



# SUDAN STUDIES

for  
*South Sudan* and *Sudan*

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## Editorial

Welcome to Issue 51 of *Sudan Studies*. This is my first issue as editor and I would like to thank all the members of the SSSUK committee and the contributors (many of whom are committee members) for helping to make it such a positive experience. Particular thanks go to the outgoing editor Jack Davies, for his invaluable practical and moral support.

Issue 51 of *Sudan Studies* coincides with the tenth anniversary of the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which ended the long war between the government of Sudan and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army in the South. At a recent meeting at Chatham House in London, a panel of speakers reflected on the legacy of the CPA and its effect on lasting peace in both countries. As we all know, there is no peace in Sudan or South Sudan at the present time and people continue to suffer from the failures of their leaders to act in the interests of all their citizens. The historical and contemporary causes of war and its human consequences were discussed in our annual Symposium in September 2014 and are addressed by several of our contributors in this issue.

We begin this issue with an appreciation of Jack Davies's work as editor of *Sudan Studies*, written by **Douglas Johnson**, the former chairperson of SSSUK.

The first article is one by **Gérard Prunier** which Jack had hoped to publish in the last issue of *Sudan Studies*, but which was delayed by the illness of the author. Gérard discusses the causes and consequences of the events of December 2013 in South Sudan. Due to its length, his paper is in two halves: the second half will be published in *Sudan Studies* 52. In this issue, he analyses the underlying causes of the events. He uses an historical analysis to argue that both Sudan and South Sudan are heirs to a common political government tradition (*hukum*), that dates to the time of Ottoman rule and which has proved both destructive and divisive. While he acknowledges the importance of other factors in shaping recent events, he argues that it is the legacy and practice of *hukum* that is primarily responsible.

Following this we have an article by **Mustafa Khogali**, a Sudanese academic based in Khartoum. Professor Khogali outlines the situation faced by South Sudanese refugees displaced by the civil war in South Sudan to two refugee camps in White Nile State in Sudan. Many of the

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refugees have economic and social links to the receiving communities in Sudan and have been broadly welcomed. Khogali highlights the importance of considering environmental factors (particularly sanitation) when designing the camps so as to minimise the already dire consequences of displacement for those who have been forced to flee their homes.

The next section contains contributions and reports from the annual SSSUK Symposium, held in London in September 2014. We begin with a report on the event written by **Zoë Cormack**, followed by two papers with an historical perspective. The first is by the historian and broadcaster **Fergus Nicoll**, who writes about the oral history of the Mahdiyya that Ali al Mahdi wrote down in the early part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Fergus's painstaking research reveals the important role Ali played in documenting the period, providing a 'chronological, eyewitness-based description of events' to set alongside other accounts and one that deserves a wider audience.

The second paper is by the Greek anthropologist **Gerasimos Makris**, who has been researching the changing nature of the *tumbura* cult (similar to the *zar* but lesser known), since 1987. The cult's devotees are drawn from slave descendants and migrants from the peripheral regions of the Sudan and it has provided an identity for them as *Sūdānī* in contrast to the dominant 'Arab' cultural identity. In response to huge social and economic changes, the cult has adapted rather than disappeared. It has developed an Islamic profile, increasingly dealing with problems related to *'irūg* (a form of magic that until then was treated by male Muslim traditional healers, and catering for Arab as well as non-Arab clients. Makris ably makes the case for working on one subject for a long time by providing us with a fascinating and scholarly account of cultural change that can be appreciated by non-specialists as well as anthropologists.

The crisis in South Sudan was discussed at the Symposium by a distinguished panel of speakers: **Mawan Muortat**, **Benjamin Taban Avelino**, **Philip Winter** and **Rosalind Marsden**. Their notes and notes of what they said form a report for this Issue. Each speaker chose to address a different aspect of the situation, making an important contribution to our understanding of it and ideas about ways forward.

The last part of the Symposium was largely taken up with presentations which drew on the culture of the Sudans. **Djamela Magid** and other young people who are part of the Sudanese and South Sudanese diaspora performed work from their new collection of prose and poetry which has

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been published as the book *'I know two Sudans'*. Their performance was very moving, particularly as some contributors are just discovering their homeland and reflecting on what it means for them. For this Issue, Djamela has written a short introduction to the project that produced the book and we have an excerpt from a short story by **Dan L. Lukudu** and a poem by **Yasmin Sinada**.

The cultural theme continues with contributions from **Philip Winter**, **Lutz Oette** and **Douglas Johnson**, all of whom usually write about Sudan and South Sudan in their capacities as academics, activists and commentators. Here, we are given an insight into other aspects of their interest in and engagement with both countries.

Philip presents a piece of travel writing about the animals and landscape in Badingilu National Park, on the east bank of the White Nile. He visited on several occasions in 2011-12 and was encouraged to find that some animals that used to inhabit this vast area were beginning to return after the last war. In addition to the loss of people, the loss of animals has impoverished the country, he notes. His account was written in April 2013 before fighting resumed and it is sad to think that the animals of Badingilu may again be threatened, as well, of course, as the people.

Douglas writes a short piece about the Sudan in British comedy, noting that it is not a likely subject for humour. It is a light-hearted and quirky piece of writing and will make me look at the old TV programme 'Dad's Army' with more attention the next time it is repeated.

The final cultural contribution is a set of beautifully written poems by the academic and activist Lutz Oette reflecting on the time he spent in Sudan (before partition) and the friends he made there. He dedicates his work to the men and women who are working towards a free, just, democratic and peaceful Sudan whilst remaining true to its culture(s). His poems are both heartfelt and thought provoking and offer us an insight into how it feels as an outsider to visit contemporary Sudan and share in the lives of its people.

Last but by no means least comes an excellent book review of Mark Fathi Massoud's recent book *'Law's Fragile State: Colonial, authoritarian and humanitarian legacies in Sudan'*, by **Peter Woodward**. Some of you may have had an opportunity to hear Massoud speak at recent meetings in the UK and will be interested to read this review of his work. This is only one of many books which published recently on South Sudan and



Sudan and we would welcome offers from people willing to review one – so please get in touch if you would like to do so.

The section ‘**SSSUK Notices**’ contains information about a conference in Khartoum in February 2015 and the Minutes of the 2013 SSSUK AGM and the Accounts for that year.

I hope you enjoy reading *Sudan Studies* and that it inspires some of you to offer an article, poem, book review or something else for one of our forthcoming issues.

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## Jack Davies: An Appreciation

In any small society such as the SSSUK, the hardest positions on the committee to fill are those that require the most work: the secretary, the treasurer and in our case, the editorship of *Sudan Studies*. For most members of the SSSUK, especially for those who do not live within reasonable travel distance to attend the AGM in London, the main benefit for joining the society is our twice-yearly journal. To the editor falls the duty of soliciting articles and reviews, editorial revisions, setting, copyediting and meeting deadlines. To these practical duties there are also the more diplomatic ones: maintaining editorial standards, dealing with dilatory contributors and consoling disappointed authors. Jack has performed all of these duties wonderfully well and we have all benefited from the timely appearance of *Sudan Studies* throughout his editorship.

Jack's association with Sudan has been a long one. As a lecturer in Geography at the University of Khartoum during the late 1950s and early 1960s, he analysed the population and language data from the first national census of 1955/56 to produce Sudan's first population and language maps. He maintained his research interest in development issues in Sudan after he left Khartoum and has published numerous articles, chapters and pamphlets on the subject. Among his major contributions are *Tropical Africa: An Atlas for Regional Development* for the University of Wales Press and *The Nile Valley* for Longman. As substantial and significant as these publications are, we must not overlook his seminal *The Post Offices and Postal Agencies of the Sudan, 1970 to 1983* (Sudan Study Group, 1984).

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I am sure that all readers of *Sudan Studies* will join us in thanking Jack for the work he has done for the society and wish his successor, Charlotte Martin, equal success.

Douglas Johnson

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# **Why did South Sudan blow up in December 2013 and what is likely to happen as a result?**

**Gérard Prunier**

## *Introduction*

This is the first of two papers that discuss the reasons for the events of December 2013 in South Sudan. This paper outlines the underlying causes, while the second will deal with the actual events that resulted from the structural factors discussed here. I will argue that South Sudan, although culturally very different from the North, is nevertheless the heir to a common political tradition, that of the Ottoman *hukum*, a complex and destructive concept which is still fully operational today, both in Khartoum and Juba.

## *The Turkiyya and the Mahdiyya*

Present day “Sudan” was born in 1821 from the conquest of a chunk of North-Eastern Africa by the troops of the “Turco-Egyptian” Khedive (king) of Egypt, Muhammad Ali. Having managed to set himself up as the master of Egypt after Napoleon’s departure, he strove for two classical Ottoman political goals, legitimacy and conquest. The Sudan could help achieve both goals: the Khedive hoped to extract gold and slaves from its southern conquest and to control a new land which had not been under Istanbul’s sway previously reinforced his claim to autonomy vis-à-vis his Turkish suzerain. Thus, from the beginning, “the Sudan” did not exist in itself and for itself but in relation to another entity, whose needs it was organised to satisfy. There was no grassroots upward movement pushing to create a Sudan “nation”, a situation that was fairly common to the whole African continent.

Africa was colonised and the states that succeeded the colonial authorities were largely patterned on the administrative model created by the metropolis. This is the point where the Sudanese experience diverges from the rest of Africa. The word “colonisation”, with its connotation of rational economic exploitation and systematic administration, can hardly be applied to what later became known as the “*Turkiyya*” period in the Sudan. The political and administrative system of that period was purely one of looting and commodity extraction through which Cairo tried to get as much as it could out of the Sudan without ever investing a penny in the territory. The main item on the Sudan’s budget was military expenditure and even that was financed by slave raids (*ghazzua*) rather than by Cairo

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paying the costs of an army. Black slaves were captured by the Ottomans and press-ganged into the “Egyptian” Army, the surplus being sold in the slave markets of the Middle East. Thus, from its very beginning, four things were essential in “the Sudan”:

1. Its shape, limits and borders, while very relevant at a micro level, were completely vague and imprecise at the macro level.
2. The State (*al Hukum* in Arabic, a word with dreadful **destructive** connotations) was seen and felt to be a blood-sucking monster.
3. The very foundation of that *Hukum* was slavery, the absolutely ruthless exploitation of the Black population for commercial and military purposes, and this *regardless of religion*. In theory there could be no Muslim slaves but in practice this was quite different<sup>1</sup>. Later, the practice of slavery morphed into workers’ exploitation under conditions that were often reminiscent of the slaving past.
4. The very principles organising the *Hukum* were foreign. Even though the State in the Sudan is not a European product as in most of the rest of Africa, it is not either properly “Sudanese” or “African”. It is “Ottoman” i.e. **based on the concept of pillaging a conquered land**, which the Ottomans had always used, at least in the first phase of conquest, in Asia, in the Middle East, in North Africa and in the Balkans<sup>2</sup>. Post conquest situations were often very different, but the first stage was basically slash-and-burn and even after the collapse of the *Turkiyya*, the pattern simply got grounded in the local institutions. Although the state was supposed to be “national”, the vision it had of its relationship with its own **hinterland** was that of conqueror to conquered.

Hardly any gold was found in the North and since the northern population was Muslim, it could not be conveniently enslaved<sup>3</sup> but the South was pagan and therefore belonged to *Dar al-Harb*<sup>4</sup>. From about 1830 “the Khartoumers”, as they were called with dread throughout the region,

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<sup>1</sup> See Gérard Prunier: “Military slavery during the Turkiyya (1820-1885)” pp. 129-139 in Elizabeth Savage (ed): *The human commodity: perspectives on the trans-Saharan slave trade* London. Frank Cass. 1992

<sup>2</sup> See Paul Coles: *The Turkish Impact on Europe*. London. Thames and Hudson, 1968; Erik J. Zürcher (ed): *Arming the State: Military Conscription in the Middle East and Central Asia (1775-1925)*, London. I.B. Tauris. 1999; Lucette Valensi, *Venise et la Sublime Porte*, Paris, Hachette. 1987.

<sup>3</sup> This Koranic principle was not always adhered to, particularly when good-looking marketable females were concerned.

<sup>4</sup> In the moral geography of Islam the world is divided into *Dar al-Islam* (the world populated by those who are submitted [to God’s Will]) and *Dar al-Kufr* (the world of unbelief) which is also seen as *Dar al-Harb* (the world of [legitimate] war).



started to launch slaving raids ever further south<sup>5</sup>. This practice led to an endlessly expanding frontier which, in many ways, was comparable to the North American Far West or to what was called in Brazil at that time “*Bocas do Sertão*”<sup>6</sup>. During this process, which lasted for roughly half a century “The Sudan” extended over Eastern and Central Africa like a cancerous growth, reaching at its peak a huge territory, much larger than today’s Sudan. The southward expansion covered the whole of today’s Southern Sudan and large chunks of the present Central African Republic and northern Uganda. Meanwhile a parallel Eastern expansion was pushing Sudan’s borders to include Massawa, the eastern part of today’s Eritrea, the Harrar region of Ethiopia, the whole Red Sea Coast all the way to the Bab el Mandeb and then down the Indian Ocean coast of Somalia all the way to north-eastern Kenya. Westward, the Turco-Egyptians occupied the Darfur Sultanate in 1874. Thus the Sudan was not a “country” but rather a kind of on going imperial concept.

In those pre-Berlin Conference days, Khedive Isma’il (1863-1879) considered that Egypt’s “civilising mission” practically extended to the whole of Africa and at the International Exposition of 1873, the Egyptian pavilion displayed a map of Cairo’s [future] African Empire, extending westward all the way to the Atlantic, to what is now Nigeria, and southward down to the Great Lakes and Ruanda-Urundi. However, these grandiose dreams were brought low by two radically different factors: financial overreach and an explosion of Muslim-fundamentalism-cum- proto-nationalism. Financial overreach was not only due to the growing costs of the Sudanese Empire; it was also due to Isma’il’s ambitious plans for Egypt’s modernisation. The Suez Canal, the transformation of Cairo

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<sup>5</sup> There is a very rich literature on slavery in the Sudan. Two of the most interesting works are – many years apart – Mohamed Fuad Shukry: *Khedive Ismail and Slavery in the Sudan (1863-1879)*, Cairo. Librairie de la Renaissance d’Egypte. 1937, which is a very erudite effort by a great Egyptian scholar to try to exonerate the Arabs from their responsibility in the trade; and Janet J. Ewald: *Soldiers, Traders and Slaves*. Madison. The University of Wisconsin Press. 1990, which does not study the slave trade in the South but in a small **northern** kingdom, that of Talodi in Kordofan, showing that the evil of slavery even affected Muslim populations. For the long-term impact, read Susan Beswick: *Sudan’s Blood Memory: The Legacy of War, Ethnicity and Slavery in Southern Sudan*. Rochester. University of Rochester Press, 2004

<sup>6</sup> The analogy could be extended to the so-called Congo Free State, to Eastern/Southern Angola and to Western Mozambique during the mid-to-late XIXth century. The common “model” of all these territories was the primacy of commodity extraction, semi-private, semi-state military violence, an utter disregard for native ecology and human life, and a marginal administrative relationship to the national centre of power. Australia, Canada and the American Far West were special cases in that they went beyond simple resource looting to progressively include the genocide of the natives and replacement colonisation by a foreign population.



into a Haussmannian European-type capital complete with massive stone buildings and gas lighting, the beginning of industrialisation, the construction of railways, all these expenses eventually drove the Egyptian treasury into over-borrowing and bankruptcy.

This led to the British occupying Egypt in 1882 to get back the money they had loaned to the Cairo regime. However, when they came to Egypt, they willy-nilly inherited the Egyptian Empire together with the imperial core and the central parts of that empire, Kordofan and the Nile Valley, were in full rebellion. A previously unknown *fiki* by the name of Muhammad Ahmad (quickly upgraded to “*al-Mahdi*” status)<sup>7</sup> had risen against the Turco-Egyptians, accusing them both of being bad impious Muslims and of being oppressors who had imposed high taxes, forced military recruitment and *haram* (religiously forbidden) criminal penalties; thus good religious practice and the fight against foreign tyranny were all wrapped up together. The Turco-Egyptian Empire was blown asunder and in spite of a late British intervention, by 1885 “The Sudan” became independent under a “Mahdist” regime (*Mahdiyya*). In many ways, this new regime continued the practices of the *Turkiyya*:

- Ready recourse to extra-legal military force;
- Low-level performance delivering social services and furthering economic development;
- Focus on rough commodity extraction and taxation;
- Low level of administrative efficiency;
- Manipulation of racial and religious identities to reinforce the central government’s power.

The *Mahdiyya*, being “Sudanese”, was endowed with an aura of nationalistic prestige that is still alive today and it carried this aura well into the next incarnation of power in the region.

### *The Anglo-Egyptian Condominium*

The fall of the *Mahdiyya* in 1898 opened the way to British colonial conquest and to what Europeans (and some Sudanese) like to see as a period of quasi-Weberian “rationalisation” and “bureaucratisation”. There was some truth in that view<sup>8</sup> but the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1898-1956) was special for two reasons: that the overwhelming military superiority that it had over its subjects allowed it to use that force

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<sup>7</sup> In popular Islamic eschatology the *Mahdi* is God’s envoy at the end of time. He is supported by *Nabi Issa* (the Prophet Jesus) and fights *al-Dajjal* (the Antichrist). The *Mahdi* triumphs, there is a thousand years of peace and then the Last Judgment comes.

<sup>8</sup> See the two-volume history of the Condominium by Martin Daly: *Empire on the Nile*. Cambridge University Press. Two volumes. (1986 and 1991).



sparingly; and that its commodity extraction policy was much more sophisticated than any of the regimes that have ruled the Sudan before or since. These two traits made the manifestations of its power milder, even if its principles of government were not basically different from its predecessors or successors. True, the vast Gezira agro-industrial project injected a massive dose of developmental economics into a previously parasitical system. The Gezira Scheme itself was conceived of as a budget-balancing item, a way to make the Sudan pay for its own upkeep, as seen from London. This was much nicer than forcing it to pay for itself at the point of a gun but it was still, as always, externally-directed, outside-motivated, basically separated from the interests of the embryonic Sudanese “nation state”. Private and administrative riches were the target, not common wealth. The Gezira occupied only a fragment of the land surface of the Sudan and employed only a fragment of the Sudanese population and most of the Sudan remained tradition-bound and ruled *Hukum*-style. Thus, the state continued to be perceived by its subjects not as an emanation of any popular will but rather as a superimposition on society, a kind of internal colonising agent. Since the state was not geographically, ethnically or culturally neutral, the various subject groups saw themselves in different types of relationships to the central *Hukum*. Rather than the abstract letter of the law, it was the religious, ethnic or geographical position of a group of people vis-à-vis the state that determined how a group was likely to be treated. This was particularly obvious in those parts of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium where nothing of economic interest could be extracted by the central British version of *Hukum*.

We will deal in more detail with the South later but the fate of Darfur, where no economic surplus value could be extracted, was roughly similar<sup>9</sup>. Darfur was a more ambiguous situation than that of the South; the South was non-Muslim (rather than “Christian”) while the Darfurians were Muslims. The fact that the Darfurians were Muslims was used by the Central Sudanese Arabs as a deceptive bond, which was supposed to unite both groups in relation to the Southern Christians. During the war that started in 2003 (and is still on-going), their *falsches bewusstsein* (false consciousness) was enough to keep them, both “Arabs” and non-Arabs, on the side of the Khartoum *Hukum*, even though the radical

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<sup>9</sup> For a quick overview of that situation, see Gérard Prunier: *Darfur: the Ambiguous Genocide*, London, Hurst and Co. 2005 (pp. 25-36).





marginalisation their province suffered did not give them a better socio-economic status that the Southerners they were being asked to kill<sup>10</sup>.

The Naivasha negotiations (which began in 2002) between the government, which was dominated by the Muslim Brotherhood, and the Southern rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army, operated a version of the same habit/tradition/framework as was seen in Darfur. Not that much effort was actually needed. The SPLM/A as a political-military organisation was staffed by men who were the standard product of *Hukum* military training even if they opposed its political operation because they were at the wrong end of that particular stick. They wanted to turn the stick around and beat their tormentors with it but they didn't have a clear concept of how they could discard the stick. In effect the stick, instead of being used to beat them, would be used by them to beat others; not because they were evil men but simply because they had no other way to understand what authority could be about.

The various Sudanese conflicts were not driven by religion but rather by culture and politics. The continuing Darfur conflict could not provide a better (and more horrible) demonstration of this, with Muslims killing Muslims in droves, raping their women, destroying their means of livelihood and burning their villages. This "centre versus periphery" conflict was (just like the North-South Conflict and, since December 2013, the South-South conflict), one in which a crudely extractive regime at the centre firstly completely neglected certain parts of the country (nothing to be extracted there) and then crushed it militarily when it posed a threat to its dominance. This is why the present southern situation of Christians killing Christians in South Sudan should not come as a surprise. **Religion is a variable in the Sudanese conflicts but not a key causative factor.** The Juba Government today behaves towards its Christian subjects in much the same way as the old Khartoum Muslim government used to behave towards all its subjects whether Christian or Muslim, and much for the same reasons.

### *North / South Relations (1885-1972)*

Before 1885, the South was merely prey to a two-tiered non-colonisation. The Turco-Egyptians had colonised the North Sudan and together they looted the South, mostly of two things, elephant tusks and human

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<sup>10</sup> Sharif Harir: "The Arab Belt versus the African Belt: Ethnic and Political Strife in Darfur and its Cultural and Regional Factors" pp. 144-185, in Sharif Harir and Terje Tvedt (eds): *Sudan: Short Cut to Decay*, Uppsala. Nordiska Afrikainstitutet, 1993.



beings<sup>11</sup>. There was no effort in either Cairo or Khartoum at creating an administrative grid for the southern territories. The pattern was to build fortified strong points (Arabic *Zeriba*, Plural *Zara'ib*) from where slave soldiers (*jihadiya* i.e. southern blacks who had been locally captured, converted to Islam and forcibly married to black slave women) would issue forth and raid the surrounding countryside with incredible violence, under the leadership of Arab officers<sup>12</sup>. Every year a “slave campaign” was organised from the North, with hundreds of boats leaving Khartoum and sailing south on the Nile, bringing guns, ammunition, food, medicine and equipment to the *Zara'ib* network, from where thousands of *jihadiya* would then start their raids. These human vultures who were feeding on the southern black population were mostly Sudanese Arabs and in the case of some of their leaders, Europeans (mostly Italians and Germans, with a smattering of French and British). However, their operational masters were Ottomans i.e. Kurds, Turks, Greeks, Albanians, a few Egyptian Arabs, Tcherkess [Circassians] and Syrians. For the black Southern Sudanese, all these men were “*Khawaja*” [a Turkish word meaning “Sir” or “Mister”] and their presence meant death or slavery.

The period 1885 to 1898 i.e. the “Mahdiyya” [Mahdist State], which is today presented and described in North Sudan as the “birth of nationalism” was seen in the South as a period of direly acquired liberation. The *Khawaja* were kicked out and there was no desire to see them come back. When the British crushed the Mahdist State in 1898, they soon realised that for the Southern black population, their pale skin was not better than the Sudanese Arabs’ brown skins and that they would have to fight their way into the South<sup>13</sup>. The fighting lasted until 1927 when the last troops of the Nuer Prophet Ngundeng were crushed<sup>14</sup>.

The end of the fighting allowed the British to extend the Condominium administration to the whole territory of the Sudan but contrary to what might have been thought, they showed no particular interest in the non-Muslim South. The North, where the Mahdist nationalistic state had, at

<sup>11</sup> Before 1914 there was also a booming trade in ostrich feathers, something that changes in lady’s fashions caused to totally disappear after World War One.

<sup>12</sup> After 1840, many of the slavers were Europeans attracted down from Cairo by rapid cash returns on slave caravans. See Richard Gray: *A History of Southern Sudan (1839-1889)*, Oxford University Press, 1961.

<sup>13</sup> One could ask the question: « *why try to take over a vast land area which had no economic interest at the time?* ». The answer is strategic: “*To prevent the French from taking it over*”. Hence the very tense confrontation at Fashoda in 1898 which almost brought France and the United Kingdom to war.

<sup>14</sup> On this belated resistance, see Douglas Johnson: *Nuer Prophets* Oxford. Clarendon Press. 1994, particularly chapters 3 to 5.





least temporarily, managed to vanquish the British Army, was seen as the main enemy/opportunity. All administrative efforts, political stratagems and economic development were focused on the North. At the same time, the British developed a policy of “protection” towards their heathen and Christian subjects in the South that amounted to a policy of creating a “human zoo”<sup>15</sup>. One could not even call the British policy towards Southern Sudan “colonial”; it was in fact a form of benevolent paternalism verging on what is developed today for the preservation of endangered animal species. Black South Sudanese had to be **protected** from almost everything: encroachment by the Muslim North, modernisation, de-tribalisation, education and even too much evangelisation<sup>16</sup>. In order to institutionalise the distinction between north and south, the Condominium authorities proclaimed the Closed District Ordinance, which in fact created a two-tier system, a colony-within-the-colony, the South being ruled and administered as a separate entity from the North, even though it was still part and parcel of the Condominium. In a system where marginalisation of the peripheries was routine, it also became **institutionalised**.

This situation lasted till 1947, when the Juba Round-table Conference began to timidly create the first elements of North-South integration, but in many ways it was too late, as the decolonisation process was already under way. The Southerners began to worry not about their colonial status but rather about its impending *disappearance*. They worried about **the day after**. On August 18<sup>th</sup> 1955 at 7:45 a.m., Company n° 2 Platoon n° 2 of the Southern Corps (Black Troops) mutinied in Torit and started killing all the Arabs they could find. This was four-and-a-half months before independence. Now the problem of the centre was no longer how to administer the periphery but after failing to deal with it, how it could be put down militarily. Between the Torit Mutiny and the beginning of serious fighting, there was a latent period of around eight years (1955-1963) during which an uneasy semi-peace prevailed; by 1963 the insurrection had gathered momentum and slowly grew into a major conflict. The failure to resolve the conflict was one of the causes of the fall of the Abboud military dictatorship, which had tried to massively revive the *Hukum* spirit and system; later the painful continuation of conflict also caused the collapse of the timidly democratic regime in 1969. It was the “left-wing” military dictatorship of General Jaafar al

<sup>15</sup> The formula belongs to the South Sudanese writer Lazarus Leek Mawut in *The Southern Sudan: Why Back to Arms?* Khartoum, Saint George Press, 1986.

<sup>16</sup> G.N. Sanderson and Lilian Passmore-Sanderson: *Education, Religion & Politics in Southern Sudan (1899-1964)* *op. cit.*, shows this in polite detail.



Nimeiry that finally brought it to an end through the Addis Ababa peace treaty of February 1972<sup>17</sup>.

The whole period was far from being a centralised unified struggle by the Southern population against its Arab enemies. The war was fought mostly in Equatoria and by Equatorians, even though a few Dinka were involved. The armed groups organised along tribal lines, regionally, without much capacity to coordinate their actions with each other. They did not fight each other (as would happen during the second war) but they failed to organise. They kept floundering rather inefficiently, especially after the Khartoum government managed first to organise a believable “peace conference” and later to murder William Deng Nhial, the man who had tried to turn the results of the conference into a negotiated solution (1968).

The war would never have reached a point where it could be successfully negotiated from a strong military standpoint had not the Israelis entered the equation. Nimeiry was a disciple of Gamal Abdel Nasser and he embraced his socialist and anti-Israeli goals. In order to retaliate, Mossad developed a support network for the South Sudanese Anya Nya guerrillas and as it was faced with a multiplicity of competing movements, it chose Joseph Lagu’s Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM) as its core beneficiary. This choice was logical as Israel had recently supported the ascent to power of General Idi Amin Dada in Uganda and he was pro-western, anti-socialist and anti-Arab<sup>18</sup>. Subsequently, Mossad channelled military aid to Lagu’s SSLM via a Ugandan conduit and by helping one of the competing factions achieved the unity of the Anya Nya movement. This helped to further the peace negotiations, as a unified SSLM stood for South Sudan but it was not enough to prepare the ground for a future Southern Sudanese administration. Here, we already see the distinctive features of what was to become the problem of South Sudan after the end of the recent war, i.e. the appearance of unity barely papering over the cracks in the façade; since everybody was glad to see the end of the war, nobody thought much about what would happen later.

**What happened after 1972 was, *mutatis mutandis*, pretty much what happened after the 2005 signing of the CPA: a near-complete mess.** Why was this? First and foremost because the SSLM “unification” of the

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<sup>17</sup> The best synthetic study on that whole period can be found in Dunstan M. Wai: *The Arab-African Conflict in the Sudan*, New York, Holmes and Meir, 1981.

<sup>18</sup> The following year (1972) he turned around and became anti-western, pro-socialist and pro-Arab. The change had to do with his desire to invade Tanzania and to the British refusal to help him in such an endeavour.



years 1970-1972 had largely been a product of foreign influence: in 1972 by Israel and in 2002-2005 by the USA. In both cases the attention of the foreign actor was mostly focused on the international dimension, on the relationship between the foreign Godfather and his South Sudanese protégé. The accent was **definitely not** on the internal workings and processes of the object of that attention: the *Hukum* factor was most not a topic of discussion at Naivasha, even in the corridors. The South Sudanese actor was asked to provide a good show, hold a glorified stance on the diplomatic podium of international attention **and not** to give an account of how it was attending to its own inner processes. The gap between the two approaches was huge (and even probably worse in 2005 than in 1972) and when international attention switched from the solution of the conflict to post-conflict implementation, the international community lost interest in the kind of dispensation that was being implemented. Instead, it trusted blindly in the fact that US-sponsored “freedom fighters” were almost bound to try promoting a democratic freedom-loving political regime. Nobody could spot the ghost of the *Hukum* landing almost automatically and fitting in perfectly in Juba.

#### *The Interim Period and the Road to the Second War (1972-1983)*

After the first war, the first interim period (1972-1983) saw the regional administration in Juba being granted a fair amount of freedom and leeway but with no money to do anything. The already skimpy annual grant from Khartoum was never paid in full and there was no tax base<sup>19</sup>. As a result the Juba High Executive Council (HEC) permanently tottered on the brink of financial collapse and survived only on a tight leash whose end was held by government in Khartoum. Somehow it muddled through, without Khartoum caring much about how it survived. Then in 1979 the US Chevron Oil Company found oil in Upper Nile Province and the whole wobbly “regional administrative” structure came crashing down.

Why did the finding of oil lead to such a catastrophe? The basic reason was that the Addis Ababa Peace Agreement had been signed in complete bad faith by the Northern government, which only wanted (a) to stop the war (b) to let the Southerners simmer in their own juice, without giving them the capacity to do anything on their own. Oil suddenly introduced a

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<sup>19</sup> For an analysis see my long essay/short book *From Peace to War: the Southern Sudan (1972-1984)*, University of Hull, Department of Sociology and Social Anthropology; Occasional Paper n°3 (1986). This work will be reassessed, modified and incorporated in my forthcoming book: *Behind the Grass Curtain: a History of South Sudan's Permanent Nationhood Crisis*, due to be published by Hurst and Co sometime in 2016.



completely new dimension and President Nimeiry immediately started angling for some way of stealing it from under the Southerners' feet. His approach was to use the contradictions between the large (40%) Dinka group of tribes and the other tribal groups. Derisively called by the other tribes in South Sudan "**the useless majority**", the Dinka, who had played a secondary role in the fighting but who had wanted to take a much larger role in the autonomous regional politics, were the object of frequent hostility in the South. Nimeiry played on this and launched a political movement aimed at what was called *kokora* (the cutting up), with the aim of re-dividing the South in order to create an entity, state or province where Khartoum could modify the land law which in 1972 had inadvertently given mineral rights to the HEC government. Since the HEC was at the time the seat of a near ethno-political revolt against the Dinka, the moment was well chosen and Nimeiry managed to push through a unilateral modification of the Peace Agreement, creating a new Province called *al-Wihdat* (Unity), which immediately got the popular nickname of "Dis-Unity Province". The HEC Parliament refused to endorse this unilateral manipulation of the peace Agreement and Nimeiry dissolved it in 1980, as he was constitutionally entitled to do.

It is at that time that the first conspiracies to organise an armed movement and go back to war started. This is a very important point. A common "explanation" for the return to war is that Nimeiry proclaimed the *Shari'a* and Southerners could not accept that. This is completely false because **the war re-started in May 1983 while the Shari'a legislation was not enacted before September 1983**. To say that *Shari'a* created an added incentive is correct but it could not be the cause of a war that began before the legislation was passed. The real cause of the war was the territorial and administrative manipulation of the HEC governance parameters by Nimeiry in complete defiance of both the peace agreement and popular feeling in the South; this was a typical *Hukum* practice. *Kokora*, which had initially been a popular anti-Dinka movement, became unacceptable overnight when public opinion understood how it had been manipulated.

The road to war was in fact much more complicated and contradictory than the popular perception of John Garang's heroic SPLA insurrection. The first military operations had begun as early as February 1982 and they were not started by Garang but by a group of independent rebels in Upper Nile, led by Samuel Gai Tut (a Lou Nuer) and Akwot Atem (a Bor Dinka), and even if there were some members of other tribes, these rebels, quickly dubbed Anya Nya II in memory of the first war's Anya Nya, were mostly Nuer. When Garang launched his own insurrection by





taking advantage of the 105<sup>th</sup> Battalion's mutiny, he took refuge in Ethiopia where he found himself facing the Anya Nya II rebels who were already there. This resulted in an immediate confrontation between the mostly Nuer Anya Nya II and mostly Dinka SPLA troops, a direct antecedent of the present (2014-2015) pattern of ethnic fighting. So, the second civil war started not with a fight against Khartoum's troops but an intra-South Sudanese conflict, a fact completely overlooked and even hidden in today's independence narrative. The SPLM, occupying the political space of a government-in-waiting has had no desire to write an objective history but rather to replace it with a heroic narrative, for both inside and outside consumption. This was a very different pattern from the situation in the 1960s when the various Equatorial groups created competing entities but had not fought each other on a large scale. Here, among Nilotic pastoral tribes which had a much more brutal war ethic, the fighting was immediate. The Dinka SPLA won, largely because in contrast to Anya Nya II, it managed to get the support of the Ethiopian Communist regime of Mengistu Haile Mariam<sup>20</sup>. The Ethiopians put all their military weight on Garang's side.

The political/philosophical approach of Garang to that war was rather peculiar. He pretended to be a Communist (it is unlikely that he ever was, at least in any deep sense) and he pretended to be a "Unionist" while 80% of his troops (if not more) were convinced secessionists. However, this "official stance" got him the Ethiopian seal of approval. In fact, he was both a master tactician and a pragmatist: pleasing Mengistu was a short-term tactical choice which paid off. Fighting for revolutionary unity with troops that were neither revolutionary nor unionists was a paradox<sup>21</sup>. The problem was that the thinking of the leader and the thinking of the led were not really synchronised and this was to have very deep consequences after Garang's unexpected death in 2005.

### *The Second Interim Period and its Eventual Collapse (2002-2013)*

<sup>20</sup> There were two reasons: Garang opposed southern independence while Anya Nya II supported it, a most unpleasant political stance for Mengistu who was fighting against the Eritrean secessionist movement; and then Garang, well-educated, diplomatic and charismatic, managed to build a strong personal relationship with the Ethiopian dictator, who preferred him to Gai Tut and Akwot Atem.

<sup>21</sup> I would not venture to say what Garang actually thought. But knowing him a bit and knowing the situation – educational and political – of the Southern Sudanese elite, my feeling is that he did not deem South Sudan capable of ruling itself. And also that he had a pan-Sudanese form of political consciousness. Seeing him operate around genuine Arab allies like Mansur Khalid or Yasser Arman, it was obvious that he had no feelings of racial preference.



A key trait, which was to later have enormous consequences and lead to the current conflict, was the organisational nature of the SPLA. In all the diversity of late 20th century guerrilla movements in Africa, the SPLA's pattern of internal organisation can only be compared to that of Angola's UNITA: it was the most top-down, militarised, centralised and undemocratic of all<sup>22</sup>. The SPLA, with its organisational brutality, its looting of natural resources and its dictatorial political style, was in fact **an anti-Hukum Hukum**. The same approach characterised the social recruitment of cadres in both UNITA and the SPLM. In both cases the "boss", Savimbi or Garang, wanted men around them who were highly talented militarily but with limited formal education. These organisational traits and peculiar type of social recruitment have remained to the present day, and have played a major role in the unfolding of the contemporary crisis. Let us consider what I have termed in other contexts "right-wing Leninism"<sup>23</sup>. It meant that "the chairman" was in fact the party dictator. This is why the 1991 Nasir Faction uprising against John Garang was a very mixed bag: it has always been presented as an attempt by power-hungry warlords (Riak Machar, Lam Akol, Gordon Koang) to wrest power from Garang and it is true that there was a certain amount of that, especially as far as Lam Akol was concerned. However, there is another side to that particular coin: the organisational structure of the SPLA was top-down to the point of internal dictatorship. Since the beginning of the war eight years before, there had never been a Movement Congress; many prominent SPLA leaders such as Benjamin Bol or Martin Majier had been killed by Garang and the Movement was run as a kind of crony-group private venture. The demands for democratisation that accompanied the Nasir mutiny in 1991 were to some degree tactical but they were also genuine and created a wave of internal turmoil that Garang himself was quick to pick up. The organisation of the Chukudum

<sup>22</sup> This is not a coincidence. The Portuguese form of archaic colonialism, evident from Brazil to Africa, had structurally much in common with the Ottoman *hukum*. The rebels fighting against these systems instinctively aped the models provided by their enemy and the guerrillas that emerged from that confrontation tended to be a mirror image of what they fought against.

<sup>23</sup> What do I mean by that? The Bolshevik party invented a political structure, which was both (a) based on Marxist economic theory (b) radically hierarchical and anti-democratic. Right-wing Leninism was a way to jettison the Marxist economics and enshrine the hierarchical organisational form. Chinese President Chang Kai Chek invented it and Joseph-Désiré Mobutu was his first African disciple. Jonas Savimbi and John Garang were gifted pupils. The formula later had a remarkable success under the names of "Arab Socialism" and "African Socialism" in the 1960s to 1980s. The Communist-sponsored SPLA, blending the old *hukum* authoritarian tradition with the more modern right-wing Leninism, showed a clear operational convergence of these two trends.





Convention in 1994 was largely motivated by Garang's fear that he had to give at least a veneer of democracy to camouflage his authoritarian rule if he wanted to win in his contest with Riak Machar<sup>24</sup>. The heart of today's crisis in the South Sudan government is directly linked to that problem i.e. the fact that the organisational structure of the SPLM, which was already partly dysfunctional as early as 1991, has now become **completely** dysfunctional while we have to admit that the "government" is still run on the pattern of what had long been a "right-wing Leninist" guerrilla movement.

A nearly final contribution to the stacking-up of unmanageable problems was the American insistence on the signing of the peace during the Naivasha negotiations of 2003-2004. President George W. Bush was under strong domestic pressure in the early 2000's to achieve some semblance of peace in the Sudan. The explosion of the Darfur conflict had been very poorly understood by US public opinion. In Washington, Senators would receive mail from their constituencies where well-intentioned members of the public were demanding that the administration should strive **"to stop the killing of Christians in Darfur"**. US Senator John Danforth and other Bush administration envoys worked tirelessly at putting together a peace agreement (the future CPA) that would be the product of the needs and wishes of the US-led international community but which did not correspond to the needs of the Sudan. In Naivasha in March 2004, John Garang told me:

Of course I wanted to go all the way to Khartoum and win the war. But the Americans won't go for that and I can't do without them. It is to be regretted. So I will have to take a roundabout way. I'll sign the peace first and then I'll have another fight to win the elections later.

He did not stop for one moment to seriously consider the idea of secession. Secession was the "spare tyre" element, obtained by Salva Kiir when he had signed the Machakos Agreement in 2002. Actually Garang had not been very pleased about this agreement that Salva had signed on his own, without asking the boss. Salva had defended his move by saying to Garang: 'We never know, it might come in handy if there is nothing else we can do'. Salva was a secret secessionist but he did not want to speak his mind in front of the leader, something which had always been a dangerous exercise and which he later dared to do only during the great meeting in Yei in 2004.

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<sup>24</sup> And a mere veneer it was because none of the democratisation measures decided at Chukudum in 1994 was ever implemented, it was a purely paper exercise without concrete effect on the organisational structure.



## Conclusion

The event that sealed the fate of South Sudan was Garang's accidental death in 2005. Why so, because all the other factors we have just listed were still (and are still) fully operative: the contradiction between a "unionist" peace and the secessionist aspirations of the majority of the troops & public opinion, the ongoing fighting in other peripheries (Darfur, South Kordofan, Blue Nile), the complete organisational misfit, the ethnic tensions between the tendencies represented by Riak Machar since 1991 and the aspirations to rule of a section of the Dinka sub-tribes, the creation of an SPLM-North party which had grown to being the largest of all political parties **in the North**, while its southern Godfathers (except for Garang himself and a handful of associates) did not care at all for this bizarre Arab outgrowth of their beloved SPLM.

If one looks at this complex bundle of contradictions that buttressed the incredibly difficult and inefficient machinery of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, one is struck by one thought: the whole unstable contraption rested squarely on the shoulders of one man, John Garang de Mabior, Chairman of the SPLM. When he died, the complicated scaffolding became irrelevant overnight because it was not supported by a durable structure and a movement that was independent of one man's personality; and by this I do not mean "institutions", I simply mean a cultural/political/ethnic *modus operandi*, a way of doing things, a way of being, a climate. The CPA was an abstraction of the international community which Garang had agreed to collaborate with in order to please Washington and to retain its support but it had no roots, no backing, no buttressing dream behind it, and so when the carrier of that paper peace died, the CPA died with him and we had to re-enter the domain of the ordinary, of the doable, of the possibility to make-do-with-what-we-have, and what we had was quite small at the non-military level and very poorly adapted for the job ahead. The man who inherited the mantle of Garang's hugely charismatic leadership was a former NCO in the Sudanese Army, with a primary education, a limited view of the world and a tendency to drink too much. However, he had at his disposal the machinery of what I have termed "right-wing Leninism" i.e. a clumsy but efficient organisational bulldozer. This is what passed for a "government"; in fact it was just a deep money scoop and a killing machine.

In the next paper, we will discuss how these factors were acted out in a series of political moves that largely (but not completely) dovetailed with the pre-1983 war's ethnic rivalries. While Kiir's handling of the SPLM government was a fairly logical implementation of *Hukum* governance,



the rebellion that developed around Riak Machar was both more of the same and an attempt at creating a new dispensation. Whether the rebels will manage to give birth to a new chapter in Sudanese governance will partly depend on their capacity to go beyond their constraining tribal scaffolding and whether a new more holistic (federal?) type of governance can be developed into an acceptable alternative to the Dinka-led late *Hukum* South Sudan state.



# Notes on Two Refugee Camps in the Southern Part of White Nile Wilaya, Sudan

Mustafa M. Khogali

## *Acknowledgement*

In May 2014 the author had the chance to accompany some postgraduate students from the Disaster Management and Refugees Institute (Dimarsi), International University of Africa, Khartoum, who were studying aspects of trauma among refugees from the Republic of South Sudan, to two camps in White Nile Wilaya or State. This visit resulted in the writing of this paper, which should be viewed as ‘short notes’ rather than a piece of research.

## *Introduction*

During the last six decades the Sudan has continued to receive waves of African refugees. The start was with the Congolese crisis in the early 1960's. This was followed at different dates by political tension and wars in Chad, Uganda, Ethiopia, Eritrea, and lately in the Republic of South Sudan (RSS).

By January 2014, political tension in the RSS had culminated in civil war. The conflict started with violent political differences between the President of RSS (from the Dinka tribe) and his deputy (from the Nuer tribe). In addition to the elites of these tribes a third tribe, the Shilluk, became involved in the war. Thus, the conflict turned into a tribal war mainly between these three tribes, living on the boundary between Sudan and the RSS.

As the war raged, it was the civilians – children, women and old men – who suffered indiscriminate killing, burning, raping and the destruction of anything of value by the fighting groups. In January 2014, waves of refugees started coming to Sudan from RSS, and by May 2014 about 95,000 refugees had entered the country. Some stayed in the two camps in the southern part of White Nile that are the focus of this paper, while the majority drifted north and eastwards.

## *The camps*

The two camps we visited, ‘Kilo Number 10’ and ‘Alagaya’ are located near the boundary between Sudan and RSS. The physical and human aspects of the geography are well known to many of the refugees because they used to live and work in the area at the time when the Sudan was a



united country and had maintained economic and social contacts with the local villagers. Furthermore, large sections of the tribes living in White Nile were nomads or semi-nomads and their seasonal movements used to take them to the northern parts on the RSS mainly around Bahr el Arab, and the settled population also moved their livestock. Thus, it was natural for the refugees to feel somewhat at home in their new destination. Equally, the Sudanese welcomed the refugees and housed them in camps that were built on the land where seasonal rain-fed cultivation is usually practised.

Kilo No. 10 camp is on the western side of the White Nile River while Alagaya camp is on the eastern side. There are some similarities in the physical and human geography of the two camps as well as some differences. In this section, each camp is discussed separately and then a short summary is given.

### *Kilo No. 10 Camp*

This camp is located about 10 kilometres west of the White Nile, 350 km south of Kosti town and about 35 km north of the political boundary between Sudan and the RSS (see map below). Kosti town and the camp are connected by a dirt track road. The journey between the camp and the town takes about five hours by car if the road is dry but during the rainy season, the road becomes muddy and impassable and is usually closed to motor traffic. The road was closed to traffic for part of the time during our visit, which took place at the end of the dry season.

Many villages can be seen along the road and judging from the casually built houses and the large herds of cattle, one could conclude that the people are nomadic or semi-nomadic and the settlements are of recent origin.

The area between Kosti and the camp comprises a flat clay plain, with some low sandy dunes that indicate sand encroachment and desertification. The land is almost devoid of any natural vegetative cover, suggesting that it is under annual rain-fed cultivation without any rotation/fallow system in place; this contributes to desertification. The average annual rainfall in Kosti is about 450 mm, increasing to about 600-650 mm on Bahr el Arab and at the camp site.

The main tribes in the region are Seleim and Ahamda; both cultivate *dura* (sorghum) and raise livestock (mainly cattle and sheep) and these feed on the scanty vegetation that grows during the rainy season and on the remains of crops after the harvest.





The camp was established in January 2014, shortly after the start of the recent civil war in the RSS. The camp is built on heavy clay soil and the site is slightly lower than the surrounding ground, creating a sort of a shallow depression. There was originally woodland at the campsite but the trees were cleared to give space for 380 tents, each of which is 4x6 meters in area. Most of the tents are used by the refugees but a few are allocated to the administration and used for medical purposes and a primary school serving both sexes.

The administration of the camp is entrusted to the Sudanese Red Crescent and most of the staff, nurses, guards and others were recruited from Al Naim town, which is 35 km north of the camp, or from Umm-Jalal centre, which is about 30 km south of the camp.

The camp was designed to accommodate 28,000 refugees but at the time of our visit, only 5,600 refugees were living there, as most of those who had registered their names and got certificates had left the camp and gone either northwards to Kosti or Khartoum, or eastwards to the Gezira and Gedaref. Those who stayed in the camp were mostly women (36%), children (62%) and a few old men (2%). 70% of the women in the camp were pregnant or breast-feeding.

Each tent was allocated to five families and each family was composed of 5-6 persons, making a total of 30-35 people in each tent, which is quite congested accommodation! The refugees in this camp came from the Dinka and Shilluk tribes. There were none from the Nuer tribe as there is long-standing enmity between the Nuer and the Dinka.

The refugees are supplied with sufficient dry rations to just satisfy their basic survival needs i.e. lentils 1.8 kilogrammes per person per day (pppd), *dura* 1.8 kg pppd, cooking oil and salt. The rations are collected by each family every 15 days. In addition to these rations pregnant and breastfeeding women are given ration bags containing starches, protein, salts, and vitamins. It seems that the quantities given to each family are sufficient, as some of the rations are sold to the nearby villagers. Selling is not prohibited, as it is known to the authorities of the camp that the refugees need some money to buy items such as tea and sugar. The nearby villagers are pleased to buy rations as they usually pay low prices and lentils are needed as they are not grown locally.

The camp is supplied with water every day which is brought from the White Nile. There are three water tankers with carrying capacities of 90,





80, and 50 barrels respectively. The large tanker does 3 journeys every day, the medium tanker 4 journeys and the small tanker 5 journeys. The total amount of water carried to the camp every day is:  $90 \times 3 + 80 \times 4 + 50 \times 5 = 840$  barrels. The water is treated with the proper chemicals and then stored in water bladders, and each family gets the amount of water they need.

There is a medical centre in the camp and usually there are 3 medical officers available every day, one from the Ministry of Health and the others from the Spanish branch of the organisation 'Sudan Plan'. In addition, there are a midwife and a number of nurses. Drugs are given to the patients free of charge. The medical facilities are also available to the villagers if they need them.

A large number of pit-latrines were dug in the camp. Originally it was planned to dig 120 pits but because many of the registered refugees left the camp, only 50 pits were dug, each 4 metres deep, 10 metres in length and 60 centimetres wide, and these have specially made metal covers. However, because the form of such latrines is new to the refugees, the children do not use them. Furthermore, many women get rid of their human refuse by the corners of the tents, especially at night when it is dark. Spraying of fly-killing chemicals is done every now and then but household flies continue to breed and have become an environmental hazard.

### *Alagaya Camp*

This camp is located on the eastern side of the river, a few metres east of a tarmac road that was built some years before the separation of South Sudan to serve the White Nile pump schemes. There is, in theory, river transport from Kosti to Juba but because of the war it is not working.

One cannot fail to notice a large number of villages along the road, in which all the houses are in good shape, indicating that the people settled in these villages a long time ago, although they still keep large numbers of cattle and sheep. Judging by the number and size of the villages one would conclude that the population density on this side of the White Nile is high compared to that on the other (western) side.

The ethnic composition of the refugees in Alagaya Camp is akin to that of the Gezira and Blue Nile regions where irrigated and rain-fed cultivation are commonly practised. In the past, the region east of the White Nile was well-known for its pump schemes and for the production of long-staple cotton although these schemes have deteriorated and are no longer as



important as they were. However, new large-scale schemes for the production of sugar cane have been developed. This point is important, as it seems that the refugees have their eyes on these schemes, where they hope to find jobs after the end of the rainy season, when cultivation and the sugar industry resume working.

The possibility of paid work for refugee men may explain why the percentage of the males in this camp is high while there are only a few elderly males in Kilo Number 10 Camp.

**Table No. 1** The gender composition of refugees in Alagaya Camp, May 2014

	<b>No.</b>	<b>Percentage of Total Refugees</b>
Children	2048	64
Males	0461	14
Women	0681	22
<b>Total</b>	<b>3190</b>	<b>100</b>

Source: files of the camp authorities

Notes: About 65% of the women in the camp are pregnant or breastfeeding.

Alagaya camp is comparatively small with 3,190 refugees and 117 tents. The administration of the camp is in the hands of the Sudanese Red Crescent. All the services i.e. food distribution, medical care etc. are similar to those found in the Kilo No. 10 Camp.

### *Summary*

While many aspects of the two camps were the same there were also significant differences. Alagaya camp was smaller and had a sizable male population compared to Kilo 10 camp. There were more opportunities for the refugees to find seasonal work in the area around Alagaya than there were in Kilo 10 camp. In addition, the ethnic composition of both camps was different with those living in Alagaya camp coming from an agricultural tradition in contrast to Kilo 10 where many of the refugees were from a nomadic or semi-nomadic background.

### *General remarks: The situation of the South Sudanese refugees in Sudan*

The refugees came to a land and people that were very well known to them. The local villagers were friendly to the refugees and gave them land to erect tents, as they had in the past had some economic and social contact with them. Furthermore, the villagers also expected to gain some benefits from the presence of the refugees e.g. they buy the rations given to the refugees at low prices and have access to lentils which are not



produced locally. In addition, they hoped to be provided with drinking water and make use of the medical services offered in the camp. Indeed, the villages requested to be given some of the services in the same way as the refugees. Such requests have an historical precedent, as in the 1980s when a large influx of refugees from Ethiopia and Eritrea came to the Sudan, the government of that time suggested to the UN Agencies dealing with refugees that it was unfair to the villagers (many of whom were underfed, suffered from diseases and drank polluted water) to be excluded from the services provided to refugees. The UN Agencies agreed to provide the local population as far as possible with drinking water and allowed them to make use of the medical services in the camps.

Being forced to leave their home areas results in many problems for refugees themselves, as well as impacting on the economy and society of the areas they have left and the receiving areas. From an economic point of view, being a refugee means fleeing from home and being forced to leave material resources unutilised i.e. no cultivation of the land or raising of livestock. Cattle are either left unattended or in the care of children and women, who face the risk of being killed or raped if they stay in conflict areas. On the other hand, receiving regions that are short of labour during the rainy season gain the advantage of increasing their labour supply, perhaps at low wages.

It could be claimed that living in a refugee camp has its advantages i.e. assured quantities of food though limited in kind, clean drinking water and some medical care. Yet those living in refugee camps have many serious problems, not least of which are the adverse psychological effects of the trauma they have suffered.

### *Environmental Considerations in the Refugee Camps*

The main environmental problems in the two camps are environmental degradation and flooding, and sanitation.

The region south of Kosti is a clay plain which is known to be muddy during the rainy season. As such the choice of the location of Kilo Number 10 camp was unfortunate, as it is prone to flooding. In addition, the natural vegetation in and around the two camps suffered from extensive clearing of trees and bushes both to make way for tents and to provide firewood for cooking and selling, increasing the likelihood of flooding.

As the region is part of the tropics it sometimes has strong winds and heavy rainfall. That is what happened on 5<sup>th</sup> May, 2014, when a gale coupled with heavy rains dismantled all the tents in Kilo No. 10 camp as well as many in Alagaya. The site at Kilo No. 10 subsequently looked



like a muddy swamp, which is unsuitable for humans to live on. For that reason it was decided to abandon the camp, remove all the refugees and build a number of small camps near some villages. This was thought to be better than having a large camp on a clay plain.

Sanitation at the two camps proved to be a problem. It was planned to dig 120 latrines for Kilo No 10 camp and 80 latrines for Alagaya camp. However, only 60 were dug in the former and 40 in the latter camp. However, the children were unfamiliar with these types of latrines and refused to use them and many men and women also didn't use them, especially at night. Instead, small holes are dug by the corners of the tents and human waste is buried and covered with some earth; this did not prevent flies from breeding and huge numbers of household flies live in each tent with the refugees, creating a dangerous health hazards. Despite not being frequently utilised, the pit latrines are not kept clean and give off nasty smells.

Usually refugees are looked upon as liabilities in receiving countries as well as by the International Agencies. However, looking deeply into the problem and with good planning it could be argued that they will turn out to be an asset, especially in providing labour for rain-fed and irrigated cultivation. When the writer visited Alagaya camp in May, at the end of the dry season, I noticed that the men in the camp were idle because at that time of year there was no work either in rain-fed or in irrigated cultivation. However, by July, labourers would be in great demand for both types of cultivation. It is important to plan well to make full use of such a labour force. Planning should include considering the distribution of the refugees, their wages, their accommodation and the supply of clean drinking water. It is true that the refugees have their eyes on possible jobs in agriculture and that means they would be willing to work but nevertheless, proper planning is highly desirable.

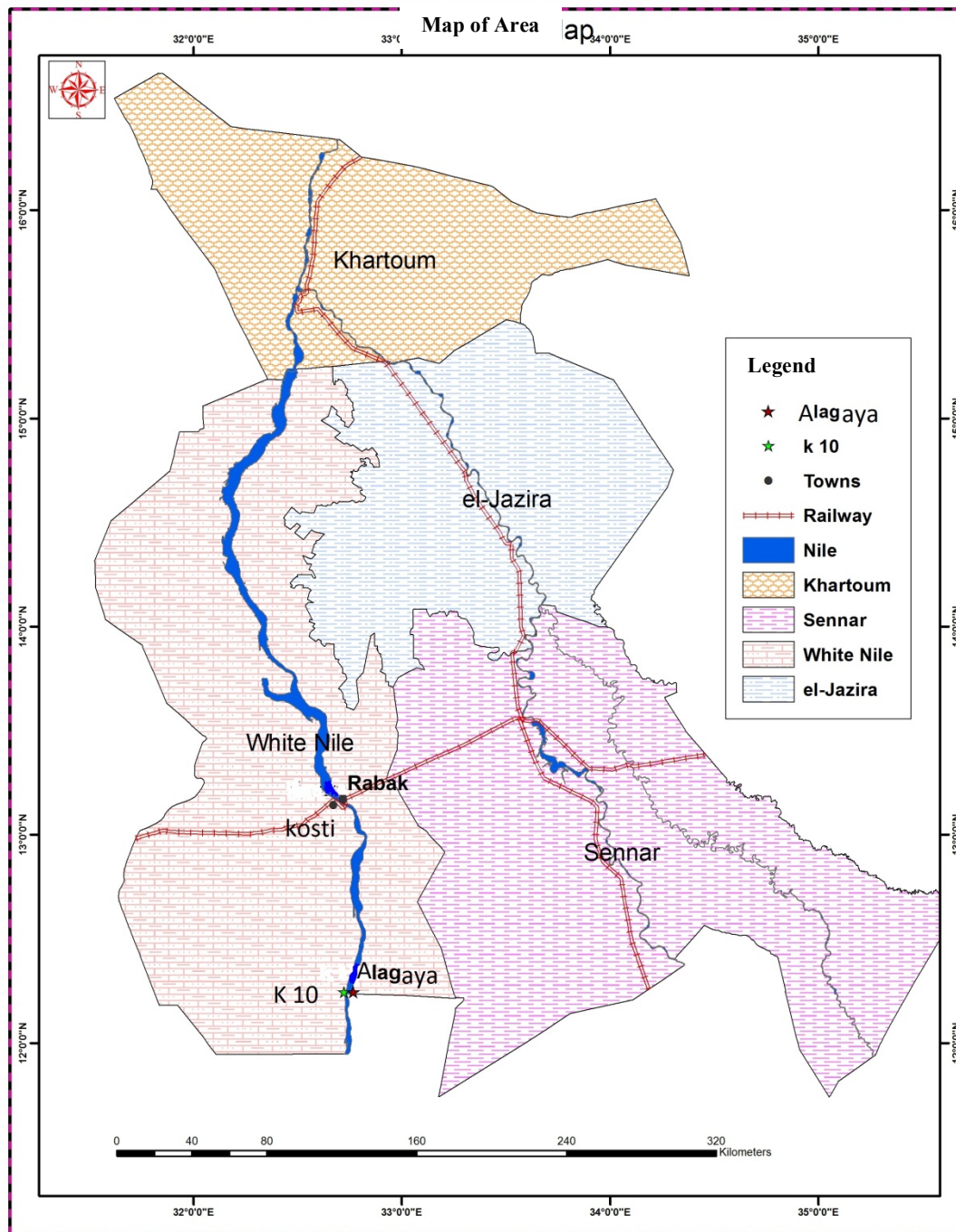
### *Conclusion*

Refugee life is not a normal life and as such has its problems both for the refugees, the region of departure and the receiving region. However, it is not possible, to prevent people fleeing for their lives from their own lands and therefore it is important to take the necessary measures, as far as possible, to minimise adverse repercussions. One important measure is the choice of a good location for the camps and good administration. The site of Kilo No. 10 camp was unfortunate and the situation was exacerbated by excessive clearance of vegetation. Cutting trees for cooking and for selling was also a mistake.





One common environmental problem in refugee camps in many parts of the world is how to dispose of human refuse, especially in large camps and in camps such as those in the Sudan where refugees are unfamiliar with modern latrines. This is an important and difficult problem, as having sufficient numbers of latrines for thousands of refugees living in a limited area and keeping them clean is costly and even then, the problem of proper use remains.



## Report on the SSSUK Annual Symposium 2014

Zoe Cormack

On Saturday 14 September, members and friends of the SSSUK convened at SOAS for the Annual Symposium and General Meeting. There was record attendance: well over 120 people. The large numbers were due to Gill Lusk's committed organisation, a new partnership with the Centre for African Studies at SOAS and an excellent line-up of speakers.

After a welcoming address by the society's President, Ibrahim el Salahi, the programme of talks and panels kicked off. We began with two talks that reflected, in different ways, on how history has been constructed and understood in Sudan.

Gerasimos Makris (Panteion University, Athens) spoke about his long-term ethnographic research on *Tumbura*, a spirit possession cult with similarities to *zar*, practiced in the shantytowns of Omdurman. *Tumbura* followers come from the historical peripheries of Sudan – the South, the west and the Nuba Mountains. These are areas that have historically been associated with slavery. The spirits which *Tumbura* adherents are possessed by are historical figures – for example *khawaja* soldiers from the 1898 re-conquest or Turco-Egyptian officials. The songs performed at these rituals express historical memories of enslavement and colonisation – the rituals and songs of spirit possession allow for different interpretations of Sudan's history.

Fergus Nicol's presentation took us from the margins to one of Sudan's central political families. He gave a fascinating account of a little known oral history of the Mahdiyya, compiled by Ali al Mahdi (1881-1944), one of the son's of Muhamed Ahmed al Mahdi himself. From his retirement home in Omdurman, Ali conducted over twenty years worth of interviews about the events surrounding the life of his father. His method was to call anyone who had direct experience of the Mahdi to Omdurman, swear them to honesty and interview them. The documents he produced – a thick description of the period – have been edited into a book by Sadiq al Mahdi. The tireless work of Ali, a figure who in life was somewhat overshadowed by his prominent brother Abdel Rahman al Mahdi, has now been somewhat forgotten by history.

From questioning **what** we know and **how** we know about the past in Sudan and South Sudan, attention turned to concerns about the uncertain

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present and future in both countries. Of particular concern were the ongoing conflicts in South Sudan and the transitional areas of Blue Nile and South Kordofan. A panel discussion (chaired by the historian Douglas H. Johnson) discussed the current crisis in South Sudan. The panellists: Dame Rosalind Marsden (Chatham House and British former Ambassador to Sudan), Mawan Muortat (political commentator), Benjamin Taban (political commentator) and Philip Winter (former representative of Independent Diplomat) offered their interpretations and insights. All speakers highlighted the gravity of the situation but suggested that local relations and peace building could offer some tentative hope.

After lunch, Djamela Abdel Majid, an editor of a new book of short stories entitled, *I know Two Sudans*, explained how the desire to show a more complex image of Sudan had inspired her project to showcase new writing from Sudan and South Sudan. Djamela was joined by three of the contributing authors, who read excerpts from their chapters. Prizes have been awarded for the three best stories in the book, chosen by the internationally renowned Sudanese author, Leila Aboulela.

The meeting closed with a preview of Frédérique Cifuentes' new film *Sudan After Separation: New North, Old North: How Sudanese artists and intellectuals from the diaspora are playing their part in shaping the new Sudan*. The film screening brought us back to the theme of Gerasimos Makris' opening talk on *Tumbura* possession. One important message is that there are many different ways to construct the nation and many different parties involved, far beyond the political elite. Artists, filmmakers and marginalised shantytown dwellers are also active historical agents and dynamic shapers of the future.



## ‘Alī al-Mahdī’s Oral History of the *Mahdīa*

Fergus Nicoll

‘Alī al-Mahdī was one of nine sons born to Muḥammad Aḥmad ‘Abdallah al-Mahdī, of whom seven were killed in conflict or died in British internment camps. ‘Alī’s mother was Na’ima *bint* al-Sheikh al-Qorashi wad al-Zein, the Mahdī’s mentor in the Sammānīa *tarīqa*, based on the Blue Nile.

It seems clear that ‘Alī was born between four and seven years before his more celebrated brother ‘Abd-al-Raḥman, who went on to become *Imām* of the *Anṣār* and the leading indigenous personality during the period of Condominium rule. This question of birth date is important because in the normal run of things, the older brother would expect to be the Mahdī’s heir, both temporal and spiritual.

While Richard Hill gives us a birth date of 1881,<sup>25</sup> my own research into the Mahdī’s family tree, based on original Sudanese and British sources in Khartoum, deduced a slightly earlier birth date: 1878. A list of Sudanese signatories to a ‘Petition of Sound Elements’ in June 1924 – when ‘Abd-al-Raḥman’s celebrity and financial success were well established – unequivocally describes ‘Alī al-Mahdī as the ‘eldest living son of the Mahdī’.<sup>26</sup> ‘Alī’s biographer, Sādiq ‘Awad Bashīr, is a dissenting voice, citing family sources to aver that ‘Alī was born in 1886, in other words, more than seven months after his father’s death.<sup>27</sup> This is of course biologically possible but, given the Mahdī’s well-known spiritual retreat during the final Ramadān of his life, followed by a rapid terminal illness, unlikely.

The first we hear of the Mahdī’s younger sons – too young to have featured in any description of the Khalīfa ‘Abdullāhī’s rule or the resistance to Kitchener’s invasion – is in August 1899. After British troops intercepted what they believed to be an attempt to mobilise a counter-strike against occupation forces, two of ‘Alī’s brothers, al-Bushra and al-Fādl, were shot by firing squad, following a summary court martial

<sup>25</sup> Richard Hill, *A Biographical Dictionary of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1967), p. 49.

<sup>26</sup> Tim Niblock, *Class and Power in Sudan: The Dynamics of Sudanese Politics, 1898-1985* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1987), p. 175.

<sup>27</sup> Sādiq ‘Awad Bashīr, *al-maghfir lahu ‘Alī al-Mahdī, 1886-1944: al-mu’arikh wa’l-murabbī wa’l-‘arif billah (sīra zātīa)* (The Late ‘Alī al-Mahdī, 1886-1944: Historian, Educator and Knower of God (A Personal Biography)) (Omdurman: n.p., 2014), p. 3.



on charges of inciting resistance.<sup>28</sup> ‘Abd-al-Raḥman, recovering from a bullet wound in his shoulder, was taken under the wing of Muḥammad Ṭaha Shinqetti at Jazīrat al-Fīl (Elephant Island), not far from al-Shukkāba.<sup>29</sup>

All the older surviving male members of his family, including ‘alī, by then 21 years old, were sent, with prominent *Anṣār* survivors, to prisons at Wadi Halfa or at Rashīd (Rosetta) in the Egyptian delta. Many succumbed to tuberculosis and ailments induced by the rigours of prison life. While ‘Alī languished, ‘Abd-al-Raḥman set about building up the first of what were to become remarkably diverse business interests – initially timber, then agriculture and finally cotton – as well as an enormous spiritual following.

By the time ‘Alī was released from prison in Rashīd in 1912, after 13 years’ incarceration, he appears to have been a broken man. Certainly, his ambitions were non-existent: he refrained from contesting the role of *Imām*, opting instead for a quiet life in the colonial civil service as a translator in a government ministry. And to show there was no bitterness or rivalry, he resigned in 1926 to work full-time for ‘Abd-al-Raḥman, joining the board of the family business, the *Dā’irat al-Mahdī*, and running the company’s Omdurman office.<sup>30</sup> Mubārak ‘Abdullāhi al-Fāḍl al-Mahdī, grandson of the boy shot at al-Shukkāba and son of the *Dā’ira*’s primary *wakīl*, or legal representative, quoted his father as follows:

We came out of Karārī [the Battle of Omdurman in September 1898] with no hope. There were two sons of the Mahdī, close in age. But ‘Alī saw that his brother was more capable and gave way. Imagine if he had fought, where would the *Anṣār* be?<sup>31</sup>

‘Alī worked for his brother for three years, until he retired to compile his oral history. He was based during this time at a large house in Omdurman, with a small mosque attached to the residence, now known

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<sup>28</sup>. Report by Major H.G. Fitton of Military Intelligence, *Sudan Intelligence Report* 64 (18 July to 31 August 1899), p. 2.

<sup>29</sup>. Fergus Nicoll, ‘*Dā’irat al-Mahdī*: Money, Faith and Politics in Sudan’, Durham Middle East Papers, Luce Fellowship Paper No. 14 (2013), pp. 3-4.

<sup>30</sup>. al-Ṣiddīq ‘Abd-al-Raḥman Azraq, ‘*Ilāqāt al-intāḥ al-zirā’īa fī mashārī’ dā’irat al-mahdī*’ (Agricultural Means of Production in the Schemes of the *Dā’irat al-Mahdī*) (Omdurman: Dirāsāt Istrātijā, 2000), p. 65.

<sup>31</sup>. Interview with Mubārak ‘Abdullāhi al-Fāḍl, London, 8 May 2013.



as the *Dār al-Zikr*.<sup>32</sup> He compiled his notes using a simple but effective technique: whenever he heard about anyone who had had personal contact with the *Mahdīa* – as a follower, a servant, a fighter, etc. – he would have them brought to Omdurman at his own expense. There he would have them swear an oath of honesty on the Koran, before interviewing them extensively and taking detailed notes.<sup>33</sup>

There is a potential flaw in this method: the simple availability of reliable sources. If we assume that ‘Alī al-Mahdī worked on gathering testimonies over a period of up to 20 years between his resignation from the *Dā’ira* and his death in late 1944, the pool of witnesses was obviously decreasing. Take a hypothetical case: a 20-year-old man who travels from al-Massalamīa on the Blue Nile to Jazīra Abā (Aba Island) on the White Nile in June 1881, shortly after the Mahdī’s formal public manifestation, to swear allegiance. Assuming he survives the years of jihad and the numerous battles that culminated in the capture of Khartoum, assuming he survives the internecine rivalries, famine and smallpox epidemics of the Khalīfa ‘Abdullāhi’s reign, and assuming he survives the serial slaughters of the British invasion in the second half of the 1890s, he would be 80 years old in 1941.

This point forces us to remember a basic fact about the Sudan wars that’s frequently forgotten, at least by non-Sudanese: 11,000 were killed at Karārī alone, and many thousands more on the Atbara, at Tūshkī, Abū-Tuleih, Sinnār, Trinkitat and around Sawākin. In fact, even in the earliest battles against the Egyptian garrisons – relatively small-scale affairs – ‘Alī al-Mahdī says 350 were killed in the skirmish against Yūsuf Pāshā al-Shallālī and 3,000 in the disastrous first assault on al-‘Ubeid.<sup>34</sup> That basic numerical problem must be borne in mind as the content of ‘Alī al-Mahdī’s history is assessed.

Little is known of these documents until the mid-1960s, when they were bundled up and handed for editing to ‘Abdallah Muḥammad Aḥmad, a headmaster who went on to become an Umma Party MP and, in another era, Sudan’s Ambassador to Rome. The original title given to ‘Alī al-Mahdī’s notes, *al-aqwāl al-marwīa fī tārikh al-mahdīa* (The Oral Sources for a History of the *Mahdīa*), was changed to the more polemical *jihād fī sabīl Allah* (Jihad in God’s Cause) and the authorship was effectively

<sup>32</sup>. Sādiq ‘Awaḍ Bashīr, *al-maghfūr lahu ‘Alī al-Mahdī*, p. 35.

<sup>33</sup>. Interview with Sādiq ‘Awaḍ Bashīr, Doha, 9 July 2014.

<sup>34</sup>. ‘Alī al-Mahdī, *jihād fī sabīl Allah* (Jihad in God’s Cause) (ed. ‘Abdallah Muḥammad Aḥmad) (Khartoum: Khartoum University Press, 1965), pp. 33-5 and 41-3.



appropriated by al-Ṣādiq al-Mahdī, who contributed little more than a foreword but under whose name the book is usually listed in bibliographies.

In structural terms, the published Arabic edition is set out as follows. Chapter 1 establishes the paternal and, interestingly, maternal, lineages of the Mahdī, before narrating his opening encounters with the occupation authorities in Khartoum. This section contains evidently first-hand descriptions of the meetings with the Governor-General's envoy; it is also the first to give the names of all the most important figures in any given scene:

The steamer carrying Muḥammad Bey Abū-al-Sa'ūd and his delegation arrived on the 7<sup>th</sup> of August 1881. They lowered their sails at Mashr' al-Ardība, where the delegation was welcomed by the Mahdī's uncle, al-Sayyid Muḥammad Abū-Hidāya, as well as 'Abd-al-Raḥman Maḥmūd, Aḥmad Muḥammad Kheir, Muḥammad Aḥmad Sheikh Idrīs and 'Abd-al-Raḥman al-Hājj 'Alī. Abū-al-Sa'ūd alighted from the steamer, wearing a kaftan with a cashmere belt, a robe made of white wool, and a fez on his head. He saluted the people, who told him that the judge and *mā'mūr* [administrator] from al-Kawa had just arrived on the island. Abū-al-Sa'ūd then left the steamer, along with his contingent of 25 guards, and went to seek an audience with the Mahdī.<sup>35</sup>

A long second chapter begins with the ensuing battle on Jazīra Abā:

After arranging his lines, the Mahdī stood behind the flag of Sheikh Amīn. The soldiers advanced, walking across the dry *khōr*. It was a moonlit night, enabling the Mahdī and his men to monitor the movements of the government troops. Captain Ibrāhīm led them and when he saw the *Anṣār* flags, he called out to his soldiers in Turkish, ordering them to be ready to fight. Abū-al-Sa'ūd also saw the flags but told Captain Ibrāhīm that they were flying over graves, because he had noticed a cemetery nearby when he went to the Mahdī some days earlier to try to persuade him to surrender. This mistake was to cost the soldiers dearly.<sup>36</sup>

<sup>35</sup>. 'Alī al-Mahdī, *jihād fī sabīl Allah*, p. 8. The author notes with gratitude the invaluable assistance of Muhammad Ismail Morsi in Cairo and Muhammad Abd-al-Moneim in Doha for this translation.

<sup>36</sup>. *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.





Chapter 2 then takes us through the *hijra* to Jebel Qadīr, the battles with Rāshid Bey Ayman and Yūsuf Pāshā al-Shallālī, the negotiations and, when necessary, suppression of the Nuba hill-tribes, the advance on al-‘Ubeid and the resulting siege, before culminating in the defeat of the Hicks expedition at Sheikān. There is plenty of colour in these sections but little emotion and fewer new insights. Chapter 3 moves briskly through the jihad in the Jazīra region, the capture of the Omdurman garrison, the siege and fall of Khartoum itself, and the death of Gordon. On this last point, ‘Alī al-Mahdī sticks to the traditional line that the Mahdī explicitly ordered his men to make sure that a number of influential men in Khartoum, including Gordon, were taken alive:

Then he said to them: ‘As for Gordon, my brothers, do not kill him but keep him alive and bring him to me. This is a great man in the eyes of his people, so keeping him alive is a great blessing. I want to deliver him back to his people and exchange him for two great men: al-Zubeir and ‘Arābī. Because Gordon is so cherished by his people, they would exchange him for 20 men.’ Then he said: ‘You must fight from our trenches until you enter the town – but do not kill those who raise the banner of surrender.’ The Mahdī specifically warned them not to kill the following: Faraj Pāshā al-Zeinī, the General Commander; Sheikh Muḥammad, the blind chief justice; Sheikh al-Amīn al-Ḍarīr, the Sheikh al-Islām; Aḥmad Bey ‘Alī Jallāb, *mudīr* of Khartoum; Sayyid Ḥussein Majdī; the Persian Sheikh Muḥammad al-Khoraṣānī; Sheikh Muḥammad al-Saqqā; the *sanjak* Muḥammad Qarḍhīa and his son the *sanjak* Aḥmad Muḥammad Qarḍhīa; al-Sheikh Suleimān al-Darāwī; and the Levantine Muḥammad Ṭaha al-Shāmī... Then al-Imām al-Mahdī repeated his warning, saying yet again: ‘Gordon must not be killed, even if he kills one hundred of your men.’<sup>37</sup>

The successful seizure of Khartoum is followed by a series of very short chapters. Chapter 4 sets out the first phases of the Mahdī’s planned move on Egypt, mainly by way of transcribing the well-known warning letters to the Khedive Ṭawfiq and the Egyptian people, before ending with the Mahdī’s untimely death and the transfer of authority to the Khalīfa ‘Abdullāhi. Chapter 5 focuses on the campaign against Abyssinia but it begins with the Khalīfa’s immediate consolidation of power:

<sup>37</sup>. Ibid., p. 92.



On the third day after the Mahdī's death, the Khalīfa gathered the senior members of the Mahdī's family in the *Imām's* prayer room. They were Aḥmad Sharfī, Aḥmad 'Abd-al-Qādir, Sayyid Muḥammad Ṣālih, Sayyid Aḥmad 'Abd-al-Karīm, Aḥmad Suleimān, 'Uthmān al-Nāyir, Sheikh Ṭaha and Sayyid Muḥammad Ḥājj Sharīf. The Khalīfa ordered all the doors to be closed. Then he said to them: 'The Mahdī, peace be upon him, has died, moving towards the mercy of his Lord. But I ask you now to stay with me as you were with him before. I wish for none of you to stray from my council, as I fear the influence of slanderers. You all know the Khalīfa 'Alī walad Hilū here – and you know how loyal he is to me. You all know the Khalīfa Sharīf, for he is one of you, the Ashrāf. I now order you to behave towards me as the Khalīfa 'Alī does. Never leave my side under any circumstances. If I sit, you sit. If I ride, you ride with me. And as you do so, let the Ashrāf follow you and imitate you, taking you as their model and the model for the Mahdī's own sons.' With that, the council was over.<sup>38</sup>

Chapters 6 and 7 give us a fascinating description of the internal politics of the Khalīfa's new autocracy, including the isolation and punishment of any rival individuals or communities, particularly in Kordofan and Darfur. Chapter 8 contains a lot of important information about negotiations between the Mahdist state and Egypt. We learn that Muḥammad Sirr al-Khatim, eldest son of Muḥammad 'Uthmān al-Mīrghanī and exiled in Egypt, appointed himself go-between on behalf of the Khedive Ṭawfiq. In one section, he presents a list of demands to the Khalīfa 'abdullāhi, although as 'Alī al-Mahdī the author concedes:

I have not been able to find the correspondence or a copy of the demands, but I have been able to confirm some of them.

Among the terms for peace stated by the Egyptians were:

1. The frontier between us will be at Khor Mūsa Pāshā, south of Wadī Halfā;
2. For trade to resume effectively, we should exchange goods by sending and receiving commercial caravans;
3. The Mahdīa should release the prisoners you have seized, including the Christians;

<sup>38</sup>. Ibid., pp. 111-12.



4. The Mahdīa should open the route for the ḥajj to blessed Mecca; and
5. Let there be a defence pact between us, so that we may supply you with our men if you need them in war and you do the same for us as necessary.<sup>39</sup>

The Khalīfa's council rejects this offer of reconciliation but does endorse the despatch of a mission to Egypt – despite questions as to their intellectual competence to engage in dialogue with the wily Cairo '*ulamā*'. This section contains an occasionally amusing and very detailed description of the delegation's journey to Aswān, where a British officer demands that they change into more appropriate clothing before proceeding to Cairo. The members of the embassy refuse to shed their patched *jibbas* and, embarrassed by the impasse, the officer eventually allows them to proceed:

Then the British officer released them and no one interfered further until they reached Gīza. There they found a car waiting for them, which took them to the Ministry of War. There the Sirdār Grenfell Pāshā asked them for the letters they had with them but they refused because they had been ordered to deliver them to the Khedive of Egypt in person. He promised that they would meet him the next day at 9 a.m.

In the morning, they delegates were taken to the Khedive's administrative office, where they were ordered to leave their spears and swords. Then they drove on to 'Abdīn Palace. On the ground floor, they found a large number of Egyptian '*ulamā*', pashas, ministers and dignitaries, along with Sayyid Muḥammad Sirr al-Khatim. He too tried to get the letters from them but they refused. Then they were taken up to the third floor, where they found the Khedive sitting on a luxurious couch.

He was a handsome, bearded man with two bodyguards by his throne. The head of the delegation handed over the letters, the copies of the *Rātib* and all the Mahdī's original warnings and proclamations. Then they saluted him and left. When they returned to the ground floor, they gave the special letter addressed to the British Queen to the officer escorting them. He referred the matter to Lord Cromer, who descended the

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<sup>39</sup>. Ibid., p. 138.



staircase, took the letter, said simply ‘Good afternoon’, and returned upstairs.<sup>40</sup>

Chapter 9 is very short, describing the difficulties in accommodating the massive influx of Ta‘āisha from the west as a bulwark of the Khalīfa’s power but the inevitable clash with the Ashrāf is presented in Chapter 10. This is a long and detailed chapter, by far the most precise narrative in the second half of the book, again with the kind of detail that can only have been provided by people who were present. The account is strikingly non-partisan and betrays no editorial bitterness about the treatment of the Ashrāf, focusing instead on the anxieties felt by figures who were caught in the middle and were upset to see the Mahdi’s legacy undermined by factional in-fighting. But the denouement – the trial of two leading supporters of the Ashrāf – spares us nothing:

The jury consisted of Judge Aḥmad ‘Alī at its head, ‘Abd-al-Qādir Umm Maryūm, Sayyid al-Makkī, Ṭaha wad al-Ja‘ālī, ‘Abd-al-Bāqī wad Ḥājī al-Māḥī and Judge al-Hādī al-Ḥillāwī. They summoned ‘Abd-al-Qādir Sātī ‘Alī and Muḥammad ‘Abd-al-Karīm. Judge Aḥmad stated that they were guilty of involvement in the *fitna* [disturbance] between the Khalīfat al-Mahdī and the Khalīfa Sharīf. They were found guilty and sentenced to death, along with their fellow conspirators, Aḥmad walad Suleimān, Sa‘īd Muḥammad Faraḥ and the secretary, Aḥmad al-Nūr.

‘Abd-al-Qādir was resigned to his fate but Muḥammad ‘Abd-al-Karīm began to defend himself, until ‘Abd-al-Qādir bade him be silent, saying that the matter had been settled and there was nothing to be done about it. After three days in prison, they were sent by steamer to the *Amīr* al-Zākī Ṭamal at Fashoda, along with a letter from the Khalīfat al-Mahdī. Zākī met them at al-Jabalein while he was on his way to Omdurman and he was handed the death warrant.

Rather than execute them in front of his army, Zākī Ṭamal postponed their killing until after dark. He instructed the *Amīr* ‘Abdallah Ibrāhīm to carry out the sentence but he refused, saying: ‘I do not think that any good man would agree to a sentence that kills men related to al-Imām al-Mahdī. You would do better to assign a group of tough black slaves who know nothing of these men’s virtue.’ The *Amīr* Zākī agreed, assigning instead a troop leader called Kāfī and ordering him to

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<sup>40</sup>. Ibid., pp. 141-2.



take as many of the *jihādīa* as he needed to escort the prisoners outside the town after the ‘*ashā*’ prayer and beat them to death with clubs.<sup>41</sup>

After this kind of close-up drama, the end of the book is rather a rush and an anti-climax. Somewhat out of sequence, Chapter 11 rehashes the struggle to establish the *Mahdīa* in the Red Sea Hills, trudging through a wearying sequence of battles, all described in bland, matter-of-fact terms. And the final Chapter 12 is equally terse, describing how the Khalīfa’s forces fell back, time after time, in the face of the relentless advance of Kitchener’s invading army, weakened by sickness, poor equipment and internal political divisions. On the eve of the disastrous battle at Karārī, north of Omdurman, there’s an interesting variant on the reported dispute between the Khalīfa and ‘Uthmān Dīqna over a mooted night assault on the British encampment:

At midday on the 1<sup>st</sup> of September 1898, Kitchener observed with his telescope the Khalīfa’s armies approaching the Karārī hills from the west side of Omdurman. He greatly feared a night attack, so he sent spies among the Khalīfa’s forces to spread the rumour that the British were themselves planning to attack that night. ‘No need to make rash decisions and hasten the fight,’ was the response among the men; ‘better to wait in our trenches and vanquish the enemy on our own ground.’ The efforts of these fifth columnists were fruitful and the number of those who wanted to fight in broad daylight increased. So the Khalīfat al-Mahdī failed to attack that night, deciding instead to fight at noon the following day.<sup>42</sup>

And appropriately enough, the death of the *Mahdīa* is described in a section entitled *marḥāba bi’l-shuhāda*: Welcome to martyrdom. After setting out the disposition of the Khalīfa’s 52,000-strong infantry and cavalry, ‘Alī al-Mahdī rehearses the grim conclusion:

Such were the armies that marched towards the valley around the village of al-‘Ajeija, between Karārī and Sirghām hills. At 6.45 a.m., after sunrise on the 2<sup>nd</sup> of September, the field was filled with banner-waving *Anṣār*, calling out *Allahu akbar*. The enemy waited for them until they came into range, then the artillery opened fire, slaughtering them in droves. But they

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<sup>41</sup>. Ibid., p. 176.

<sup>42</sup>. Ibid., p. 210.





pressed on without hesitation until 2 p.m., when they were ordered to regroup. So they fell back on Omdurman, leaving around 27,000 fallen on the field, 11,000 of them martyred and the rest wounded. Among the martyrs were Sayyid Muḥammad al-Mahdī and the *umarā'* Ya'qūb, Ibrāhīm al-Khalīl and 'Uthmān Azraq. The army of occupation claimed that only 48 of its soldiers were killed and 382 more injured. That was simply because of their superiority in weaponry, supplies and training. But for that, they would have been vanquished for sure.<sup>43</sup>

In assessing the contribution of 'Alī al-Mahdī's work to a wider understanding of the period, we are forced to acknowledge some disappointments. This oral history is more a chronological, eyewitness-based description of events than an ideological statement: in this respect it falls short of both Ismā'īl 'Abd-al-Qādir al-Kurdufānī's uncritical insider account<sup>44</sup> and Holt's objective, document-based analysis.<sup>45</sup> There is no explanation of Muḥammad Aḥmad's evolution as a religious leader, or the development of the early *Anṣār* community at Jazīra Abā before his manifestation as the Mahdī. There is no description of the sociological implications of the gathering of the clans at Jabal Qadīr in the Nuba hills, or the consolidation of a new kind of authority at al-'Ubeid.

To offset these shortcomings, the book offers a powerful sense of immediacy, vivid description and many new insights that add important detail to other accounts of the period. It is certainly high time a new edition was published, with its proper authorship duly re-established. And it may be that an English translation would be worth pursuing, to give non-Sudanese readers access to a neglected but still valuable account.

<sup>43</sup>. Ibid., pp. 211-12.

<sup>44</sup>. Muhammad Ibrāhīm Abū-Salīm (ed.), *Sa 'ādat al-mustahdī bi-sīrat al-Imām al-Mahdī: Ismā'īl 'Abd-al-Qādir al-Kurdufānī* (The Reward of the One who Seeks Guidance by the Life of the Imām al-Mahdī by Ismā'īl 'Abd-al-Qādir al-Kordofānī) (Beirut: Dār al-Fikr, 1972); Haim Shaked, *The Life of the Sudanese Mahdī: A Historical Study of Kitāb sa 'adat al-mustahdī bi-sīrat al-Imām al-Mahdī by Ismā'īl bin 'Abd-al-Gādir* (New Jersey: Transaction Press, 1978).

<sup>45</sup>. Peter Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898: A Study of its Origins, Development and Overthrow* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1958).



# The Ṭumbura Spirit Possession Cult in the Sudan: A Long-Term View

G. Makris

## Introduction

Among the most well-known spirit possession cults studied by anthropologists is the Sudanese female cult of *zār boré*, often known simply as *zār*. The pioneering full-scale ethnographic analysis of *zār boré* was the 1972 unpublished PhD of Pamela Constantinides. There and in a number of publications that followed (1977, 1985, 1991) Constantinides improved Ioan M. Lewis' 'deprivation theory', which argued that 'women... ex-slaves and people of servile origin and subordinate status generally, seem to find in chronic possession and regular membership of the cult organisation a measure of security and opportunities for the enhancement of their position',<sup>46</sup> albeit temporarily, vis-à-vis male and other hegemonic structures.

For Constantinides, rather than a weapon **strategically** employed by women in a 'sex war' against men, the possession cult of *zār boré* provided women with a *topos* from which men were excluded and an idiom in which they could articulate their own female discourse on life and procreation, creativity and religiosity. From this perspective, *zār boré* was a female analogue to male *ṣūfī* orders.

Similar views were expressed among others by Ahmed al-Shahi (1984), who saw in *zār* a medium of expression for the problems that subordinate women face in male-dominated societies; Samia El-Nagar (1980), who saw *zār* as a female counterpart to the social and ritual association of men in *ṣūfī dhikr* and *madīḥ*; and Sayyid Hurreiz (1991), who analysed *zār* as ritual psychodrama on its way to becoming a folklore society.<sup>47</sup>

Finally, the study of *zār* was advanced theoretically by Janice Boddy, whose analysis focused on issues of gender and cultural 'enclosure', subordination and consciousness. In publications that span three decades (1982, 1988, 1989, 1994, 2002, 2010), Boddy approaches *zār boré* as a discursive attempt put forward by women to comment on creatively – and perhaps overcome – their gendered over-determination, embodied in the form of pharaonic circumcision. Possessed by spirits representing the

<sup>46</sup>. Lewis, 1966: 322. See also *ibid*, 1971.

<sup>47</sup>. See Lewis, Ahmed al-Safi and Sayyid Hurreiz (1991) for a more comprehensive presentation of the bibliography on Sudanese *zār* and kindred spirit possession cults.



**other**, women problematise their ‘natural’ position in a traditional patriarchal social order, while at the same time affirming its intrinsic value. Moving away from simplistic models of ‘male domination’ and ‘female resistance’, Boddy shows the fluid and creative effects of power internalised in the negative, neutral and positive guises, as constraints, conventions and values respectively.<sup>48</sup> Incorporation of **otherness** in Boddy’s analysis of *zār boré* may have an emancipatory effect on the way the possessed visualise their life and their society.

My own modest contribution to the study of Sudanese *zār* should be seen within this cursorily described framework. There is however a difference. Since my first visit to the Sudan in 1987, I have been studying *tumbura* in the region of wider Khartoum. *Tumbura* is another form of *zār*, less well known and less studied than *boré*, which is found in the big urban centres of the country. Though some of the previously mentioned authors do refer to it, it is only Susan Kenyon who has really studied *tumbura* in depth (1991a, 1991b, 2012). Kenyon’s focus is the town of Sinnār and her research on the subject enriches and corrects mine in a number of ways, thus allowing us to get a fuller picture of this otherwise little known type of *zār*.

If a gender approach has proven to be theoretically germane for the feminine *boré* cult, this could not be the case for *tumbura*. Though more prevalent among women today, *tumbura* has never been a feminine cult. On the contrary, it has been traditionally practised by **both** men and women of slave descent, as well as 20<sup>th</sup> century migrants to the north who belong to groups originally associated with slavery.<sup>49</sup>

I have studied *tumbura* for the last twenty-five years, which for some may seem to be too long. Is it, though? As I shall argue, such long-term fieldwork is in fact valuable because it allows one to chart the historical changes that the cult of *zār* itself has gone through during that long period. Most anthropologists who study possession do recognise the importance of history for the cults, especially in relation to the spiritual entities involved, as well as in reference to various important personalities who influenced the cults’ development. However, such studies stop short of showing how the cults themselves change through

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<sup>48</sup>. Boddy, 2002: 190-1. Here Boddy refers directly to the work of Jean and John Comaroff.

<sup>49</sup>. Strikingly, besides anthropologists such as Seligman (1914) and Kenyon (1991a,b) and my own informants, *tumbura*’s popularity among both men and women of slave descent is also supported by two excellent lithographs from the 1880s-90s (Hurgronje, 1931; Lamothe, 2011).



time, how their structures are transformed, their practices reconceived and their scope altered.<sup>50</sup>

This is a pity, not only because we overlook interesting ethnographic data but also because a long-term view of such practices may suggest that our neat categorisation of them as ‘spirit possession cults’ distinguished from other religious practices, does not reflect ethnographic realities but rather static anthropological categorisations of religious phenomena.

The case of *ṭumbura* is instructive. While repeated stints of fieldwork during the late 1980s and early 1990s adequately described *ṭumbura* as a spirit possession cult, gradually this has changed. New periods of fieldwork up until 2014 have revealed that the cult has widened its scope and area of expertise as a weapon against witchcraft-related dangers. In this way, it has attracted a new clientele from people who until then actively distrusted the cult and ridiculed its devotees. This is important, because it throws new light on some undercurrents characteristic of contemporary Sudanese religiosity and on opaque connections between religious categories that are otherwise presumed to be unrelated.

It is certainly possible, of course, that such blurring of lines between analytically distinct practices becomes more visible or even possible during periods of rapid social change. The point is that one has to be there long enough to realise it, just like in the present case. During the last twenty-five years or so, the Sudan has been transformed into a neo-liberal, faltering and corrupt (oil) economy under a self-proclaimed Arab Islamist regime. All these transformations I have seen reflected upon *ṭumbura* itself, whose practices have been changing along. In this paper, I shall describe two of these changes, showing how *ṭumbura* has gone beyond the world of spirit possession *per se* into the realm of witchcraft and – strangely – how it has used its ‘black’ fame to become more respectable. But first, let me describe the cult and its people.

### *The ṭumbura cult and the Sūdānī people*

As already mentioned, *ṭumbura* has been traditionally practised by slave descendants and migrants to the north from the nineteenth century slaving grounds in western and south-western Sudan, the Nuba Mountains, the Blue Nile Province and South Sudan. The cult’s main centres of activity are urban low-class neighbourhoods and the shanty-towns sprawling at the edges of Sudanese cities. In the eyes of the hegemonic self-identified Sudanese Arabs, *ṭumbura* is an un-Islamic and barbarous practice, a form

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<sup>50</sup> A possible exception is Kenyon, 2012.





of malevolent magic and a proof of its devotees' assumed baseness and ignorance; all this despite the fact that very few of them have ever attended a *ṭumbura* ceremony; the cult and its milieu are beyond the pale of respectable Sudanese society.

For the cult devotees, the *zār* or *ṭumbura* spirit is considered to be a single entity which appears in many forms or modalities, usually taken from their historical experience. These include Nubawī, Bandawī and Gumsawī, representing African tribes to which many devotees originally belonged before their ancestors' enslavement;<sup>51</sup> the Sawākniyya and the Lambunāt, associated with the old port of Sawākin, from where slaves were exported to Arabia and Egypt; the Bashawāt, standing for the Turco-Egyptian army of the 1821-1885 period; and the *Khawājāt*, associated with the Anglo-Egyptian army whose 1898 invasion or 'Reconquest' led to the colonisation of the Sudan and to the all important (for the cult devotees) abolition of slavery.<sup>52</sup> Finally, alongside these historical stereotypes we also find *Shaykh* 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, the spiritual father of the Qādiriyya brotherhood, and Bilāl, the first *mū'azzin* of Islam and an Ethiopian slave, whom the *ṭumbura* people claim as one of them, a *Sūdānī*.

*Sūdānī* is a term of central importance for understanding *ṭumbura*. When I first met the cult devotees in the late 1980s, they called themselves *Sūdānī*, a collective identity standing in juxtaposition to that of Arabs. For my informants, the *Sūdānī* were the original and thus lawful owners of the land (*nās aṣlī*), whom the Arabs had enslaved in the nineteenth century; even so many decades later, in an era apparently remote from the pre-colonial days of slavery, Arabs still look down upon *Sudani*, often calling them slaves ('*abīd*).

Significantly, the *Sūdānī*-Arab antithesis was neither merely a rhetorical device nor a sociological lens employed solely by the *ṭumbura* people. Rather, it reflected the way the situation was perceived in the Sudan by the late nineteenth century slave-holding classes and was adopted wholesale by the Anglo-Egyptian colonial authorities. Certainly, to a degree the *Sūdānī*-Arab antithesis did essentialise both sides: on the one hand, it dismissed the African heritage of the self-proclaimed Sudanese

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<sup>51</sup>. For the Nuba, see Stevenson, 1984; Manger, 1994; for the Banda, see Slatin, 1896: 194, Seligman and Seligman, 1932: 463; Peterman 1941: 175-6; Santandrea, 1957; for the Gumuz, see James, 1986, 1988; Ahmad, 1988, 1997, 1999, 2000.

<sup>52</sup>. Makris, 2000; Kenyon, 2012. The 1898 invasion supposedly restored the Egyptian rule over the Sudan, that had been lost in 1885 through the Mahdist uprising; hence the 'Reconquest'.





Arabs; on the other, it disguised the Arabisation and Islamisation of the slave descendants and later of those migrants from the nineteenth century slaving frontier lands.

But this is neither here nor there. For older *tumbura* devotees and their immediate descendants, the iniquity of slavery and its attendant historical burden should be seen as part of their everyday reality in the urban centres, where an Islamic Arab riverain cultural outlook has been traditionally equated with a quintessential Sudanese identity. That was the case back in the 1980s and *mutatis mutandis* this is the case today.

It is this sedimented sense of historical injustice that has situated the *Sūdānī*-Arab antithesis at the centre of the *tumbura* universe. There, it constitutes the bedrock upon which the cult has developed as a ritual discourse through which its subaltern devotees articulate a positive self-identity: rather than unsettling or resisting a **gendered** ‘over-determination’ *à la zār boré*, as Boddy has shown, *tumbura* problematises and subordinates a **cultural** ‘over-determination’, one with a strong ethnic –almost racial – dimension, as well as class and religious tags, which all point towards alternative subaltern readings of history and subjectivity. How is this done?

#### *Tumbura as a humanisation process*

Being related to slavery, the *Sūdānī tumbura* devotees are seen by the hegemonic self-proclaimed Arabs as inferior and more specifically as (i) people without real descent – meaning without the long patrilineal descent that Sudanese Arabs claim to possess; (ii) people who are barely religious – i.e. pagans or second-class Muslims; and (iii) people without history – as slavery had cut them off from their tribal traditions and any form of agency. For the slaving classes, the slaves and their descendants are ‘speaking animals’ (*ḥayiwānāt al-nāṭiqā*). *Tumbura* turns all this on its head.

As argued in my initial study of the cult (2000), people approach *tumbura* seeking remedy for what we would call psychosomatic ailments ranging from migraines and body pain to partial blindness or paralysis. These disappear after a long ritual process and the victims, though possessed for ever, never become ill again; the spirit is transformed into a source of blessing. Showing their gratitude, the ex-patients are initiated into the cult. During the seven-day initiation ceremony, possessed by the spirit in its various forms, the devotees dance ecstatically to the sounds of a lyre (*rabāba*) and *nagagīr* drums, under the watchful eyes of the *shaykha*, the female group leader, and the *sanjak*, the male *rabāba* player.



All *ṭumbura* ceremonies start with the *taṭrīq* homily where the *shaykha* recites the *fātiḥa* for Prophet Muḥammad, Bilāl, **our father** Adam and **our mother** Eve, and for previous cult leading personalities. The *taṭrīq* ends with the new devotee's name. In this manner, he or she is proclaimed an ordinary human being, progeny of Adam and Eve and possessor of a ritual descent line of forefathers. The whole process is done in the name of God and his Prophet, thus showing its religious character, and is situated within the framework of mainstream Sudanese Sufism. A sacrifice is offered to *Shaykh* 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī, whose popular Qādiriyya ṣūfī order has been historically friendly towards slave descendants and other subalterns, and the *shaykh*'s blessing is transferred to the new cult member.

But *ṭumbura* goes further than asserting that its members are truly human beings and good Muslims, just like the Arabs. It actually claims that its *Sūdānī* devotees are **better** than the Arabs, presenting them as the real owners of the land. This is done through the more than one hundred cult songs, which are performed during the ceremonies. Forming a *Sūdānī* mnemonic archive, these songs describe the devotees' historical travails. As the possessing spirit modalities and their corresponding songs are fused ontologically, we can say that through initiation into *ṭumbura* the fragments of the devotees' historical experience, shattered by slavery and oppression, are joined in a harmonious whole. No longer slaves but *nās aṣlī*, original people and lawful landowners; no more victims but victors in an on-going struggle against subjugation. I called my 2000 book on *ṭumbura* 'Changing Masters' because through initiation into the cult, the subaltern devotees free themselves from the erstwhile slave masters, stereotypically described as Arabs, and submit to *Shaykh* 'Abd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī in his dual nature as a spirit modality and a ṣūfī man of God. Finally, if this is the case, it would be more appropriate to see the possessing modalities of the spirit not as representations of **otherness**, as in the case of *zār boré*, but as refractions of the *Sūdānī* self, whom *ṭumbura* ceremoniously reconstitutes.

#### *Ṭumbura and the army*

As my ethnographic material suggests, this transformation or changing of masters is effected through initiation into *ṭumbura* through a discourse which has features that are salient to war and the life of soldiers. Its crowning moment is the song of *Ṭumburanī*. This comes at the very end of a series of songs relating to the previously mentioned *Khawājāt* spirit modality. The songs chronicle, in an often elliptical manner, events that took place from the time Khartoum fell to the Mahdists (1885) until their



destruction in 1898 and the establishment of colonialism.<sup>53</sup> All devotees stand up, some of them wearing items evoking British soldiery, as the *sanjak* joyously proclaims *Ṭumburanī* ‘King of the Sudan’.<sup>54</sup>

To understand this joy and the generally positive feelings that *tumbura* people often exhibit towards colonialism, we should remember that the colonial regime outlawed slavery. It is well known that the Anglo-Egyptian attitudes towards slavery were at best ambivalent.<sup>55</sup> However, there is no doubt that a sea change occurred on this front after 1898, as numerous accounts from older informants suggest, pointing out how *al-Inglīzī* had given them or their parents their freedom, how straightforward they were and how compassionately they looked upon the *Sūdānī*. Additionally, we should also take into account that many of the early *tumbura* devotees were soldiers of the ‘black’ or ‘Sudanese battalions’ of the victorious Anglo-Egyptian forces. As it were, the ‘Reconquest’ had landed the *Sūdānī* among the winners and had given them the opportunity to crush their erstwhile Arab masters.

It would not be wrong then, to characterise early *tumbura* as an army cult, especially if we remember that the *Sūdānī* soldiers were followed in their numerous campaigns and into retirement by their families. It is among such army people, men, women and their children, that the narrations I managed to gather situate the development of *tumbura*; it is among these people that Seligman (1914) observed two *tumbura* ceremonies in 1909 and 1911; people are depicted dancing ecstatically near a *rabāba* in the previously mentioned 1897 lithograph (Lamothe, 2011); it is to these people that Kenyon (1991a,b, 2012) refers in her detailed study of *tumbura* in Sinnār.<sup>56</sup>

However, the cult's symbolism also points towards the army.<sup>57</sup> For example, the titles of the *rabāba* lyre player and his second-in-command, *sanjak* and *brigdār*, are military ranks of the Turco-Egyptian and Anglo-Egyptian armies respectively; *liwā*, a now extinct *tumbura* office, also refers to the Anglo-Egyptian forces; one of the four flags hoisted during the ceremonies is the Anglo-Egyptian flag used during the 1898 invasion, while another one bears a striking resemblance to the standard of the

<sup>53</sup>. For an analysis of the songs, including their original Arabic text, see Makris, 1994.

<sup>54</sup>. Ibid, 2000.

<sup>55</sup>. The literature on the subject is huge. Indicatively, see Warburg, 1978, 1981; Hargey, 1981.

<sup>56</sup>. The preeminent authority on Sudanese military slavery is Douglas Johnson (1988, 1989, 1992).

<sup>57</sup>. See Seligman, 1914; Makris, 2000; Lamothe, 2011; Kenyon, 1991, 2012.



Mahdist slave troops (*jihādiyya*);<sup>58</sup> devotees holding sticks as if they were guns stand to attention guarding the *rabāba* during specific phases of the rituals.

All in all, it would be fair to say that *tumbura* flourished within army camps up until the 1898 invasion and then spread in the low-class neighbourhoods and shanty towns where most of the older soldiers retired with their families alongside other subaltern populations of slave descent.<sup>59</sup> Firmly rooted in the institution of nineteenth century military slavery, the cult developed in these sites as part of a subaltern urban culture, articulating an understanding of history alternative to that of the hegemonic Sudanese (self-identified) Arabs.<sup>60</sup>

Things changed progressively as this localised subaltern culture was enriched by waves of non-Arab rural immigrants and lower classes of Arabs, who augmented the population of these neighbourhoods and altered their ethnic composition. Crucial in this respect, too, were the complex processes through which these sociologically disparate categories were transformed into workers. An army past, with all its slavery-tinted glory, could be easily drowned in the rough seas of proletarianisation, the common fate of many different subdivisions of subalterns as the country moved down the road towards decolonisation and beyond. Apparently, the *Sūdānī* identity of the *tumbura* people was weak, even when it first emerged, although it continued to exist.

Especially after independence (1956), new fault lines emerged with the civil war and new loci of identity side-lined the hitherto more or less clear distinction between slave-related *Sūdānī* and dominant Arabs. It never disappeared of course, but as a distinction salient to the people's everyday experience, it became complicated not only for demographic reasons but also because it was situated under the overarching identity of Sudanese nationality and the struggle for its soul. The Arabisation of previous generations of subalterns moved much more rapidly than before, while at the same time younger rural migrants could retain close contact with their natal culture, something by definition impossible for slaves and their

<sup>58</sup>. Interestingly, this is the only symbolic reference to the Mahdist regime, if this is really the case. In agreement with the idea that the *tumbura* spirit modalities represent the **self** rather than the **other**, there is no modality corresponding to the Mahdists. On the whole, the Mahdiyya is absent from the ceremonial of *tumbura*, except as a background in songs narrating army- or slavery-related stories.

<sup>59</sup>. Ibid.

<sup>60</sup>. In his *Slaves into Workers*, Sikainga notes when referring especially to the *zār* cult, how the '[e]x-soldiers were responsible for the dissemination of many cultural traits from their home areas into the northern Sudan' (1996: 110).





descendants. In this context, the term *Sūdānī* shed its previous subaltern connotations and came to define Sudanese nationals,<sup>61</sup> thus rendering the (*Sūdānī*) *tumbura* devotees sociologically invisible as a distinct category and the cult itself at odds with the new social realities.

### *Towards a new future*

Things came to a head in the 1980s and 1990s when *tumbura* experienced a sharp decline, though most probably the decline had started much earlier.<sup>62</sup> From at least 100 groups in Greater Khartoum it went down to 15 or less. As the old generation of officiants and ordinary devotees was passing away, fewer came to replace them. I vividly remember what 'Awad, brother of the famous *sanjak* Muḥammad Jābir, who had recently died, told me in 1996: 'from the moment I became a civil servant (*muezzin*), I left *tumbura*. It is not for me anymore.' 'Awad was not only a member of a famous *tumbura* family; he was a *sanjak* himself in a period when the actual number of *sanjaks* was rapidly declining. Today, there is only one left in Greater Khartoum and he is well into his 70's. 'When Muḥammad 'Alī dies, we will bring the *rabāba* outside in the courtyard (during the ceremonies) and will sing the songs', I was told by *Shaykha* Nūra, the most active female *tumbura* leader in the capital. This has not happened yet but it is in the offing.

Other things did happen, though, during those lean years. From a non-gender-specific cult, *tumbura* became almost entirely practised by women; men abandoned it as the process of Arabisation offered them comparably more opportunities within the context of the hegemonic Arab Sudanese culture. The first ceremony I ever attended was revealing in that respect. The *sanjak* was sitting at the western side of the courtyard facing across the empty space reserved for the dancers, the four *tumbura* flags at the eastern side. The drummers were immediately on his right. The northern side was full of the female devotees (*banāt al-'idda* or the girls of the ceremonial paraphernalia). The southern side, on his right, was empty. It was reserved for the *awlād al-'idda*, the boys or male devotees. However, in my experience they never really came as a group, although

<sup>61</sup>. This process had started in the 1920s among the Arab élites but took decades to involve the wider population. South Sudan's independence in 2011 and various revolts elsewhere suggest that the process of defining what exactly *Sūdānī*/Sudanese means is far from being concluded.

<sup>62</sup>. The majority of the older devotees I met in the 1980s presented the colonial period as the golden era of *tumbura*. Twenty five years later, older devotees talk about the days of President Ja'far Numayrī in the 1970s. Admittedly, the 1970s was a relatively good period at the level of the political process, especially after the 1972 peace agreement with the South. I still remember Numayrī's photograph that my main informant *Shaykha* Ḥalīma kept near that of her daughter's wedding.





one or two would sometimes appear at a ceremony. To me this indicated that the few male devotees that I saw were the last of a dying breed. ‘They will come next time’, I was assured repeatedly and my informants continued to declare *tumbura* to be both male and female in terms of clientele. It was only elderly Wad al-Gibél, a trusted informant and close friend, who told me some time later that men had practically abandoned *tumbura*. They had jobs, houses, families and reputations; he had none, he only had *tumbura*.

In this context, the cult gradually lost much of its *Sūdānī* relevance in the eyes of its (less numerous than before) younger devotees, most of whom were young Nuba women who had come to Khartoum in the 1980s or were offspring of a previous generation of migrants. Such people sang the songs but did not realise their meaning; they participated in the ceremonies but did not understand the motions involved. Having seen *zār boré* around, they started experiencing *tumbura* like another version of *boré*. It was revealing that not a few of them claimed to be possessed by **both** *tumbura* and *boré*, something unheard of among older cult members, who referred to *boré* scornfully as a money-making fraud and a lewd dancing event which afforded Arab girls the opportunity to misbehave away from their menfolk.<sup>63</sup> I still remember how utterly incensed the *sanjak* and older cult members became once when the ‘girls’ performed several *boré* songs in an interval of a *tumbura* ceremony – although significantly with the tacit consent of the relatively young *shaykha* of the group. Today, the *shaykha* has the most active *tumbura* group in the region.

All this took place during a difficult period, whose milestones make depressing reading: the introduction of Islamic law and the recommencing of a brutal civil war between the North and the South (1983); civil insubordination and the return of an anaemic, factional and ineffectual democracy (1985); mass poverty, collapse of the market and dashed hopes, an army coup supported by the Islamists (1989) and the beginning of a concerted process of Islamisation of public life – that banned the celebration of all forms of *zār*, which since then has functioned more or less clandestinely.<sup>64</sup> Inexorably, this regime change

<sup>63</sup>. Is it not interesting how totally the *tumbura* people had adopted the hegemonic Arab male discourse on *zār boré* which emphasised exactly these issues?

<sup>64</sup>. Having been there, I can testify that the first covert *tumbura* ceremony took place in the house of *Shaykha* Maryam in the neighbourhood of Bānat Sharq in Omdurman on 3 August 1989, a month after the coup of 30 June. It was a relatively small affair that did not attract attention. After so many years, I have realised that the police intervene only in cases of inside information, which are indeed rare and as such later



led to the intensification of the civil war, an assumed connection of the country with terrorism ('Carlos the Jackal' and Usama bin Lādin resided in Sudan in 1991-94 and 1992-96 respectively), a US Embargo (2002-), the genocide in Dār Fūr (2003-), market deregulation, corruption and nepotism. Even the surge in the economy during the first decade of the present century, buoyed by oil exports and peace with the South, did not really translate into higher living standards or better services for the majority of the population. Mostly those who benefited were close to the governing elites and foreign concerns. Subsequently, the 2011 secession of the South and the subsequent drying up of oil revenue, put even more pressure on an already fragile economy.

Such harsh conditions, which profoundly hindered the celebration of costly ceremonies for those who were prepared to brave the police ban, as well as the seemingly partial transformation of *tumbura* from a *Sūdānī* cult into a non-Arab version of *zār boré*, made me think that *tumbura* would disappear or be radically '*borésised*'. I was wrong on both counts.

In that atmosphere, *tumbura* managed to survive, with its leaders 'marketing' it as a **veritable** Islamic tradition in a manner that made it attractive to a **non-Sūdānī audience**, hitherto not connected to the cult of the *zār* spirit.

### *Islamic magic*

While continuing to manage affliction that was attributed to possession by the *zār* spirit, albeit less frequently than before, in the last few years the Greater Khartoum *shaykhas* have also dealt with problems related to '*irūg*', a form of magic that until then was treated by male Muslim traditional healers.

'*Irūg* can be a natural substance like a piece of wood or a small wrapped piece of paper with spells written on it, which a magician hides in the victim's house thus causing illness or misfortune. Using their own traditional divination methods, i.e. those employed in order to ascertain possession by the *zār* spirit, *tumbura* officiants can unearth these substances and send the magic back to its author. At other times, the *tumbura shaykhas* prescribe the use of '*irūg*' as a defence against malevolent intentions, often related to job antagonisms or unwanted transfers of employees. Having thus acquired a reputation, the *tumbura*

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become part of the cult's lore. It is worth considering here that *tumbura* ceremonies constitute less of a target than the much more popular *boré* events. After all, they concern the lowest of the low, so to speak, and take place in neighbourhoods where the police would not venture without second thoughts.



*shaykhas* attract their ‘clients’ not only among non-Arab subalterns, but also among people of Arab descent (office workers, professionals or civil servants). What is more, *tumbura* officiants claim that they combat ‘*irūg* magic **in the name of Islam** and only because they themselves are pious Muslims, who pray, fast and follow their forefathers’ religious customs (*tuqūs*). Instead of a *Sūdānī* spirit possession cult, *tumbura* is now presented as a **genuine** Sudanese Islamic customary ritual.

From this angle, it could be reasonably suggested that *tumbura* has developed a two-tiered strategy. On the one hand, it still celebrates classic possession cases following the ritual procedures I had initially observed in the mid-1980s, which culminate in the seven-day initiation ceremony of the ex-patient – though this is considerably delayed, much more than in the past, until the necessary funds are amassed. On the other hand, it treats ‘*irūg*-related and other such cases in a more or less private fashion. Visits are few and the final thanksgiving ceremony, though modelled upon the initiation ceremony, does not function this way. Such ‘clients’, so to speak, stay aloof from the group and its social milieu, which after all retains its association with non-Arab subalterns.

The following example is typical. A young Arab lady, a university graduate with professional experience and long-time residence in the Gulf, told me she had first heard of *tumbura* through the family servants, when all her attempts to deal with company problems had failed. Her initial contacts with the group, in the low-class neighbourhood rarely visited by people of her social status, was almost terrifying. But ‘*al-Hamdu lillāh* [praise God], *Shaykha* Nūra understood everything’ and solved her problem. Several times in the house of the *shaykha* I have seen this lady, often accompanied by Arab friends of her social status, whom she brings along to meet the *shaykha*. They always sit in the background, silent and withdrawn. How different they are when we discuss things over espresso coffee and sweets in the posh Ozone Café in the centre of Khartoum – whose existence is not even known among my *tumbura* friends in the low-class neighbourhood.

#### *An African familiar*

There is a key to understanding all this. Even under its present guise, *tumbura* has not shed all of its potent subaltern *Sūdānī* character. More often than not, *Shaykha* Nūra and other *tumbura* leaders fight ‘*irūg* magic assisted by the spirit modality of black Bandawī, aka Azraq Banda. Still described as a vicious looking naked black man or a ferocious crocodile



from southern Sudan,<sup>65</sup> Bandawī enjoys a newly-found autonomy that was not there before. From being a spirit modality functioning within the cult ceremonial when activated by its attendant songs, Bandawī has now become a free agent, an ally or servant of *shaykhas*, almost like the familiar of a classic witch.

In relation to the cult's assiduously cultivated Islamic profile, these new developments – a preponderance of 'irūg-related problems and Bandawī's autonomy – are important for two reasons. First, the cult's Islamic credentials as an 'irūg fighting agent are duly acknowledged, while its magical potency through an association with the power of the African **other** is further underlined. What we have then, is an affirmation of the cult's power through an oblique reference to its **otherness** but the latter appears subordinated to the *tumbura*'s Islamic profile. The cult's *Sūdānī*-ness re-emerges in the shape of the terrifying African Bandawī, which is domesticated in the service of the cult's self-styled impeccably Muslim officiants. 'Bandawī is helping me because I trust God and His Prophet. Everything comes from God, Makris, everything', I was told emphatically by *Shaykha* Nūra time and again. And the government people, those who accuse *tumbura* and *zār*? 'These are not Muslim! No, no, no, these people with beards look after their stomach.'<sup>66</sup>

Secondly, to return to what has been said earlier, the *shaykha*'s 'clients' are kept quite independent of the cult group. They certainly pay for the service but no initiation into the cult is demanded as in the past. Are they possessed by the spirit? I do not know and, interestingly, they also cannot offer a clear answer. The spirit, as a rule Bandawī, is there, usually in their dreams or more rarely as a presence they see and feel around them, sometimes as a voice. But possessed? The picture I have managed to put together is hazy, perhaps because we are in an area where the general transformations the cult is going through have not yet crystallised.

One is tempted to associate this construction of atomised relations within the Islamic magical universe of *tumbura* with the current socio-economic difficulties in a deregulated Sudanese economy. Indeed, such an association becomes evident when we consider the particular problems and personal difficulties that *tumbura* officiants are often called to resolve

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<sup>65</sup>. Often mistaken for the Azande, the Banda live in Baḥr al-Ghazāl State bordering the Central African Republic. Supposedly ferocious cannibals, the Banda formed the backbone of Zubayr Pasha's slave army in the 1860s-70s, the *Sūdānī* soldiers par excellence. See note 5.

<sup>66</sup>. Stereotypically, the people who have grown beards are identified as Islamists and as friendly to the government.





with the help of Bandawī: job insecurity and travelling abroad. Among the cases recorded is that of a mechanic with long experience in Libya who lost his job and returned to Khartoum in 2008. The *shaykha* found him a new job with an oil company in Heglig. Another case was that of a 'manager' facing compulsory early retirement. Not only did Bandawī help him, as a crocodile he also threatened some of his co-workers. The manager's name disappeared from the retirement list.

Similarly, *tumbura* can effectively safeguard against enemies or rivals in the work environment, as in the case of a senior manager I had the opportunity to observe in 2011. Those resorting to *tumbura* are given some magical substances and instructions on how to use them – usually a powder with which the customer washes his or her face every morning and a piece of wood wrapped with paper, which the customer should always carry with him or her. These substances are allegedly effective even in other countries.<sup>67</sup> In the meantime, the *shaykha* burns incense for a number of days intoning the rivals' names that her customer has provided.<sup>68</sup> Another method is for the client to enter alone the room where the *rabāba* is kept and 'speak to it' right from the heart or alternatively to stand in the midst of a *tumbura* ceremony and pronounce the rivals' names in front of all the group members. As I was told, the *shaykhas* do not intend to harm these people, only to neutralise them. However, they are capable, if asked, of annihilating their customers' rivals in business, usually through castration. Sadly, I was also told that such cases have greatly increased because people have no money and are desperate for jobs.

### Conclusion

At the very centre of my study of *tumbura* lies the ingenious deployment by the slavery-related cult devotees of the *Sūdānī*-Arab antithesis, which constituted the discursive framework that was originally constructed by the self-identified Arab slaving classes to legitimate the enslavement of non-Muslim black Africans. In the hands of the *tumbura* people, this antithesis was turned on its head, declaring them not as helpless ciphers but as ordinary human beings wrongfully victimised by foreign invaders. Even more interestingly, this inversion was couched in a discursive medium that both sides shared, that of Islam. This offered a common

<sup>67</sup>. In this case, the senior manager was from Nigeria. He had heard about *tumbura* from his Sudanese driver while on a business trip in Khartoum.

<sup>68</sup>. In the case discussed here, the 'client' was from Nigeria. *Shaykha* Nūra had already pressured him to offer to organize the thanksgiving ritual, however, but he argued that the five year period for which he had asked the spirit to protect him from his rivals, ended in 2016.





ground upon which similarities and differences were continually negotiated by the cult devotees in the process of forging a positive self-identity celebrated through initiation into *ṭumbura*.

Of late, this process has taken an interesting turn with *ṭumbura* opening up to an 'Arab universe' which until then was closed to it. The key for this development has been the employment of *ṭumbura* as a veritable *Sūdānī* weapon against forms of magic associated with new dangers and antagonisms that arise from within a very fluid socio-cultural and political environment.

These transformations of *ṭumbura* compel us to rethink some of our anthropological categorisations. In our case, years of ethnographic observation have revealed that the anthropological category of spirit possession is rather too tight for a practice such as *ṭumbura*, which has come to exhibit parallels with contemporary forms of witchcraft prophylaxis that elsewhere in Africa anthropologists have related to rapid social change, urbanisation and the introduction of capitalist processes of production.<sup>69</sup> It is not that *ṭumbura* ceased to be a spirit possession cult and turned into a weapon against witchcraft. Rather, its spirit-related armoury and its (until recently) disparaged association with *Sūdānī* blackness, have found new applications in the solving of novel problems. Or, to put it differently, it is as if the current socio-political developments have inspired or perhaps compelled some of the cult officiants to rethink *ṭumbura*'s relevance and to reorient its capabilities over the course of their generation. Methodologically, this is something that only long-term ethnographic research can study or, indeed perceive, in detail. Patiently observing the passing of a previous generation of *ṭumbura* people and the emergence of a new one has indeed proved to be crucial for the mapping out of both continuities and changes.

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<sup>69</sup>. Geschiere, 1997; Moore and Sanders, 2001; Meyer and Pels, 2003.



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## Panel on Contemporary South Sudan

**Rosalind Marsden, Mawan Muortat, Benjamin Taban Avelino,  
Philip Winter**

### *Introduction*

Four distinguished speakers were asked to contribute to a panel discussion at the 2014 SSSUK Symposium about the situation in contemporary South Sudan. Each of them chose a different aspect to discuss and there was a lively question and answer session afterwards. What follows is a summary of their presentations taken from their speaker's notes and notes made at the Symposium and collated by the editor.<sup>70</sup>

### *Rosalind Marsden: 'South Sudan: What is the way forward?'*

Rosalind highlighted the gravity of the situation, especially for the many South Sudanese caught up in the conflict. On independence day, South Sudan had enjoyed huge international goodwill and support. It was a tragedy that, due to a failure of political leadership, many South Sudanese now felt that the ideals of the struggle had been betrayed. The last 9 months had seen grave violations of human rights. Tens of thousands of people had been killed, many of them ethnically targeted by both sides; 2 million people had been displaced; civilians had been killed inside hospitals, churches, mosques and UN compounds; women and girls had been subject to appalling levels of sexual violence; and millions were suffering from severe hunger. 100,000 people were still sheltering in UN compounds, too frightened to leave but living in miserable and squalid conditions. The UN was struggling to cope with this situation and had warned that both sides were mobilising for further fighting at the end of the rainy season in November.

### South Sudan peace talks in Addis Ababa

The peace talks under way in Addis since the beginning of 2014 under the aegis of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD), with support from the Troika (US, UK, Norway) and the EU, had made little progress and there had been repeated violations of the cessation of hostilities agreement. Deadlines given to the warring parties to agree on a transitional government had been repeatedly ignored. The one-sided

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<sup>70</sup> Any mistakes are the responsibility of the editor





power-sharing provisions of the Protocol on Agreed Principles on Transitional Arrangements, endorsed by the IGAD Summit on 25 August, had further damaged IGAD's credibility as a neutral mediator. What could be done to end the suffering?

The following steps should be taken by the international community:

**Increase pressure on the parties to stop the bloodshed and reach a political solution:** IGAD and the AU Peace and Security Council had repeatedly issued statements threatening consequences against those obstructing the peace process but no action had been taken. The US and EU had introduced targeted sanctions against some individual commanders on both sides and the EU had called for an expanded arms embargo but there was still no agreement on sanctions in the UN Security Council. Tougher action is required by the international community, including regional partners.

**Provide more humanitarian assistance** to prevent even worse food shortages in 2015 and press for unhindered humanitarian access. Continued fighting means that aid agencies are still not getting the necessary access to help those in need.

**Address the root causes:** if a transitional government was formed with many of the same people who had been in Government since 2005, there was a risk that they would soon start squabbling again and the government might even collapse. Nor would such a government inspire confidence among South Sudanese that it would be able and willing to carry through fundamental reforms of the kind required to address the root causes of the conflict. It was therefore important to continue work on the reform agenda in the Addis talks to ensure that any transitional government was committed to deliver against a clear set of reform priorities, particularly in areas such as security sector reform, economic reform, combatting corruption, natural resource management and governance.

**Ensure justice is done and grave human rights violations addressed:** South Sudanese were hoping that the AU Commission's 'Commission of Enquiry' would include strong recommendations for justice, accountability, reconciliation and healing that would help to end the cycle of violence. The AU Commission's report had not yet been published. It remained to be seen, for example, whether it would name names and recommend the establishment of a hybrid court. The nature of the report would be a key test of the AU's ability to handle justice issues.



**Support reconciliation:** Addressing the trauma inflicted during this and previous conflicts was perhaps the most important factor in preventing the reemergence of civil war. Reconciliation initiatives needed to take place at grass roots level so that victims of the conflict had a chance to be heard. This was an area where tribal chiefs, faith leaders, women's groups and other civil society elements could play an important role. The international community should help to support genuinely independent and inclusive reconciliation initiatives.

*Mawan Muortat: 'Reconciliation, local democracy and power'*

Mawan chose to focus on two main topics in his presentation: the need for reconciliation and for local government and decentralisation. He asked, 'What do South Sudanese want and what has stopped them having it?' What they want, he argued, is what anyone else wants and many have, i.e. peace, justice, prosperity etc.

The South Sudanese people adore their country and are staunchly defensive of it; they want its sovereignty and its unity. This was clearly expressed in the popular and widely recognised independence vote of January 2011. They, however, differ (often bitterly) on how the country should be organised and how it should be governed. This is of course true for every country but the destructive way in which people have historically expressed those differences has harmed the welfare of South Sudan and has created doubt about the commitment of South Sudanese to their country.

The factors which hinder South Sudanese getting what they want are numerous and complex, and cannot all be easily identified. I will name the major factors as I see them.

1. **Enormous structural challenges face South Sudan.** Development and the building of a new nation take a long time and South Sudan was and is very poor, lacking in skills and infrastructure and with a low level of investment.
  - a. There are no tarmacked roads linking the towns or regions of South Sudan, except the new Juba-Nimule road which was donated by the USA. Most roads become impassable during the long rainy season months.



- b. About 70% of South Sudanese have never attended school.
- c. Infant Mortality Rate (age 0 to 1 year) is 102/1,000 (world average is 50).
- d. Under 5 Mortality Rate: 99/1,000. (Uganda: 66, UK: 5).
- e. Maternal Mortality Rate: 2,085/100,000 (UK: 8.5/100,000).
- f. Several thousand people have yet to return and be resettled (and this was before the current crisis).
- g. 83% are based in the rural areas and they are subsistence farmers.
- h. Manufactured goods and over half of urban food supplies are imported from neighbouring countries.

## **2. Unrealistic expectations**

Over 80% of South Sudanese voted in the Referendum, of which 98.3% voted for independence.

- a. They were promised abundant potential wealth.
- b. They were expecting too much too soon.

## **3. Poor governance**

- a. Considering these unrealistic expectations, any government was bound to fail.
- b. However, the government of South Sudan contained many structural weaknesses which rendered it even less equipped to live up to the task.
  - i. Lack of capacity: wars and exclusion.
  - ii. Corruption and abuse of power: SPLM/A had no fiscal system when in the bush.
  - iii. Regionalism/Tribalism/Sub-tribalism: leaders of SPLA/M gained positions as a result of their fighting abilities and many of them are poorly educated and from rural backgrounds.
  - iv. Traditional leadership was undermined in favour of loyalty to the revolution.
  - v. Poor commitment to public service: jobs regarded as a source of wealth.



#### **4. SPLM's historical divisions**

- a 2004: Kiir versus Garang's loyalists
- b Riek Machar.

**5. Lack of commitment to working as teams within the SPLM:** unable to transcend differences and work together to achieve common aims.

**6. Northern threat:** international factors continue to adversely affect South Sudan.

- a. Borders: Heglig/Pan Thou; Abyei ; 60% security expenditure.
- b. Oil Shutdown: pluses and minuses.

**7. SPLA and loss of identity:** 70% of SPLA cohort are now outsiders: militia leaders etc, brought into the army as part of Kiir's 'Big Tent' strategy.

#### **8. Exploitation of ethnicity by politicians**

##### Ways Forward

We can improve the current situation. As a priority we need to address issues of poor governance and of unity and disunity.

We need to recognise that ethnicity is a factor that divides people in our country and accept and live with our differences. We have allowed divisions from the 1970's and 1980's to fester up until the present time. The SPLM became divided during the years of struggle and this was used by external forces to further divide us. This experience caused such hurt and pain that we have found it difficult to forget and forgive and this is leading to renewed violence now. We need to reconcile or we can't achieve our purpose of building a new nation.

One of our priorities needs to be justice and people who have committed crimes need to be identified and punished. There should be a process of truth and reconciliation, along the lines of the South African model, where perpetrators of violence admit their crimes and express remorse to their victims. At the local level we need a process of retribution and compensation where communities share responsibility for what has happened and compensation is paid.

Government corruption and nepotism could be addressed by restructuring and also by fostering the development of a credible opposition that is



capable of holding government to account. South Sudan is highly politicised and holding power is linked to access to wealth; civil servants should be technocrats rather than elected politicians in order to address this problem.

Decentralisation of power is needed so that wealth can be shared with all the regions and peoples of the country; at the moment only twenty percent of the nation's wealth goes to the regions. While decentralisation is a good idea, if wealth is shared along regional/ethnic lines, there is a danger of division within the regions as ethnic entities are not always harmonious units.

*Benjamin Taban Avelino 'The role of citizens in building a strong and effective democratic system of governance in south Sudan'.*

Benjamin wanted to express his opinion about what has happened in South Sudan and the role of citizens in building the state. He told the audience that he was not enthusiastic about independence at the time of the Referendum as he thought that the South was not ready for it economically. Also, the state was organised along ethnic lines and this was bound to cause political problems. Independence was to bring freedom and self-reliance for the people and the ability to move as they wanted. All South Sudanese have different experiences but Benjamin didn't feel free or independent in a context where inter-ethnic and political conflicts continued to ravage the nation.

When the war started in Juba in December 2013, the priority was to stop things escalating but the war spread all over South Sudan and the world. People are dead and scattered, internally displaced or exiled. Why did we fight for this? Kiir and Machar could have resolved their problems but they have been cowards and have hidden behind the citizens who are taking the bullets. The leaders should go and leave power to the people as South Sudan belongs to all of us.

Democracy in South Sudan is on a life-support machine and we need to find our own way as things cannot work in South Sudan as they do in Kenya or Zimbabwe for example, where the position of prime minister is created to appease opposing groups. Democracy means that people should choose their leaders and be able to express their opinions. Government should be based on the will of the people but this is not the case in South Sudan where it is the other way round. People are unable to hold their elected representatives to account but they have done nothing





about this, they have just kept quiet. The representatives of the people do not listen to what the people have to say. Citizens need to participate in public life and leaders should sit down together and compromise so as to agree on solutions to our problems.

There are some practical ways to save South Sudan from the current political crisis:

1. **The South Sudanese people as citizens should not be afraid to exercise their sovereign power of democracy**, remember the power of the people (citizens) is supreme.
2. **Civil society and community-based organisations should work together** in cooperation without contradicting each other if they want to challenge the authority of the government.
3. **The power of elected governments should be superior** to any section or part of the citizens; unless the citizens form a strong majority alliance, the authority of the government cannot effectively be challenged.
4. In the current political situation in South Sudan, **the citizens have the right to form community alliances** to demand the SPLM-led government steps down because of the murder of innocent civilians in Juba and misleading the people on the alleged coup to overthrow the government. This false allegation resulted in armed rebellion causing crimes against humanity and the displacement of over a million people.
5. **The people should be able to call for an independent and credible Interim Government** that is capable of commanding the trust and confidence of the people. This government would help reform the governance system, oversee a peace and reconciliation process and organise the first post-independence democratic elections.
6. **The citizens should be able to call for a South Sudanese people's representative conference**, to be constituted by representatives from all the ethnic communities in South Sudan, political parties, professional bodies, women and youth representatives, to decide the future of the country as the elected political representatives failed to hold the government to account.

These actions are necessary as they protect and save democracy.



*Philip Winter 'Searching for Security in South Sudan'*

Philip began by saying that we are witnessing a tragedy in South Sudan and it is the worst it has ever been. The new state is broken perhaps beyond repair and the responsibility for this lies with its leaders.

The leaders are not playing by the rules and neither are world leaders.  
All the actors are playing a different game, to use a footballing metaphor.  
The USA is playing American football  
The SPLM is playing Rugby Union  
The SPLM IO is playing Rugby League  
The ex-detainees are playing Australian rules  
The AU is playing soccer  
The EU is playing tennis  
IGAD does not know what game it is playing  
The UN is trying to find the rulebook.

The current peace talks are in trouble and continuing failure will breed chronic insecurity for the foreseeable future of South Sudan; we have only to look at Somalia and the Central African Republic to see this. The parties to the talks are not serious about the process, given the huge opportunities afforded to make money if they should grab power.

I am not sure what security is, as its definition varies between people: it's both personal, communal, public and state. The SPLA's role in security should be limited to the defence of territorial integrity and the borders of state.

On the personal level, security cannot be defined in an arbitrary way as you feel it or you don't. People live in societies and so there is communal security: those undergoing cattle raids, and abduction of adults and children, are not going to feel secure.

Public security means freedom of movement and of thought, too. Security in Juba is in the hands of the Security Services. On paper, the National Security organs have no powers of arrest, detention or interrogation. In practice, they have taken them and arrest, question and detain at will. If South Sudanese (who are largely illiterate) are stopped by the Security Services, they can't do much except appeal to relatives for help. The responsibilities of the police service have been consistently undermined by this illegal approach to security and the involvement of the SPLA in public security.



The SPLA is part of the problem and not the solution; the structures of the state are broken and security structures have no validity. It is going to take years to rebuild a sovereign state. Responsibility for this situation does not lie with external actors, even if IGAD is a mix of meddling and mediation, and the UN Security Council is divided and has limited leverage. IGAD has made fundamental mistakes but the process is set to continue.

Meanwhile, what can we do? My message to international organisations and NGOs is to work a bit more locally in the ten states of South Sudan i.e. both at county, *boma* and *payam* level, where they can tap into histories and local processes that help to build peace.



## Creative Writing from the Sudans

Djamela Majid, Dan L. Lukudu, Yasmin Sinada

### *Introduction by Djamela Majid*

‘Creative Writing from the Sudans’ was set up in 2013 by a group of friends passionate about the Sudans and eager to collect and publish writing that reflects some of the more positive aspects of the two countries. Much of the news about Sudan and South Sudan that informs opinions of them both is negative, yet those who have lived there or visited know that there is a lot more to the Sudans and their peoples than wars, politics and tragedy. It was this missing narrative that the project sought to redress.

With this in mind, plans were made to create a website, launch a competition to collect written pieces and prepare them for publication. The competition called for creative pieces of 3,000 words or less. This guidance was intentionally broad in order to attract a wide range of ideas and only religiously and politically orientated works were excluded. The competition was launched on the Creative Writing from the Sudans website and advertised through social media and word of mouth; the response was fantastic.

Within months of launching, the website had over 6,000 views from visitors in more than 50 countries. Entries came in from writers around the world, including Sudan, South Sudan, China, America and Germany. The writing was equally varied, with themes such as family, friendship, hospitality and hope permeating the pieces. Poems, short stories and factual accounts, as well as an epistolary piece and an interview with the South Sudanese hip-hop star Emmanuel Jal were submitted. The standard of the entries was inspiring and indicative of the rich heritage, culture and ethnic diversity of the two Sudans. The entries were published in the book, *I Know Two Sudans*.

After meeting Leila Aboulela at the annual Africa Writes event, the team at Creative Writing from the Sudans was fortunate in securing the support of the internationally acclaimed author, whose own work is strongly influenced by her experience in Sudan. After reading the shortlisted entries, Leila selected the three prize-winners, who received £100, £50 and £30 respectively. In first place was Stella Gaitano with a beautiful short story, *A Lake the Size of a Papaya Fruit* about a girl who grows up

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with her grandmother in South Sudan, translated from Arabic by Adil Babikir. The second prize went to David L. Lukudu who wrote *Ahmed Suk Suk*, an entertaining short story about a southerner who remains in the North following the separation of the Sudans. In third place was Mohamed Fakhreldin Omer with his entry *Greeting Khaltu Fatma*, a moving account of a visit back to Sudan. Leila was so impressed with the entries that she also awarded two Honourable Mentions to Elizabeth Harrison and Reem Gaafar for their respective pieces.

The book *I Know Two Sudans* is a unique artefact in itself; proceeds from sales have now reached over £2,000, with a reprint under way. All the money raised is being equally distributed between two causes: 'The Children of Sudan' and 'Confident Children out of Conflict'. The first is a charity set up by a group of young people living in the United Kingdom that aims to better the future of the youth of Sudan by helping to provide education, efficient healthcare and child sponsorship programmes, and to integrate youth projects for children all over Sudan, regardless of their race, religion or socio-economic background. The latter is an NGO based in Juba which has established a safe centre where survivors of gender-based violence and girls at risk of sexual exploitation and abuse are protected and reintegrated back into society.

The realisation of this book was made possible by a generous community of Sudanese and non-Sudanese who have been touched by their experiences in the Sudans, all of whom are eager to see the nations thrive and their strengths celebrated. Writers put forward their personal pieces, a distinguished author contributed her time and expertise and well-wishers donated funds for the prize-money, publication and launch party, where many supporters brought along their interest and enthusiasm. One backer commissioned three maps especially for the book and another sponsored two emerging Sudanese artists who contributed their fine works. 'Creative Writing from the Sudans' owes its success to a lot of people, many of whom have never met each other but all of whom share a love of the Sudans.

*I Know Two Sudans: An anthology of creative writing from Sudan and South Sudan* is edited by Djamela Majid, Amal Osman, Rod Usher and Ali Abdulla Ali Rahman, and is available for purchase from, [www.creativewritingfromthesudans.com/bookshop](http://www.creativewritingfromthesudans.com/bookshop)

Two extracts from the book are reproduced below.

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*Extract taken from 'The Gold Market' by Dan L. Lukudu*

“Lokule, you better not be dressed like that,” said Johnny, my older cousin. “A tucked-in new shirt and a new pair of blue Edwin jeans - no one dressed that way can come out of that market without being victimized.”

“No, no ... that’s not true,” I argued, shaking my head. “Nobody can ever pickpocket me, if that’s what you mean. I’m twenty... you know. It’s the elderly who’ve lost their senses.”

“My advice is - look casual and you won’t attract attention.”

“Don’t worry. I’m old enough to take care of myself.”

And off I went to the Omdurman Popular Market, in search of the best deals on sports boots.

\* \* \*

About an hour later, as I alighted from the bus and crossed the street, in the blazing Omdurman midday heat, I was not surprised to find the market so overcrowded. The hustle and bustle was as far reaching as the street, at least ten metres away from the market square. A distinct and tantalizing aroma of spiced *Shaiya*, or *Shawurma*, emerging from a restaurant nearby, filled the air, as I headed towards the stalls. Several vendors stood in the uncomfortable heat, behind their displays of various produce and other items. One man had a heap of ripe brown dates in front of him and he kept calling out “Fresh dates! Sweet dates! Come buy the best dates... dates, dates, dates!”

I passed the date-seller and a few other vendors.

When I reached a stall, next to another middle-aged salesman, I had to slow down, as the customers ahead of me appeared to have stopped moving. In front of the salesman, on the ground, was a large canvas sheet on which was a heap of grain - wheat. Next to this, were a bushel and several measuring cylinders. The salesman, dressed in a white *jallabiyah*, stood there addressing passers-by: “Famine... famine. All over the radio... famine, the TV... famine, the papers... it’s famine. Come people! Buy now! Tomorrow I won’t be coming, for famine is coming... so fast it’s coming!”

“Which radio?” asked a grey-bearded man.

“Omdurman radio,” replied the salesman.

“How come I didn’t hear that?”

“That’s the latest. You must’ve missed it!”

And then the salesman started again: “Famine, famine, famine. Radio Omdurman says famine... famine, famine. If I were you, I’d buy everything, for famine is coming, so fast it’s coming!”



Looking on, a broad smile appeared on my face. And I was not the only one. I noticed a number of people with happy faces, while they too stood listening to the trader.

The salesman must have noticed me smiling, as soon as some customers cleared the area in front of him. “Sharp-looking young man...,” he said, “I’m sure the family needs some grain?”

I shook my head and started moving on, still wearing the smile. To me it was always fun listening to such salesmen, cleverly attracting customers. And I had often wondered about how people like him are so persuasive.

I brushed past another slow traffic of customers - young and old, male and female, who were constantly stopping to buy or inquire about something.

As I left the row of stalls and strode to another, a short distance away, I heard a voice calling from behind me.

“Excuse me! Excuse me Mister!”

I turned to see two boys hurrying towards me. One was shorter, and he appeared to be in his mid-teens, while the other stood taller - about six feet - and looked almost my age. The younger one was dressed in a knee-reaching, white *jallabiyah*, while the other wore a nondescript shirt and a pair of dark trousers. Both youngsters had flip-flops on their feet and their appearance looked unkempt.

The pair stopped when they reached me.

### About the author

Dan L. Lukudu was born in Juba, in what is now South Sudan. He holds a Master of Science degree in Drug Discovery, from the School of Pharmacy, University College London, United Kingdom, and a Bachelor of Applied Science degree in Biomedical Laboratory Research Science, from Rotterdam University, in the Netherlands. His interest in Creative Writing arose from a culture of reading, from his days back in elementary, through to secondary school. He has aspired to write like world-renowned authors, whose work he has admired for so long. In 1997, while residing in the Netherlands, he enrolled on a correspondence-based Creative Writing course from the United Kingdom. Since then, he has used writing contests, reading, as well as independent research, to perfect his writing skills.



*The Baobab Tree by Yasmin Sinada*

A monkey from the forest leapt into their garden, landed;  
On top of the Baobab Tree

'*Sit al shai*, selling tea, smiley face, keeping cool;  
in the shade of the Baobab Tree

A handsome couple, eye to eye, longing so;  
Hidden in the shadow of  
the Baobab Tree

Above the head in the sky, steaming hot, blazing down;  
On the crown

Between the Niles, Blue and White, Tuti Island, green and calm;  
Stands alone

Where Tuti ends and they meet, at the Mogren, grows roots deep;

Omdurman, Dervish men, twirling round,  
dreads are long, heads are high;  
Across the yard

Children running for some gum,  
make a stop at Hamad's shop,  
On the corner

Funeral tent, stretching out, on the road from the house;  
Smiling down

Wedding chants, red and gold, henna hands, '*zaghroots*' long;  
Dancing is the Baobab

Old man, turban white, slow in pace, 'H' tattooed on his face, strolling  
by;

'*Tobed*' lady, wrinkly faced, making perfume with crocodile nails;  
smelling divine

Famous Gisma with her drums, back up girls and frantic fun,  
'*jirtik*' party, wedding dance;  
Shaking is, and in a trance;



Wedding night on a stage, long black hair, beautiful face,  
Outstretched arms and outstretched legs,  
The rest of her soft and shakes,  
Groom is swaying, feeling dizzy,  
No more free, is the Baobab Tree

Late at night or afternoon,  
All the women meeting soon,  
Drums are beating, dancing frenzy  
Dressed in RED, they are plenty  
This is '*Zaar*', the counselling sessions  
For the ladies releasing tensions.  
Recording stories on its knee  
Is, The Baobab Tree

Donkey carts on the street  
Selling carrots, pepper and beat,  
Crossed legged, '*markoub*' feet  
Is the farmer, feeling heat  
Next stop, the Baobab Trees

Fish market and '*basta*' sweets,  
Morada is full of treats,  
'*soug*' Khartoum is where you go  
get your spices when they're low,  
by the Nile in Bahri town  
Baobab is feeling down.

*Haboba's* house and crispy sheets  
'*Anghareb*' and '*bambar*' seats  
Furniture from rope and wood  
'*bakhoor*,' is the sandal wood  
Lifted up, in esprit,  
are the old Baobab Trees

Tamarind and Gungulez  
Foul soudaani and Aradeb  
Mullah rob, Dom and Loz  
Kisra, Shata, Balah and Moz  
Karkade and Lemon Tea  
Thirsty is the Baobab Tree



In Nyala, Kordofan  
Dongola and Port Sudan  
They all know the Baobab

They are Sudan,  
They are the crown,  
They are the branches and the roots  
Of the Baobab.

#### About the author

Yasmin Sinada

My mother is Czech and my father Sudanese. I spent my childhood in Prague, Aden, Khartoum and later on, in London. I did my postgraduate studies in England and worked as an IT consultant. Currently, home is Germany with my Sudanese husband and two sons, who are my full-time occupation.





## The Ghosts of Badingilu

Philip Winter

In the new nation of South Sudan the rhythm of life is mostly determined by the rise and fall of the White Nile and the seasonal rains which bring new grass to the savannahs and woodlands of this harsh but fertile land. On the east bank of the Nile, an open savannah, with patches of woodland, stretches from the river to the highlands of Ethiopia. It is a great wilderness, comparable perhaps with the Serengeti or the Kalahari, containing some seasonal watercourses and pools which last until the end of the dry season. One of these, Badingilu Pool, was described by Peter Molloy, in the 1950s, in three articles and a book, "The Cry of the Fish Eagle". As far as he knew, the pool provided the only water between the village of Lafon, about 100 kilometres east of Juba, and the Nile. It was used by elephants as they moved between the mountains and the river and also by giraffe, buffalo, roan antelope, eland, ostrich, tiang, hartebeest, zebra, reedbuck, Mongalla gazelle, warthogs, hyenas, wild dogs and lions. A variety of ducks, storks, pelicans, egrets, herons and ibis could be seen there too.

I never visited the pool when I lived in Juba in the late 1970s but I heard about it from the current Under-Secretary of the Ministry of Wildlife Conservation and Tourism, Charles Acire, then a young wildlife officer. He had gone there at the end of the first civil war, in 1973, and told me later that the animals were entirely undisturbed by his presence. During the war, I heard about the pool again: when the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) split into factions in 1991, Bor was attacked and many people killed. Survivors fled south, some down the main road to Juba and some through the bush in what they called the "Tingili Desert". Many of these survivors succumbed to dehydration and died as they tried to reach safety further south in the camps of Ame, Aswa and Ateppi. The SPLA, too, miscalculated early in the war when dispatching a unit of soldiers from Lafon towards Mongalla, believing that there would be water in the pool. The soldiers arrived and, finding the pool dry, sent a messenger to ask for help - help never arrived and a good number died of thirst.

Today, the people of the area refer to the wide-open spaces east of the White Nile as "the Sahara" – the place without water. Knowing this, I was cautious when I first tried to reach the pool with Matt Rice of Fauna & Flora International (FFI) in February 2011. Like Molloy sixty years

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before, we bashed straight through the bush from the Juba-Mongalla road, coming out into a shallow depression of dried mud which we thought to be Bala Pool. With only one vehicle and one of our tyres already ripped open by a tree stump, we decided to go no further but to camp where we were. Our reward was to see the largest number of wild animals I had seen in Southern Sudan since before the war, two species in good numbers, the Bohor Reedbuck and the Mongalla Gazelle. They seemed relatively tame, some stopping to look at us in surprise as we passed, others bounding off in graceful leaps. We also disturbed a venerable warthog, sleeping under the tree where we pitched camp, and saw a group of eland departing in the distance with a couple of ostriches. During the night, we heard lion, leopard and hyena calling.

A reconnaissance later in 2011 enabled us to establish that there was now a track across Badingilu which was used mostly by Murle people coming from Pibor with cattle to sell in Juba. Furthermore, Badingilu, gazetted as a national park in 1983 – the year the civil war broke out – now enjoyed in theory some protection and was endowed with a headquarters and a small ranger outpost, courtesy of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) and the United States' taxpayer. The rangers were nonetheless nervous when we asked to follow the track, explaining that they had just had a firefight not far away with soldiers from the nearby SPLA base, who were poaching in the park.

We could not return until January 2012, early in the dry season. This time we were given four rangers to guide and guard us, one of them a Murle who knew the track. But the rains of 2011 were poor and, after leaving the initial forest belt and crossing into dry grass plains, we found ourselves in a wasteland of heat and dust. We pushed on for more than 40 km, seeing no sign of a pool, other than a slight, dry depression which our guides insisted was a “khor” or seasonal river. We asked where the next water was and were told it was in the Khor Veveno, two days' walk ahead. So we stopped and camped in a small grove of trees, woken before dawn by two lions, one to the north and one to the south of us, communicating whatever lions communicate with their unmistakable roars and grunts. We rose at dawn and made our way back to Juba, disappointed that the fabled pool had apparently disappeared.

In the dry season of 2013, I got a new permit to go into the park and made overnight visits to Bala Pool, finding two waterholes much nearer the road, and also an area along the Nile, Fura, where we were told the animals drank if the pools inland were dry. The Bala waterholes were clearly well used both by wildlife and by poachers – the rangers showed



us an extensive poachers' camp they had dismantled, carting the skulls and horns of reedbuck, gazelles an eland and a hartebeest back to the park headquarters along with the desiccated carcass of a roan antelope.

Late in March 2013, the end of the dry season and backed up by six rangers, each with an AK-47 rifle and two magazines, we headed off once more up the track. Where in the previous year there had been dust and bare soil, the plains were still covered in metre-high golden grass. Mongalla gazelles and reedbuck burst away from us as we made our way slowly through the woodland and into the plains. Not far ahead of the place where we had turned back in 2012, we started to see a lot of kites and storks flying above the tree-line. Soon we found a depression in the road, in which there shimmered a little water, framed by fresh green grass. Storks and egrets flew off as we got out of the car. We had only an hour of daylight left so we made camp a few hundred metres off the track, overlooking another green, grassy depression. We heard the reedbucks' alarm whistle as we went to sleep under a bright moon. Later the sky grew cloudy. Later still a heavy wind blew and then, at 5 a.m. a few drops of rain sprinkled us awake. In the distance a lion grunted and a hyena howled.

In the morning, we walked south for half an hour. All of a sudden, we came to a shallow muddy pool, shrunk from its widest extent, in which a clump of catfish heaved and struggled to survive in the vanishing waters. A gaggle of Marabou storks stood in the shallow water watching, apparently unable to catch anything. We had at last found the elusive Badingilu Pool. On its bank, we also found the decaying leg of a lion, perhaps shot by a passing cattle herder. Its ignoble end made me think of the hundreds of thousands of animals shot in Sudan's two civil wars. heir loss has impoverished South Sudan just as its wars have impoverished its people; more than two million people died, some at this very pool, a place now haunted I thought, by ghosts both animal and human.

People recover in time, as wildlife populations can too, where the habitat remains intact, as in much of South Sudan. Wildlife there nonetheless remains threatened by the widespread availability of weapons and the sentiment that people are entitled to eat or sell their wildlife. So elephants and buffaloes in South Sudan have been reduced to the low thousands; both white and black rhinoceros may be extinct; zebra and giraffe, waterbuck and hartebeest are dwindling. Tourism, much extolled as a possible source of income more sustainable than oil, could help but is proving difficult to start in a hot country with little infrastructure, an



uncertain bureaucracy, a limited viewing season and animals mostly terrified of people.

That said, a start could be made, so that some of the urban population of Juba, currently full of United Nations' and NGO staff with little to do at weekends, could walk or drive through landscapes alive with reedbuck and gazelle and the larger animals could breed up again. Protecting the water points, patrolling the tracks and securing a couple of tented camps would reduce poaching and is not too ambitious a start. For the few who can afford it, tour operators could also hire planes to fly over the migrations, at present the easiest way to see them. There are one or two foreign investors interested in these possibilities but no investment as yet. As I left the ranger post at Gerikedi musing over the history of the pool, I asked the head ranger if he had had any other visitors. "No", he said, looking at me, "you are the only one who ever comes here."



## Sudan in British Comedy

Douglas H. Johnson

Sudan is not a likely subject of humour these days. I doubt that it ever became a staple of British music hall routines (in the way that Mafeking Night and British railway sandwiches did) but it has been the topic of the occasional understated joke in British films.

The first example I ever came across was in a film from the late 1950s or early 1960s of such understated humour that I have forgotten both its title and the names of its principal actors. It involved a young London couple seeking to hire a live-in housekeeper/baby-sitter. Their first hire was an elderly couple who explained that they had recently retired from the Sudan. It turned out that they were a pair of crooks using ex-Sudan civil servants' reputation for respectability to cover their real intention of tunnelling through the couple's basement into the vault of the bank next door.

The theme of robbers also figured in that excellent Ealing comedy, *The Lady Killers*, where the pet parrot of the elderly widow who rented rooms out to Alec Guinness' band of thieves was named 'General Gordon' and where there was at least one scene of the widow scolding the thugs for 'upsetting General Gordon'.

Sudan was a more sustained source of jokes in Rowan Atkinson's World War 1 TV series, *Blackadder Goes Forth*. Captain Blackadder frequently refers to how they used to do things in the Sudan and in the final episode he tries to get out of the upcoming offensive by sticking two pencils up his nostrils, wearing underpants on his head and feigning madness – 'an old trick I picked up in the Sudan'. Unfortunately his commanding officer (Stephen Fry) also served in the Sudan and once had to shoot an entire platoon for trying that ruse, so the plan doesn't work. Blackadder then begs a favour from another Sudan veteran, Field Marshal Haig (Geoffrey Palmer), having once saved Haig's life from 'a viciously sharp slice of mango'. Haig's only advice is to repeat the Sudan trick, so Blackadder has to go over the top with the rest of his men.

Sudan, and more particularly the Battle of Omdurman, were unlikely running gags in the now oft-rerun sitcom, 'Dad's Army'. The elderly veteran Corporal Jones frequently refers to his Sudan service and his 'When I was in the Sudan...' is as much a catchphrase as his 'Don't





panic!’ In the earliest episodes he claims to have been on the Gordon Relief Expedition but only Omdurman is mentioned in later episodes. The medal ribbons he wears do include the Queen’s Egypt medal and the Khedive’s Star issued for the 1884-5 Sudan campaigns, and the Queen’s and Khedive’s medals for the 1896-9 re-conquest.

Omdurman is explicitly portrayed in the episode ‘The Two and a Half Feathers’, a spoof on the popular book and film *The Four Feathers*. The Walmington-on-Sea Home Guard platoon is joined by a Private Clarke, who served with Corporal Jones in Sudan. He accuses Jones of having left him to die in the desert. Those members of the platoon who believe the accusation send Jones white feathers, a sign of cowardice, except for Private Frazer (John Laurie), the Scottish undertaker, who is too stingy to send him a whole feather and sends only a half.

Jones able to restore his reputation by relating what really happened in Sudan on the day before the Battle of Omdurman, a story that is recreated in retrospect with characters from the platoon appearing in various role reversals as characters in Jones’ story: Sergeant (the Honourable) Wilson and his unacknowledged son Private Pike (John Le Mesurier and Ian Lavender) as upper class officers, Captain Mainwaring (Arthur Lowe) as a foul-mouthed, bullying sergeant, the elderly and frail Private Godfrey (Arnold Ridley) as a Sudanese Fakir (*faki*), and Private Frazer and ARP Warden Hodges (Bill Pertwee) as Dervish warriors. It turns out that Private Clarke was a cad and Private Jones in fact saved his life. On the truth being revealed, Clarke absconds and Jones is vindicated.

As with all *Four Feathers* remakes (see ‘Why *The Four Feathers*? (why not seven?)’, *Sudan Studies* 34, July 2006) the Dads’ Army episode is less about Sudan and more about British attitudes to their role in Sudan. As with the original and the remakes it ends with honour restored.



## **Sudanese Journeys: of friends, nightmares and dreams**

**Lutz Oette**

*Life is a dream: only the pain is real*  
(loosely based on Voltaire)

### **FRIENDS**

I have been immensely fortunate and privileged to meet, work and spend time with a great many good people in Sudan. This joint endeavour has prompted me to write a series of reflections that, I hope, will invite further reflections and may even offer some insights.

This collection is first and foremost a tribute. A tribute to the men and women who have committed themselves to working towards a Sudan that is free, just, democratic and peaceful whilst remaining true to its culture(s). As anywhere else, this movement is not without its weaknesses and pettiness. Yet many people have gone to great lengths to make this vision a reality. Knowing what is at stake at this historical juncture, they are determined to break the cycle of misery and violence. My wish is to share some of this inspiration as a humble contribution to the ongoing struggle.

### **NIGHTMARES**

#### *LAW AND ORDER*

They broke the murmur and chatter of  
Men and women drinking tea in the evening market square  
Making their pick-up trucks shout as loudly as they did

One of them pushed a passing cyclist who nearly fell down  
Just like this for no reason, just for the fun of it, just because he could

Nothing had happened, no questions were asked  
They were gone like a whirlwind  
That must rear its ugly head then and again  
To remind people of the true masters



### *THE FOURTH FLOOR*

The weather isn't nice today, he said  
It's never nice on the fourth floor  
But the ignorant outsiders had to be told  
As they wouldn't get the usual treatment

Others needn't hear the weather forecast  
The dread of naked power being wired into the collective psyche  
Being taken to that floor  
One cannot expect to get off as lightly as we did

### *SHADY PEOPLE*

Some of them had shared the meal  
While they were waiting to pounce  
Beware the bogus guests in your midst

Pounce they did  
Menacing in their incompetence  
All shouting, pushing and shoving

Taking dozens of people calling for justice hostage  
While entertaining the African Union  
Letting dodgy plain-clothes officers run the show

Strange and weird, verging on the farcical  
No questions are ever asked properly  
Lingering rumours occupying the space of answers

### *A GIFT FROM JEBEL MARRA*

How wonderfully sweet they taste  
What a marvellous place they must grow in  
But not many are able to go there  
The oranges themselves are not innocent  
Reminding people of the peace and beauty that was



### *NUBA MOUNTAINS*

Its sleepy beauty barely covered the silently nurtured wounds  
Even the mountains had not escaped  
Carrying the literal reminders of the killers

No prompting is needed for the stories to emerge  
The undiminished memories  
Quietly fuelling the unbroken quest for justice

### *AT THE OMDURMAN NATIONAL DANCE THEATRE*

The riches of its music and cultures  
Where was it,  
In this travesty of national dance  
Where even supposed Southerners were obscured by headscarves

The selected few  
Beneficiaries and foreign visitors  
Were invited to admire the fake  
Of watching the grimace in the mirror

In the place at the heart of its nationalism  
The nation tiredly rolled out as a cliché  
Steadfastly refusing to accept people as they are  
I couldn't wait to breathe in the dusty air outside

### *TEDDY BEARS*

A comedy, a drama, a farce, a child's play?  
A superb cast to please the lot  
And feed prejudices on all sides  
The disgruntled employee, the hapless teacher,  
The tussling lawyers, the conciliatory ambassador,  
The rabble rousers, the righteous judge,  
The frenzied media  
Is this really happening, I wonder,  
I want to laugh but laugh I can't



### *THE CRY*

No introduction, just the name  
And then the story  
A frightening glimpse  
Into the abyss

The abyss of their soul, their families,  
Their country's darkest secrets  
Of killing one's brother's children in a fit  
and murdering one's sibling because he made too much noise

The killer in them is gone  
Bewilderment and despair filling the void  
Try them as much as you like  
There is no more punishment for those who lost their humanity

### *FAST FOOD ON AFRICA STREET*

Friends they claim to be  
Their inviting smiles neat and clean  
Dispelling the heat, the dust, the street  
Promising a carefree future

Come will the day  
When people will be aghast  
How they could ever fall  
For a cheap smile that cost so much

But these friends pay good money to stay  
And will forever smile at their prey with contempt  
For having allowed themselves to be blinded by their lies

### *BETRAYAL*

You were like a father  
You invited me to your home  
And even, jokingly, called me a son of your country  
Everyone admired your courage and commitment  
Standing firm when no one else dared

Why did you covet the money needed elsewhere  
We struggled to understand  
But going to bed with the very people

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You had claimed to despise and  
Who are out to destroy  
Put you beyond reach

Perhaps I should have known  
That night when you wouldn't stop drinking and sweating  
That you, of all people, had succumbed to those ever-present demons  
Flitting around with their crafty and brutish lure

A leader we lost, a friend, and a good man,  
But you lost the most precious of gifts  
That we can have for each other

I won't see you sweating again  
But with pain will I remember a man  
Who not so long ago seemed so remarkable  
But means nothing today

## INTERLUDE

### *IN THE MIDDLE OF THE NIGHT (ARRIVAL)*

Past a check point, the guards half-asleep  
Through empty streets dimly lit  
What a ghost town this was  
How can such a big place ever be so eerily quiet

Our knocks took an eternity to be answered  
Drifting off into a dreamless sleep  
I wondered what the morning would bring

## DREAMS

### *CONNECTIONS*

Idle they lie,  
Reminders of a future that never was  
Rusty skeletons  
their origins long forgotten

Frozen in the heat of those fateful days  
When civil projects were halted in the name of something bigger  
Announced by torturing those who had visions and cared

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With juniors administering dead ends

Some still dream  
Of people and goods rolling through the country  
A dream of a different future  
As vibrant as India

### *HOPE*

The children of years of suffocation  
Are coming of age  
Seizing the moment

Treating those who suffered rape  
Taking up cases of those who have been wronged  
Speaking out for peace and democracy

The old guard is wondering and hoping  
That someone will finally  
Break the seemingly endless cycle

### *A VISIT TO KHARTOUM*

She wore her head high and free  
He wore his uniform  
Hand in hand they walked  
The new Sudan having come to town

A revolution, a sign of times to come  
A dream for some, a nightmare for others  
But this was long ago  
The couple having gone back to the South to tender its own fields

### *NYALA*

In peaceful surroundings we sat, all tense,  
Remembering the heavy price  
And the lurking menace of war

In the wadi nearby  
Naked boys were frolicking around  
More carefree they could not have been  
Theirs was every right to claim life regardless

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### *THE MAD MAN OF EL FASHER*

He would come for lunch  
Choosing us as his audience  
He was hard to ignore  
For his speeches were too compelling

Compelling in their sheer intensity  
Not for their sense  
Compelling for their treatment of life  
Not for making sense

What was his point?  
Can there be one in a place like this?  
His speeches scribbled tightly on sheets of paper  
Hinting at method in madness

Some people laughed and tried to deride him  
But their glances sat uneasily  
There was more truth to this man  
Than we could even imagine to understand

### *NAKED*

Why was everyone staring at us?  
No, not us, rather the bare skin of my beautiful neighbour's arms  
matching her black sleeveless shirt

Everyone, men and women, had their eyes fixated  
magically drawn to her skin for different reasons  
blissfully unaware, she had awoken deep desires,  
desires of unfulfilled fantasies,  
dreams of liberation  
and of feeling at ease with being a woman

At the end of proceedings, she pulled over her jacket  
all the dreams and desires quickly receded  
to wait for the next trigger



*VALENTINE'S DAY*

All of a sudden our sleepy refuge is  
full of birds of paradise  
wearing emblazoned T-shirts and a swagger  
short skirts and an open laughter

This could be any global city  
With the deafening music setting the tune  
For hormone driven parading  
And seductive poses

Come the next morning  
The boys wear ordinary shirts  
and the girls don their veil  
all traces having disappeared

*HEAT*

In the cool you can relax  
and think, and work,  
to earn more money  
to keep it cool

All around, the scorching sun,  
The dust, the noise  
People struggling  
To cope

In the cool,  
You cannot hear  
the stirring rhythm of the heat  
burning itself deeply into the country's soul



*BELONGING(S)- ROOTS*

It carried us with a gentle swing  
And the beat of the Oud  
The perfect travel companion

Switching to cheap pop  
The car turned alien  
Out of tune with its surroundings

With its ugly and seductive appeal  
That nothing matters but fun  
Liberating people to be nowhere

What a relief for the ears and mind  
When we switched back again  
Returning a sense of here and now

*AT THE TEA LADY'S*

I was burning, restless and thirsty  
Then you invited me  
To quench my energies  
And stay

First you calmed me down  
Then I forgot where I was  
Time evaporated aimlessly  
Amidst the murmur

I barely noticed  
The coming and going  
Only when you rose in the evening sun  
Did I wake and stumble into the darkness





Mark Fathi Massoud, **Law's Fragile State: Colonial, Authoritarian and Humanitarian Legacies in Sudan**, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2013, ISBN: 9781107026070 hardback, £60.

The author's family fled Sudan in 1983 and he grew up in the USA, returning to the country only in 2005 when he was a graduate student at Berkeley, University of California. In the Introduction, he recounts that when he told 'a well-respected Sudanese lawyer' that he was researching a book on law in Sudan, the reply was that, 'Your book will be a very short one'. Far from it. As a non-lawyer I found it fascinating and eye-opening with regard to the evolution of the state, politics and law over the period from the reconquest in 1898 to 2011.

The book opens with a chapter entitled, 'Lawfare and Warfare in Sudan', which lays out the core of Massoud's thesis: that forms of legal order can exist even in conflict-prone countries. However, that law may not be 'liberalising', in the way generally associated with Western approaches to secular-based human rights law and the separation of powers, so much as the kinds of controlling systems that authoritarian states may establish in the name of ideologies, whether secular or religious.

Massoud starts with the centrality of law in the work of district commissioners in the Condominium. DCs spent much of their time concerned with law, whether as magistrates themselves or touring to inspect *inter alia* the numerous Native Administration courts established in the inter-war years; with Sharia Islamic courts for family matters alongside. In addition, the 'benevolent despotism' (the author's term) established the Kitchener School of Law in 1936 to train Sudanese lawyers in the traditions of the independence of the judiciary. The law itself was pluralistic, being drawn from a variety of backgrounds including British, Indian, and Egyptian legal codes as well as the customary law of Sudan itself.

Much of that is generally fairly well known: it is in the developments after independence as politicians and the judiciary clashed that the authoritarian mode of law developed. Massoud dates it from the mid-1960s, when Parliament clashed with the judiciary over its decision to dissolve the Sudan Communist Party, which in the eyes of the judiciary was contrary to the existing (though still provisional) constitution. The Chief Justice at the time was Babiker Awadallah, who resigned, though he was to continue to play a major role in this story. From then on, law was in a state of crisis at least until 1989. Nimeiri's early involvement with Nasser contributed to a shift from common law to more Egyptian-



style civil law (*'qanoon Nimeiri'*), and under the new Permanent Constitution there was much confusion. However what was clear, according to Massoud, was that the political elite rather than the judges controlled the legal system. In addition, this authoritarian trend was emphasised in the midst of Sudan's political instability by the political elite's fear of the potential political power of the judiciary and lawyers more generally. The profession had been at the centre of the 1964 revolution and was frequently involved in various protest movements: it needed to be brought under control. The most notorious form of legal intimidation during Nimeiri's years was his introduction in 1983 of Sharia (*'qanoon September'*) and the grotesque punishments carried out under it, before his downfall to a second popular uprising in 1985. But that was not to be the end of it, for the restoration of the old political elite did not lead to the repeal of Sharia, while renewed war in the south and general unrest elsewhere contributed to the coup of 1989. A new era of authoritarian law was about to commence.

I was aware that the Islamist regime brought in by Beshir's coup of 1989 turned on the existing legal profession and that a new sharia constitution was soon being harshly applied. What I had not realised was the scale of the new system being created, not only for the purposes of control but as part of building a new political-legal culture. It was not just criminals who had to adjust their thinking but in an often litigious society those seeking redress in civil law were being brought into the ways of Sharia. One obvious purpose was to legitimise the regime through the implementation of Sharia; but as the book makes clear, it resulted not only in the sweeping away of common law, but a fall in legal standards of all kinds with everything from legal education to the appointment of senior judges determined by the state.

Western backers of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement of 2005 hoped to bring the state back towards liberal democracy and millions of US dollars were poured in to encourage a Western approach to law, including people's empowerment training in Human Rights. Indeed it was in the course of such UN trainings that the author returned to the land of his birth. But it was an uphill task: not only were reciprocal duties more central to the popular culture than individual rights, the regime itself was giving nothing away: a God-given state implementing a God-given law, what could be better than that? Catch 22 all over again. As Massoud ends, 'Law has been suborned to serve the cause of despotism... refashioning legal tools into weapons.'

Peter Woodward

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# SSSUK

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## **Symposium on Contemporary Issues in Knowledge Production: Identities, Mobilities and Social Media**

**Khartoum, 18-19 February, 2015**

This symposium is organised by the newly-formed Sudanese Knowledge Society. It is not directly linked with SSSUK but members may find it of interest. Please do not contact SSSUK regarding this conference.

The organisers have issued a Call for Participation which is available on our website [www.sssuk.org](http://www.sssuk.org) The 'Information for Presenters' is reproduced below.

### *Information for Presenters*

#### Submissions:

- Please send your abstracts and a short bio (100 words) to [submit@skssociety.org](mailto:submit@skssociety.org) by 12 October 2014.
- Notification of acceptance will be sent to authors by 9 November 2014.
- Submitted abstracts should be 300 - 500 words.
- English is the primary language of the symposium. However, a translation service for presenters who prefer to use Arabic is available upon request, but on a limited basis.
- Symposium will be held on 18 - 19 February 2015 (Venue to be confirmed).
- Registration:
- Online registration will start on 1 December 2014.
- Free registration is our goal, but even if we do not get adequate funding, we will keep registration fees to a minimum.

Updates on this symposium will be posted at  
<http://kpimsm.blogspot.com/>



**Sudan Studies Society of the UK**  
**27<sup>th</sup> Annual General Meeting, 5 October 2013**  
**Khalili Lecture Theatre, SOAS**

**MINUTES**

**1. Apologies for absence**

Apologies were received from committee members: Andy Wheeler, Dan Large, Michael Medley, John Ryle, and from members: John Udal, Sarah Errington, Imogen Thurbon, Peter Everington, Wendy Wallace, Heywood Hadfield, Judith Large and Diana Rosenberg.

**2. Matters arising from the Minutes of the 26<sup>th</sup> AGM of 2012**

The minutes should have been dated Saturday 29 September 2012.

**3. Chairperson's report**

Douglas Johnson spoke about the current state of Sudanese studies in the UK and the increased interest in the two Sudans, partly as a result of the large Sudanese diaspora here. Presentations at today's symposium were evidence of the wide range of activities currently taking place across the country – at the Pitt Rivers Museum, the Sudan Archive at Durham and the Sudan Open Archive. Numerous theses about the Sudan and South Sudan were being written at UK universities and NGO and journalistic reporting had increased. He believed that the SSSUK existed to foster a more rounded appreciation of the peoples of the two Sudans.

**4. Secretary's report**

Gill Lusk thanked other committee members and El Fadil Elobeid of the RAS for their help in organising the symposium. She urged members to encourage more people to join the Society as more income would enable us to organise more events. Even though we did not pay for the hire of the room, we still make a loss on the annual symposium, so extra members would help financially and help us to have more activities.

**5. Treasurer's report**

Adrian Thomas circulated the approved accounts for 2012. He highlighted the cost of the annual symposium which requires a large subsidy and suggested that we may have to look at the charging structure at the next committee meeting. Printing costs for *Sudan Studies* had gone up slightly. Our main source of income was the membership dues which were slightly up this year. David Lindley was thanked for checking the accounts and all his efforts with regard to the Gift Aid refund. Another refund would be due in 2013.

Mansour Elagab asked if *Sudan Studies* could be made available at Sudanese functions and the Chair suggested that organisers of such events should get in touch. Mansour also asked if anyone from the Embassy attended the annual symposium and the Chair pointed out that the meeting was open to all. Invitations were not issued but all were welcome.





**6. Editor's report**

Jack Davies hoped that everyone approved of the new cover and title. He pointed out that there was only one article in the current edition of *Sudan Studies* by a Sudanese author and urged further articles from Sudanese members. He would like to retire soon, after edition 50, so we would need to identify a successor. He felt the front cover could do with a makeover so urged anyone with design skills to get in touch. The Chair thanked the Editor for all his work.

**7. Website**

There was no report from Michael Medley, the website manager who lives in Thailand. A vote of appreciation for Michael's work was unanimously passed.

**8. Elections for the committee**

Nominations for officers were proposed and elected as follows:

Gill Lusk as Interim Chair – nominated by Douglas Johnson

Adrian Thomas as Treasurer – nominated by Douglas Johnson

Jane Hogan as Secretary – nominated by Adrian Thomas

Andy Wheeler to continue as Deputy Chair - nominated by Adrian Thomas

Jack Davies to continue as Editor

Elected members were proposed and elected as follows:

Derek Welsby – nominated by Gill Lusk

Dan Large – nominated by Gill Lusk

Fergus Nicoll – nominated by Douglas Johnson

Sharath Srinivasan – nominated by Douglas Johnson

Previously co-opted members were proposed and accepted as follows:

Jacob Akol

Ahmed El Bushra

Michael Medley

Cherry Leonardi

David Lindley

Peter Woodward

John Ryle

The retiring Chair then handed over the new symbol of authority, a South Sudanese baton to the new interim Chair whose first duty was to thank Douglas for all his efforts over the past 6 years.

Jane Hogan, Secretary  
7 October 2013



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