israel via Sudan in 'Operation Brothers' and its successor, 'Operation Moses'. By any measure, this was a momentous historical event and it is one that has the additional attraction for many readers of being, as author Raffi Berg says in his introduction, "...the only operation of its kind that has been completely led by an intelligence agency, from start to finish".

That makes for exciting reading. This is no academic account of history but it does claim to be factual. However, the stylistic device of largely invented dialogue will annoy some readers, though it will draw in others. Berg, the Middle East Editor of the BBC News website, has expertly marshalled and woven together a mass of events. It is some achievement to turn this dense detail into a page-turner. This is all the more true since the story is largely set in a country, Sudan, that as we all sadly know, has provoked little interest from most outsiders, even when it was ruled by an internationally aggressive Islamist regime that certainly merited greater attention or later, was staging



a remarkably peaceful and courageous revolution to overthrow the regime headed by President Omer Hassan Ahmed el Beshir (cf. *Sudan Studies* No. 60, July 2019).

### *Migration ancient and modern*

*Red Sea Spies* is modern history in action and ‘action’ is very much in the frontline, for the work was top secret and highly dangerous, which is what makes this a ripping yarn. These were ‘people-smugglers’ with a difference and the book is their story in that it is told by the Israeli spooks themselves. “In the course of over 100 hours of interviews I conducted with past and present Mossad agents and Navy and Air Force personnel involved in the secret operation, both on the ground and behind the scenes, many made a similar personal point: that they knew there and then that they were involved in something historic”, says Berg. The passage of time had allowed these stories to be told at last, albeit anonymously.

Herein lie both the book’s strengths and its weaknesses. The story is told by the spies themselves, especially by a charismatic and sometimes maverick commander known as ‘Daniel L’, who led the operation from 1979 to 1983. By definition, we have only his and his comrades’ assurances that events of nearly 40 years ago unfolded in the way that they recall. Although the story is set almost entirely in Sudan, there is little Sudanese perspective and even less Ethiopian. A little more political context for both countries would be welcome, as would a few more dates.

As the title tells us, this is essentially the story of ‘Dani’ and his comrades, and their daring exploits, and it has to be read as such. Their first challenge was to find the Ethiopians who wanted to go to Israel, in itself no mean task in Eastern Sudan’s sprawling refugee camps, themselves well infiltrated by informers and Sudanese security agents. Dani, a Uruguayan-born Israeli whose parents were French, posed as a French anthropologist studying the (cross-border) Beni Amr tribe. This reminded me that around that time, a British friend who worked for a refugee charity in the East told me, then a young freelance journalist in Khartoum, that she had become friendly with an Israeli academic who was looking for Ethiopian Jews. It was not a story that I could follow up and still hope to remain in Sudan, so I never learned whether this was Dani, as I now suspect. Sadly, my friend is no longer around to ask.

Interesting glimpses of Sudanese history suddenly appear here and there. Much later, when the Ethiopians were travelling to Israel by sea, one of Dani’s key colleagues on board, and from 1983 his successor, was one David Uri Ben Uziel, aka “Tarzan”. He is described as having “more experience of southern Sudan than perhaps any other Israeli” (p. 160). A paratrooper, he was sent

there by, wait for it, Efraim Halevy, “the architect of the Mossad’s activities in south Sudan, to build up a separatist guerrilla movement known as the *AnyaNya*...” (pp. 160-1).

This had a more strategic purpose than simply helping the South Sudanese rebellion. “Tarzan trained its [*AnyaNya*’s] troops and led them on sabotage missions against the forces of the central government, blowing up bridges, sinking supply ships and walking hundreds of kilometres with them on foot. The theory was that if the Sudanese Army could be tied down, it would be less likely to send reinforcements to the Suez Canal where Sudan was helping Egypt in the War of Attrition” [1969-70], writes Berg. General Ben Uziel became a heroic figure to many in South Sudan, where he was known as “John” and where Israelis were widely seen as natural Biblical allies against the Muslim government to the north.

The spiriting of Ethiopian Jews to Israel was however part of a more domestic agenda for the governments of Israeli Prime Minister Menachem Begin, who saw this ‘return’ as a moral issue. Nevertheless, the book suggests that Israel was also looking for a ‘listening post’ on the Red Sea after losing its base in Sinai when the Peninsula was returned to Egypt in the 1979 peace treaty. That raises questions about the current Sudanese-Israeli rapprochement.

The Ethiopians were trying to escape not simply because they were persecuted as Jews, though some were and probably most felt compelled to practise their faith in secret. Yet they had two additional forces driving them to migrate to Israel. One was the repression that most of their fellow countrymen suffered after Colonel Mengistu Haile Mariam took power in 1977 and which brought tens of thousands of Ethiopians, especially Eritreans, to flee to Sudan in the 1970s and 1980s.

The other was unique to the ‘Falasha’, a term for the Ethiopian Jews usually deemed derogatory but which has been widely and often neutrally used in Sudan. This second aspect was also more important to them, as it involved the very core of their sense of identity. This was a belief in the return of the persecuted Israelites to what is now Israel, a Biblical tradition thought to date back nearly 3,000 years. In their often remote mountain villages, the Ethiopians had held on to the Jewish dream of “tomorrow in Jerusalem” and there are moving accounts of how many arrived on foot in Sudan and kissed the ground, believing that they had walked to the Holy City. The trek had taken literally months of extreme hardship and many had died along the way.

The ‘Beta Israel’ (House of Israel), as the Ethiopian Jews were properly known, were far stricter guardians of their articles of faith than some of the Israelis who had come to collect them. Berg rejects the verb ‘rescue’ as, he says, do the Ethiopians themselves: “they were masters of their own fate”. They



were also deeply imbued with their faith. We hear how the “spies”, impatient to keep moving on the long and dangerous route across eastern Sudan, had to yield to the Ethiopians’ insistence on full observance of the Sabbath, when for the ultra-orthodox, no movement is allowed. That meant a Saturday with no cooking and no travel, not a situation a special forces commando was necessarily comfortable with.

### *Immigrant struggles*

This is especially poignant since on their eventual arrival in ‘Jerusalem’, the Beta Israel were not entirely made welcome, as the book also notes. Some ultra-orthodox rabbis in particular questioned whether they were really Jews at all, a theme taken up by some right-wing politicians alarmed by the African influx. In company with many of his agents, Halevy, who after running Mossad took over the National Security Council, clearly felt strongly about the Ethiopians’ right to migrate to Israel.

Over 30 years later, in 2018, this powerful British-born spook was still outspoken in his public criticism of those who had made life difficult for the Ethiopian immigrants. “Israel betrayed them by taking strict rules of conversion, which had not been used when Ezra and Nehemiah came back from Babylon with children whose mothers were not Jewish” [in the 5<sup>th</sup> century BCE], Halevy declared. “No one asked the people who came from Auschwitz and Majdanek [Nazi concentration camps in 1940s’ Poland] for documents that proved their Jewishness. Hitler was sufficient proof that they were Jews.”

The incoming Ethiopians, large numbers of them subsistence farmers from remote villages, have yet fully to tell their story, at least in English, of the joys and sorrows of their arrival in a land where milk and honey did not always flow. The passage of time at least brought one sign of success in May 2020, when Israel’s first Ethiopian-born minister was appointed: 38-year-old journalist and lawyer Pnina Tamano-Shata became, not surprisingly, Minister of Immigrant Assimilation.

This increases the Ethiopian Jews’ potential for impact on the estimated 6,500 Sudanese living in Israel. According to Israeli media, they include about 1,600 from Darfur and 300 or so Nuba people. Most of the others are probably South Sudanese. Most are thought to lack refugee documentation. Israel is slow to give full asylum to refugees, in part because of its foundation as a Jewish-majority state. Yet a beleaguered Netanyahu cannot afford simply to deport refugees, especially since he has been forced into a coalition government. There is now widespread concern among Sudanese residents that since February’s meeting between Netanyahu and El Burhan in Uganda, they would become part of a bargain between the two governments, which

announced they wanted to move towards diplomatic relations. As elsewhere in Africa, Israel has plenty of military and intelligence resources to offer Sudan, along with the perennial bait of agricultural expertise.

### *Destructive engagement*

This is a million miles from Israel's October 2012 bombing of the Yarmouk munitions factory in Khartoum which was assembling rockets to send to the Hamas movement ruling Gaza. It is nearer to the relationship which, if it was to move the remaining Ethiopian Jews from Sudan, Israel was forced to develop with Nimeiri's regime after its covert people-smuggling was leaked in 1984 – paradoxically, by the World Zionist Congress, says Berg.

This marriage of convenience with Nimeiri was short-lived compared to the nearly five years of secret operations from Arous (or Arousa) holiday village on the Red Sea coast north of Port Sudan. The village had been founded by two Italian archaeologists in 1974 but, in a country devoid of a tourist industry, had failed. Dani and his team had taken it over and turned it into a genuine if sparsely visited holiday destination. Its clients were mainly foreign residents wanting to dive but increasingly as time went on, Sudanese honeymooners: "*arous(a)*" in Arabic means 'bride'. As overseas diplomats contemplated coral reefs, the Israeli staff were using the camp as their base for carrying the Ethiopians to Israel, at first by ship and later by aeroplane. There are derring-do tales of Hercules C-130s landing in the dark in the desert and even more alarmingly, setting off overloaded with their human cargo for the long flight back to Israel.

Since fresh water was a rare commodity in the desert fastness, the agents imported a desalination plant from Israel, carefully excising all indicators of its origin. This reminded me of an incident in Nyala in 1975. I commented on the range of goods on display in the vast Souk Umdafasa, many of which were certainly not on sale in Khartoum at the time. They even included French wine and Kalashnikov automatic rifles, though those were under the counter. Of more conventional goods, a local resident said: "Yes, if the label's been cut out, it comes from Israel!" "How?!" "Oh, via Libya!". Politics on the ground is one thing, officialdom another.

The Mossad operatives maintain that the Sudanese regime knew nothing of their real activities until they themselves turned to President Nimeiri and especially his security chief and First Vice-President, Major Gen. Omer Mohamed el Tayeb, in 1984. The previous year, Nimeiri had imposed his version of Islamic Law, commonly known as the "September Laws". With Nimeiri under mounting pressure, his security officers were ever more active and ever more brutal. The Israeli smugglers had several narrow escapes and

it became urgent to shift the remaining Ethiopian Jews from the Sudanese refugee camps.

Only Nimeiri and Omer knew the refugees were Jewish, Berg writes. “We knew they were Jewish, we knew they were Ethiopian, but we thought they were going to Spain”, the then Director of the First Vice-President’s Office, Hashim Abu Ranat, told me in June 2020. The book doesn’t mention a meeting in that period between Nimeiri and Israeli Defence Minister (and later Premier) Gen. Ariel Sharon in Nairobi. Another senior Sudanese official active at the time points out that, as with this year’s encounter between El Burhan and Netanyahu, no photographs were published of that meeting. The story of how Sharon met Nimeiri was later leaked by an Egyptian government newspaper, which said that the go-between was Saudi Arabian multimillionaire Adnan Khashoggi (whom anyone around at the time in Khartoum will recall as a regular feature of Nimeiri’s regime).

### *DC Spies*

It was later widely believed in Sudan that the United States Central Intelligence Agency had masterminded the evacuation of the Ethiopians but according to *Red Sea Spies*, the role of the CIA was essentially simply, in 1984-5, as a go-between for the Mossad to Nimeiri who, in the Cold War scheme of things, had moved from being pro-Soviet in 1969 to pro-American for most of his long reign. The CIA had known about the Israeli operation but had also chosen not to know. Halevy flew to Washington to sort out the US role as a go-between, Berg writes.

Enter Milton Bearden, CIA Station Chief in Khartoum. The channel to Nimeiri and Omer Mohamed el Tayeb was successfully opened and Nimeiri reluctantly gave his permission: he knew that if the secret came out, he would not survive as President. The USA substantially increased its aid to the regime, says Berg, a figure which Abu Ranat puts at \$1.5 billion. Meanwhile, Berg says that Gen. Omer himself received “payment in cash of up to \$2 million” (p. 268).

In April 1986, a year after Nimeiri’s overthrow in a popular uprising, Omer was tried for treason and his right-hand security men, Maj. Fatih Mohamed Ahmed Erwa and Colonel Osman Sa’id (later Ambassador in Addis Ababa), turned state evidence. He was gaoled for a couple of years, then deported to Saudi Arabia with the mediation, says Abu Ranat, of Prince Turki al Faisal (then head of Saudi Arabia’s General Intelligence Directorate), and is now back in Sudan.

This is all material that is challenging to verify and the memoirs of several retired Sudanese officials would make fascinating reading. Bearden, meanwhile,

can be found telling his version of many events in print and on the internet. After Khartoum, he was made CIA Station Chief in Kabul, where he ran the multi-million dollar covert operation to arm the Taliban (including with Stinger missiles) to drive out the Soviet Army, and later, held the same post in Moscow itself.

Bearden went on to found a flurry of consultancies and in the 1990s, became an advocate of constructive engagement with the National Islamic Front regime, firstly to further the peace process in Southern Sudan but also more widely, especially after George W. Bush became US President in January 2001. Such is his public persona that he made it into the first sentence of the first chapter of *Red Sea Spies*: “It was after dark when the knock came on Milton Bearden’s door”. In fact that is to start at the end of the operation, when in 1985, after Nimeiri had been overthrown, the US Chief Spook organised the highly risky shipping out of the four remaining Israeli agents in crates on a cargo plane.

Paradoxically, it was an event that brought joy and hope to millions of Sudanese that ended (at least temporarily) the hopes of the Ethiopian Jews: Nimeiri’s overthrow in March-April 1985. As tens of thousands of Sudanese calling for democracy marched through the streets shouting “Westminster!”, the US Embassy was scrambling to make sense of events. In late March I visited it in quest of journalistic copy and the late Ambassador, Hume Horan, an accomplished Arabic-speaker, told me that Nimeiri was not about to fall from power. “You journalists talk to the wrong people!” he memorably declared.

Like much of the Western media, *Red Sea Spies* treats this *Intifadah*, which the 2019 Revolution has brought back to many minds, as essentially an army coup, rather than a civilian uprising against a military/security-based regime. Citing Milt Bearden, the book describes how military and security men were combing the capital for the Israelis after another former Nimeiri-stalwart, Baha el Din Mohamed Idriss aka ‘Mister Ten Per Cent’, had offered information on their activities in a bid for clemency.

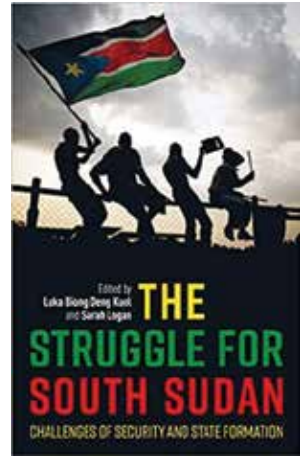
After Nimeiri and therefore also Omer Mohamed el Tayeb were deposed, the military was certainly very jumpy, as many were unsure whom to trust. It was the only occasion in twelve years in Sudan when a row of soldiers all pointed their rifles at me. Yet it was not the military who cut off telephone communications, as *Red Sea Spies* says. One reason a different version of the *Abreel* rising did not make it into the *Observer* newspaper was that the Telecommunications Workers’ Union had suspended telephone calls. I pleaded with one of the union leaders to let me get my story out by telex or phone. Fervently apologetic, he said they had to “protect the revolution”, a revolution

of course led by professional people such as himself. It was Easter weekend, diplomats had gone off to Sabaloga Falls despite days of unrest, and my story of Sudan's 1985 Uprising never made the press.

This enjoyable book stirs a wealth of memories for anyone involved in that period. It also invokes several ghosts of the past that cry out for further investigation.

**Gill Lusk** worked in Sudan from 1975 to 1987, then at Africa Confidential in London. She chairs SSSUK.

Luka Biong Deng Kuol and Sarah Logan (eds), **The Struggle for South Sudan: Challenges of security and state formation**, I.B. Tauris, London, 2019, ISBN 9781788315180 paperback, £21.59.



The best edited volumes offer the reader value greater than the sum of their individual parts. Indeed, the back-cover blurb of this book promises this to be “the most comprehensive analysis yet of South Sudan’s social and political history.” And while the editors have assembled an impressive and well renowned group of scholars – albeit for a volume with only three out of thirteen chapters authored by South Sudanese – most of the material has already been published in other places or is largely a repeat of the authors’ earlier writings. As a collective work, therefore, this book falls short: it offers few new insights and little practical reason to purchase the title, when a quick internet search can throw up most of the material *gratis*.

Perhaps more importantly, there is not much of a unifying theme to the book. Although it promises “analyses [of] the [post-2013] crisis and some of its contributing factors,” most of the material is decidedly pre-2013 in scope, or almost ahistorical: the chapters on the constructive management of diversity by Francis Mading Deng and Daniel Deng (pp. 46-63), and that of Joseph Siegle and Patrick O’Mahony on assessing the merits of decentralisation as a conflict mitigation strategy (pp. 144-171), could have been written at almost any point in the last twenty years and have very little discussion that is specific to South Sudan. Deng and Deng conclude their chapter by suggesting that “the South Sudanese must ask and answer some tough questions about what has gone wrong in South Sudan,” (p. 61). It would have been useful if they had proposed what the toughest of these questions ought to be.

Some tough questions are posed by the editors themselves in the book’s conclusion. They ask whether the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement will provide institutional and collective leadership (p. 262), whether customary law and traditional structures can provide the basis for forging a national identity (p. 263) and whether appropriate electoral systems and systems of government could help manage diversity (p. 265). There is as much policy prescription here as there is analysis: while it is perfectly arguable to propose the emergence of new (non-SPLM) political parties, a system of proportional electoral representation or an Ethiopian-style House of Federation better formally to

reflect the country's ethno-political make-up in legislative institutions, such suggestions sit uneasily in a work that claims to aim at analysing South Sudan's lot, rather than fixing it.

The best thing about this book is that it serves as a reminder to scholars, analysts, practitioners and South Sudanese themselves of the important intellectual and historical work that exists on South Sudan: the chapters by Douglas Johnson on federalism in the history of South Sudanese political thought, by Peter Hakim Justin and Lotje de Vries on local boundaries as a (re) source of conflict in South Sudan, and by Naomi Pendle on the lessons that can be learned from customary law in forging ethnic and national identities in South Sudan, all contain important lessons. But these important parts do not require, at least for most readers, the consumption of the whole text.

**Aly Verjee**

## News from the Sudan Archive, Durham

The range of material in the Sudan Archive provides an exceptionally rich research resource for scholars in all disciplines of studies relating to Sudan and South Sudan and to the wider region, with records dating from the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the present day. As I write the Archive remains closed and all staff have been working from home since March, yet despite the pandemic, most research enquiries can still be answered and image orders fulfilled. So please get in touch, whether to further your own research, to suggest additional records we should try to collect or to make a donation to the collections yourself.

The Archive's homepage is

[www.dur.ac.uk/library/asc/sudan/](http://www.dur.ac.uk/library/asc/sudan/)

More digitised material from the collections is added most weeks, and can now be browsed here:

<http://iiif.durham.ac.uk/jalava/>

and a Google Maps finding aid was recently added, geo-referencing some of our digitised maps:

<https://tinyurl.com/yavcsthy>



Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the residency of the 2020 Sir William Luce Fellow, Dr Katie Hickerson, will be deferred to next year. Past Luce lectures are available online at [www.dur.ac.uk/sgia/research/fellowships/](http://www.dur.ac.uk/sgia/research/fellowships/).

### *Recent accessions to the Sudan Archive*

Acquisitions of recent publications are not generally noted – but are nevertheless received with deep thanks. Large accessions generally remain uncatalogued for a period of time but can usually be accessed on request.

**Brigadier Gerald A. Eastwood** (1889-1977) and brother Timothy Eastwood:  
3 photo albums relating to periods of Army service in Sudan in the 1920s.  
\***Thomas H. B. Mynors**, Sudan Political Service 1930-1955 (1907-2000) and his wife Dagmar (née Sjögren, 1916-2006): file of correspondence, 1937-1953.

**Frederic Newhouse**, Inspector General of Egyptian Irrigation in the Sudan 1934-1937 (1883-1969): hydrological library collection.



**\*Paul Doornbos** (1950-2018), anthropologist: bibliography.

**Missionary publications:**

*No More Birds for Iromo* by Winifred Green and Claire U. Mouillesseaux,  
and artwork by Frances Hertzler (1965)

*Nuer New Testament* (1968)

*Latuka New Testament* (1969)

**Other publications:**

*The Tiger Strikes. India's Fight in the Middle East* by W. G. Hingston (1942).

*Jangara, a novel of the Sudan* by John Sawkins (1963).

*But Little Glory: the New South Wales contingent to the Sudan, 1885*,  
ed. Peter Stanley (1985).

\* accruals to existing collections.

Additional accruals will have been received since March but must remain unprocessed until I return to the office.

**Francis Gotto**, Archivist

francis.gotto@durham.ac.uk

+44 (0)191 334 1218.

## Society for the Study of the Sudans (UK)

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Email: [treasurer@sssuk.org](mailto:treasurer@sssuk.org)

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Charlotte Martin,  
Hon. Editor,  
*Sudan Studies*,  
72 Castle Road,  
Colchester,  
CO1 1UN  
Email: [sudanstudies@sssuk.org](mailto:sudanstudies@sssuk.org)

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It is helpful to have some relevant details about the author (2-3 lines), e.g. any post held or time spent in the Sudan and interest in the topic being discussed.

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