
Does Darfur Have a Future in the Sudan?

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Does Darfur have a future in the Sudan? I ask the question because Darfur does not really have that much of a past in the Sudan. Despite a history of interaction with the Nile Valley, as much with Egypt as with what is now the northern Sudan, Darfur was not finally incorporated into the Sudan until 1916. Neglect by the centre, both in colonial times and since independence, has led to the emergence in the mid-1960s of political protest, culminating in a rebel uprising and a much-publicized conflict unfolding since 2003. Darfur's place within the Sudan has become an internationally debated question. Let me say at the outset that I believe Darfur's future lies *with* the Sudan—I prefer “with” rather than “in”—but it has to be with a Sudan that is ruled very differently than the present Sudan. But in order to discuss Darfur's place within the Sudan in the future, an understanding of the past is necessary.¹

THE GEOPOLITICAL BACKGROUND

In my writings on Darfur's history, mainly its precolonial history, I have never asked the question, is Darfur “naturally” a part of the Sudan? From an historian's perspective, the answer has to be no. The modern Sudan is the artificial creation of two imperialisms, Egyptian and British. In 1821, for reasons to do with his ambitions in the Middle East and toward the Ottoman Empire, Muhammad Ali, the ruler of Egypt from 1811 to 1848, invaded the Nilotic Sudan looking for gold and slaves, the latter to be used as soldiers, and in the process conquered and unified most of what

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is today the northern Sudan. He had seemingly also planned to invade Darfur, but a serious revolt along the Nile thwarted that plan. As it turned out, there was little gold and the slaves were too few, so Muhammad Ali turned to using Egyptian peasants as cannonfodder. From 1839 onwards, a motley collection of European adventurers, Egyptian and northern Sudanese traders, and others penetrated into the southern Sudan, looking for ivory and slaves. The great divide between the Muslim Sudan and the non-Muslim south had been breached. The Egyptian Sudan remained a wasting Egyptian asset until the Egyptians were swept away by a messianic revolution led by the Mahdi, a self-proclaimed messiah, in 1882–1885.²

In the same year, 1882, that the Mahdi manifested himself as the “divinely-guided” one, the British occupied Egypt. Because they had no interest in the Sudan, they forced Egypt to abandon it, sending Charles Gordon, who had been governor-general of the Sudan from 1877 to 1880 charged with suppressing the slave trade, to withdraw the Egyptian garrisons from the country. The Mahdist forces continued to make military gains, culminating in the fall of Khartoum and the death of Gordon in January 1885. The latter caused an outcry from antislavery circles and from Queen

Victoria, to whom Gordon was a hero.

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This British government indifference changed in 1896, when for reasons that had to do with European politics, the British decided to “reoccupy” the Sudan, allegedly on behalf of Egypt, using in part the Gordon myth as justification.³ By 1898, they had destroyed the Mahdist

state and gradually occupied Kordofan and the southern Sudan; in the same year, Sultan Ali Dinar restored the Darfur Sultanate, a development that the British, for the moment, acquiesced in.⁴ In 1916, largely because of the French advance eastwards from Lake Chad, the British decided to “pinch out” Darfur and occupied it, killing its ruler in the process.

The above is a brief and crude presentation of the wider geopolitical history of what today we call the Sudan. Ironically, Muslim Darfur has a shorter history as part of the Sudan than the non-Muslim south. Until 1874, Darfur was an independent state; it was conquered by the slave-trader al-Zubayr Pasha (d. 1913), who was then cheated out of his conquest when the Egyptians marched in on al-Zubayr’s heels and briefly occupied the country for some nine years (1874–1883). The latter never

really controlled Darfur; neither did the Mahdists. Between 1874 and 1898, a period remembered in Darfur as *Umm Kwakiyya*, best translated by an Irishman as “the Troubles,” Darfur experienced more or less what it is experiencing today: drought, rape and rapine, and warlordism. Many fled, as they did in 2003, as refugees to what is now Chad. In 1898, the then sultan, Ali Dinar, brought the “troubles” to an end; his methods were rough but effective and the British simply inherited his state.⁵ Between 1916 and 1956, Darfur was ruled by the British, but their control was minimal, of development there was virtually none—the people were left more or less to their own devices. The same reality continued after the British left and Darfur was part of an independent Sudan.

When the British occupied the Sudan in 1898, they were very concerned to keep the French out of the South—this “Scramble for Africa,” culminating in the confrontation of Kitchener with Captain Marchand at Fashoda, nearly led to war between Britain and France.⁶ In other words, already in 1898 the British decided that the southern Sudan was part of a putative Sudan, while Darfur was left on hold until 1916. Indeed, ever since the breakthrough into the south through the *sadd* or vegetation barrier on the White Nile in 1839 by Salim Qapudan, the south was much more part of the affairs of the north than ever was Darfur. Indeed, al-Zubayr Pasha conquered Darfur in 1874 from the south. In other words, the south was from about 1839 to about 1882 a part of the north in a way that Darfur never was, and the British moved much more rapidly after 1898 to take control of the south than they did in Darfur, partly motivated by the desire to control the Nile Valley. *Ergo* the south has a longer chronological connexion with the north than does Darfur. Chronologically the south was part of the north from 1839 to the present—166 years—while Darfur was part of the north from 1874 to 1898 and from 1916 to the present—113 years.

Before pursuing this argument at other levels, there is a further point to consider; in the transition to independence, 1953–1956, Darfur did not figure in the argument. Both the politicians of the northern elite in their dealings with the British and the latter were aware of the fact that they had a southern problem; no one at that time ever raised the issue of a Darfur problem. Why?

BEING ARAB, BEING NOT

Because both sides, British and northern Sudanese, assumed that there

was not a problem. To put the argument simplistically, the assumption was made by both parties that because the people of Darfur were Muslim, they were part of the north with which they would identify, an assumption as flawed as if the French in West Africa had decided to annex Senegal to Mauritania on the premise that all the *indigènes* involved were Muslim. This would have entailed joining the racially very conscious Arabic-speaking *bidan* (Whites) of Mauritania with the *sudan* (Blacks), who speak Wolof and other languages, of southern Mauritania and Senegal. Fortunately, the French were considerably more sophisticated than their British counterparts and recognised and promoted, if only to exploit it, the existence of an *islam noir*, of a Muslim African identity that did not require one to pretend to be Arab.

It is this conflation of religious and ethnic identity that bedevils the Sudan today, as it has throughout its recent past, lies at the root of the present conflict in Darfur, and will surely emerge in the eastern Sudan in the near future. The northern Sudanese elite, recruited from approximately 5 percent of the population (ethnically, Ja'aliyyin, Danaqla, Shayqiyya, and Nubians [colloquially Halfawis]) regard themselves as Arab, known also as

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the *awlad al-bahr*, “people of the sea” [here meaning the Nile] or *awlad al-balad*, “people of the country.” How this perception arose is a complex and interesting question. The northern Sudanese speak Arabic and regard themselves as Arab—the Nubians are an anomaly here; they speak their own language and do not really regard themselves as Arab. The late Muhammad Ibrahim Abu Salim (b. 1927, d. 2004), one of the Sudan’s greatest scholars, spoke Nubian at home and certainly did not regard

himself as Arab. But he functioned as an Arab and was at various times president or chairman of the Arab Archivists Association, mirroring in his own life the fact that the Sudan is a member of the Arab League, despite the fact that some 60 percent of its population are not Arab—but then so is Somalia. Ethnicity is a moveable construct.⁷

From the perspective of an historian, the bottom line, if one can put it that way, is how many Arab nomads actually moved into the Sudan in medieval times and how did northern Sudanese ethnicity and identity come

to be constructed? Professor Yusuf Fadl Hasan would argue many, Professor Jay Spaulding would argue very few.⁸ The evidence is very sparse and difficult to interpret, and I am confident that neither Hasan nor Spaulding would be too dogmatic as to the truth. What is less disputable is that the two great state-forming enterprises of the northern and western Sudan, namely the Funj and Darfur Sultanates, from approximately the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries onwards, had their roots in African peoples: the Funj, who created the Sinnar state, but whose ethnic identity is still something of a mystery, and in the case of Darfur, the Fur, a known if not necessarily clearly defined ethnicity. In other words, state-forming activity was an African enterprise, however much or little informed by Islam. Sinnar and Darfur were thus two of a series of Sudanic states, going westwards to Wadai, Baqirmi, Kanem/Bornu, the Hausa states, Ghana, Mali, and Songhay, to name only the most important. These were African states that increasingly took on an Islamic identity.

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The influence of Islam is a crucial issue. In both the founding legends of the Funj and the Fur, various Arab or “wise strangers” (a term coined by my teacher, P.M. Holt) make their appearance.⁹ They intermarry with local dynasts, they teach new eating habits, they bring a form of Islam, they claim Arab descent, and they relate their communities to a wider Arab/Muslim World. What substratum of reality lies behind these traditions is simply beyond recovery. Two generations of Sudan Political Service officials filled the volumes of *Sudan Notes and Records* with articles on “Funj Origins,” while later scholars, Hasan, Spaulding, and myself, among others, have dipped into this particularly historiographically fraught pond. None of us have come up with anything very worthwhile or relevant to the present debate, save perhaps Spaulding.

Spaulding argues in his magisterial *The Heroic Age in Sinnar* that the processes of Arabisation/Arabicisation/Islamisation—and the interaction between the three processes—are the product of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, dominated by urban centres along or near the Nile, Khandaq, Dongola, Shendi, Arbaji, al-Masallamiyya, and al-Ubayyid, where a combination of trader and holy man laid the foundations of northern Sudanese culture and a very specific northern Sudanese

Arab identity. He calls these centres “enclaves,” where Islamic norms, law, language, and seclusion of women prevailed.¹⁰ This was the period of the manufacturing of Arab pedigrees, relating their protagonists back to Arabia, the writing of these being frequently ascribed to a legendary figure, al-Samarqandi. It was this period that saw the emergence of the archetypal figure of the *jallaba*, the itinerant merchant, usually of Ja’aliyyin or Danaqla ethnic origin, establishing settlements based on the *hosh* or four-walled dwelling (as opposed to the millet-stalk round hut: gender seclusion versus gender interaction), practising female seclusion and the custom of pharaonic circumcision.¹¹

In my *State and Society in Darfur*, the same elements as Spaulding describes are present, but in a more muted way. The reason was that the *jallaba* were more subordinate to a powerful Fur state structure than was the case in Sinnar. But as the Lady Nasra—a member of the royal Funj dynasty in Sinnar and a successful owner of a brothel there in the 1830s—illustrates and the royal women of Darfur illustrate (riding horses like men and worshipping snakes and stones), the old order was never entirely subdued. Women did not buy into the Arab/Muslim agenda so easily, as the survival to the present day of *zar*, *tambura*, and other spirit possession cults show.¹²

The Mahdist period saw the triumph of the *jallaba*/holy man element. The Sudan was to be remade into their ideological world. They were not entirely successful, except in one vital respect: they bequeathed this agenda to the British, who swallowed it whole. That is they accepted that the northern, eastern, and western Sudanese were Arab and showed little understanding of the ethnic complexities that lay underneath the surface.

Reading early British Condominium administrative records, it is astounding how racist they are. In 1915 (Sir) Harold MacMichael was stationed on the Kordofan/Darfur border as an intelligence officer collecting information on the sultanate in preparation for its invasion or “re-occupation” to use British-speak. In his *Notes on Darfur 1915*,¹³ he gives an overview of the ethnic and political situation in Darfur. *Notes* simply assumes the ethnic, moral, and intellectual superiority of the “Arabs” and the concomitant inferiority of the non-Arabs. The latter are acceptable to the degree that they are Arabised; thus the Keira royal family of Darfur owe their status to their “Arab” blood. MacMichael simply accepted the genealogical constructs at face value, writing a monumental two-volume work laying them out. Nowhere, to the best of my knowledge, did MacMichael or others of the Sudan Political Service, the British administrative *cadre* who ran the Sudan,¹⁴

ever face up to the reality that state-formation was the work of non-Arabs. MacMichael could not conceive of the fact that Ali Dinar had a perfectly rational plan from 1898 onwards to bring Darfur back to some kind of order, supported by the Darfur elite, after the disastrous years of the *Umm Kwakiyya*. What makes the British especially perfidious is that after killing the sultan in 1916, they happily continued to use his system. This system still has great validity today in Darfur, even if the actors involved do not appreciate or understand this fact.

The British simply assumed that their Sudan was fundamentally Arab, but it is important to remember how small that British Sudan was. It was circumscribed by Khartoum, the administrative and educational centre; al-Ubayyid in Kordofan, centre of the lucrative gum arabic trade; Wad Medani in the Gezira, headquarters of the Gezira cotton scheme; Port Sudan, the Sudan's outlet to the world and a colonial construction; and Atbara, also a colonial construct as headquarters of the Sudan Railways. Now, if you draw a line around these cities and towns on a map, you arrive at a very small part of the whole—this is Sudan *utile*—the rest is

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the Sudan *inutile*. Since independence, the overwhelming bulk of investment and development has gone into the Sudan *utile*. As a parenthesis to this comment, one might note that the present Khartoum government (which consciously or unconsciously accepts the *utile/inutile* divide) is seeking actively to expand the Sudan *utile* to include the oil-producing areas (around Bentiu on the Kordofan/southern Sudan border, but the oil-bearing area is rapidly expanding); here they are simply following British precedent. This new initiative has profound implications for the south and Darfur and is a threat to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) that was finally concluded in January 2005 between the Khartoum government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A).

Back to the British: within their Sudan *utile*, they had two related objectives: to insulate it from the Egyptians, and likewise to insulate "their" Sudanese from the Egyptians. To achieve the former, they needed the latter, but as educated manpower (women did not figure here) who could replace the Egyptians as "subalterns."¹⁵ To this end they created within the Sudan *utile*, very early on by British African colonial standards (the Sudan did not

come under the Colonial Office), an effective educational system, in English, with high standards based on a system of schools—Wadi Sayyidna, Hantoub, Bakht al-Ruda, Khor Taggart—fed into Gordon Memorial College (founded 1902), which that grew into the University of Khartoum.¹⁶ As a policy it worked brilliantly: it produced a very competent elite that interacted with the British very effectively.

But this elite, and I am speaking of a very small group of men in the 1920s and 1930s, had an identity problem. Who were they? They were Muslim, they spoke Arabic, although the Nubians had Nubian as their first language, they had Arab names and claimed Arab descent, but were they Arabs? The first strike against them was that they were black. In the early 1920s, there were two tendencies regarding identity. The first is associated with Ali Abd al-Latif and the White Flag League; they asserted their Africaness, but then ethnically they were, being southerners and westerners who largely rose through the army. This group was effectively eliminated in 1924, but their ideas have lived on in the Sudanese Communist Party (founded in 1945, but with older antecedents) and indirectly in the SPLM, which owes much to the Communists. The other tendency was the assertion of Arabness (*uruba*), fed by a group of poets and writers clustered around two literary journals, *al-Fajr* and *al-Nahda*, in the 1930s that looked culturally to Egypt. This latter tendency was taken up and promoted by the Mahdists and the Khatmiyya, the two main religious movements in the north, both of which in different ways interacted well with the British.¹⁷

Before we go any further, let us deal with the question of colour. Arabs have as much, if not more, colour prejudice as Westerners; to claim otherwise is to be dishonest. The poets, mentioned above, people like al-Fayturi, al-Malik al-Tambal, and Jibril Salih Jibril, wrote much on their colour and the ambiguity of their relationship to the Arab World. I have very few Sudanese friends who have not told me stories of encountering colour prejudice in Egypt or elsewhere. In Sudanese Arabic, there is an elaborate colour-coding vocabulary. These are topics that are only now beginning to be discussed. The reason for this reticence is slavery.

The northern and western Sudan, from at least the eighteenth century to the twentieth century (well into the British period), was a slave-owning society. This is a complex and very under-researched topic and what follows is very impressionistic.¹⁸ My own guess would be, for example, that the population in Darfur in the nineteenth century was 30 percent slaves, of course largely from the non-Muslim south or semi-Muslim peoples in the north

(Georgia was, I believe, the most heavily slave-populated American antebellum state at 17 percent). That figure would probably have been true for most of the northern and eastern Sudan. Although the British had used slavery and Gordon's heroic, if ambiguous, mission against it as one of their justifications for "reconquering" the Sudan, once installed in it, they interfered very little. Various innocuous "Masters and Servants" Ordinances were proclaimed, but nothing much changed. When I first went to Darfur in 1968, I knew slavery was an issue, but as a good 1960s socialist, I was very circumspect. Finally, I worked up the courage to ask a prominent Darfur chief about slavery—we were drinking coffee on the main street in al-Fashir. He simply looked up, called out *ya zoll* (fellow) and said, "He is a slave, ask him." Here, again I am being very impressionistic; slavery and issues of the "ransom of slaves" frequently come up in reports from Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International. Much is unsubstantiated and confused and to a degree trivialized by the media, but there are serious issues here that need to be confronted.

The nexus of ideas about ethnicity, colour (the desire of blacks to whiten their skin or straighten their hair), and slavery and its heritage has yet to be seriously researched—but it does have to be confronted. Feeding into it is the very opaque area of ethnicity and identity. Here there is a concatenation of ideas and prejudices, race, religion, colour, and status (with gender as a joker) that have yet to be unravelled. Until they are, most of what is or will be written on this subject will be partial. I have many anecdotes, but anecdotes are no substitute for analysis, and this is an area where the Sudanese have to confront their own identity. It seems already to be beginning in the *mahjar*, in the diaspora. The present crisis in Darfur encapsulates this range of problems, above all, in the variable of ethnicity.

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DARFUR: THE PRESENT REALITY

Present-day Darfur is a crisis intermittently visited by the media. Coverage is patchy, not least because the Khartoum government carefully controls access by outside journalists. By media here I mean Western; the

Arab world appears to be very little interested in what goes on in Darfur.

The presentation in the media of the crisis in Darfur is, of course, simplistic.¹⁹ The most common analysis pitches Arabs versus Africans with the Khartoum government using the former to ethnically cleanse the latter, the ultimate motive being control over land and, possibly, oil in southern Darfur. Slightly more sophisticated analysts seek to place the Darfur crisis in the wider Sudanese context of the north/south peace agreement, the CPA, and argue that Darfur can be brought in under the CPA umbrella; there is no evidence that this latter approach has any validity. The latter position appears to be that of Western observer states to the CPA, among them, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Norway. The international dimension of the Darfur crisis is represented by the talks recently

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held in Abuja between the Khartoum government and various Darfur rebel factions under the auspices of the African Union (AU). These talks, going into their seventh round, went absolutely nowhere. The Darfurians are so deeply divided, ethnically and politically, that they are quite incapable of presenting a united front, while the Khartoum government has no particular reason to reach a settlement any time soon.

Definitions of ethnicity appear to be fundamental to the conflict in Darfur. At one level, it is a conflict between Africans (largely settled) and Arabs (largely nomads), with the latter supported and manipulated by the Khartoum government. Darfurians have always been aware of their ethnic identity, but have frequently blurred it by changing occupations or language, or by intermarriage. Ethnic identity has always been very fluid and contextual. No administrative unit in Darfur was ethnically pure. What seems to have happened in these last years is the hardening of an ideological/racist divide, speeded up by outside forces. Judging by recent reports, the situation on the ground is becoming one of great complexity: some Arab and African groups reach local accommodations with their neighbours; in other areas there is brutal ethnic cleansing, often with government support; other groups oscillate between being Arab or not. Two other elements are the emergence of new local elites; for example, Zaghawa traders operating in Darfur and the Persian Gulf, and the nomads' desire to

be no longer nomads. The latter's battlecry is increasingly land; they want secure title to land, so they can have access to schools, medical care, and work. The overall picture is one of a disintegrating or, at least, a very rapidly changing society in which law and order are fast disappearing (or optimistically, evolving into new forms) and where the various players—the government, the rebel movements, the Arab, and other militias—have little legitimacy or ability to talk to each other, or, again optimistically, have not yet found a way to talk to each other.

In this situation, it is not easy to discern any clear policy line from the Khartoum government beyond a determination to survive in power. Here, there are two levels, the Khartoum and the international dimension, and what happens on the ground in Darfur. The former is perhaps most easily delineated; the Khartoum government wants the least possible international involvement in Darfur, the AU presence there is more or less emasculated, the INGOs' freedom of action is circumscribed and harassed, and UNMIS (the UN Mission to the Sudan) does not have an easy time, however valiantly they try. In other words, one might argue in the short term that the Khartoum government has the upper hand, at least as regards the hopelessly split rebels and the largely powerless international bodies.

But the situation cannot remain static. One may assume that the international community will continue to be ineffectual *vis-à-vis* Darfur. One may assume that Khartoum will continue to undermine the CPA. One may assume, as seems most likely, that the CPA will either collapse or, even if it survives, lead to a separation between north and south, which increasingly appears to be the assumption on the part of the SPLA. If the latter assumption is correct, an independent south will have its own range of ethnic and regional issues, while the north will have to confront its relationship to Darfur, the Nuba, the Beja, and others. Darfur will be the testing ground.

But I cannot simply leave it there. I may be an historian rather than an international public official, but I do have some ideas on what might be done to improve the situation in Darfur. If we accept as a reality that what has happened in Darfur in the last years has been a rapid but brutal process of urbanisation—the creation of the internally displaced people's camps—then there are consequences. First, relatively few will go back, both for negative reasons of insecurity, but also for positive reasons: they will slide from the camps into the towns, from Kalma to Nyala, as is already happening, in search of work, education, and medical treatment for their children. The

latter will always be their priority. How can this be achieved? The fundamental need will be for people to feel they have legitimate rights in the place where they live; the people of Darfur have to feel that their needs are being addressed in ways that are legitimate within their own culture. What does this mean? First, it means a system of local government run by leaders they

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trust and in whose choice they have a say, in contrast to the present situation where tribal leaders are foisted by *diktat* upon them by Khartoum. Here, in reality, Khartoum has little choice; the centre does not have the resources or the legitimacy to establish a modern-style administration. Second, there has to be an agreed law in Darfur; one not simply dic-

tated from Khartoum, but a law that blends Islamic law with local law; this is a crucial issue in two respects. A law that the local communities accept as legitimate can be the only foundation for questions of compensation for murder, rape, issues of impunity, and the like. The second, and in the long term this is crucial, is that there has to be a land-law that nomads and sedentaries, Africans and Arabs, can accept. Security in regard to land and land-ownership is fundamental to both farmers and nomads. And here, ironically, the nomads are disadvantaged because they have far less security in land than the farmers. All these issues presuppose an essentially political agreement between the Khartoum government and the various Darfur groups.

The problems of Darfur are not insoluble if the fighting can be stopped, but they need to be left to the Darfurians, who must learn to agree among themselves as to what will be their future relationship with the Sudan. ■

ENDNOTES

- 1 A few titles reflecting the Sudan's *longue durée* that readers might wish to refer to are: P.M. Holt and M.W. Daly, *A History of the Sudan: From the Coming of Islam to the Present Day* (London: Longman, 2000); Sir Harold MacMichael, *A History of the Arabs in the Sudan*, two volumes (London: Cambridge University Press, 1922); R.S. O'Fahey and Jay L. Spaulding, *Kingdoms of the Sudan* (London: Methuen, 1974); R.S. O'Fahey, *State and Society in Dar Fur* (London: C Hurst & Co Publishers, 1980); Jay L. Spaulding, *The Heroic Age in Sinnar* (East Lansing: African Studies Center, Michigan State University, 1985), and Yusuf Fadl Hasan, *The Arabs and the Sudan* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1967). A useful reference work is Richard A. Lobban, Robert S. Kramer, and Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, eds., *Historical Dictionary of the Sudan* (Lanham: Scarecrow Press, 2002). I have here not included writings in Arabic, but would emphasise that there is an important historiography on virtually every topic discussed here in Arabic.

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- 2 Richard Hill, *Egypt in the Sudan, 1820-1881* (London: Oxford University Press, 1959).
- 3 On the penetration of the south, see Richard Gray, *A History of the Southern Sudan, 1939-1889* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961); on the Mahdist movement, P.M. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan, 1881-1898* (London: Oxford University Press, 1970); and on British policies in the region, G.N. Sanderson, *England, Europe and the Upper Nile, 1882-1899* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1965).
- 4 See A.B. Theobald, *Ali Dinar: Last Sultan of Darfur, 1898-1916* (London: Longmans, 1965). Theobald uncritically accepts British official interpretations of events, for example, that Ali Dinar was coming under the influence of the Turks, allies of the Germans. There is little evidence to sustain this view.
- 5 Ali Dinar had been chosen by the royal clan as sultan in 1892. In other words, when he returned from Omdurman to Darfur in 1898, together with a large part of the Darfur ruling elite, he was *already* in his own and followers' eyes the legitimate sultan.
- 6 To the works by Sanderson and Gray cited in footnote 3, may be added R.E. Robinson and J. Gallagher, *Africa and the Victorians: The Official Mind of Imperialism* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1961) and R.O. Collins, *The Southern Sudan, 1883-1898: A Struggle for Control* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1962).
- 7 On the emergence of the northern Sudanese elite, see Tim Niblock, *Class and Power in Sudan: The Dynamics of Sudanese Politics, 1898-1985* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1987).
- 8 See the works cited above. The theme of numbers runs throughout both books.
- 9 P.M. Holt, *Studies in the History of the Near East* (London: Frank Cass, 1973), 76–78.
- 10 Spaulding, 150–158.
- 11 On the latter, see Lilian Passmore Sanderson, *Female Genital Mutilation* (London: Anti-Slavery Society, 1986).
- 12 As one example of the considerable literature on this topic, see Susan M. Kenyon, *Five Women of Sennar: Culture and Change in Central Sudan* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991). A classic work on the interaction between Islam and pre-Islamic beliefs among a community straddling the Sudan/Chad border, see Marie-José Tubiana, *Survivances préislamiques en pays Zaghawa* (Paris: Institut d'Ethnologie, 1964).
- 13 Typescript in the Sudan Collection, University of Khartoum Library. I am preparing an annotated edition of the work for publication. This assumption of Arab superiority runs as a *leitmotif* through almost all early British writings on the Sudan.
- 14 A.J. Arkell, the greatest scholar to come out of the Sudan Political Service, was the exception to this generalization.
- 15 Here I borrow a term from Indian colonial historiography, which refers to book-keepers, non-commissioned officers and the like, the indispensable, but scarcely recorded, servants of empire.
- 16 See further, M.O. Beshir, *Educational Development in the Sudan, 1898-1956* (London: Oxford University Press, 1969).
- 17 Heather J. Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism: Nationalism and Culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (California: University of California Press, 2003).
- 18 An early pioneering article on this is P.F.M. McLoughlin "Economic development and the heritage of slavery in the Sudan Republic," *Africa*, xxxii (1962): 355–389. A major study, in Arabic, has been written by Muhammad Ibrahim Nuqud, the secretary-general of the Sudanese Communist Party.
- 19 Two very recent accounts are Gérard Prunier, *Darfur: The Ambiguous Genocide* (London: Christopher Hurst, 2005), and Julie Flint and Alex De Waal, *Darfur: A Short History of a Long War* (London: Zed Books, 2005). Prunier's account is strong on the wider regional context, but weak on Darfur, while Flint and De Waal provide a concise well-documented account of what has been happening on the ground over the last years.
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