

# GREEN IS THE COLOR OF THE MASTERS

## The Legacy of Slavery and the Crisis of National Identity in Modern Sudan

by Francis M. Deng

Black is depicted in [Arabic] literature as something not good. That is why people are described as not Black but brown or green. Green in the Sudan means that their *asl* [ancestral origin] is not Negroid.

Abd al-Rahman al Bashir

The first color in rank is *asfar*. This literally means “yellow,” but is used interchangeably with *ahmar* to denote “whiteness.” The second is *asmar*. This literally means reddish, but it is used interchangeably to describe a range of color shades from light to dark brown... The third in ranking is *akhdar*. This literally means green, but it is used as a polite alternative to the word “black.” Last and least is *azrag* to mean “black,” which is the color of *abid*, (slave)... In order to avoid describing self as *aswad* (black), the collective Northern consciousness renamed the *akhdar* (green)... Whereas a very dark Northerner is only *akhdar*, an equally dark Southerner is bluntly *aswad* (black).

Al-Baqir al-Afifi Mukhtar

Sudanese passports never describe the holder as “black.” The description used for the overwhelming majority of the holders would be “green,” the standard color of the nation in official Northern eyes. Indeed, green is seen as the ideal Sudanese color of skin because it reflects a brown that is not too dark, giving associations with black Africa and possibly slavery, and is not too light, hinting at gypsy (*halabi*) or European Christian forbears, the infidel Khawajas.

Deng, *War of Visions*

## I. **Introduction**

The connection between slavery and humanitarian crises in modern Sudan is inherent in the atrocities associated with slavery, the resistance to it, and the tragic consequences on the victims and their communities. Slavery in the Sudan dates back to recorded history. “Slave-raiding was originally a state activity, and ...this process was probably of greater antiquity than our sources allow us to trace.”<sup>1</sup> As both cause and effect, slavery stratified races, ethnicities, religions and cultures, placing some into the category of slave masters and others into that of the target populations, denigrated and dehumanized to justify their enslavement. In the Sudanese context, the master race comprised the Sudanese in the North who had become assimilated into the Arab-Islamic mold and made to pass as Arabs, although they were, and still are, in effect a visible African-Arab admixture, with the African element predominant. The enslaveable groups were the Black Africans, especially those in the non-Arab, non-Muslim South, who practiced indigenous religious beliefs, and were therefore viewed as heathens and infidels. But those who were first affected by slavery, even before the South became exposed to it, were the ethnic groups in non-Muslim parts of the North, in particular, the areas bordering the South, the Nuba Mountains and the Southern Blue Nile, the Beja region to the East and Darfur in the far West.

The long-term implications of the normative framework in which the non-Muslim and non-Arab groups became the primary victims of slavery is obvious in the fact that they are still the most marginalized and discriminated against in the Sudan today. Their resistance to this position has taken the form of insurgencies that have provoked ruthless counterinsurgencies by the Arab dominated governments, inflicting atrocities on the civilian populations believed to support the insurgencies and tolerating, even encouraging, the resurgence of slavery in its crude form. The way national authorities respond to humanitarian crises afflicting the populations from these regions, whether caused by natural disasters or conflicts, ranges from indifference, to denial, to outright persecution in conflict situations.

This paper explores the connection between slavery and humanitarian crises in modern Sudan as an evolutionary process covering overlapping qualitative phases. The first phase witnessed the prevalence of slavery against the Sudanese Blacks alongside a process of arabization and islamization that allowed the races to mix and elevate the resulting hybrid into a

category that was esteemed above the enslaveable categories. During the second phase, the British ended the slave trade and the crude forms of slavery, but allowed the practice and the related attitudes of racial stratification and discrimination to continue. The third was a phase of paradoxical protection of the South through the infamous separatist “Southern Policy” that kept the South isolated and undeveloped, relegating it to an inferior status in the modern Sudan. The fourth came with the domination by the Arab-Islamic North at what for the South was a misnamed independence. The fifth and the last phase features the liberation struggle by the South, which was initially separatist but was later recast as a movement for the liberation of the whole country toward a new Sudan that would be free from any discrimination due to race, ethnicity, religion and culture. This redefinition of issues is winning allies from the North, especially among the non-Arabs. The paper concludes with the critical choices the Sudanese are called upon to make and whether these choices will favor a restructured unified Sudan, a co-existence within a framework of unity in diversity, or the partition of the country, probably along the North-South division.

## **II. Slavery in the Evolution of Identities**

Slavery was central to the normative classification of groups along racial, religious and cultural lines because it determined who was superior to be a master and who was inferior to be legitimately enslaveable. In turn, slavery contributed significantly to the consolidation of those qualitative identities. The broader context of arabization and islamization provided the framework for the formation of identity categories. The historical evolution of identities crystallized into North and South, until the recent realignment began to challenge that racial divide and postulate a new vision for the country.

The Northern two-thirds is inhabited by ethnic groups, the dominant among whom intermarried with incoming Arab migrants and traders, and, over centuries, produced a mixed African-Arab racial group that resembles the African peoples cutting across the continent below the Sahara. Indeed, the Arabic phase, *Bilad al-Sudan*, from which the Sudan derives its name, means *the Land of the Blacks* and refers to all of those sub-Saharan territories. Arab immigration and settlement in the South, in contrast to the North, were discouraged by natural environmental barriers, the difficulties of living conditions, including the harshness of the tropical climate for

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<sup>1</sup> Douglas H. Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars*, International African Institute, in association with

people accustomed to the desert, and the resistance of the warrior Nilotic tribes. Those Arab adventurers who managed to travel to the South were primarily in slave raids. They were not interested in arabizing and islamizing the Southerners because that would have removed their prey from *dar al-harb* (land of war) and placed them in *dar al-Islam* (land of peace), thereby liberating them from slavery.

### A. Slavery and Assimilation in the North

The formation of the northern identity of assimilation was the outcome of a process that viewed the Arab-Islamic mold as the ideal to be emulated through the marriage of the Muslim-Arabs into the leading Sudanese families. Throughout the process of arabization and islamization, slavery was the decisive factor that classified people into the master race, comprising Arabs and Muslims, and the enslaveable race, the Black Africans, who were deemed to have no culture, but could be redeemed by their adoption of Islam, the Arabic language, Arab culture, and, of course, fusing blood with the master race. This process eventually resulted in the transformation of the pre-Islamic society.<sup>2</sup>

Islam was promoted by leading Sufi orders, which were introduced to the country during the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries. One of the distinguishing factors of Sufi orders was the degree to which they accommodated pre-Islamic practices, allowing the syncretism of traditional African religious practices with Muslim rituals. There came a point in this process when Islamic values and institutions prevailed over preexisting practices, yet the latter continued to enhance the former. By recognizing and building on the traditional order, Islam became identified with the local community and adopted many uniquely Sudanese characteristics. By the early 1800s, Sufi orders had become firmly established and had pervasive political and religious influence.

The Turko-Egyptian conquest in 1820-21 introduced the foundations of the modern state in the Sudan. Unlike the immigrant Arab traders, the Turko-Egyptians were an imperial power and came to the Sudan with clear objectives; the most vehemently expressed was to recruit Blacks as slave soldiers for the Egyptian army. Indeed, during most of the period of Turkish Egyptian rule, the slave trade flourished and the victims were the Blacks in the surrounding

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Fountain Publishers Kampala James Currey, Oxford, and Indiana University Press, Bloomington, 2003, p.2

<sup>2</sup> In the Sudan, unlike other African countries with a Muslim population, Islam is closely associated with the Arabic language, culture, and race, perhaps because of the historical association with the Arab world and in particular with Egypt. For the history of Arab assimilation, see Yusif Fadl Hasan, *The Arabs and the Sudan* (Edinburgh University Press, 1967), p.90.

regions of the South, the neighboring Nuba and the Ingassana, and the people of Darfur farther west. Under pressure from Europe, the Government later began to suppress slavery. General Charles Gordon was sent first to the South and then to the Sudan as Governor-General with the objective of suppressing slavery. But his efforts produced no significant results, even though they antagonized the slave-traders, especially the Baggara Arab tribes of the West who were among the most deeply engaged in the slave raids and trade. Gordon became the symbol of the detested Turko-Egyptian rule. With his death in the hands of the Mahdists in 1885, the Turko-Egyptian rule collapsed.

Without embracing Islam, Southerners initially supported the Mahdi as a liberator against foreign domination.<sup>3</sup> However, southern support was withdrawn after the Mahdiyya (the Mahdist Movement) proved to be yet another source of oppression and slave raids from the North. But the Mahdists did not only alienate the South, they also generated divisions among the various tribes and regions of the North.<sup>4</sup>

The Mahdi's principal source of support against the Turko-Egyptian government was the slave-raiding militant Arab tribes of Southern Kordofan and Darfur, who were vehemently antagonized by the government's antislavery campaign in response to pressures from Europe. In contrast, the Mahdist revolution promised them the restoration of slavery. It should be noted that these are the same tribes that would engage in what the government called abduction of Southern women and children, but which was well documented as a revival of slavery in its crude form.<sup>5</sup>

The Mahdiyya, both in its initial campaigns and in what happened during the Mahdist state, proved to be an extremely costly adventure. With the breakdown of law and order; famine due to drought, war, and lack of state capacity to meet the emergency, it was a catastrophic period. Rudolph Slatin, an official of the Turko-Egyptian administration, spent years in the Mahdists' captivity, converted to Islam, later escaped, and subsequently returned to play an important role in the Anglo-Egyptian condominium, left a graphic description of the awful condition of the country.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> See Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience, Religion Among the Dinka* (Oxford, The Clarendon Press, 1961) 164-165. See also Francis Mading Deng, *Tradition and Modernization: A Challenge for Law Among the Dinka of the Sudan* (New Haven, London: Yale University Press, 1971), 48-49.

<sup>4</sup> Khalid, *The Government They Deserve: The Role of the Elite in Sudan's Political Economy* (Kegan Paul Institute 1990), 4.

<sup>5</sup> Douglas Johnson, *The Roots of Sudan: Civil War*, p.157

<sup>6</sup> Rudolph C. Slatin Pasha, C.B., *Fire and Sword in the Sudan: A Personal Narrative of Fighting and Serving the Dervishes 1879-1895*, trans. F.R. Wingate (London: Edward Arnold, 1897), pp. 272, 274.

It is estimated that the population of Sudan fell from around 7 million before the Mahdist revolt to somewhere between 2 and 3 million after the fall of the Mahdist state.<sup>7</sup> Whatever the human cost, the indisputable fact is that Mahdism had a contradictory effect on the country. On the one hand, it provided the nation with a common vision against foreign rule and offered the prospect for independence; on the other hand, it generated internal divisions, intertribal, and a general turmoil from which the country suffered much and has never fully recovered.<sup>8</sup>

The present Northern Sudanese identity is the culmination of a complex historical process that at times entailed contradictions. Arab-Islamic conquest, though not decisive, imposed a system in which the symbols of identity favored by official policies were reinforced and postulated as the ideal. And yet, the framework accommodated traditional values and institutions. Indigenous pride also affected the process, which culminated in the unique vision of the Sudanese Arab-Islamic identity that now prevails in the North.<sup>9</sup> To northerners, the composite Arab-Muslim identity, in the words of one source, symbolizes “the best nation God has created.”<sup>10</sup> And yet, this blatantly racist outlook tends to be clouded with theoretical, often politically motivated discussion of the concept of identity aimed at making Northern self-identification with Arabism a cultural association that is benign and less racist than it really is. In his statement to the 1965 Round Table Conference on the problem of the South, Prime Minister Sirr Al-Khatim Al-Khalifa observed: “Gentlemen, Arabism, which is a basic attribute of the majority of the population of this country and of many African countries besides, is not a racial concept which unites members of a certain racial group. It is a religious, cultural and non-racial link that binds together numerous races, black, white and brown. Had Arabism been anything else but this, most modern Arabs, whether African or Asian, including the entire population of the Northern Sudan, would cease to be ‘Arab’ at all.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the reliability of the estimates, see M. W. Daly, *Empire on the Nile: The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1898-1934* (Cambridge University Press, 1986), p.18.

<sup>8</sup> Douglas Johnson has observed, “The Mahdiyya is now often interpreted in Sudanese history as an early form of Sudanese nationalism. ... This is to misread the Mahdiyya through modern spectacles. Racial attitudes in the North remained unchanged from the Turkiyya.” *The Roots of Sudan’s Civil War*, p.6.

<sup>9</sup> The late Jamal Muhammad Ahmed, a leading Sudanese diplomat, scholar, and humanist wrote of “the relative peace that informs the African Muslim’s nationalism. There is no duality in his thoughts; too preoccupied with the future to judge the past, too much of a piece to dispraise.” “Islam and Socio-Religious Thought of Africa,” in Charles Malik, ed., *God and Man in Contemporary Islamic Thought* (American University of Beirut, 1972), p.39. In another context, Ahmed notes, “The [African] Muslim intellectual is tranquil...He has no wounds carried over from his past experience of religion and its institutions.” *Id.*, p. 45.

<sup>10</sup> Abdel Rahman Al Bashir in response to the question on identity. As he explained, he was reporting on the Sudanese Arab perspective, not his own.

<sup>11</sup> See Appendix 15 in Muhammad Omar Bashir, *The Southern Sudan: Background to Conflict* (Khartoum University Press), p. 168.

In reality, Northern Sudanese “Arabs” conceive of their identity in both racial and cultural terms, even though they are quite flexible in their interpretation of those terms. As Professor Ali Mazrui, the renowned African Scholar, noted, “Disputes as to whether such and such a family is really Arab by descent or not, and evaluations of family prestige partly in terms of lighter shades of color, have remained an important part of the texture of Sudanese life in the North.”<sup>12</sup> Abd al-Rahman al-Bashir, one of those interviewed by the author on the issue of identity, while recognizing that Islam and the Arabic language are important factors in being considered an Arab, emphasized genealogy:

You must belong to something [a known ancestry]... say the Abassids [which means] that your great, great, great grandfather [original ancestor] is Al-Abbas, the Uncle of the Prophet, so that you are distinguished. Some of the Sudanese think of themselves as Ashraf [descendants of the Prophets closest friends and associates]. This might be forced, but it gives them satisfaction. These are the things that are in the mind if the people: that you speak Arabic, the good language of the Koran, and you are from the Arab world which is the best nation God has created. Rightly or wrongly, this is the way people think. They find pride in this and in their origin, *asl*. The word *asl* is very important in the Sudan. If you want to marry, you should look for the *asl*. People think that way: How pure is this man? Is he contaminated or not? I am just explaining the way people think.”<sup>13</sup>

Ironically, this exaggerated pride in Arabism stems from a deeper inferiority complex associated with the African connection. In the words of Mansour Khalid, “The reason [for northern identification with Arabism] stems from an inferiority complex really. The Northern Sudanese is torn internally in his Arab-African personality. As a result of his Arabic Islamic cultural development, he views himself in a higher status from other Sudanese not exposed to this process. Arabism gives him his sense of pride and distinction and that is why he exaggerates when he professes it. He becomes more royal than the King, so to speak.”<sup>14</sup>

Amir idris, in his published doctoral dissertation, *Sudan's Civil War: Slavery, Race and Formational Identities*, has observed: “With some marginal exceptions, all the Sudanese peoples north of the thirteenth parallel had, by the nineteenth century, become Muslims or at least

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<sup>12</sup> Ali Mazrui, “The Black Arabs in Comparative Perspective,” p. 69. Michael Wolfers Argues, “So much of the debate on race relations is conducted on the interaction of black and white groups and peoples that we do not have a ready terminology for what is occurring in a country like Sudan.” “Race and Class in Sudan,” in *Race and Class*, vol. 23, no. 1 (Summer 1981), pp. 65-79.

<sup>13</sup> This and other views quoted in the following pages, unless otherwise noted, come from elite interviews conducted by the author on the issue of identity in the Sudan in the late 1980s and early 1990s. The material was used in *War of visions*.

<sup>14</sup> In the Interviews by the author, see *War of Visions: Conflict of Identity in the Sudan*. The Brookings Institution, Washington, DC, 1995, p. 43—31.

preferred to identify themselves as Muslims. Even those groups that didn't speak Arabic as their first language nevertheless regarded Arabic as the language of 'civilization' and religion. And Muslims in the North claimed themselves patrilineal descent from distinguished Arab ancestors. This conventional acceptance of the claim to be 'Arab'.... demarcated and racialized the people of the Sudan.... [E]ven conversion to Islam could not fully compensate for the absence of accepted Arab ancestry."<sup>15</sup> Through this process, "Northern Sudanese Muslims invented derogatory ethnic and racial categories to refer to non-Muslim groups in the South. These invented categories included terms such as "*Ibd*" (sic) or slave for Southerners or *Fallata* for Western Africans. Thus, with the creation of these categories the people of South Sudan, the Nuba Mountains, and the Upper Blue Nile became prey for Northern Muslims slave traders."<sup>16</sup>

Al-Baqir al-Afifi Mukhtar has also argued that Northerners' marginal identity explains their overemphasis on Arab descent. "Statements such as 'I am an Arab. I have genealogy', or 'I am an Arab, nationally and culturally, whether you like it or not', are repeatedly issued by the political and cultural entrepreneurs. Unlike the elite of the Arab world, who do not need to state the obvious, Northerners feel the need to complement their lack in features by words."<sup>17</sup> Here too, the Sudanese "Arabs" confront a serious dilemma and therefore a personal crisis of identity. Since the Arabs who came to the Sudan were mostly men who married into African Sudanese families, the psychosocial implications of parental schism and implicit antagonism raise vexing questions. Al Baqir Mukhtar writes: "Northerners live in a split world. While they believe that they are the descendants of an 'Arab father' and an 'African mother', they seem to identify with the father, albeit invisible, and despise the mother who is so visible in their features. There is an internal fissure in the Northern self between the looks and the outlook, the body and the mind, the skin color and the culture, and in one word, between the 'mother' and the 'father' ... a misfit".<sup>18</sup>

The psychological implications go even deeper, as Mukhtar explains: "This inferior position has undoubtedly had its impact on the psychology of the Northern individual...The understanding was that the lighter the color of the skin, the closer the person is to the center, and the more authentic his or her claim to Arab ancestry. Failing to comply with the standard color,

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<sup>15</sup> Amir H. Idris, *Sudan's Civil War: Slavery, Race and Formational Identities*, Lewiston, New York, The Edwin Mellon Press, 2001, pp. 36-37.

<sup>16</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>17</sup> Al-Baqir al-Afifi Mukhtar, "The Crisis of Identity in the Northern Sudan: A Dilemma of a Black People with a White Culture," a paper presented at the CODESRIA African Humanities Institute tenured by the Program of African Studies at Northwestern University, undated and unpublished, pg. 20.

<sup>18</sup> Al-Baqir al-Afifi Mukhtar, "The Crisis of Identity in the Northern Sudan," p. 13.



as is the case with most of the Northerners, the individual seeks a second resort in the hair, in order to prove his or her Arab identity; the softer the hair the closer the individual to the center.”<sup>19</sup>

Interestingly enough, Northern “Arabs” do not recognize this complex within them; to the contrary, their outward appearance and discourse reflect a self-assurance that is strikingly in contrast with the marginality of their claimed Arabness, perhaps a case of successful denial or overcompensation. This exaggerated pride was so graphically articulated in an often quoted statement by Ismail al-Azhari, one of the legendary figures of the nationalist struggle, who was to become the first prime minister and later president, expressed in unequivocal terms to the Round Table Conference on the problem of the South in 1965:

I feel at this juncture obliged to declare that we are proud of our Arab origin, of our Arabism and of being Moslems. The Arabs came to this continent, as pioneers, to disseminate a genuine culture, and promote sound principles which have shed enlightenment and civilization throughout Africa at a time when Europe was plunged into the abyss of darkness, ignorance and doctrinal and scholarly backwardness. It is our ancestors who held the torch high and led the caravan of liberation and advancement; and it is they who provided a superior melting-pot for Greek, Persian and Indian culture, and handing them back to the rest of the world as a guide to those who wished to extend the frontiers of learning.<sup>20</sup>

As might be expected, this Arab-Islamic orientation has played a pivotal role in Sudan’s foreign policy, in which one man, Muhammad Ahmed Mahjoub, played a leading role. Mahjoub was a man who, in the words of one author, “had been at the center of power more frequently than perhaps any other Sudanese politician, [and]... who in many ways was regarded as the personification of Northern Arab Sudanese conservatism” or perhaps more accurately, identity.<sup>21</sup> For Mahjoub, as for most of the northern Sudanese who identify with Arabism, the connection is as racial as it is cultural, but the religious and cultural dimensions become paramount because of the obvious anomalies of the racial aspect of Arabism when applied to Sudan. This is especially reflected in the love for the Arabic language, which is not only associated with Arab origin, but is sanctified as the language of Islam, therefore of God. Mahjoub, also a poet, clearly relished Arabic as a dominant feature of Arab identity. Recalling a conversation with King Hassan of Morocco, he wrote:

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<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>20</sup> Quoted in *Deng, War of Visions*, p. 421.

<sup>21</sup> Cecil Eprile, *War and Peace in the Sudan, 1955-1972* (London: David and Charles, World Realities, 1974), p. 162. For his own account of his role, see Muhammad Ahmed Mahjoub, *Democracy on Trial: reflections on Arab and African Politics* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1974).

King Hassan II is one of the few Arab leaders who are masters of the Arabic language. As a poet myself, I can particularly appreciate his mastery. I once asked him after the end of a conference, how he had acquired it. He told me that after he returned from studying in Paris, his father, King Mohammed V, brought over teachers from the Karanoun University near Fez who put the young prince on the mat and taught him Islamic law and the Arabic language. "God bless your father's soul," I commented. "He bestowed on you a treasure for which you and all the rest of us should be grateful." He seemed a bit nonplused. "I know I should be grateful. But why you?" I replied: "At least for some of the time, we at the conference were not subjected to hearing incorrect Arabic grammar. And this, I assure Your Majesty, is a great blessing." He smiled but made no comment.<sup>22</sup>

Mahjoub played a key role in the independence movement, initially under the umbrella of the literary societies of Abu Ruf and al-Fajr. In his literary contributions, Mahjoub, "who alone among the writers of his generation showed a constant and clear-minded concern with the question...[articulated] the goals... of the ...literary movement in the Sudan in a remarkable pamphlet, ... [*Al-Haraka al-Fikriya Fi-l-Sudan---*The Literary (or Intellectual) Movement in the Sudan-published in 1941] in which he wrote: "The objective towards which the literary movement in this country should be directed is to establish an Islamic-Arabic culture supported and enriched by European thought and aimed at developing a truly national literature which derives its character and its inspiration from the character and traditions of the people of this country, its deserts and jungles, its bright skies and fertile valleys."<sup>23</sup>

Despite this Sudanese grounding, Mahjoub cherished the memory of "the glorious past of Islam, which unified the Arabian peninsula under one religion, and moved Islamic---mainly Arab---armies to the conquest of both the Persian and Byzantine empires." With patriotic pride, he recalled, " It was no doubt a glorious epoch for nomadic tribes which found a new esprit in their new faith, a new fervour for conquest. Under the Ummayad and Abbasid caliphates some of the Caliphs were men of wisdom and brilliance and their achievements in different fields were numerous." Then he lamented the decline of the Arabs as a race: "The power of the Abbasids was eventually extinguished by the Mongolian hordes of Genghis Khan and his successors.... The real power moved into the hands of non-Arab Muslims...."<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., pp. 108-09

<sup>23</sup> Muddathir 'Abd al-Rahim, *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Sudan: A Study in Constitutional and Political Development, 1899-1956* (Oxford: Clarendon, p. 113.)

<sup>24</sup> Mahjoub, *Democracy on Trial*, p. 74

Mahjoub acted as a spokesman for the Arab delegations in introducing a draft resolution on the situation in the Middle East in 1958 in the wake of the Iraqi revolution, which triggered American and British intervention in Lebanon and Jordan: “I am not speaking... in the name of the delegation of the Sudan,” he said. “ It is my honour and privilege to speak in the name of all...the ten Arab states which are related not only by a common language or a common heritage of history and culture, but also by blood.”<sup>25</sup> His aspiration for the Arabs was poetically euphoric: “For us, Arabs, this will be the beginning of a glorious future. It will be the beginning of strengthening our ties, co-operating among ourselves, and being tolerant with each other. We shall, no doubt, do all that is possible to realize our hopes and aspirations.... Once more, the light will come from...[the East]. “ Our ...mission henceforth will be the pursuit of human perfection, peace, security and not destruction and annihilation of the human race.”<sup>26</sup>

The exaggerated identification with the cause of Arab nationalism as well as the ambivalences involved, both of which are embedded in the marginality of Sudanese Arab identity, were most manifest in Sudan’s, in fact in Mahjoub’s, role in the Arab reaction to the defeat by Israel in the Six-Day war of 1967. At the outbreak of the war, Sudan, along with the rest of the Arab countries, declared war on Israel. An Arab conference was held in Khartoum at the end of August 1967. According to Mahjoub, “Khartoum was the only politically acceptable conference site for both conservative and extremist Arab leaders. At that particular moment of history there would have been objections to any other Arab capital hosting a full assemblage of Arab leaders.”<sup>27</sup> While Mahjoub does not explain his assertion, it is obvious that Sudan’s Arab marginality distanced it from the Arab in-fighting. As the host, Mahjoub chaired the foreign ministers’ meeting that preceded the summit. Addressing his colleagues, he said in his keynote statement: “What took place between the fifth and tenth of June was ... but an onslaught upon our very existence and our culture. You will be mistaken if you think that the Zionist imperialist aggression is satisfied with the Arab territory it has devoured; what we see is just the beginning of a neo-colonialist attack, aimed at the people before their land, at history before geography, at the very roots of our existence and not its form. Any unified Arab action which does not restore Arab dignity and sense of honour at this fateful moment, can only deepen the setback, and help to realize the military objectives of the colonialist political conspiracy.”<sup>28</sup>

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 97.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid., pp. 98-99.

<sup>27</sup> Mahjoub, *Democracy on Trial*, p. 136.

<sup>28</sup> Mahjoub, *Democracy on Trial*, pp. 136-37.

The psychological roots of this exaggerated attachment to Arabism go deep into the history of the threatening and even humiliating relations with the Christian West. Appreciating this psychological dimension is important to understanding the threat of demotion to the supposedly inferior African identity, which both the South and much of the non-Arab North pose to the Sudanese claim to Arabism by advocating a restructuring of the country's identity to be more reflective of its visible African element. This deeply entrenched inferiority complex has developed the Arab superiority complex that is so vigorously committed to the Islamic-Arab identity and its agenda for nation building.

Edward Atiyah, a Syrian who arrived in the Sudan in 1926, taught in the Gordon Memorial College, and later joined the intelligence department of the Anglo-Egyptian administration, observed this phenomenon closely: "The educated Sudanese, as a class, were unhappy. Their minds were being warped, their souls soured, and I knew the reasons...as no Englishman could..."<sup>29</sup> For Atiyah, Sudanese nationalism and hatred of the British represented a reaction against humiliation and an attempt to retrieve a sense of dignity, which had been destroyed and supplanted by a feeling of inferiority. Identification with the Arab East was as much a reaction against Western domination as it was an escape from the inferiority of the African background. Sudanese emphasized their Arab descent, excluding from their consciousness any connection with Africa or the Negro elements, and they found great consolation in the renaissance of the Arab East. Since that renaissance had not much to offer in tangible terms, they sought comfort and encouragement in the past glory of the warlike Arabs who, inspired by their religion and the spirit of the Prophet, had swept victoriously through Christendom. Atiyah captured the thinking of the North as he witnessed it in 1926 in words that recall to mind those of Azhari, 39 years later: "Had not the Arabs been the masters and teachers of the world when the now mighty Europeans were steeped in medieval night? Had they not translated Aristotle into Arabic and transmitted to the European barbarians the first gleams of the light of Greece? But the greatest consolation of all, the one beyond doubt and dispute, the safe and sure anchorage of their being was the knowledge that in their Book and Prophet they possessed the Ultimate Truth. In this serene knowledge they felt superior to all outsiders...Truly that knowledge was a rock of comfort."<sup>30</sup>

The Northern Sudanese Scholar, Muddathir 'Abd al-Rahim, confirms Atiyah's observation by explaining that a dominant theme in the writings and verbal utterances of the

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<sup>29</sup> Edward Atiyah, *An Arab Tells His Story: A Study in Loyalties*, (London, John Murray, 1946, p. 158

literate Northern Sudanese at that time was the need for unity and solidarity based on principles of Islamism and Arabism rather than on Sudanese nationalism. Having been defeated and humiliated by the Anglo-Egyptian forces, the Sudanese, he explains, needed psychological reassurance, which they could not find in their past or in contemporary African identity. Instead of helping them regain their lost self-confidence, Africa threatened to accentuate their feeling of inferiority in comparison with both the British and the Egyptians. “Almost involuntarily, therefore, the Sudanese...turned their backs on Africa and became passionately attached to the glorious past of Islam, which, together with the richness of classic Arabic culture and thought provided the necessary psychological prod.”<sup>31</sup>

Muhammad Omar Bashir, another Northern Sudanese Scholar, observed that, “It was the citadel of Islamic culture that stood as a guarantee against the submersion of the Sudan in the jungles of heathen Africa, the source of magazines and books that were the intelligentsia’s link with the world beyond, the cradle of the nationalist movement and its heroes.” Consequently, according to him, “Northern Sudanese generally identified themselves with the Arab world through... Egypt...the window through which they viewed the outside world.” Bashir considered it natural for them to do so, since “they were undoubtedly more Arab than African in their culture...Besides, the Africans in the Southern Sudan, who were among the most backward peoples on the continent, could hardly inspire their Arab compatriots with any desire to identify with Africa.”<sup>32</sup>

Since in reality most Northern Sudanese families are mixed, the notion of race, *unsur* or *jins*, from which the word for nationality-*jinsiyya*-is derived, has to be flexible in terms of color. To be racially Arab then does not require being as light as the original Arabs. On the contrary, the Sudanese have developed their own color scheme, which favors the mixed mold as the ideal, relegating both black and white to a lesser order. But even within this color range, shades are critically important. Relating the notion of *asl* to color, Abd al-Rahman al-Bashir, a man of very dark complexion, noted, “Black is depicted in [Arabic] literature as something not good. That is why people are described as not black but brown or green. Green in the Sudan means that their *asl* (origin) is not Negroid.”<sup>33</sup> Although Sudanese, Northerners and Southerners alike, range in

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<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>31</sup> Muddathir ‘Abd al-Rahim, “Arabism, Africanism and Self-Identification in the Sudan,” in Yusif Fadl Hasan, ed., *Sudan in Africa* (Khartoum University Press, 1971), p. 230. Quoted in Francis Mading Deng, *Dynamics of Identification: A Basis for National Integration in the Sudan* (Khartoum University Press, 1973), p. 38

<sup>32</sup> Mohammed O. Beshir, *The Southern Sudan*, p. 134.

<sup>33</sup> From the interviews by the author. See *War of Visions*. p. 408.

skin color from exceedingly black to various shades of brown, Sudanese passports never describe the holder as “black.” The description used for the overwhelming majority of the holders is “green,” the standard of the nation in official eyes. Indeed, green is seen as the common Sudanese color of skin because it reflects a brown that is not too dark, giving associations with black Africa and possibly slavery, and not too light, hinting at gypsy (*halabi*) or European Christian forbears. Al-Baqir Mukhtar, however, provides an even more nuanced perspective on the complexities of Northern color consciousness and stratification:

The first color in rank is *asfar*. This literally means “yellow”, but is used interchangeably with *ahmar* to denote “whiteness”. The second in rank is *asmar*. This literally means reddish, but it is used interchangeably to describe a range of color shades from light to dark brown. This range usually includes subdivisions such as *dahabi* (golden), *gamhi* (the color of ripe wheat), and *khamri* (the color of red wine). The third in ranking is *akhdar*. This literally means green, but it is used as a polite alternative to the word “black” in describing the color of a dark Northerner. Last and least is *azrag*. This literally means “blue”, but it is used interchangeably with *aswad* to mean “black”, which is the color of the *abid* (slave).<sup>34</sup>

Mukhtar notes with refreshing candor that “The average Northerner views dark color as a problem that should be dealt with...Defense mechanisms must be put to work...In order to avoid describing self as *aswad* (black), the collective Northern consciousness renamed the word *akhdar* (green)...Whereas a very dark Northerner is only *akhdar*, an equally dark Southerner is bluntly *aswad*.” He goes on to provide an insight into the denigrated position of the Blacks in the Arab world. Although the prophet Mohammad tried to eradicate discrimination against them, it persisted and worsened after his death. Quoting ‘Abduh Badawi, Mukhtar explains how Black poets were called “*aghribat al-Arab*”, “the ravens of the Arab world”, likening them to that detested black bird whose blackness is traditionally considered bad omen.

There was a sharp sensitivity over color among the black poets before Islam. This was because they were a depressed and downtrodden group and because they were excluded, sometimes roughly, sometimes gently, from entering the social fabric of the tribe...They lived on the edge of society as a poor depressed group. They were only acknowledged under conditions of extreme pressure, as we know from the life of ‘Antar. Although this poet was the defender of his tribe, and its supreme poetical voice, his own tribe’s attitude

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<sup>34</sup> Al-Baqir al-Afifi Mukhtar, “The Crisis of Identity in the Northern Sudan,” pp. 14-15.

towards him continued to pain him and to weigh on his mind. The name ‘son of a black woman’ stuck to him even when returning from victory in battle.<sup>35</sup>

Mukhtar explains that although Islam preached the unity and equality of human kind despite differences in tongues and colors and that “the most noble of you in the eyes of God is the most pious”, and the Prophet taught that: “no Arab shall enjoy superiority over the non-Arab, nor shall the white ever excel the black, nor the red the yellow, except in piety”, the attitude of the Arabs towards Blacks never changed. Many Blacks apparently internalized the contempt against them. ‘Antar, a great warrior and the heroic poet is said to have resented his Ethiopian mother, Zabiba, as the one who was responsible for his blackness.’<sup>36</sup>

The evolution of a Northern identity shaped largely by the prevalence of slavery in an environment that fostered Arabization and Islamization contrasted sharply with the identity of resistance that evolved in the Southern part of the country, the subject of the next section.

## **B. Southern Identity of Resistance**

The evolution of the southern identity of resistance began in the period prior to the Anglo-Egyptian condominium rule, a time when the South was a hunting ground for slaves, when in local usage, “The world was spoiled.” However, as Douglas Johnson has noted, the earlier process of slavery to which various regions of the North were subjected, did not affect the South. “At this early date [prior to the Turko-Egyptian invasions]. Most of what is now the Southern Sudan lay outside the radius of exploitation by the Kingdoms of the central Nile.”<sup>37</sup> Southward state expansion was by eighteenth century effectively halted by the Shilluk Kingdom and the Dinka “who even offered refuge to Muslim pastoralists anxious to escape state power.”<sup>38</sup> It was in the nineteenth century that slave raids began to extend to the South and with it the emergence of North-South divide.

The significant aspect of the southern confrontation with invaders from the North, including the Arabs, is that while they persistently raided the South for slaves, they never penetrated deeply and did not attempt to settle. Swamps, flies, tropical humidity, and the fierce resistance of the tribes kept the contact marginal, even as it was devastatingly violent.

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid

<sup>36</sup> Al-Baqir Mukhtar, “The Crisis of Identity in Northern Sudan,” p. 35

<sup>37</sup> Douglas H. Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan: Civil War* p. 6

<sup>38</sup> Ibid p. 2

Furthermore, since the Arab Muslim was interested in the actual or potential value of the Negro as a slave, he did not desire to interact and integrate with him in the same manner as in the North. If the Negroes of the South had been converted to Islam, the Arabs could not have justified slave raids on them. Consequently, as Dunstan Wai has observed, “prior to the Turko-Egyptian adventures into the South, there had been no...political alliance or unity between the North and the South of the present Sudan.”<sup>39</sup>

The Turko-Egyptian ambitions in the South began in earnest when in November 1839, Captain Salim led an expedition to explore the source of the White Nile and the economic potential of the region. Salim’s expedition penetrated up to Gondokoro, near Juba, the capital of today’s Equatoria state in the Southern region. This opened the way for future expeditions to the Southern part of the country. The success of Salim’s expeditions aroused considerable interest in Europe where his journal was translated into various languages. Thereafter, accounts of travelers and explorers formed “ a complement to the more immediate impulses of European commerce and evangelism which seized the initiative in the Southern Sudan in the decade following Salim’s expedition,” and with that the increased spread of slavery southward:

The Southern Sudan became a breeding ground for rapacious slave raids, with clashes between differing societies and their respective cultures beginning in earnest and reaching unprecedented proportions. European merchants and missionaries as well as Turko-Egyptian soldiers and sailors invaded the South. The aggressiveness of the foreigners met with an equally vehement resistance from the people. The ultimate intentions of the intruders [were] confirmed with all finality ...by the robbing and hostility evidenced. The Europeans soon decided to undertake direct expeditions in the Southern interior to establish permanent and effective stations. Having realized the degree of insecurity involved in these landlocked expeditions they recruited a large number of armed Arab servants from the Northern Sudan and Egypt.<sup>40</sup>

It was not until the Turko-Egyptian government opened the Bahr al-Ghazal and Equatoria provinces in the 1820s and established more security from outside invaders that the slave trade became well established and assumed large proportions. European traders with Arab partners and servants established slave camps, or zaribas, as centers for trade and local control. Abel Alier describes the “tragic drama” that was to sow “the seeds of bitterness, violence and

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<sup>39</sup> Dunstan M. Wai, *The African-Arab Conflict in the Sudan* (New York, London: Africana Publishing Company, 1981), p. 27. Another Southern author states that “Southerners did not know the North, and Northerners did not know the South. What little they knew of one another was tinged with suspicion.” Bona Malwal, *People and Power in Sudan: The Struggle for National Stability* (London: Ithaca Press, 1981), p. 21.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid



resistance” and the degree to which that legacy has continued to poison North-South relations to this day: “By the middle of the 1860s and the early 1870s, the military and commercial networks were expanded throughout the South by both Northern Sudanese and Turco-Egyptian officials, sometimes working in competition, but often working in conjunction with each other. Thus from the point of view of Southern peoples there was little to distinguish between the two groups of exploiters and plunderers...In Bahr El Ghazal the Ja’ali merchant, Zubeir Rahma Mansour reigned supreme, uprooting the fertile tribes, developing and expanding the administrative centers and slave routes through Bahr El Ghazal, Darfur and Kordofan.”<sup>41</sup> It has been argued that the “hardship created by [Turco-Egyptian] government’s economic policies in the North contributed to the exploitation and subjugation of the South and gave certain section of the Muslim and Arabic-speaking population of the North a personal stake in its exploitation.”<sup>42</sup>

Sir Samuel Baker, whose mission in 1869 from Ismail Pasha, the viceroy of Egypt, was to establish a chain of forts and to suppress slavery, recorded his impressions of the destruction inflicted on the people: “It is impossible to describe the change that has taken place since I last visited this country. It was then a perfect garden, thickly populated and producing all that man would desire. The villages were numerous, groves of plantens fringed the steep cliff on the river bank, and the natives were neatly dressed in the bark cloth of the country. The scene has changed: All is wilderness. The population has fled. Not a village is to be seen. This is the certain result of the settlement of Khartoum traders. They kidnap the women and children for slaves and plunder and destroy wherever they set their foot.”<sup>43</sup>

Baker did not succeed either in conquering the South or in suppressing the slave trade. In 1874 he was succeeded by General Gordon, who had distinguished himself militarily in China. Gordon’s mission was to establish the administration and to fight slavery. When he left two years later, “Egyptian authority was still tenuous and the slave trade continued to flourish.”<sup>44</sup> Shortly thereafter, Gordon was appointed governor-general of the Sudan with the mission of pacifying the country and suppressing the slave trade. Although he had some success in fighting slavery,

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<sup>41</sup> Abel Alier, *Southern Sudan: Too Many Agreements Dishonoured* (Exeter: Ithaca Press, 1990), p. 12. According to one source, “It has been estimated that during the nineteenth century Arab slavers carried off about ‘two million blacks’ from the southern Sudan.” Edgar O’Ballance, *The Secret War in the Sudan: 1955-1972* (Hamden, Conn.: Archon Books, 1977), p.20.

<sup>42</sup> Douglas Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan’s Civil War*, p. 5

<sup>43</sup> Sir Samuel Baker, quoted in W. W. Cash, *The Changing Sudan* (London: Church Missionary Society, 1930), p. 12. Quoted in Francis Mading Deng, *Dynamics of Identification: A Basis for National Integration in the Sudan* (Khartoum University Press, 1973), p. 28.

<sup>44</sup> O’Ballance, *The Secret War in the Sudan: 1955-1972*, p. 22.

“by employing...the small body of river police that had been formed in 1864...bribery and corruption generally nullified his efforts in this respect.”<sup>45</sup>

The Turkish administration brought a general devastation on the whole country, North and South, which made the Mahdist revolt initially popular as an anti-Turkish alliance against a common enemy. The Dinka, one of the larger Nilotic groups, composed hymns that linked the Mahdi as with the Spirit of Deng, the deity associated with rain and lightning as manifestations of God’s might. They prayed to him to save them from their long suffering at the hands of successive invaders, who eventually included the Mahdists. Mahdi, as a symbol of spiritual power and righteousness, became known as the son of Deng, while the Mahdists themselves came to be viewed as Arab aggressors.<sup>46</sup> But southerners in general did not embrace Islam, and they soon came into conflict with the Mahdists. Fanatically motivated and sure of their divine mission to rid the world of infidels, the Mahdists carried the holy war into the South and, with it, full-scale slavery returned.<sup>47</sup> Although the southerners were anxious to rid themselves of Egyptian rule, they did not want new alien masters, especially slave traders. They resisted, but with devastating consequences.

Major Titherington, one of the earliest British administrators in Dinkaland, wrote that the social system and personal outlook of the Raik Dinka were in a state of deterioration as a result of the continued harrying they had received from the Arab slave traders and of the demoralizing effects of the invasions they had suffered during the half-century preceding British rule. “They lost hundreds of thousands of cattle; men, women, and children in thousands were slaughtered, carried off into slavery, or died of famine; but the survivors kept alive in the deepest swamps,

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<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> Godfrey Lienhardt, *Divinity and Experience: The Religion of the Dinka* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1961), pp. 164-65. See also Francis Mading Deng, *Africans of Two Worlds: The Dinka in Afro-Arab Sudan* (Yale University Press, 1978), pp. 131, 214. As Lienhardt noted, “News of the Northern Sudanese prophet, the Mahdi, reached Dinkaland too, and in some places, though known only by the Mahdi name, the Mahdi (in Dinka, *Maadi*) is assimilated in thought to the prophets of the Powers.” After quoting the hymn, Dr. Lienhardt observes, “The old man who sang this hymn said in reply to a question that *Maadi* was a great prophet they had heard of in the north: ‘We have heard that Divinity appeared in the North,’” p. 165. See also Francis Mading Deng, *Tradition and Modernization: A Challenge for Law among the Dinka of the Sudan* (Yale University Press, 1971), pp. 48-49, for more discussion on the point.

<sup>47</sup> Indeed, it is widely acknowledge that the Mahdist revolt was in large part a protest against the abolition of slavery. As Gabriel R. Warburg has observed, “The suppression of the slave trade in the late 1870s was one of the major reasons for the success of the Mahdist revolt. This was so since the suppression of this trade harmed practically all echelons of Sudanese society.” “National Identity in the Sudan: Fact, Fiction and Prejudice in Ethnic and Religious Relations,” *Asian and African Studies*, no. 24 (1990), p. 153. See also p. 154 on the return of slavery during the Mahdiyya.

bravely attacked the raiders when they could, and nursed that loathing and contempt for the stranger and all his ways”<sup>48</sup>

In the extensive interviews conducted by the author with Dinka chiefs and elders about the past, present, and future of their people, this theme emerged conspicuously in their collective memory. They remember the Mahdist revolution as first claiming to rescue the people from the repressions and the exploitation of Turko-Egyptian rule, but then turning out to be itself a major cause of destruction. In the words of Chief Giirdit, “Although the Mahdi started as liberator, his rule became bad. He wanted to enslave the people.”<sup>49</sup> Chief Giirdit specifies the Turks and the Dongolawi tribe of the Mahdi as the sources of destruction in the South: “They were the people who spoiled our country...captured our people and sold them. They would attack and destroy an area, and when they conquered [that area] they would take the people and add them to their army as slaves...If a man had children, one might give them a child or two in the hope that they would spare his life and maybe help him with some means of livelihood.”<sup>50</sup>

Chief Makuei Bilkuei made the point almost obsessively: “ It was the Ansar [Mahdist followers] who destroyed the country...That is what is called spoiling of the world.... Yes, [they] would come with camels and donkeys and mules and guns....That’s how [they] killed people.... [They] destroyed areas until [they] reached us here. Then [they] took the people and sold them.... They said, ‘*La Illah, ila Allah, Muhammad Rasul Allah.*’ [There is no God but the One God and Muhammad is God’s Messenger]. That was the way they chanted while they slaughtered and slaughtered and slaughtered.”<sup>51</sup> Chief Makuei, an old man presumably in his nineties at the time of the interview in 1973, claims not to speak from hearsay: “ I have seen the Ansar and I have seen the destruction that came to our people. I saw the horses of the Ansar.”<sup>52</sup> Chief Arol Kacwol sounded almost sarcastic when he said, commenting on the destruction, “It came from these people who are now call our relatives-the Arabs. That was how they humiliated us.”<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>48</sup> G. W. Titherington, “The Raik Dinka of Bahr El Ghazal Province,” *Sudan Notes and Records*, vol. 10 (1927), pp. 159-160.

<sup>49</sup> Francis Mading Deng, *Africans of Two Worlds*, p. 132.

<sup>50</sup> Deng, *Africans of Two Worlds*, pp. 132-33; Francis Mading Deng, *Dinka Cosmology* (London: Ithaca Press, 1980), pp. 41-42.

<sup>51</sup> Deng, *Africans of Two Worlds*, pp. 133; and *Dinka Cosmology*, p. 76.

<sup>52</sup> Deng, *Dinka Cosmology*, p. 78.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 56. For a fictionalized account of a slave raid and redemption by exchange see Francis Mading Deng, *Seed of Redemption*, New York, N.Y. Lilian Barber Press, Inc. 1986, pp. 19-21

Many of those interviewed gave specific examples pertaining to their own families. Stephen Thongkol's father, with two brothers, were supposedly shot and killed by the Arabs; the father of Chief Arol kacwol was exchanged from slavery with a sister; the father of Acueng Deng was a rescued slave; and so was the grandfather of Albino Akot. Pagwot Deng and Biong Mijak also gave accounts of more recent encounters with slave raiders or isolated seizure of children by slavers.<sup>54</sup>

It is evident from the foregoing accounts of slavery from the Southern perspective, that while the Arabs of the North regard the Africans of the South to be only good as slaves, the attitude of the Southerners is one of a deep scorn for the Arabs whom they view as depraved and lacking the moral values associated with humanity. In the interviews with Dinka chiefs and elders, this theme emerged recurrently. To give a few examples, in response to a question on whether, in light of the peace achievement of 1972, the peoples of the Sudan would integrate or remain separate, one elder observed: "This question...whether people will mix or remain separate-why should we not remain separate? Why should we not remain as we are? .... God did not create at random. He created people with their own kind. He created some people brown and some people black. We cannot say we want to destroy what God has created...Even God would get angry if we spoiled his work."

The Dinka claim that slavery is a peculiarly Arab institution which is abhorrent to the Dinka sense of morality and, indeed, nature itself. "Those [Arabs] are people whom God created with their own ways," said one elder. Another elder pleaded: "If you, our children, have survived, hold to the ways of our ancestors very firmly. Let us be friends with the Arabs, but each man should have his own way. We are one Sudan, but let each man be himself." Yet another elder, a man of renowned spiritual powers inherited from a long line of religious leaders, gave a dramatic account of his resistance to Arab influence: "I don't speak Arabic. God has refused my speaking Arabic. I asked God, 'Why don't I speak Arabic?' And he said, 'If you now speak Arabic, you will turn into a bad man.' And I said, 'Isn't there something good in Arabic?' And he said, 'No, there is nothing good in it.'"<sup>55</sup>

Today, there is a strong feeling in the North against any discussion of slavery. Teaching about slavery during the colonial era was uniformly condemned in the North as an encouragement of southern anger and hatred toward the North promulgated by the vicious agents

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<sup>54</sup> Francis Mading Deng, *Dinka Cosmology*. London, Ithaca Press, 1980 p. 279.

<sup>55</sup> Francis Mading Deng, *Africans of Two Worlds :The Dinka in the Afro-Arab Sudan*, New Haven, London, Yale University Press 1978, pp. 212-213

of imperialism. Ismail al-Azhari, the first prime minister and later president of the Sovereignty Council of State, called it a “carefully worked-out, diabolical scheme which has for its aims the fostering of antagonism and alienation between the sons of one country.”<sup>56</sup> The southern spokesman at the 1965 Round Table Conference on the Southern Problem, however, argued that slavery “cannot be forgotten especially where nothing has been done to demonstrate clearly a change of heart among the responsible offspring of those who were responsible for it. We remind the conference of this historical event because we believe there is a lesson to be drawn from knowing about it. Knowing it may bring us wisdom to avoid further and future calculated missteps.”<sup>57</sup>

### **III. British Rule and the Ambivalent Abolition of Slavery**

The British dominated Anglo-Egyptian Condominium administration unified the country, but decided to administer North and South separately. This dual system reinforced Arabism and Islam in the North and encouraged Southern development along indigenous African lines, while introducing Christian missionary education and rudiments of western civilization in the South. With respect to slavery, British perspectives on the stratification of races, cultures and religions, on which slavery was founded, did not differ profoundly from that of the Arab-Islamic North. The result was an ambivalent attitude toward abolition of slavery in the Sudan.

As Amir Idris explains in his study *Sudan's Civil War: Slavery, Race, and Formational Identities*, throughout history Arabs and Europeans presented the Sudan to the outside world as comprising two different regions, the North constructed as ‘oriental’ and the South a ‘people without history’. The Northern Sudanese became known as Arabs, Muslims and ‘civilized’, while the Southern Sudanese were labeled ‘black’, ‘heathen’ and ‘primitive’: “The racist ideologies of fifteenth century Europe grew out of the development of African slavery in the Islamic world as far back as the eighth century.

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<sup>56</sup> Sayed Ismail el-Azhari, in his address to the Round Table Conference on the Problem of the Southern Sudan, March 16, 1965. Quoted in Francis Mading Deng, *Dynamics of Identification: A Basis for National Integration in the Sudan* (Khartoum University Press, 1973), p. 29.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 43, n. 5.

By the ninth century, ... the Sub-Saharan African emerged as a 'son of Ham' destined to perpetual servitude. ... Blackness then became a metaphor for servitude and the curse of Ham legitimized the continued subjugation of black Africans."<sup>58</sup> In the tenth century, Mutahr ibn Tahir al-Maqdisi, asserted that among the black Africans, whom he described as cannibals, pagans and primitive, there was no marriage and the child does not know his father.<sup>59</sup>

Idris contends that the Europeans saw the "Arabs as closer to their world view and civilization than the African Blacks. He quotes John Lewis Burchardt, a Swiss, who wrote about the Northern 'Arabs' and the Southern 'Negroes': "It is by the nature of their skin that the Arabs distinguish themselves from the Negroes...Their skin is fine as that of the white person, while that of the Negroes is much thicker and coarser. The hands of the latter are as hard as board, while the touch of the Arabs ... is as soft as that of the northern nations."<sup>60</sup> He also quotes from Emil Ludwig, who described the people of the Southern Sudan as 'child-like,' with a degree of romanticization: "If the Negroes are to be compared with children, then on the Nile at any rate, they must be compared with happy children whose cynical innocence lives on in their cruelty. They may kill each other in anger, but they know nothing of the perversions of the white man, everything that darkens white life, hatred and contempt, ambitions and jealousy, above all the curse of gold is absent from the daily life of the Negro."<sup>61</sup>

As the dominant power in the Anglo-Egyptian administration, the British decided not to abolish the practice hastily, but instead to discourage it gradually. Slaves were even encouraged to stay with their masters as "servants." As Gabriel Warburg has noted, "The end of slavery ... came about as a result of economic, rather than moral, reasons once wage-earning labor became more easily accessible."<sup>62</sup> The British drew a distinction between the slave trade and slavery, abolished the former and tolerated the latter: "Where the slave trade existed, so did the breakdown of law and order, and no British administrator in the Sudan could tolerate slave raiding against their subjects. ... Slavery ... [Their] attitude toward slavery ... was relaxed and practical, and they were not about to carry on any crusade against its existence."<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Amir H. Idris, *Sudan's Civil War: Slavery, Race and Formational Identities*, Lewiston, New York, The Edwin Mellon Press, 2001, pp. 16-17.

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.* It is ironic that in one of the verses in the Dinka Songs collected and translated by the author, the Arabs are described as a people among whom no one knows the father of a child.

<sup>60</sup> *Id* p. 18

<sup>61</sup> Emil Ludwig, *The Nile*, New York, The Viking Press, 1937 p. 76. Idris *id* at p. 20

<sup>62</sup> Gabriel R. Warburg, "National Identity in the Sudan: Fact, Fiction and Prejudice in Ethnic and Religious Relations," *Asian and African Studies*, vol. 24, no. 2 (July 1990), p. 155.

<sup>63</sup> Robert O. Collins, *Shadow in the Grass: Britain in the Southern Sudan, 1918-1956*, New Haven and London, Yale University Press 1983 p.374

According to Martin Daly, the authorities argued that “Domestic service suits both the master and servant and had the advantage from the point of view of the Government of preventing the servant from becoming a thief or a prostitute and of keeping labour on the land. What the government said for public consumption and what it knew to be true were radically different. In 1906, for instance, Slatin had contended: “to my certain knowledge, no slave, male or female, is obliged by force to stay with his so-called master’, a ridiculous assertion. In 1918 Sterry (the Legal secretary) was able to still to write about runaways being captured and carried off, tied to camels, all with knowledge of officials.”<sup>64</sup>

In view of the Sudan Government’s desire not to jeopardize the support of leading Sudanese notables, the British authorities refrained from any serious attempt to quash slavery, at least until the 1920s, and, indeed, often found themselves actively supporting the domestic side of that institution. In Mansour Khalid’s words, “Kitchener’s- and more so Wingate’s-policies, to appease the Sudanese notables, went to the point of tolerating slavery for the first two decades of the Condominium rule, a matter that led to sharp exchanges between the Government and the Department on both the manner and pace of implementing the anti-slavery laws. Wingate, conscious of negative reactions to those policies back home, went so far as to enlist the support of Muslim ‘Ulama to justify his attitude towards slavery if only to make it palatable to the British public opinion.”<sup>65</sup>

Lord Kitchener, the first Governor-General of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, declared the policy of his government in ambivalent terms: “Slavery is not recognized in the Sudan, but as long as service is willingly rendered by servants to masters it is unnecessary to interfere in the conditions existing between them. Where, however, any individual is subjected to cruel treatment and his or her liberty interfered with, the accused can be tried on such charges, which are offenses against the law, and in serious cases of cruelty the severest sentences should be imposed.”<sup>66</sup>

Martin Daly elaborated on the dilemmas that faced The founding rulers of British Administration in the Sudan. “Cromer and Kitchener were well aware that slavery posed a political problem to their administration. Article II of the Condominium Agreement stated: ‘The importation of slaves in the Soudan, as also their exportation, is absolutely prohibited.’ ... No

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<sup>64</sup> M. W. Daly, *Empire on the Nile: The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan 1893-1934*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press 1986 p. 234

<sup>65</sup> Mansour Khalid, *The Government They Deserve: The Role of the Elite in Sudan: Political Evolution*, London and New York, Keegan Paul International, 1990 p. 49

<sup>66</sup> Circular Memorandum on Slavery, May 6, 1925. INT. 11/43/364 Quoted by Amir Idris, op cit p.50

mention was made of slavery. In explaining this omission to Salisbury, Cromer said that domestic slavery was ‘a much more difficult’ problem than the slave trade, and warned that ‘For the moment we had better leave it alone.’<sup>67</sup> Commenting on Kitchener’s memorandum to the Governor-General in which he stated that slavery was not recognized in the Soudan, but as long as service was willingly rendered by servants to masters it was unnecessary to interfere in the conditions existing between them, Daly observed that the statement, notwithstanding its use of the euphemisms of ‘servants’ and ‘masters’, clearly foresaw a policy of tolerating slavery, based on a recognition of its pervasiveness, its essential contribution to the economy and the possible effects on Sudanese opinion of enforcing its abolition.

Daly explains the racist roots behind this policy: Slatin had been embarrassed in 1897 when Queen Victoria was said to be “much concerned at rumours” that he favoured slavery and took “the side of the masters over the slaves”. He had replied by referring to the “inherent bad qualities of these Negro races whom we seek in vain to raise to our own level”; such “godforsaken swine” did not “deserve to be treated like free independent men”, for when they had been so treated some deserted, others stole. “By 1900 Slatin had altered his language but not his views: in a report to Wingate he blamed agricultural problems on the ‘liberation of slaves’; opined that ‘by nature all blacks are lazy’; recommended the return to ‘their master’ of slaves recently recruited into the army, and the settlement on the land of others; suggested the creation of ‘Government farms and work houses where non-enlisted blacks...should be placed and made to cultivate’; and proposed that the number of ex-slave followers’ of soldiers should be limited so as to increase the agricultural labour supply.”<sup>68</sup>

Daly concludes his account of the evolution of Government policy on the slave trade and domestic slavery with a surprisingly understanding tone: “The Sudan Government’s defense of slavery is understandable in view of its priorities and Sudanese traditions.... The abolition of the slave trade was impossible so long as domestic slavery was tolerated: a demand for slaves would be supplied, just as it had been in the closing years of the Turkiya. ... [A]side from its impact on the overall labour supply, slavery was a matter of little [concern] to Wingate, Slatin, and the central government. ... The moral side of the matter was not pertinent.”<sup>69</sup>

The strongest defenders of slavery were provincial Governors in the central agricultural areas who believed that slavery was indispensable to the economy of their provinces and whose

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<sup>67</sup> Daly *op cit* p. 232

<sup>68</sup> *id* p. 233

<sup>69</sup> *id* pp. 238-239



views were in harmony with those of the Northern Sudanese “notables.” The most prominent among these were the three religious leaders: Sayyid Ali al-Mirghani, Sharif Yusif al-Hindi and Sayyid abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi. These leaders appealed in a petition submitted in 1925 to the Director of Intelligence for caution regarding the abolition of slavery. “They emphasized the ‘benign’ nature of Sudanese slavery, arguing that those who work for masters were actually partners to the landowners and have many privileges and rights and cannot be called slaves.... Slaves were treated as members of their masters’ family.” They warned the government about the social consequences of sudden emancipation. “In their view, male slaves would become useless for any work while their female counterparts would turn to prostitution.”<sup>70</sup>

Ironically, ex-slaves were recruited into the Egyptian army, which elevated them socially, and yet their slave origin remained a stigma. During the early nationalist movement which was closely connected with Egyptian nationalism, officers of slave origin were to play a leadership role which, if it had not been nipped in the bud, and condemned with racist overtones, could have promoted the cause of unity above racial differences.<sup>71</sup> The person most associated with this aspect of Sudanese history is Ali Abd al-Latif, an officer of southern origin, whose role in the nationalist movement within the northern framework, is one of the outstanding anomalies of Sudan’s identity dynamics. Born in Egypt around 1899 of ex-slave Dinka parents, Ali Abd al-Latif studied at Gordon College and Khartoum Military School, graduating from the latter in 1914 as a second lieutenant.<sup>72</sup> In 1921, he formed the Sudan United Tribes Society. This group favored an independent Sudan with tribal and religious leaders as its rulers. Presumably because this move would have reversed the process of arabization-islamization with Egyptian connections, it appeared to have been repressed, and very little information exists on its activities. Perhaps for the same reason that the group has been obscured deliberately or inadvertently, it is considered “doubtful whether it existed at all beyond a small number of Ali’s associates.... In any case, it was a short lived endeavour.”<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> Idris, *Sudan: Civil War*, p. 52

<sup>71</sup> According to Muhammad Omar Bashir, the military college, the first of its kind in British African colonies, “was responsible for producing the officer class which played such an important and significant role in the history of the Sudan.” Early recruits were “mostly black Sudanese since non-black Sudanese preferred to enter the Gordon Memorial College....” *Revolution and Nationalism in the Sudan* (Barnes & Noble, 1974), pp. 42, 58.

<sup>72</sup> According to Bashir, Ali Abd al-Latif “was the son of a Dinka mother, a slave of Mahamdeen Mahamdeen from Khandaq in Dongola Province.” *Ibid.*, p. 73. An interesting question arises as to why he is more popularly known as a Dinka, not a Nuba.

<sup>73</sup> Hasan Abdin, *Early Sudanese Nationalism: 1919-1925*, Sudanese Literary Series, no. 14 (Khartoum University Press, 1985), p. 49.

Ali Abd al-Latif had become politically “disillusioned with the Sudan Government” after “a number of disappointments.”<sup>74</sup> He “had been dismissed from the Army following a personal clash with an English officer, who, he felt, had treated him arrogantly...”<sup>75</sup> In 1922, he wrote an article entitled “The claims of the Sudanese Nation,” which he sent to the editor of the newspaper *Hadarat al Sudan* (Sudanese civilization). In the article he expressed a number of grievances against British colonial rule and called for self-determination.<sup>76</sup> Although the article was never published, Ali Abd al-Latif was tried, convicted, and sentenced to one year’s imprisonment.<sup>77</sup> When he was released a year later, he had become a national celebrity. “If there is such a thing as a turning point in history, this was one in the development of Sudanese nationalism.”<sup>78</sup> Ali Abd al-Latif is widely recognized in the Sudan as the prototype of the modern secular nationalist leader.

In May 1923, Ali Abd al-Latif and Obeid Haq al-Amin formed the White Flag League, which was more militant than its predecessor, the League of Sudanese Union, and whose declared goal was to liberate the country from the “slavery” of colonialism. It saw the attainment of this goal through the unity of an independent Nile Valley state, which implied uniting Egypt and the Sudan. A few days before the formation of the White Flag League, Ali Abd al-Latif and several colleagues in the movement sent a telegram to the governor-general, protesting the fact that the Sudanese people had been excluded from the forthcoming negotiations between the condominium partners in which the Sudan question would be discussed. The telegram read: “Our dignity will not permit us to be bought and sold like animals who have no say in their disposal. We protest with all our strength against our people not being given the right, which is theirs by law, of expressing their opinion openly and of sending their representatives, selected by the Nation, in order that they may at least be aware of the decision taken in the coming

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<sup>74</sup> Mansour Khalid, *The Government They Deserve: The Role of the Elite in Sudan’s Political Evolution* (London and New York: Kegan Paul, 1990), p. 70.

<sup>75</sup> Muddathir ‘Abd al-Rahim, *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Sudan: A Study in Constitutional and Political Development 1899-1956* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), p. 104.

<sup>76</sup> Hasan Abdin calls it “The Demands of the Nation.” *Early Sudanese Nationalism*, p. 48.

<sup>77</sup> Tim Niblock, *Class and Power in the Sudan: The Dynamics of Sudanese Politics 1898-1985* (London: Macmillan, 1987), pp. 165-68. Commenting later on the article, the Ewerts Report observed: “The document, for writing which he was convicted, contains no word in favour of Egypt; it advocates the government of the Sudan by the Sudanese and the ending of foreign rule ... much of its contents however was an expression of sentiments which were and still are genuinely shared by the bulk of the educated younger generation and even some of their seniors.” Bashir, *Revolution and Nationalism*, p. 74.

<sup>78</sup> Abdin, *Early Sudanese Nationalism*, p. 50.

negotiations in regard to their future. They alone are entitled to decide their fate, because this decision lies with the Nation and it is hers by right.”<sup>79</sup>

The White Flag League collected petitions of loyalty to Egypt, and several members of the league were sent to Egypt to present them to the Egyptian authorities. The delegation was intercepted in Wadi Halfa and sent back to Khartoum, where its arrival triggered the first political demonstrations in the country. Ali Abd al-Latif was once more arrested, tried, and sentenced, this time to three years’ imprisonment. This induced the cadets of the military college to join the growing waves of demonstrations. More than fifty cadets were arrested and sent to prison, where further demonstrations and a prisoners’ mutiny took place. Members of the league soon “spread the news and the spirit of insurrection throughout the Sudan, as far as Talodi and Fashir in the West and Wau and Malakal in the South.”<sup>80</sup>

In the meantime, relations between the condominium parties were deteriorating rapidly. On November 19, 1924, Sir Lee Stack, the governor-general of the Sudan, who was also the Sirdar [commander] of the Egyptian army, was assassinated in Cairo by Egyptian nationalists. The British responded immediately by evacuating all Egyptian troops from the Sudan. Disturbances broke out in many parts of the country. More specifically, while the Egyptian troops were being evacuated, Sudanese units in Khartoum stood in solidarity with their withdrawing Egyptian colleagues and refused to obey orders of their British officers. They were eventually put down by force, with heavy loss of life. The Sudan was thenceforth fully under the control of Britain, with Egypt losing all effective participation in the government of the country.

In the wake of the 1924 uprising, the officers of Dinka origin provided an important connection between the soldiers on active duty and the town population, not only in the cities but also in the provinces extending to the south. Officers in two southern towns, Wau and Malakal, organized demonstrations. In Wau, Zein al-Abdin Abd al-Tam, one of the Dinka founding members of the White Flag League, was among the officers who organized the demonstrations. Malakal demonstrations were considered to be so serious that the governor of the province requested a detachment of British troops to restore order. These demonstrations preceded those that took place in al-Obeid, Medani, Kassala, and Taladi, organized by Zein al-Abdin Abd al-Tam, who had been transferred from Wau after the demonstrations there. All these culminated in the Khartoum mutiny accompanying the evacuation of Egyptian troops.

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<sup>79</sup> Muhammad Omar Bashir, *The Southern Sudan: From Conflict to Peace* (London: C. Hurst, 1975), p. 134.

<sup>80</sup> ‘Abd al-Rahim, *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Sudan*, pp. 106-107.

This nationalist leadership by officers of slave background was antithetical to the dominant Arab elements of the North, who viewed this class of leaders as unworthy. When the 1924 uprising was crushed, and the British attitude toward the Blacks reversed itself to one of open disdain, northern prejudices based on race and resentment were unleashed. A special committee set up to investigate the 1924 disturbances described Ali Abd al-Latif as “ a young savage...who found himself a military cadet in his teens and at the age of twenty-two became a commissioned officer, and so was translated at a bound from the dregs to the cream of local society.”<sup>81</sup> Mansour Khalid observes: “The British did not disguise their anger at this ‘betrayal’ by non-Arab officers.... And though the racist overtones in the report of a disgruntled British investigator are comprehensible, those of the northern notables are not. ... *Hadarat al Sudan* newspaper in its comments on the 1924 incidents called on the British to ‘exterminate those wayward street boys’ and went on to ask, ‘what a lowly nation is this that is now being led by people of the ilk of Ali al-Latif. From what ancestry did this man descend to merit such fame? And to what tribe does he belong?’”<sup>82</sup> As *Hadarat* was owned by al-Mighani and al-Mahdi, the article must have reflected their own thinking; at least it did not conflict with it.

Although this early period of the nationalist movement is often overlooked, it has a symbolic significance in several respects. First, it shows the positive dynamics of identification, its flexibility and malleability. The descendants of slaves became assimilated into the Arab-Islamic culture and even assumed the leadership of the first nationalist movement in the country. Second, and on the negative side, this assimilation was tenuous and fragile, as it asymmetrically favored Arab-Islamic identity and discriminated on racial and cultural grounds. Neither islamization nor the cultural assimilation into the Arab framework provided these Blacks with a basis of social equality; they were still viewed as racially different and inferior. Once the protective veil of the British was removed by what was seen by them as betrayal by these ex-slaves, prejudices that were being thinly concealed were revealed with a vengeance. A third, more optimistic lesson is that a large number of the people in what is now the Arab-Islamic

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<sup>81</sup> Ewarts Report, secret report of special committee commissioned in 1925 to enquire into political organizations in the Sudan culminating in 1924 disturbances, quoted in Bashir, *Revolution and Nationalism in the Sudan*, pp. 73-74.

<sup>82</sup> Khalid, *The Government They Deserve*, p. 110n. Peter Woodward cites the article as stating, “Low is the Nation if it can be held by Ali ‘Abd al-Latif.” *Sudan, 1898-1989: The Unstable State* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner, 1990), p. 56. The author cites Niblock, *Class and Power in the Sudan*, p. 168. Niblock also quotes the paper: “The League should know ... that the country is insulted when its smallest and humblest men, without status in society, pretend to come forward and express the country’s opinion.” It has been observed that “the leaders of the White Flag League had little support outside the small and politically immature intelligentsia and the handful of Sudanese Army Officers who founded it.” Gabriel Warburg, Islam, *Nationalism and Communism in a Traditional society: The Case of the Sudan* (London: Frank Cass, 1978), p. 94.

North are the progeny of these Blacks to whom time and the liberal processes of assimilation have been more hospitable and generous. Seen in the historical perspective in which the races, the cultures, and the religions have mixed, the role of this group, historical and potential must not be underestimated. Recent events in the Nuba Mountains, Southern Blue Nile, Darfur and the Beja region testify to the potential rise of these forces and their impact on the nation. While the non-Arabs in the North have largely been a silent majority, this is no longer the case. This shift and the humanitarian crises the conflicts with the Arab-Islamic center have generated indicate both the magnitude of the national identity problem and the prospects for its reconstructing a more equitable inclusive national identity framework.

#### **IV. British Paradoxical Protection of the South.**

If the British administration in the Sudan was tolerant toward the on-going practice of slavery in the North, it was more decisive in stopping Northern slave raids against the Southerners and protecting the South against any exploitive adventures by Northern traders. The legacy of slavery had divided the country into the Arab Muslim North, with the identity of slave masters, and the African South, the hunting ground for slaves.

The Mahdist revolution, initially perceived in the South as a liberation movement for the country, turned out to be more of the same, a regime of slave raids from the North. Believing in their ‘civilizing mission’ to scourge the earth of the ‘infidel’, the Mahdists carried their *jihad*-holy war- to the Southern Sudan, in close cooperation with the slavers. But they were never strong enough to establish their hegemony over the South. Robert Collins describes the failure of the Mahdist state, as the Turko-Egyptian role before it, to control the South, “Indeed the failure of the Mahdists to spread Islam up the Nile is one of the most significant aspects of the Mahdiya. A generation of interaction between Africans and the Arabs in the Southern Sudan had produced not the acceptance of Islam or of Arab culture by the African tribesmen, but a legacy of distrust and fear and a tradition of resist the imposition of alien ideas and customs upon them.”<sup>83</sup>

British protection of the South from Arab slave raiders and traders did not mean that they had greater respect for the Black Africans in the South than the Arabs did. Quite the contrary, they shared a similar view of the Southerners. Following the downfall of the Mahdist state at the

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<sup>83</sup> See Robert Collins. “African-Arab Relations in the Sudan.” Paper presented at the annual meeting of the Middle East Studies Association. 23-26 November 1985. New Orleans. Louisiana. p. 1. Quoted in Idris, p. 44

reconquest, the pervasive and persistent southern resistance and the government's view of the people of the South as savages led the British to appoint military men as administrators in the South for the first two decades of condominium rule. "These seconded military officers were preferred for the Southern Sudan, where they were required to lead police patrols and punitive expeditions against recalcitrant Southerners."<sup>84</sup> Lord Cromer formulated his policy on the basis that "A light system of taxation, some very simple forms for the administration of civil and criminal justice, and the appointment of a few carefully selected officials with a somewhat wide discretionary power to deal with local details are all that for the time being is necessary."<sup>85</sup>

An agent for modest change in the South was found in the Christian missionaries. Their influence, it was hoped, could both "civilize" the South and win the confidence of its inhabitants, which the slave trade had destroyed.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, during the peace that followed, Islam's influence increased in southern towns through the Muslim traders and civil servants. Although some tribes, notably the Nilotics, did not become susceptible to Arab-Muslim culture, other tribes, especially in towns and trading centers, adopted Muslim names, northern dress, and other elements of Arab culture.<sup>87</sup>

The Egyptian anti-British revolution of 1919 led the British to break the close connection between the Sudan and Egypt and, as a further obstacles to the spread of Arab influence and nationalism in the Nile Valley, to tighten their policy of separate development of the North and the South, marking a new phase in what became known as the Southern Policy. In the words of one historian, "This policy clearly set out to encourage an African – as opposed to an Arab-Muslim – identity in the Southern Sudan, since it was felt that the indigenous institutions and the traditional cultures were not strong enough to withstand the onslaught of Arabism and Islam."<sup>88</sup> It entailed the creation of separate military units in the South staffed with southern recruits under the command of British officers, with northerners and Egyptians totally excluded. The use of English as a lingua franca and the return of indigenous southern customs were encouraged to the exclusion of all persons and things northern. In 1922 the Passports and Permits Ordinance

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<sup>84</sup> Collins, *Shadows in the Grass*, p. 14.

<sup>85</sup> Memorandum to the Marquess of Salisbury, Quoted in Mekki Abbas, *The Sudan Question* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1952), p. 161.

<sup>86</sup> Initially, the government was reluctant to permit the Christian missionaries even into the South on the grounds that, according to one authority, "They would, 'spoil the natives.'" O'Ballance, *The Secret War in the Sudan*, p. 27. Only pressure from within Britain forced a change of policy.

<sup>87</sup> See 'Abd Al-Rahim, *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Sudan*, pp. 77-78. For an overview, see Lilian Passmore Sanderson and Neville Sanderson, *Education, Religion and Politics in Southern Sudan 1899-1964* (Khartoum University Press, 1981), Chapter IV.

<sup>88</sup> Warburg "National Identity in the Sudan," p. 156.

(Closed Districts Ordinance) was promulgated. Under this rule, permission for Sudanese to travel from North to South could be refused or withdrawn at will. Traffic from the South to the North was virtually nonexistent.

In 1930 the Civil Secretary, Sir Harold MacMichael, restated the southern policy in what he describes as “simple terms.”

The policy of the Government in the Southern Sudan is to build up a series of self-contained racial or tribal units with structure and organization based, to whatever extent the required of equity and good government permit, upon the indigenous customs, traditional usage and believes.... It is the aim of the Government to encourage, as far as possible, Greek and Syrian traders rather than the Gellaba (Northern) type....The limitation of Gellaba trade to towns or established routs is essential... Every effort should be made to make English the means of communication among the men themselves to the complete exclusion of Arabic.<sup>89</sup>

In the administration of justice, the Chiefs’ Courts Ordinance was passed in 1931 to formalize the functions of tribal institutions. Unlike northern Sudan, where Friday was the day of rest, Sunday was made the official resting day in Southern Sudan. K.D.D. Henderson noted some of the reasons for the exclusion of the northerners from the South as the British administrations saw them:

The Northerner for... the British administrator was either a raider or a trader. Up till the middle ‘twenties the Baggara were still lifting slaves south of the river and disposing of them to inaccessible markets far to the north. When not slave raiding they were poaching elephants or hunting giraffe or lifting cattle. When they condescended to do a little trading, they usually swindled the unsophisticated Nilote or paid him with counterfeit coins. As for the professional trader, the Jellabi, he in baronial eyes was an equally undesirable immigrant, battering on the villages, selling rubbishy goods at a vast profit, and introducing venereal disease. He had always preyed upon the Southerner and now he threatened to interfere with progress, as the Indian was doing in East Africa, by monopolizing petty trade and cash farming.<sup>90</sup>

Although Southerners vigorously resisted the reconquest well into the 1920s, the British were no longer imperialist intruders, but “good people,” more benefactors than malefactors. And, indeed, whatever can be said against British rule in the Sudan, it brought the longest period of peace and security, at least from invasion and the use of crude force, that the South has experienced throughout its recorded history. The unfaltering goodwill and confidence the British

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<sup>89</sup> See Appendix 6 in ‘Abd Al-Rahim, *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Sudan*, pp. 245-49

<sup>90</sup> K. D. D. Henderson, *Sudan Republic* (London: Ernst Benn, 1965), pp. 162-63.

won for that is well supported by oral history accounts, embellished with mythology. Some elders even present the British intervention in the Sudan as motivated by the desire to save the black man from Arab slavers.

With the rise of the independence movement, Northern Sudanese began to aspire toward integrating the South into a unified state infrastructure and constitutionalism framework. But the political process they put in motion did not involve Southern participation. When, in 1946, the Governor-General set up an administrative conference to help determine the transfer of power to the Sudanese, Southerners were not included in the discussions. When Northerners, with the backing of Egypt, demanded the fusion of the North and the South, the British capitulated and decided upon a policy of ultimate unity of the country.<sup>91</sup> British policy until that point had recognized that “the people of the Southern Sudan are distinctly African and Negroid, and that our obvious duty to them therefore is to push ahead as far as we can with their economic and educational development on African and Negroid lines, and not upon the Middle Eastern Arab lines suitable for Northern Sudan. It is only by economic and educational development that these people can be equipped to stand up for themselves in the future, whether their lot is eventually cast with the Northern Sudan or with East Africa (or partly with each).<sup>92</sup>

The new British policy, while recognizing the distinct identity of the South, however pushed for integration of the North and the South on the grounds that “economies and geography combine (so far as can be seen at the present time) to render them inextricably bound to the Middle-Eastern and Arabized Northern Sudan...”<sup>93</sup> British administrators in the South protested against this shift in policy and demanded that Southerners be consulted during this process. In response, in June 1947 the Civil Secretary convened the Juba conference to seek Southerners’ views on the issue of whether and how the South should be represented in the proposed Legislative Assembly, which initially was intended solely for the North. The conference revealed intense mutual suspicion and tension between the parties, with the North highly suspicious that the South wanted separation, and the South suspecting that the North wanted to dominate under the proposed unified framework. Representatives of the South, lacking the

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<sup>91</sup> See Civil Secretary’s Memorandum on Revision of Southern Policy, 1946, CS/SCR/ICI, December 16, 1946; Muddathir ‘Abd Al-Rahim, *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Sudan: A study in Constitutional and Political Development 1899-1956* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1969), appendix 8.

<sup>92</sup> Dispatch no. 89 (1945) to the British Colonial government in the Sudan by Killearn. Quoted in Dunstan M. Wai, *The African-Arab Conflict in the Sudan* (New York, London: Africana Publishing Company, 1981), 38.

<sup>93</sup> Abd Al-Rahim, *Imperialism and Nationalism in the Sudan*, 254.



education, experience, and sophistication, found themselves at a disadvantage and were swayed to support national unity on the basis of a Northern-British agenda.

With unrelenting development toward a united Sudan underway at an accelerating pace, one incident after another intensified Southern fear of the North. This fear peaked with the announcement that 800 posts previously held by the British would now be Sudanized, in fact Northernized, with only eight junior positions to go to Southerners. Southern outrage erupted in a violent revolt on August 18, 1955 in the Southern town of Torit, less than four months before independence, triggering hostilities that were to last for seventeen years. Several hundred Northerners in the South were killed and the Government's ruthless vengeance resulted in the death of even more Southerners.

Nevertheless, Northern political leaders accelerated the pace toward independence with near total insensitivity to the concerns of the Southerners. A resolution was passed by Parliament on August 19, only a day after the revolt in the South, which provided for the holding of a direct plebiscite to ascertain the wishes of the Sudanese people. This decision was soon reversed. The reason given was that the organization of a plebiscite, in a country as vast and diversified as the Sudan with its largely illiterate population, would create many problems and solve none. Moreover, it would be virtually impossible to conduct a plebiscite in the South, because the rebellion had caused a collapse in security and the administrative system.

At the critical point, the leaders of the nationalist movement "worked feverishly" for days to ensure the declaration of independence, effective January 1, 1956. Muhammad Ahmad Mahjoub, one of the main architects of the independence movement, recalled, "We encountered some difficulty in convincing the Southerners, so we inserted a special resolution to appease them, pledging that the Constituent Assembly would give full consideration to the claims of Southern Sudanese members of Parliament for a federal system."<sup>94</sup> Southern demand was subsequently dismissed without anything near full consideration. As Mansour Khalid noted, "Sudan's declaration of independence, in the words of one of its authors, was a take-in: a fraudulent document through false pretenses and the subterfuge that does no honor to the Northern political establishment."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Muhammad Ahmed Mahjoub, *Democracy on Trial: Reflections On Arab and African Politics* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1974), 57.

<sup>95</sup> Khalid, *The Government They Deserve*, 231. And as Niblock noted, "Southerners remained peripheral to the debate over independence arrangements during 1955, except when their votes were needed in parliament. Such attention as the major northern parties did give to the Southern Sudan, moreover, was motivated by short-term political interest and often had destructive consequences. Promises were made by northern politicians in the course

The crisis of legitimacy also affected other parts of the country. As Tim Niblock observed, “To much of the population in the less developed fringes of the Sudan, then, the Sudanese state as it emerged at independence seemed a distant and an alien entity, just as it did the colonial era. The peoples of Southern Sudan, and most of those in Western and Eastern Sudan, had little access to the benefits, which the state bestowed. The State personnel who faced them... appeared to share little of their cultural and ethnic background.”<sup>96</sup> To the average Southerner, the new government that took over on independence was Northern, Arab, and foreign and certainly did not signify Southern independence. The commission of inquiry into the 1955 disturbances in the South reported, “The Northern administration in Southern Sudan is not colonial, but the great majority of Southerners unhappily regard it as such ...”<sup>97</sup> In the end, the policy of separate development which was aimed at protecting the South proved to have an opposite effect. As Douglas Johnson has observed “The policy of separate administration and separate development for the northern and southern Sudan meant that there were few Northerners in the new politically active class who had any practical experience of the South; nor were there many southern Sudanese who shared the experiences or outlook of this class. ... The gulf of misunderstanding which separated North and South was all the greater as a result of that segregation.”<sup>98</sup>

## **V. Liberation Movement Against Arab-Islamic Domination**

The war in the South was to go through two phases. The first, led by the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement and its military wing, the Anya-nya, (1955-1972), aimed at the independence of the South, but settled seventeen years later for an autonomous South under the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement. The second, championed by the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement and Army (SPLM/A), began in 1983 with the Government’s unilateral abrogation of the Addis Ababa Agreement, the declared objective being not to secede, but to create a new

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of the 1953 elections which bore little relation to what these politicians intended, or were able to do.” *Class and Power in The Sudan*, 215.

<sup>96</sup> Niblock, *Class and Power In The Sudan*, 146.

<sup>97</sup> Republic of Sudan, Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Disturbances in the Southern Sudan during August, 1955 (Khartoum: McCorquedale & Co. Ltd., 1955), 7.

<sup>98</sup> Douglas Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan’s Civil War*, p. 25.

Sudan that would be free from any discrimination on the ground of race, ethnicity, religion, culture or gender.

### **A. Southern Struggle for Independence**

Southern Sudanese struggle against Arab-Islamic domination following “independence” was viewed by the central government as a violation of law and order that must be crushed and the perpetrators severely punished. And, indeed, accounts of the gruesome brutality inflicted by the Government forces during the first phase of the war indicate a dehumanizing treatment that is reminiscent of the slavery days. Blinded by their own experience with assimilation and their idealization of the resulting model in the North, northerners generally assumed that their identity was the national model, and what prevailed in the South was a distorted image that the colonialists had imposed to keep the country divided. Arabization and islamization, northerners believed, would triumph in the long run to reintegrate the country.

Having undertaken to accelerate the cultural integration of the country, the government hastened to unify the educational system along “new lines.”<sup>99</sup> As K.D.D. Henderson put it, “The solution must have appeared to lie in taking a leaf from the book of the old Government and putting southern policy into reverse, as it were. The influence of the existing intelligentsia would be weakened by cutting away its feeder system, the missionary schools from which it was recruited. Substitute a system of Islamic education uniform with that of the north and within a decade you will have built up new pro-northern Arabicized student body to replace the now discredited leaders of the nineteen-fifties.”<sup>100</sup>

Mansour Khalid has also noted that “National unity and integration were... to be achieved by assimilating the South into the Islamic and Arab culture of the north. No room was to be allowed for cultural diversity, and any dissent was to be ruthlessly suppressed by military force.”<sup>101</sup>

Apart from the ruthlessness with which the initial rebellion was countered, the tough line against the rebellion in the South began with the Government of Mohammed Ahmed Mahjoub, who became Prime Minister in 1965, and after being briefly replaced by Sadiq al-Mahdi in June

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<sup>99</sup> The *Sudan Almanac* (1983), p. 149. Cited in Deng, *Dynamics of Identification*, p. 39.

<sup>100</sup> K. D. D. Henderson, *Sudan Republic* (London: Ernst Benn, 1965), p. 183. As Tim Niblock wrote, “While the military regime did examine possibilities of forwarding economic development in the Southern Sudan, the main concern of government policy lay in Arabization and Islamization.” *Class and Power in the Sudan*, p. 224.

<sup>101</sup> Khalid, *The Government They Deserve*, p. 188.

1966, he resumed the position in May 1967 and remained in power until the coup of Jaafar Nimeiri in 1969. Mahjoub “was noted during his periods of power for his antipathy to the south.”<sup>102</sup> The irony is that Mahjoub was highly admired in the North as a man who stood for the ideals of democracy and respect for human rights. Mansour Khalid, who observed him at close range, has written that “Mahjoub was a democrat, in temperament, style of government, as well as in his private life.”<sup>103</sup> The national context for which Mahjoub advocated democracy was of course the North, and his plans nearly always excluded the South. As Mansour Khalid notes, Mahjoub’s own “narrative...tells a different story about this great democrat; the way he acted and behaved in the South, a world that lies beyond what the ruling elite consider to be the Sudan.”<sup>104</sup> For Mahjoub, as for other Northern rulers, the problem of the South was entirely one of law and order. As he himself testified, “My orders to the Army were to destroy rebel camps and hunt the rebels.”<sup>105</sup> And indeed, following his orders led to some of the worst atrocities of the war in the South.

In July 1965, shortly after assuming office as Premier, the bloodiest massacres of the war took place in the provincial capitals of Juba and Wau. During the night of July 8 in Juba, some 3,000 grass-thatched houses were burned down and more than a thousand people killed by government forces, intent on liquidating the Christianized-Westernized educated class.<sup>106</sup>

A few days later, on July 11 in Wau, government forces attacked a double wedding party, which had brought together the educated southern elite in the house of Chief Chier Rian, a veteran of the 1947 Juba Conference. Seventy-six people were killed in that assault.<sup>107</sup> On August 5, 1965, the army invaded the Shilluk village of Warajwok, south of Malakal, and killed 187 people, allegedly to prevent them joining the rebels. “It was during this period that many southerners of all walks of life sensed that the Government was pursuing a policy of extermination and fled either to the bush or to neighboring countries.”<sup>108</sup> Mahjoub’s foreign

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<sup>102</sup> Cecil Eprile, *War and Peace in the Sudan, 1955-1972* (London: David and Charles, World Realities, 1974), p. 162.

<sup>103</sup> Mansour Khalid, *The Government They Deserve: The Role of the Elite in Sudan’s Political Evolution* (London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1990), p. 280. Muhammad Ahmed Mahjoub, *Democracy on Trial: Reflections on Arab and African Politics* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1974).

<sup>104</sup> Khalid, *The Government They Deserve*, pp. 280-281.

<sup>105</sup> Mahjoub, *Democracy on Trial*, p. 212.

<sup>106</sup> See Oliver Albino, *The Sudan: A Southern Viewpoint* (Oxford University Press, 1970), pp. 60-61. See also Bona Malwal, *People and Power in the Sudan: The Struggle for National Stability* (London: Ithaca Press, 1981), pp. 39; 96-97; and Alier, *Southern Sudan*, p. 33. Because *The Vigilant* newspaper, the mouth-piece of the South, reported the incidents, its registered proprietor, Darurs Beshar, and its editor, Bona Malwal, were arrested and taken to court. The editions that reported the incident were seized and the paper suspended. The accused were tried and acquitted.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.

<sup>108</sup> Khalid, *The Government They Deserve*, p. 228.

policy was aimed at reinforcing the government to fight the war in the South while diplomatically countervailing the activities of the refugees and the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM) abroad. He sought support from the Arab world. He noted, “Arab countries, notably the UAR, Algeria, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait, helped us with arms, ammunition and funds.”<sup>109</sup>

Another Northern leader whose leadership is associated with atrocities in the South is Sadiq al-Mahdi, who succeeded Mahjoub as Premier in 1966 for a year. Within that period of one year, the South suffered a series of atrocities. Soon after assuming power, Sadiq al-Mahdi visited the southern town of Bor, where he went to a burial ground to pay homage to the soldiers who had lost their lives in the war. The prime minister reportedly stood over a grave of a young northern officer, recently killed, and wept. “No sooner had Sadiq left the town than the army, electrified by the Prime Minister’s tears, went on a rampage. Twenty four Dinka chiefs, including some who were detained under custody by the police, were slaughtered.”<sup>110</sup> When the only southern newspaper, the *Vigilant*, reported the incident, Sadiq ordered that the editor be prosecuted. However, the minister of the interior, Abdullahi Abd al-Rahman NugdAlla, “an incorruptible, no-nonsense politician, refused to be party to the Prime Minister’s fib ..., [having] himself... visited the site and seen the evidence of the killings.”<sup>111</sup>

Bona Malwal, the editor of the *Vigilant*, which had reported the atrocities, recalls that it became the policy of the government to treat every educated southerner, whether or not he was a soldier, as a rebel. “The Government declared that it would henceforth authorize the army and other security forces in the South to do whatever they saw fit for the maintenance of law and order in the South. This meant in practice that if the southern guerilla army attacked a town, all the Southerners within it were suspects and could be killed for not reporting the presence of the rebels. If the army went outside the town for patrol and were ambushed by the guerillas, all the villagers in the surrounding areas were condemned to death and their villages burned down.”<sup>112</sup>

Evidence of northern brutality in the South abounds. “The anger of the military was directed against the Anyanya and the civilian population alike, in both rural and urban centers; villages were burnt down and centers for tortures were established.”<sup>113</sup> In Upper Nile Province, for example, Kodok was designed as a center for torture, and in August 1964, schools in the

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<sup>109</sup> Mahjoub, *Democracy on Trial*, p. 212

<sup>110</sup> Khalid, *The Government They Deserve*, p. 228.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 231-32

<sup>112</sup> Malwal, *People and Power*, p. 96.

<sup>113</sup> Khalid, *The Government They Deserve*, p. 192.

provinces were closed because most of the schoolteachers had been rounded up, taken there, and subjected to daily torture. The form of torture was especially inhumane.

Chilies were put into their eyes and genitals, and each was given two hours' whipping every day tied to a tree with their heads down. The first to die in these tortures was the headmaster of Dolieb Hill center for girls, and several other casualties ensued. This torture center was only closed by the southern Minister of the Interior, Clement Mboro, after the October revolution. Mboro could hardly deliver his speech when he visited the center because the sight of deformed and tortured persons made him cry throughout his visit. ... In the village of Arini, 13 kilometers from the town of Akobo where all the 45 males had been massacred by the army, the same politician was shown the bones of all victims; nobody had been allowed to bury them.<sup>114</sup>

The magnitude of the war was more encompassing than can be demonstrated adequately by isolated incidents. Much evidence was furnished by tribal leaders interviewed shortly after the end of the seventeen-year war. In response to a question about what the war meant to the ordinary people in the South, Chief Thon Wai responded: "Our brothers [the Northerners], in their anger with us, harassed all those people who remained at home, including their chiefs. Even if the people of the forest [the rebels] had only passed near a camp, they would come and say, 'They are here inside the camp.' They would proceed to destroy the camp. Children would die and women would die. The chief would only stand holding his head. If you tried force, you fell a victim. Whatever you tried, you fell a victim. Nothing made it better. You just sat mourning with hands folded like a woman."<sup>115</sup>

Chief Ayeny Aleu described the experience graphically: "The terrible things that have happened in this area, if I were to take you ... around the whole South, to see the bones of men [women and children] lying in the forest, to see houses that were burned down, villages that were set on fire, to see this and that, you would leave without asking: ... 'Is this how we were living in our country?' You would .... Not ask me a single question."<sup>116</sup> Chief Thon described the art by which those who remained at home survived: "Whenever the boys came in the middle of the night, they would find food, they would find cattle, they would find a goat, they would eat but then leave. If any one of us was caught, he would say, 'This is a man from the forest, how do I know him? He is a man with a gun, and I have only a spear. How could I fight him? Guns destroy. Spears do not destroy.' We would explain it that way. That is how we lived, avoiding

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<sup>114</sup> Ibid.

<sup>115</sup> Francis Mading Deng, *Africans of Two Worlds: The Dinka in Afro-Arab Sudan* (Yale University Press, 1978), p. 167.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., pp. 167-68.

one another, crossing our paths, each man coming and another going.”<sup>117</sup> Some were believed and saved the agony of persecution, but many were not.

The account of Chief Stephen Thongkol Anyijong of the Atwot is very descriptive of the perception associated with the conflict and the bitterness with which the war is remembered. Suspected for sympathy with the rebels because of information furnished by an Arab trader with whom he had a hostile encounter, he was arrested.

I stayed jailed for about two years. I just lay there. I did not bathe. I had no clothes to change. And I lay on the floor. It was...a house full of insects, dead insects, and all kinds of dead things... My cell was the place into which people were brought when they died. When bodies rotted, they were taken to be thrown wherever they were thrown. Another man would be killed the following day and would be brought into my cell... They beat me and beat me. Hot red pepper was put into my eyes.

I said, “Why don’t you shoot me, kill me and get it over with? Why do you subject me to this slow death?”

They said, “You have to talk.”

I said, “What do you want me to say?”

They said, “You have to say that this idea of the South wanting to be a separate country is something you do not believe in and that you will never support it...You have to swear to that...You will not be left alone until you swear by both the Bible and the [Sacred] Spear.”

I said, “How can I swear when the whole South is angry? When so many southerners are in jail? How can I swear that the South will not be separate when this is what everybody wants? This cannot be.”

When he was eventually released, Chief Thongkol escaped and joined the rebels in the forest. The consequences of his act on his family were devastating.

Because of my going to the forest, ...they destroyed my things... in a way that never happens. If you were to know about them you would cry with tears. First of all, they took my small child who had only a common cold. When they heard he was the son of a rebel, they killed the child...I suffered through that. They came and took 28 goats and sheep from my place. Then they went looking for my other home. They took eighty sheep and goats and burned the village. Then they...went to my cattle camp and took one hundred cows and three girls...My wives went and built another home at a distant place... They came and broke down the home...They caught my little girl and took her away. The women they threw into... a big fire. You know those big Dinka huts that are raised on high platform. They put fire under the hut. The hut was turned into an oven in which the women burned.<sup>118</sup>

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<sup>117</sup> Ibid., pp. 168-69.

<sup>118</sup> Francis Mading Deng, *Dinka Cosmology* (London: Ithaca Press, 1980), pp. 122-28.

The overall effects of the war on the South “were disastrous...such rudimentary infrastructure as existed to serve the rural areas collapsed. Villages were burnt down by the army, local leaders executed, and herds were raided.”<sup>119</sup> Arab militias, whom the Government used against the Southern rebels, also exacted their toll against the civilian population identified with the rebels. This was particularly the case among the Missiriya Arabs, the most closely associated with traditional slave raids and atrocities against their Southern neighbors, the Dinka.

Although the area of Abyei, which had historically been something of a North-South bridge, remained peaceful for a while during the first war, by the mid 1960s, hostilities began to infiltrate. As far as the Arabs were concerned, the conflict was with the ethnic southerners, the Ngok Dinka included. Abdal Basit Said in his doctoral dissertation on ethnic conflict in the region: wrote, “The Missiriya believed that any Nilote was party to the conflict and is potential object of revenge. For the Missiriya, the Nuer and Shilluk were also Dinka. The ...Nilotes ...also took every Arab whether Ajairya, Falaita, or a merchant from farther northern Sudan, for a potential enemy, and an objective of skepticism, mistrust and possibly revenge.”<sup>120</sup> In this atmosphere of tension and violence, “people from the South in ...northern towns became open targets for assault, looting, murder, and at least intimidation by the resident northern majority.”<sup>121</sup>

Southerners sought protection from the authorities or asked to be transported back home. Eventually people were transported to Abyei from al-Fulah, al-Muglad, and Babanusa, but some of those in Babanusa were victims of one of the most brutal massacres in the conflict. According to a police report that Abdal Basit Saeed describes as “extremely self-incriminating.”

Masses of women and children invaded the police station where Southerners had gathered seeking government protection, and had been accorded such status by sheltering them in available rooms inside the police station. [Arab] women and children were armed with kerosene...[which they threw] onto the defenseless Southerners and set fire to them. When the local Government District Commissioner arrived.... in the afternoon, everything had gone. Fire was still burning on the dead corpses inside the rooms. He found the master-sergeant policeman who was in command of the police station and the Nazir of the Missiriya sitting under a tree in front of the police station...All the inhabitants of Babanusa refused to assist in putting out the fire...Seventy-two Southerners were burnt to death...The police station was equipped with seventeen trained

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<sup>119</sup> Paul Howell, Michael Lock, and Stephen Cobb, *The Jonglei Canal: Impact and Opportunity* (Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 258.

<sup>120</sup> Abdal Basit Saeed, “The State and Socioeconomic Transformation in the Sudan: The Case of Social Conflict in Southwest Kordofan,” Ph.D. dissertation, University of Connecticut, 1982, pp. 215-16.

<sup>121</sup> File No. M.R.Sh. 66-D-1, Al Fula, 1979; Saeed, “The State and Socioeconomic Transformation in the Sudan,” p. 224.



men who were armed with rifles, and had four tear gas bombs at their disposal. The fact that they did not apply the tear gas facility against the attackers raises many questions.<sup>122</sup>

The police report continued with uncharacteristic honesty for northern authorities: “[N]ot only did an armed police unit give *de facto* approval for a group of ‘women and children’ to burn to death a group of defenseless southerners; but also the entire town of Babanusa apparently engineered a conspiracy of incredible magnitude; leaving the genocide to the so-called ‘women and children.’ ... It was even more saddening that the whole town refused to help in digging the graves for the dead....”<sup>123</sup>

Southern moral outrage with the Arabs make them believe that they were created by God with the attributes of human beings, but with different moral attributes, the obvious insinuation being that the Arabs are vile and morally depraved. Chief Pagwot Deng said, “With us Dinka, when men fight, they fight as men. Women are not involved. And children who are only months old are not involved. What do they know, those children? If you find an adult and you kill him, he is a man who has done something; he is a man who has said something and will say something.” Chief Pagwot Deng went on to elaborate on the Arab-Dinka 1965 hostilities. “My tribe was the first to fight with the Arabs. The Arabs were chased away and his cattle remained with his women. I said to my people, ‘Do not touch [even] his milk in the gourds; let his milk remain.’ ... [T]he Arabs went and surrounded my villages. The Arab would find elderly women and burn them down. He would find a goat and take it away. But that was a small thing.” The victimization of children men, women and children, supposedly under Government protection, was the most outrageous for the Dinka. “Now that we are in Khartoum here, if we fight with them, ...would they take people into the house of the Government to be burned down inside Government prisons into which people were supposedly taken for protection, including children who are three months old, who have said nothing wrong? Is this the behaviour of people who are related? No! These are brothers only by the order of the Government.”<sup>124</sup>

After the Addis Ababa Agreement of 1972, this author asked Dinka leaders how they saw the prospects of national integration with the Arabs. The responses as indicated earlier, highlighted the differences between the Southerners and Northerners, perceived in moral terms,

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<sup>122</sup> *id.* p. 235

<sup>123</sup> *id.* 236

<sup>124</sup> Francis Mading Deng, *Dinka Cosmology*, London, Ithaca Press, 1980, p. 267

to justify remaining separate, even within a framework of unity.<sup>125</sup> The reason for this position was historical memory. Bulabek Malith recalled the suffering that the Arabs had inflicted on the black man as having created an insurmountable obstacle to Arab-African unity: “The things the Arab has done in our country, including things which we have been told about by our elders, are many. A man called Kergaak Piyin, an elder... used to tell us the stories of our country’s destruction. He said, ‘Children, as I sit here, I wish that any future destruction of the country does not find me alive. Arabs are bad. Before they kill you, they cut your muscles to make you an invalid who cannot walk; they ... ask you to grind grain [kneeling down naked] and then... they put a thorn on the tip of a stick and give it to a small child to prick your testicles as you grind the grain.’”

Bulabek Malith regards these objectionable traits in the Arabs as ingrained in their racial and cultural make-up, and he therefore rules out any basis for genuine unity. “These are a people whom God created in their own way...The Northerner is a person you cannot say will one day mix with the Southerner to the point where the blood of the Southerner and the blood of the Arab will become one.” Chief Thon Wai also considers it difficult to predict unity and prefers a wait-and-see attitude. “So, we and our brothers, the time when we will unite and live together is known to God alone. We will not say it ourselves ... It is because we have had some experience.” Thon Wai goes on to express his view that the South and the North are so different that they must maintain a certain distance to remain at peace. “Our life with the North is like that of a cold egg and a hot egg. The sun is hot and the moon is cold. They keep their distance from one another... They act as though they are about to meet but they miss one another.”

Deng Riny was explicit about the mutual prejudices of the Dinka and the Arabs. “Each man sees himself as superior. The Arabs see themselves as superior and the Dinka sees himself as superior. In this case, it is difficult to see how they will mix.” Chief Giir Thiik had the last word: “That you will intermarry and mix to be one people, I cannot see.... You will live together, but there will be South and North. Even living together is only possible if you people handle the situation well. There are many people who appear to be one, but inside them they remain two. I think that is how you will live. A man has one head and one neck, but he has two legs on which to stand.”

## **B. The War for a New Sudan**

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<sup>125</sup> The extracts cited here are also available in Deng, *Africans of Two worlds*, in which the raw material in *Dinka*

The declared objective of creating a new, democratic and secular Sudan that, would be free from any discrimination based on race, ethnicity, religion, culture or gender reflected more the vision of the SPLM/A leader, Dr. John Garang de Mabior, than it was the popular aspiration of the people of the South. Although he was able to muster popular support for the vision, both within the movement and among Southerners generally, a degree of skepticism prevailed and continues to this day.

Many, both in the North and in the South, thought that if it were genuine, it was utopian and unrealizable. Many others thought that it was a pragmatic way of pursuing separation with the support of allies in the North. Very few took the vision seriously. But among those who presumably did, with deep fear of its long-term implications, were the leaders of the Islamic movement. It can indeed be argued that the rise of Islamic fundamentalism might have been, at least in part, a defensive offensive under the threat posed by SPLM/A the vision of the New Sudan.

It should be recalled that the SPLM/A emerged as a strong force to be reckoned with. Led by a man who was as much a scholar as he was a soldier, the movement proved to be a credible threat to the establishment. Since the reform agenda envisaged by the SPLM/A targeted the Arab-Islamic distortion of the country's identity configuration, which was racially, ethnically, culturally and religiously pluralistic and more African than Arab, the Arab-Islamic establishment felt itself threatened. Since they could not mobilize support on racial grounds, being the minority they are, their only potential source of significant support was Islam to which the majority in the North adhered and connected with Arabism, as a racial and cultural phenomenon.

Dr. John Garang argued to the Southerners that although secession was their preferred option, it would never be handed to them on a silver platter; they would have to fight for it. And in fighting for it, they needed to allay the concerns against secession in the world, and to win allies in the North for the cause of justice in a restructured "New Sudan." If and when they were able to liberate their own region, the choice between secession or unity would then be under their control. But if they, with the support of their Northern allies, succeeded in creating the New Sudan, why would they then want to secede, when they would have control of the whole country? Garang went beyond that to tell his followers that once they had liberated their Southern region, those who did not want to continue fighting for the whole country could remain

in control of the South, while those who aspired towards liberating the whole country could continue. But then he added that if his followers stopped at the Southern borders, how could he continue the fight to the North alone? Southerners understood the message and the popular saying among the SPLA soldiers was: “We know what we are fighting for,” a euphemism for “We are fighting for secession under the banner of a united New Sudan.”

While the focus of the war remained in the South, the response of the government to the famine caused by drought in both the West and the East, Darfur and Beja regions, in the early 1980s indicated discrimination against the non-Arab people of those areas. The drought in Ethiopia in the mid-1980s had drawn intense international media attention, which, while pursuing Ethiopian refugees into the Sudan, came in contact with the disaster in the eastern region and then on to the draught and famine in Darfur. Earlier warnings about the impending famine had been ignored by the authorities and even when the evidence began to mount, the Government remained reticent to recognize it and was even in open denial until it was forced by international pressure to declare a state of emergency and welcome international assistance. “The international community then moved in to fill the moral vacuum and to pressure the government to be more responsive to the tragedy...[A]n unprecedented international relief operation was launched to compensate for the earlier neglect and to provide the government with the needed technical capacity to arrange for and distribute food.”<sup>126</sup>

If the Government was reticent in its response to the drought-induced famine in the East and the West, the response to the war in the South was obviously even more unscrupulous. Successive governments saw the SPLM/A vision as a threat to the Arab-Islamic identity of the country and responded with ruthless counterinsurgency measures. Beginning with Nimeiri, but intensifying with the return of the elected Government of Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi, and the military government of General Omar al-Bashir that overthrew him, the government recruited, armed, and deployed tribal militias, supposedly to fight the SPLM/A, but, instead, terrorized civilian populations, particularly the Dinka, from which the leader of the movement and the majority of its forces come. The period of Sadiq al-Mahdi witnessed the increased use of Arab militias (*Murahalin*) among the traditionally slave-raiding tribes of the Rizeigat and Missiriya Baggara Arabs of southern Darfur and southern Kordofan. Their forces attacked civilians and looted their cattle. Worse, the aim of Sadiq’s militia policy, it has been observed, was “To depopulate northern Bahr al-Ghazal through Arab militia activity, just as earlier raids

tried to drive the Dinka out of Abyei. The outcome of such plan, if successful, would be to place the crucial pastures of the Bahr al-Arab completely under Baggara control, and also to place any oil found in Muglad-Abyei area beyond dispute...”<sup>127</sup>

Government policies resulted in some of the worst humanitarian tragedies in the war. In the town of al-Dhein in Southern Darfur, Southern civilians were massacred on 27-28 March 1987. Local Arab militias attacked the town’s only Christian church on 27 March, killing more than 1000 Dinka and other Southern civilians at the train station and police post. The massacre at al-Dhein was documented by two Northern Sudanese lecturers in the University of Khartoum, Ushari Ahmed Mahmoud and Suleyman Ali Beldo, who also reported on the resurgence of slavery in the Sudan.<sup>128</sup> Sadiq al-Mahdi ordered their arrest and threatened to have them tried for libel against the Arab tribes whom they alleged to have engaged in slavery.

As a counterinsurgency action against the SPLM/A, the army, in collaboration with the militias killed thousands of innocent civilians and the use of food as a weapon of warfare, resulting in the death of over a quarter of million civilians in 1988, most of them women, children and the elderly. With the Government showing no concern for the civilian population, the international community once again stepped in to fill the vacuum, by launching a massive intervention, known as Operation Lifeline Sudan. “Lifeline, involving governments and NGOs coordinated by the United Nations, mobilized some \$200 million to \$300 million in resources for the Sudan during 1989. It is widely credited with averting a repetition of the tragedy of 1988. Having won the consent of the two warring parties to the provision of international relief, Lifeline continued, though with less success, in 1990 and 1991 and into 1992.”<sup>129</sup>

In the years that followed, slavery in the Sudan continued to be documented and the practice intensified under the military regime of the National Islamic Front. The Swiss-based Christian Solidarity International (CSI) and the British-based Christian Solidarity International Worldwide and the American Anti-Slavery Group embarked on a massive and highly controversial program of redeeming Southern slaves from their Arab slavers. Instead of condemning the practice, the Government argued that what was involved was not slavery but abductions, and a practice which it claimed was associated with intertribal warfare. Although

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<sup>126</sup> Francis Mading Deng and Larry Minear, *The Challenges of Famine Relief: Emergency Operations in the Sudan*, Washington D.C. The Brookings Institution, 1962, p.3

<sup>127</sup> Douglas Johnson, *The Little Known War The Minority Rights Group*, 1998 p. 10

<sup>128</sup> See Ushari Ahmad Mahmud and Suleyman Ali Baldo. *Al-Dhein Massacre-Slavery in the Sudan*. Khartoum. 1987.

<sup>129</sup> Deng and Minear, *The Challenges of Famine Relief*, p. 11

many, this author among them, found rewarding the slavers for their crime through the redemption program morally objectionable, with the paradoxical potential of encouraging the practice, it provided ample evidence of slavery in modern Sudan.<sup>130</sup>

As Douglas Johnson affirms, “There is no question that slavery exists in the Sudan today and that it is fed by slave raiding deployed as a tactic of war.”<sup>131</sup> The objectives of slavery as a weapon of war and means of terrorizing the civilian community have deep implications for the victim community. “As the main targets of slavery abductions are women and children, it is especially destructive of Dinka families. This, too, is in keeping with the assimilationist project also reported in the Nuba Mountains: Dinka children reared as Muslims and given Arab names, cease to be Dinka; Dinka women raped by their captors give birth to children claimed by Arab Lineage.”<sup>132</sup>

As a result of mounting international pressure, the Government decided to create a Committee for the Elimination of Abduction of Women and Children, EAWAC, with the mandate “to facilitate the safe return of affected women and children to their families; investigate abduction of women and children and to bring to trial any person suspected of supporting or participating in such activities; and investigate into causes of abduction of women and children, forced labor or similar practices and recommend ways and means for the eradication of such practices.” It is obvious from the name of the Committee that the Government still resists putting the label of slavery on the practice. The U.S. sponsored International Eminent Persons Group on Slavery, Abduction, and Forced Servitude in the Sudan noted that “the use of the term abduction instead of slavery is controversial. Southerners affected by the practice are insulted that slavery is referred to as anything less.”<sup>133</sup> This author met with the Chairman and members of EAWAC on a number of occasions and was informed of large numbers of women and children (most of them now adults) who have been found and returned to their families through arrangements with tribal leaders. So far, there have been no reports of criminal investigations, trials or punishments connected with these practices.

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<sup>130</sup> For the debate on slave-redemption, see Douglas Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan’s Civil War*, p. 159 and note 22, in which the following sources are cited: Richard Minter. ‘The false promise of slave redemption,’ *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1999; Human Rights Watch, ‘Background paper on slavery and slave redemption in the Sudan,’ March 12, 1999; Declan Walsh, ‘The great slave scam,’ *Irish Times*, 23 February 2002; Karl Vick, ‘Ripping Off Slave “Redeemers”’, *Washington Post*, 26 February 2002. Money raised through false slave redemptions is reported to have been used to purchase weapons with which to arm local communities against raids by PDF units (Section 7.7)

<sup>131</sup> Douglas Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan’s Civil War*, p. 159

<sup>132</sup> *id.* p. 157

The report of the Eminent Person Group, though diplomatically worded to hold both parties in the conflict responsible, places most of the blame for the practices on the Government:

Of particular concern is the pattern of abuses that occurs in conjunction with attacks by pro-government militias known as  *Murahaleen*  on villages in SPLA-controlled areas near the boundary between northern and southern Sudan. These are characterized by: capture through abduction (generally accompanied by violence); the forced transfer of victims to another community; subjection to forced labor for no pay; denial of victims' freedom of movement and choice; and, frequently, assaults on personal identity such as renaming, forced religious conversion, involuntary circumcision, prohibition on the use of native languages and the denial of contacts with the victims' families and communities of origin.... The pattern of slave taking ... is, to a substantial degree, the product of a counter-insurgency strategy ... [which] involves arming local militias [that] attack [and] burn villages, loot cattle, rape and kill civilians, and abduct and enslave men, women and children.<sup>134</sup>

The revival of slavery is only one aspect of the humanitarian tragedy the war has inflicted on the country especially in the South. Since the resumption of hostilities in 1983, the war in the South, the Nuba Mountains and Southern Blue Nile is estimated to have killed over two million people, displaced about five million internally, and forced half a million across the borders to become refugees in neighboring African countries and scores of thousands to seek resettlement in North America, Europe and Australia.<sup>135</sup> To these have recently been added the victims of the crisis in Darfur, in which an estimated 50 thousand people are reported to have been killed or died of war related causes, over a million displaced internally and 200 thousand have sought refuge in Chad.

The configuration of the humanitarian crises in modern Sudan goes back to the historical shaping and stratification of identities that now need to be revisited, reconsidered, and restructured, if the country is to come together and avoid the risk of falling apart. The changing perspectives of the elite in both the South and the North on the critical issue of the national identity crisis are the focus of the next section.

## **VI. Liberation of the Mind: Undoing the Legacy of Slavery**

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<sup>133</sup> "Slavery, Abduction and Forced Servitude in Sudan," Report of the International Eminent Persons Group, May, 2002, p. 29.

<sup>134</sup> *id.* pp. 7-11

<sup>135</sup> For statistical analysis of the human cost of the war, see Millard Burr, *A Working Document Qualifying Genocide in Southern Sudan 1983-1993; Working Document II Qualifying Genocide in Southern Sudan and the Nuba*

The challenge of the vision postulated by the SPLM/A for the country has intensified the debate over the issue of national identity. One aspect of the debate is whether the Northern Sudanese, who are a mixture of African and Arab racial elements, should identify themselves and the country with them as Arab.

Many Sudanese “Arabs” are beginning to question the Arab label and would rather be defined as African or simply as Sudanese. Mansour Khalid posed the pertinent issues and questions: “The Sudanese conflict is about national self-identification. It is a cultural problem which affects all, from all regions and which has disturbed the place and unity of Sudan for 30 [now 50] years. There is still no consensus among the Sudanese as to what kind of country Sudan is. Are we Arabs? Are we Africans? Are we Afro-Arabs? Are we Muslims? What is Sudan and what does it mean to be Sudanese?”<sup>136</sup>

Abbas Abdal-Karim Ahmed, an economist who served as lecturer at Juba University in southern Sudan and later worked in the Gulf and in Europe, offered an insightful analysis of the dynamics of the various considerations, both subjective and objective: “Sudanese more and more realize that we are different from the Arabs, especially those of us who go to the Gulf. ... They come back understanding very much how different they are. Of course, they benefit and like to identify themselves as Arabs, because otherwise they might not be permitted to stay there. But deep in themselves they see that they are different. Many of the Sudanese migrants who went there had never met Arabs before. They find that in fact they are very different from them, not only racially but culturally and socially. When they come back, I don’t believe they look forward to being identified with Arabs.”

Abu Bakr al-Shingetti, a northern intellectual and a member of NIF, noted, “Let me just take my own sense of self. I don’t feel that much of an Arab looking at the present realities in the Arab world. There isn’t much of pride or satisfaction in identifying oneself as an Arab.” Al-Shingetti would rather see the Sudanese identify with their own nationality rather than as Arabs or Africans. To him the stratifications of Arabism and Africanism at independence have all,

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*Mountains 1984-1998; Khartoum’s Displaced Persons: A Decade of Despair, 1990; and Sudan 1990-1992; Food Aid, Famine, and Failure, 1993*, US Committee For Refugees, Washington, D.C.

<sup>136</sup> Mansour Khalid, “External Factors in the Sudanese Conflict” in Francis M. Deng and Prosser Gifford, eds., *The Search for Peace and Unity in the Sudan*, Washington, D.C. Wilson Center Press, 1987 pp. 109-10. Most of the following information in this section derives from tape-recorded interviews with Northern and Southern scholars, intellectuals, and politicians, both inside and outside the country. While most of the interviews were conducted by the author himself, some were carried out by his research assistant, Khalid Mustafa Medani. See Deng, *War of Visions*, pp. 442-



“been crushed with the realities of what happened to Africa, what happened to the Arab world. We still have hope in Sudan ... and ... take pride in being Sudanese. That is our cultural refuge.”

Abd al-Ghaffar Muhammad Ahmed, an anthropologist, agreed: “Rather than use labels; Afro-Arabs, or Arabs, or Africans, we should acknowledge that we are Sudanese first and that has its own characteristics. Some of them are indigenous African, and some of them have come from outside the continent. All have mixed to create a new thing. That thing I would call Sudanese. ... It is high time that we inject this into our educational system so that our children can build on this Sudanese character.” Khalid Yagi, a medical academic and president of the National Alliance for National Salvation, argued that “[Even] culturally we are Africans. We can say that we are Arabic-speaking Africans. Being Arabic-speaking, I don’t think defines one as Arab. The Americans speak English; they are not English. Australians speak English; they are not English.”

Agreeing with the argument that the Sudan’s Arabness is reinforced by independence on Arab sources of support, Yagi went on to say, “The Arabs are dominating because they are [supporting] us now. ... We are depending on help. Those in power want to identify themselves with this source so that they can keep the flow of these benefits.” As a result, Yagi believes that there is no consistency in Sudanese perceptions of their identity. “One day we are Africans when conditions are right. Tomorrow, we are Arabs when we are in the Arab atmosphere. This is what is really harming the Sudan. We have not set our identity.”

Muhammad al-Fateh of the Umma party concedes that northern identification with Arabism is, in significant part, the result of economic dependence. “I do believe that our dependence on the Arab world allowed people to identify with Arabness more than anything else, to our great misfortune.” Recognizing that “the problem of identity is a fundamental one, in the Sudan,” he postulates a solution that would accommodate the differences: “It is for the educated Sudanese.... to show the people that the Sudan brings together all races whether African or Arab.... We want people all over to say they are Sudanese despite their ethnicity or race. The situation can change if everyone plays this role in his own home and if the schools teach courses dealing with national education.”

Even more than the northerners, southerners see the national crisis of identity in the identification of the country with Arabism and Islam where the reality is more pluralistic, if not predominantly African. Malwal Leek, a scholar and politician, articulated the identity crisis as

having several components. “One component is that national culture is understood as Islamic and Arab. This on the other hand has invited a response from those who have different cultural identities, which are together described as African. There are also those who believe that they have acquired another cultural identity through the Christian religion [and who] are resenting the definition of the national identity as Islamic and Arabic. .... The current war has this element imbedded in it.”

The leader of the movement, John Garang, in his address to the Koka Dam meeting in March 1986 between the SPLM-SPLA and various political factions from the North, addressed the issue of the national identity crisis: “Our major problem is that Sudan has been looking and is still looking for its soul; for its true identity. Failing to find it Sudanese take refuge in Arabism; failing this they find refuge in Islam as a uniting factor. Others get frustrated as they fail to see how they could become Arabs when their Creator thought otherwise. And they take refuge in separation. In all this there is a lot of mystification and distortion to suit the various sectarian interests.... There is no sharpness in our identity; we need to throw away this sectarianism and look deep inside our country.”<sup>137</sup>

Mansour Khalid expounds on the crisis with reference to the elite politics of sectarianism and the modern forces that are challenging them.

For 30 years, and for reasons of myopia, ignorance, and unenlightened self-interest on the part of the Sudanese ruling elite, Sudan’s national identity has been obscured and distorted. By “ruling elite” I refer to the politicized Arab/Islamic rulers coming from the urban and semiurban centers of the northern and central Sudan in Khartoum, White Nile, Gezira, and Kordofan provinces, which exert a political and economic hegemony over the marginalized social and cultural groups living in the rural and outlying regions of the country, including some parts of the geographic north. It is this ruling elite which alone has had power to make and break governments, to mold public opinion, to tackle head on the challenge of achieving unity in diversity, and to articulate a genuine vision of Sudan to the outside world.<sup>138</sup>

Khalid’s definitions of the “ruling elite” and the backgrounds of its members are pertinent to the declared objective of the SPLM-SPLA to champion the cause of marginalized regions, including the South, the West, and the East, most of which also belong to non-Arab racial or ethnic groups.

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<sup>137</sup> Quoted in Mansour Khalid, “External Factors in the Sudanese Conflict,” in Deng and Gifford, *The Search for Peace and Unity in the Sudan*, Washington, D.C. The Wilson center Press, 1987, p. 110. See also Mansour Khalid, *John Garang Speaks*, London, Kegan Paul, 1987, pp. 125-29.

<sup>138</sup> Mansour Khalid, “External Factors in the Sudanese Conflict, Deng and Gifford, *The Search for Peace and Unity in the Sudan*, p. 110

## VII. Conclusion

The recasting of the objectives of the liberation struggle by the SPLM/A from secession to an equitable restructuring of the country to be free from any discrimination on the ground of race, ethnicity, religion, culture or gender has begun to gain support in the North, especially among the non-Arab groups that have historically been regarded as enslaveable. For a while after the resumption of hostilities in 1983, the Nuba of Southern Kordofan and the Ingassana or Funj of Southern Blue Nile kept out of the conflict. By later, they joined the SPLM/A in the struggle.<sup>139</sup> In 1992, some Darfurians joined the SPLM/A and staged a rebellion which was ruthlessly suppressed. The Darfurian rebellion was revived eleven years later by two non-Arab groups in Darfur, the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and Sudan Liberation Movement (SLM) whose surprise and devastating attack prompted the Government to turn for help to the Arab militias, the “Janjaweed”, who terrorized the civilian population, burning villages, killing and raping.

As noted at the outset, the paradox is that the crisis in Darfur erupted while the war in the South was on its way to a constructive resolution through a peace process brokered by the Inter-Governmental Authority for Development (IGAD), with the support of the United States in partnership with Norway and the United Kingdom. The impending agreement stipulates that the people of the South will have the right to decide by referendum whether to secede or remain united with the North. The agreement also addresses the grievances of the people of the Nuba Mountains and the Southern Blue Nile through a symptom that ensures their autonomy and affirmative action for their development. These provisions are potentially applicable to Darfur in adapted form.

This paper has tried to argue that the linkage between slavery and humanitarian crises in modern Sudan can be traced in several interconnected historical developments:

First, the formation of the relevant identity groups in which slavery was a determining factor, which consolidated into the dominant Arab Muslim North, in effect an African-Arab

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<sup>139</sup> In response, the government undertook massive counterinsurgency measures that were vividly documented internationally as genocidal with severe humanitarian consequences. See for instance, *African Rights, Facing Genocide: The Nuba of Sudan*, London, July 1995. *Justice in the Nuba Mountains of Sudan*, August 1997; and Burr *Quantifying Genocide in Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains*, op cit.

hybrid, and the marginalized Black African non-Muslim South and islamized non-Arab groups in the North;

Second, conflicts emanating from the gross inequalities and discriminating practices characterizing the relationships between the dominant Arab-Muslim group and the marginalized non-Arab groups, primarily in the South;

Third, the humanitarian tragedies resulting from these conflicts and the failure of successive national governments to respond to these tragedies because of a vacuum of moral responsibility associated with the conflict of identities;

Fourth, the shift in the Southern Sudanese liberation objectives from secession to the demand for a restructured Sudan, which would be free from discrimination is awakening Black African consciousness among the non-Arabs in the North who are rising up against their marginalization and discrimination; and

Fifth, the serious debate ensuing over the identity of the country and a demand for a restructured national identity framework that is almost certain to bring about major changes in the North, even if the South were to exercise the right of self-determination in favor of secession.

Sudan now appears to be at a critical juncture, poised between the threat of disintegration emanating from an acute crisis of national identity that is generating widespread regional conflicts with the national political establishment at the Center and the promise of genuine unity within a restructured national identity framework. With the people of the South, the Nuba Mountains, the Southern Blue Nile, the Beja and now the predominately non-Arab groups in Darfur challenging the one-sided Arab orientation of the national identity framework, the country is called upon to transform itself and start a new common and inclusive framework of national identity in which all Sudanese would find a sense of belonging as citizens with the equality and dignity of citizenship. To resist this unfolding identity reconfiguration and demand for equality would be imprudent, unsustainable and self-dealing. But that too is an option. The question is what the consequences for the parties and the country would be. Could things get any worse? One would, of course, hope not. But that is precisely what has repeatedly happened in the Sudan, tragically for the Sudanese people, but excitingly for the political scientists, as one renowned conflict resolution scholar put it to the author. Let us hope that there will be more retrieve for the Sudanese people and less excitement for the political scientists.

