



Jok Madut Jok

SUDAN

RACE, RELIGION, AND VIOLENCE

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ABBREVIATIONS

AMIS	African Union Mission in Sudan
AU	African Union
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
ECOS	European Coalition on Oil in Sudan
EDF	Equatoria Defense Forces
GNOC	Greater Nile Petroleum Operation Company
ICC	International Criminal Court
IDP	Internally Displaced Persons
IGAD	Inter-Governmental Agency for Development
JEM	Justice and Equality Movement
LRA	Lord's Resistance Army
MSF	Medecins Sans Frontieres
NCP	National Congress Party
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIF	National Islamic Front
NUP	National Unionist Party
OLS	Operation Lifeline Sudan
PDF	Popular Defense Forces
SAF	Sudan Alliance Forces
SANU	Sudan African Nationalist Union
SLA	Sudan Liberation Army
SOAT	Sudan Organization Against Torture
SPLA/M	Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement
SSDF	South Sudan Defense Force
SSLM	Southern Sudan Liberation Movement

INTRODUCTION

RACIAL AND RELIGIOUS POLARIZATION AND THE POLITICS OF DISUNITY

In the summer of 2003, I chanced upon a meeting between Lazaro Sumbeiywo and a Dinka community in the town of Maluakon in the Bahr el-Ghazal region of southern Sudan. Sumbeiywo is a retired Kenyan army general who was the chief mediator in the Sudanese peace negotiations under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Agency for Development (IGAD). He had landed in the town during a tour aimed at acquainting himself with the popular opinion from a cross-section of Sudanese communities and civil society groups regarding the peace process. At this meeting, I was particularly struck by a speech given by one of the tribal chiefs, Makwec Kuol Makwec of the Malwal section of the Dinka. In passionate remarks addressed to General Sumbeiywo, the chief enumerated, with noticeable anger, the ‘racial differences’ that set southern and northern Sudanese apart and the reasons why he thinks they cannot belong to a single polity. His reasons, which were received with applause from the crowd, included such practices as ritual female genital cutting prevalent in northern Sudan and Islamic ritual ablutions that the ‘Arabs do after they defecate,’¹ all of which he took to be markers of what he called ‘racial differences,’ and that these racial differences are evident in the people’s moral attributes, conduct and in the way the Arab-dominated government has treated the south. He went on:

When you visited the north, you must have noticed the differences between the Arabs in the north and us here in the south ... they are red-skinned and we are black ... their names were Ali, Muhamed, Osman, etc. and our names here are Deng, Akol, Lual, etc., we have no shared ancestry, they pray differently but they want to force us to believe in their gods, they try to impose their language upon us and they have killed our people in the process over the years. They chop off women’s breasts during the raids; they have taken our people and forced them into slavery. Their climate is arid and hot and ours is cooler and vegetated, and they want our land. Their economy is more advanced and we have nothing here because they have extracted our resources for their own use, their entire way of life is different from ours, they are dishonest, they have no respect for kinship, they take their own cousins in marriage, and now you are asking us if we can live together with the Arabs as one people in a country where we, the black people, do not have a voice? If you really want to bring peace and you have the support of people from other countries in this mission, my suggestion to you is that you treat this country like a piece of cloth, have John Garang grab one end of it and Omer al-Bashir the other, and you take a knife and cut it in the middle. I assure you, the Arabs are not people we want to share anything with and history speaks for us. We have never been one, we will never be one ... They have done terrible things to us. We are not one race.²

The northeast African nation of Sudan is a country where relationships between ethnic and regional groups are ravaged by violence and the country is now on the verge of disintegration – both literally in terms of some of its regions seeking to break away from the polity, and figuratively in terms of the state lacking legitimacy in the eyes of the citizens. The purpose of this book is to use ethnographic and historical methods to explain how the wars and subsequent humanitarian catastrophes have threatened the unity of the country. It examines the intersection of race and religion as sites for the violent contestation of identity of the Sudanese nation. The book argues that the state, largely controlled by groups that self-identify as Arabs, has sought to forge the Sudanese national identity as ‘Arab’ and ‘Islamic’ while the majority of the population increasingly prefer to identify themselves by their specific ethnic/tribal names or simply ‘African’ or ‘Black.’ The problem is that, as the above quotation has shown, these categories, which are clearly cultural and experiential identities, are taken by the Sudanese as the markers of racial identities, and they have become the basis for racial alignment. As the state targets the non-Arab and non-Muslim groups for violent absorption into the ‘Arab race,’ or for exclusion from state services if they insist on asserting their perceived racial or chosen religious

identity. These categories are also part of the model used by the politically excluded groups to explain and historicize the structures of inequality that marginalize them. They use this explanation as part of their effort to forge forms of resistance on the basis that all the non-Arabs who feel excluded from the vital structures of the state share a common platform in opposition to racial and religious politics in the country.

While various Sudanese communities may categorize each other in the same way that racial groups are popularly categorized in the Western world, i.e. in terms of physical characteristics (Hanna 1996; Omi and Winant, 1994), the Sudanese popular notions of race are not based on phenotype alone, and they are not fixed. They are also pegged to a host of practices such as religion, economic activities, material conditions, the naming of people and other cultural practices. The geographical distance between groups, the natural environment in which each group lives and their language are also considered part of the racial schema. In other words, these characteristics, which are not always part of the definition of race in contemporary social sciences, but are aspects of social relations become the lines separating racial identities. This means that racial boundaries are very fluid in Sudan, and there are many ways in which people who may be classed as blacks could also pass as Arabs, while those who have been known to be Arabs could decide to label themselves as African blacks if their political circumstance demanded and allowed it. For example religion, particularly Islam, is taken by those who self-identify as Arabs as a way to relate more closely to Arabian tribes of the Middle East because of the origins of the faith. The more learned in Islamic theology, the closer to being Arab a person becomes. This means that a non-Arab who wants to become one could racialize by 'pass' through expressed devotion to Islam. Some northern Sudanese even try to trace their genealogy to the Prophet Muhammad as a way to claim both piety and Arab origins. Others choose to be Arab on the basis of how good their knowledge of the Arabic language is, and having a native Sudanese tongue other than Arabic counts against one's pure Arabness. In other contexts, people who have become native speakers of Arabic or devout Muslims as a ladder to advancement of their status are expected to be socially and politically included as Arabs, have had the disappointment of being rejected from the Arab category due to their blackness, no matter how culturally Arab or learned in Islamic religion they had become. Interviews with many Sudanese Muslims have revealed a variety of ways in which race and religion meet to influence social relations. The political confrontations that have plagued the country are a manifestation of such racially and religiously based relations. One Darfuri informant said:

Because Islam says that there is no distinction between Arab and non-Arab, we the non-Arab Muslims believe that we are brothers with all the rest of the world's Muslims, but our Arab brothers in the north do not see it this way. They think that they are better Muslims because their race brings them closer to the Prophet, and that blacks can never make good Muslims.

While it is possible that racial identity can be conferred upon a group by others, it is also evident that in many contexts identity – racial, religious or otherwise – depends on what people think their own identity is, and not what others think one ought to be. In this regard, Wole Soyinka says that 'race is an act of will,' meaning that in a situation like Sudan, where race cannot be attributed to physical characteristics, an individual or a group can choose their racial identity.* The problem arises when one group attempts to impose its notion of identity on others. Because the group that endeavors to promote its racial concepts normally does so from the position of political and economic power, it creates extreme reactions from the other groups as they try to distance themselves from the identity of the politically dominant group. In Sudan, this creates two types of reactions from the marginalized populations. There are those who seek to be included in the power structures by submitting to the notion of Arabism and in the process risk losing their indigenous identity; but still become something like second-class Arabs in the eyes of those who regard themselves as more Arab. Then there is

common thrust among other excluded people to assert more strongly the very characteristics difference that had been the basis for their exclusion and victimization. This is what has made the wrangling over the nation's identity in Sudan so deadly, as non-Arabs fight not only for political inclusion but also to prevent the country, whose population is over 70 percent non-Arab according to recent estimates, from being labeled an Arab country.³ A further problem with concepts of race in Sudan is that it becomes closely associated not only with economic and political exclusion if one refuses to be incorporated into the Arab race, but also with everyday experiences of derision, contempt and harassment. In other words, if ethnic groups insist on asserting their non-Arab identity, they could suffer exclusion, but if they accept the cultural incorporation, it also makes them a second-degree Arab. 'You are damned if you become an Arab and you are damned if you don't,' said a man from the Nuba mountains in central Sudan, 'and that is why I think people should just be what they want to be rather than the country imposing a rigid system of racial classification.' One of the results of this racial confusion in Sudan has been the tragic conflicts that have plagued the country for over fifty years. The causes of these wars are many, but race and religion have proved divisive and powerful separators invoked by both sides of the conflict, although in a fluid manner, and dependent on specific political circumstances that may necessitate assertion of Arabness in one context and blackness in another. By focusing on race as an important factor in the conflicts, however, I do not ignore the other factors such as resource competition, 'criminalization of the state' (Ferguson, 2006) or the political economic and benefits of war. Rather, I mean to show that these factors are not mutually exclusive. Notions of racial inequality give rise to unequal distribution, and resource competition is thus conducted through the prism of race.

Although this transient nature of racial concepts is not unique to Sudan, the Sudanese citizens racially perceive of themselves and of each other in ways that differ drastically from the way race is popularly perceived and talked about in the Western world, something that is intriguing to outside observers. While the Sudanese have an elaborate vocabulary of racial identification that classifies people into racial groups on the basis of physical characteristics, mainly phenotypic such as skin complexion – they use an array of skin colors like blue, black, brown and red, which are all in essence types of black and to a lesser extent, genotypic, race is also marked by a host of cultural, political and economic relations.⁴ Although the Sudanese are continually engaged in construction and reconstruction of their racial identity, these classificatory systems seem well understood by the Sudanese but far less obvious to outsiders given the evident physical similarities between all the groups. ('They all look black to me,' is the reaction that I have heard from many Westerners.) The racial boundaries are continually made and unmade. Thus, the broad categories of 'Arab' and 'African' have come to be the easiest way to speak of race in Sudan, as they are thought to encompass both the outer characteristics of people and the inner, unobservable attributes such as mental capacities, morality, and other cultural values. The term 'African' does not mean much at all, at least for the majority of the rural population. The term has come to be part of the Arabs and to gain sympathy from the outside world by reducing the conflict and the massacres of their people to events defined by race. The term 'African' is also one that the authorities and elites of the north use, but selectively. The state strives to build an Arab state, and the more Sudanese people they can persuade to take on the 'Arab' label, the more proudly the ruling elite would pronounce Sudan as an Arab country. But the elite are also quick to point out that they are also African, especially when they are speaking to foreigners. In this way they deflect the claim that their actions are racist. How can they be racist against 'Africans' when they are themselves African, they reason. That the Arabs in Sudan are also clearly African, at least by residence, and that there could be black Arabs, is a fact that adds more confusion to the racial lines but is immaterial in Sudanese daily life. Although there is no agreement as to what they really mean, these Arab-African/Black categories are used both by Sudanese and

outsiders to explain some of the root causes of the Sudanese conflicts, such as the ongoing Darfur conflicts that place the Arab-run government in Khartoum and its allied militias on one side, and the African people of Darfur and their opposition armies on the other. These conflicts have escalated into genocide since 2003.

Furthermore, racial lines and the degree to which Sudanese people are bounded by them are magnified and concretized by confrontations over resources as the wars in Darfur have demonstrated. As Arab cattle herders lose much of their grazing land to drought and desertification, and therefore seek pastures in the areas occupied by settled farming African communities, the non-Arab Darfurians stick more strictly to the racial category African or black (and African lands) in order to deny the herders grazing rights on the basis of a local history of demarcation of tribal territories.⁵ The narrative production of this history ranged from descriptions of the non-Arabs as original inhabitants (the Fulani, from whose name the term Darfur is derived, the Masalit, the Zaghawa), to the coming of the Arabs, supported by the state, to Arab attempts to steal the land from the rightful owners by trickery, and finally to the attacks that have culminated in the 2003–2006 genocide. In these narratives the Arabs are depicted as outsiders and the Blacks as an indigenous people under occupation, and therefore the insurgency, in addition to being waged in order to attain the region's share of national resources and political power, is also a strategy to defend the region against the marauding Arabs. The central government, having always faced political as well as security pressures from the Arab groups that want access to better grazing lands and services, decided in 1983 and again in 2003 to offer military support to these Arab groups in the name of fighting regional insurgencies, and in the process used counterinsurgency claims as a pretext for reconfiguring territory allocation and land use.⁶ So although the genocide in Darfur is being waged in the name of racial and religious domination, it is safe to say that it is also for the survival of Arab cattle, which in turn is intrinsic to the survival of the Arab race and way of life in the region. In turn, the African Darfurians began to emphasize their African identity and increasingly described the confrontation as a racial one, for the conduct of war, once underway, began to show racial projects operating in everyday military activities. Of course, it is possible that the Darfurians began to emphasize the racial aspects of this confrontation in the same way southerners had done for years, as such depiction of the North–South conflict was beginning to draw international efforts to negotiate a settlement and yielding results, perhaps partly because of the 'race card.' A Western diplomat involved in the peace talks said, 'If Arab-African racial explanation of the North–South conflict has worked to get southerners a chance for self-determination, why would the others not expect it to work for them as well?' If it is indeed true that the black Darfurians had begun to rationalize this way, one begins to see the debates on the concept of race in Sudan as falling into two categories. One is that a group's racial identity is ideological, forged as a discourse for self-assertion and is historically contingent. The other is that racial identification is primarily a structural phenomenon, i.e. a response to economic marginalization, exclusion from power, and other forms of inequality.

These racial dichotomies have also been used for decades as part of the southern local historical narrative to explain the five decades-long North–South civil wars as setting Arab northerners against African southerners. Southern advocacy groups and political parties which seek to represent the south as a racially defined population frequently use this North–South divide to mean the same thing as Black-Arab or African-Arab divides. Thus race in Sudan, although clearly a perceived construct with vague Arab and African racial categories, has become a battleground in which the nation's identity is contested. The marginalized populations use it as a part of their liberation discourse: the dominant groups use it to emphasize their supposedly superior status and to raise their supporters to defend their privileged position. The violent expression of exclusionary policies by the state, the violent attempt by the indigenous political movements to gain autonomy, and local activist networks advocating

human rights have all used this interpretation of race to justify their actions. In other words, the Arab-African divide has not only functioned as an important factor in the Sudanese wars, at least as a pretext, but also as a defining factor in political and military alliances. For example, all the Sudanese governments since independence have made a concerted effort to make the country primarily Arab with numerous biases in allocation of resources favoring the groups that have accepted this Arab identity. The rest of the populations that feel marginalized have also used race to explain why they think that they have been excluded from political gains and the fruits of economic development. For instance, in the late 1970s and early 1980s, the government of Ja'afar Nimeiri conducted a massive campaign to forcibly repatriate rural migrants – those coming from the south, the west and the Nuba mountains – from Khartoum, as a way to deal with overcrowding in the city, unemployment, and crime. To carry out this program, the police used racial profiling to identify who was to be arrested. Those arrested were detained or loaded onto lorries and transported back to their regions or other more rural areas that the detainee chooses to be taken to, usually the agricultural schemes in southern Blue Nile, Kordofan or south Darfur. Because this program, known as *Kasha* in Sudanese colloquial Arabic, was based on using perceived racial appearances of people to identify who is to be repatriated from the national capital, it was carried out against all Nuba and southerners in such an arbitrary and indiscriminate fashion that it was decried as racist. Black university students, government officials and other long-term residents who had jobs and families in the city were often arrested and forced into *Kasha* trucks or jails, without examining their identity cards, and from where they were frequently released only after paying bribes.

Clearly the lack of employment and the disproportionate concentration of services and jobs in the capital and other northern cities was one of the reasons why the people living in remote regions were increasingly migrating to the north. Yet, during this same period, the government constantly altered the number of development plans such as the building of manufacturing plants in the south – for example they diverted the equipments initially intended for a number of industrial projects in the south. The fruit canning factory in Wau, the Melut sugar factory in Upper Nile, and Tonj twine-making facilities all lost their equipments and technicians, which were diverted to similar projects in the north even though the planning and foreign development aid had designated the projects to these southern towns by name. Some of these development plans had in fact been marketed to donor countries specifically as part of a postwar effort to rehabilitate the southern economy and to help southern Sudanese catch up with their northern counterparts. However, once the projects were funded, some of the funds were immediately diverted to northern projects. Such programs were taken by the local populations in the southern areas as evidence of blatant Arab racism toward non-Arabs and the state's racialized development policies favoring the Arabs. They argue that, if we are to take the non-Arab experience of citizenship in the Sudanese state seriously, any discussion of national unity must first of all be about social relations of citizenship and inequality on a nationwide basis. The debate goes something like this: when we speak of racial difference the way non-Arabs do is to uncover the otherwise disguised relations of inequality, but when the Arab elites talk of equality, they do so in order to deflect claims of the state for recognition and responsibility for all citizens.

Furthermore, the anthropological understanding that race is the product of social circumstances rather than anything natural or essential about people's physical attributes does not make it less relevant for everyday Sudanese, as will become clear in the chapters that follow. In fact, it demonstrates the notion that while race cannot be pinned down in genetic terms it continues to be very important in everyday life. There is a big difference between what Sudanese people take to be their common sense about racial groups, i.e. the way racial programs operate at the level of everyday experience, and what science has to say about racial differences being unfounded on a biological level. The classification of Arab vs. African is an example of racial formation as a state practice in the Sudanese context, despite

official rhetoric which denies the significance of race. The Sudanese state often speaks of the non-existence of racial inequality by pointing at the constitution and the concept of equal opportunity encoded in it, but the social circumstances of non-Arabs reveal clear evidence pointing to incongruity between the equality of opportunity that the constitution speaks of and its outcome in terms of everyday experience and actual access to services. A non-racial constitution enables the state to get away with racial discrimination.

A Muslim Dinka who had lived in Khartoum observed:

They tell us that we are all citizens of Sudan and that we are equal in front of the law, but any southerner will tell you that this is not true ... The police, the Arab merchant, and many other types of northerners show you in so many ways that you are expected to be a member of a servant class.

For decades scholars in the social sciences have articulated the social construction of race as both culturally and historically contingent, where traits are read off bodies as those bodies come to signify place and power, or lack thereof, in a given society (Omi and Winant, 1994; Bowker and Star, 2000). There are clear parallels between Sudan and other countries in the West in terms of how race is made. The classifications Arab and African, despite their shortcomings as a meaningful way to pin down people's racial identity, are as real as the way they operate in the form of stereotypes that people encounter in their daily lives. For example, in the northern cities, there are a host of preconceived notions about Blacks that inform the manner with which the state, the individual Arab, and northern communities deal with them – the Black student at Khartoum University who is taken for a servant looking for domestic work, a non-Arab businessman who gets harassed by the police on the assumption that he may be a thief, the common slurs hurled at non-Arabs as being lazy, uncivilized, unintelligent, prone to crime, the caricature of southerners or Nuba in everyday northern humor etc. are all among the many ways in which race is experienced in Sudan. At the national level, race and racialization of social structure manifest themselves in the conflicts and destruction that they have incited in Sudan. Although this racial divide has no scientific relevance, we cannot deny its role as a trigger for political and social behavior. As Michael Omi and Howard Winant demonstrated, race should be seen 'as a dimension of human representation rather than an illusion' (Omi and Winant, 1994: 55). The state-supported racialization of social relations has been a deadly project in Sudan and has prompted people to carry out terrible acts of violence, to deny services, and to determine a person's status in the nation. Because those dominating the political power are included in the category Arab, the Arabs occupy the top of the ladder in the socioeconomic hierarchy and that racial hierarchy is therefore also reflected in the governing process, the control of state power and resources. I no longer see the impact of race as being limited to what people think of one another or to the racial slurs mentioned above, but as a mechanism for allocation of rights, resources and social standing. Race has to be seen as a reality built into the structures of government, the social and political institutions of the state.

As successive Khartoum governments seek to assert their authority, and the ruling Arab groups seek to consolidate their hold on power, they apply some of these racial and religious differences as the criteria for choosing to ally themselves with some groups against others. Some of these alliances have encouraged bloodshed and much of the suffering that has gone on since the mid-1950s, making violence the predominant method to enforce the unity of the country, and making Sudan a country that faces the threat of disintegration. This threat has become increasingly visible and demonstrable over the last twenty years as more and more non-Arab and non-Muslims who feel excluded from the centers of power move further away from Sudanese citizenship and instead offer loyalty to racial or regional or ethnic citizenship. Along with the increasing politicization of Islam and consequent economic and political exclusion of the vast majority of people, these racial concepts are the crux

the Sudanese conflicts. At the very least, even if race is not the initial cause of the violent conflicts (have already mentioned confrontation over natural resources) the racialized social structure deployed as a weapon and ideology with which these resource wars are fought.

In religious terms, Sudan has been developing an extremist branch of Islam that has not only created a religiously intolerant society but also promoted a strain of Islamic militancy that has provoked accusations of international terrorism, an image that many Sudanese living in the peripheries have attempted to distance themselves from. Like race, the role of religion in the conflicts cannot be divorced from other factors, but rather shows that religion in Sudan merely provides the lens through which the world is seen. The rise of militant and political Islam in Sudan dates back to 1965, but has increased dramatically since the National Islamic Front's (NIF) ascent to power in June 1989. Since then the NIF, which has changed its name to the National Congress Party, has become widely known as a regime that has successfully used civilian atrocities, ethnic cleansing and genocide as instruments of domestic political repression with impunity. It has ruled with an iron fist and critics have been tortured, detained indefinitely without trial, or exiled: it goes without saying that the NIF has a dismal human rights record. The use of Arab militias, the Popular Defense Force, to effect indiscriminate attacks on civilians accused of abetting opposition forces in the south, slave raiding, the summary execution of twenty-eight high-ranking army officers without trial in 1989 on trumped-up charges of disloyalty, the execution of business executives on charges of illegal currency dealing under the revamped Islamic law (shari'a), the imprisonment of political leaders and exile of others like Sadiq al-Mahdi of the Umma Party and Muhamed Osman al-Mirghani, the denial of food aid to displaced persons due to allegations that they were supporters of the opposition armies, and suppression of basic civil liberties like freedom of association, freedom of the press and the persecution of critics who pointed out the state's failure to provide services, were all abuses decried by the Sudanese public. They prompted the US to impose economic sanctions on Sudan, primarily as a state sponsor of international terrorism such as the hosting of Osama bin Laden and the assassination attempt on Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak at the Organization of African Unity summit in Addis Ababa in 1995. The United Nations Commission for Human Rights has appointed a series of special rapporteurs to investigate the distressing reports and allegations of deliberate civilian displacement, torture of political opponents, massacres, slavery, and genocide, mainly in the south of the country and in the Nuba mountains.

Because this strife is driven by politicized Islam, the area of the country most affected by it has been the south, as Islamists have stated in various forums that the insurgency in the south is driven by anti-Islamic sentiments held by southerners, and therefore a war against it is not only legitimate, but also sanctioned by Islamic Jihad, or holy war. The Nuba mountains, the southern Blue Nile, and currently the western region of Darfur have also been severely affected by the war in terms of civilian atrocities, destruction of assets, the denial of food aid as a weapon of war, persecution of the political leaders and the destruction of their social and cultural institutions, or ethnocide. Although they have historically been part of the north in the old North–South dichotomy which characterized earlier conflicts, since 1983 they have been drawn into the war alongside the south, particularly because of the southern leaders' revised discourse about the conflict. The leaders of the south-based opposition Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), especially its inspirational leader, the late John Garang, pitched the conflict as being more about cultural, economic, and political marginalization in the peripheries than race and religion. This appealed to a large northern population who began to either join the south or set up their own regional rebellions against the Arab-run state. The result was that some regions within the traditional north, such as Darfur, used the concept of marginalization to fuel their war against the government, even though Darfur had been the strongest support base for successive Khartoum governments in the wars against the south for over half a century. This revised

view, setting the regions against the central elite, has caused many Sudanese citizens to constantly reimagine their relationship with the nation state. The new discourse had the potential to develop class differences over race and religion as the basis for periphery vs. center and the elite vs. the marginalized confrontations, but the ruthless racialized reaction and declaration of holy war by Khartoum against these rebellious regions has renewed and strengthened racial and religious adherence in the regions as well as tying the inhabitants more strongly to their geographical regions in disfavor of their citizenship in the nation. Note the words of Amal, a Darfurian woman who was raped: 'I hate Arabs, I even hate my Arabic name and I wish I could get rid of it ... I hate having thought of myself as a citizen of Sudan all my life ... if Darfur was an independent nation, this would not happen.'

The race-based and religiously inspired military reactions to regional opposition have gained much international attention due to the ghastliness of the atrocities carried out, and have made Sudan a pariah state in the eyes of many countries, especially in the West. It has also created a stronger desire for autonomy in the peripheral regions. This book explains this development by describing and tracing the contemporary histories of Sudan's many conflicts, which have raged on and off since 1955. These protracted internal conflicts have caused the death of over 2.5 million Sudanese since 1983 and the displacement of more than five million others. The wars have also resulted in the destruction of infrastructure and people's livelihoods, especially in the peripheries, and disastrously reduced living standards for the bulk of the Sudanese population.

Since 1998, Sudan has also plunged into an abyss *vis-à-vis* national unity due to its oil industry in the south. The oil industry, instead of becoming a panacea for Sudan's economic woes as many Sudanese say they had hoped it would, has come under fire in international circles and from within Sudan. No sooner did oil revenues begin to flow into the hands of the government in Khartoum in 1999 than the NIF government used them to arm itself and fight the southern-based opposition Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) with more brutality, to target for eviction the Nuer and Dinka civilian populations that occupied the oil region, and to augment its economic, political and social support base within the northern part of the country. As a Nuer man who was displaced during a government attack on his village said, 'Again, typical of Sudan, even a development that could have been good news [enormous oil profits] turned out to be an omen for the ordinary people'. Oil-related atrocities were so devastating that they prompted lengthy and distressing reports from every major human rights group in the Western world,⁷ government policy agencies, especially in the US,⁸ major think tanks and research institutes,⁹ and non-governmental organizations¹⁰ around the world.

The scramble for Sudanese oil reserves and prospects by such disparate countries as Canada, China, Malaysia, Sweden and others sharpened the clear rift between international market interests and the micro-level politics of indigenous groups' claim to ownership of resources. These countries were quickly accused of putting their financial interests before human security in Sudan, especially as those who live in the oil regions were quick to use race and religion as the loci for the contest over oil revenues. The foreign oil companies and their mother countries were implicated in facilitating the government's war machinery because they allowed Khartoum to use oil-related facilities such as the all-weather roads and aircraft landing fields they had constructed to stage attacks, against both the civilian population in the oil areas – in order to make way for these foreign oil companies – and the opposition forces operating within the oil region of Upper Nile.¹¹ Oil exploration has exposed another layer of violent racial and religious politics. Because economic development and concentration of resources has been racially defined, the Arabs would be the first to benefit from the southern oil resources in line with what had historically been regarded as a racially based state discrimination. This was absolutely unacceptable to southerners: Western countries such as Canada and Sweden were

accused of 'making the looting of our oil possible on behalf of the Arab north' (as described by one informant), and regarded as having let down their Christian brethren at a time when they were expected to back up the south. The involvement of the Chinese in the Sudanese oil industry was viewed as a result of pure greed: 'the Chinese got blinded to human suffering by their hunger for energy sources,' one informant stated. The involvement of the Malaysians was read in the south as a form of Islamic alliance with Khartoum, and many voices could be heard calling for the US and other Western Christian countries to come to the rescue of south Sudan in the name of their shared faith. The reports by the British charity Christian Aid¹² and by an alliance of Canadian churches and faith-based NGOs uncovering the oil-related atrocities,¹³ which brought a great deal of international attention to the role of oil in the destruction of south Sudan, were met with considerable gratitude in the south. The way local communities perceived themselves in relation to a wider Christian world was heightened by these reports, which raised hopes for an international intervention: but the complaints from a few diplomatic circles did not translate into concerted action for a long while.¹⁴ As will be explained later, there were a number of attempts to force the Sudan government to suspend oil activities until it had reached a peaceful settlement with the south. NGOs, human rights groups, and Sudan activists in the West called for foreign companies that conduct business in Sudan to be delisted from the US stock markets as a way to force them into abandoning their deadly alliance with the Sudanese government. Talisman, a Canadian company, withdrew from Sudan in 2002 and was forced to sell its stake in Sudanese oil to an Indian oil company when the Sudan controversy became a liability in terms of its stock performance on the Western capital markets, especially when the company was sued in New York by Sudanese communities affected by the oil-military complex.

Gruesome state violence, oil-related and otherwise, continued unabated and revealed the racial and religious classification in the conduct of war itself. The mechanisms with which violence is carried out in Sudan, its resultant social and economic dynamics, and the manner in which it is locally embodied, have garnered local and international human rights concern because of the obvious racial and religious fanaticism exhibited by Muslim soldiers serving in the non-Arab areas in the south and in the non-Muslim regions of the west. Where Islam could function as a tool for the training of a soldier to shed his remorse for his victims, as is the case for soldiers who are sent to the south, the Muslim soldier is imbued with the belief that he does not have to adhere to any boundaries because the enemy is not a co-religionist. In those areas where government soldiers and the local population in a war zone are both Muslim, the race factor becomes instrumental in the formation of the soldier's character. This explains the shocking incidents of mass rape that have been carried out by both the Janjaweed Arab militia and the regular armed forces in Darfur. In view of the way Arab soldiers behaved toward southern women throughout the North-South war – often justifying sexual assault on grounds that they did not share the same faith – that a Muslim soldier should violate the bodily integrity of a Muslim woman, as they did in Darfur, reveals not only the manipulation of the soldier but also the intersection of religion and race as the state's tools of suppression, alternating between race and religion according to the prevailing political and military situation in a given region. It also reveals another differential in the experience of violence, especially the gendered aspects of it, no matter which region, racial or religious group is at war. Violence in Sudan can be characterized as both conjunctural, where there are definite actors who commit violence at the behest of state institutions or other powerful agents within the state, and structural, where poverty, inequality, gender bias, racism, religious bigotry, and inadequate services form a less visible but equally pernicious violence that is a part of the social fabric of Sudanese society. For example, in addition to reports of mass rape, the use of women as war trophies and other forms of sexual violence, Sudan has attracted attention for the use of child soldiers, unpaid militias who consider rape and abduction of women an

girls as forms of payment, the conditioning of young soldiers to violence over many years, violence against the enemy's female population, and the reproduction of such violence within the soldiers' families and communities, all of which reveal gender differentials and hierarchies in the war experience.

In the meantime, international attention did little to inspire concerted international efforts to help Sudan come to its own internal settlement or to pressure it into an internationally mediated one. The so-called international community was able to muster sympathy for the war victims, however, and poured aid money into funding the humanitarian programs which became the subject of international human rights and research scrutiny in their own right. Debates ensued as to whether or not the agencies themselves were actually exacerbating the conflict by allowing the international community to avoid any real political solution to Sudan's crises, whether aid was functioning as an alibi for the failure of the international community to seek solutions to the root causes of Sudan's conflicts by instead throwing money at the crisis; and by permitting the local authorities to neglect the welfare of their own people, or worse, to deny certain citizens, in this case those understood to be both Black and non-Muslim, such basic human rights as access to humanitarian aid.¹⁵ At the same time other populations – Arabs and certain types of Muslims – in this two-tiered system of citizenship, were deemed superior and worthy of the riches and resources extracted from the peripheries, or more deserving of foreign relief.

Among the many problems of humanitarian aid is its distributive role in exacerbating the politics of the conflict in Sudan: as it feeds the victims of the conflicts it also frees the victimizers to continue to feed themselves lavishly while the violence persists. In other words, the government of Sudan has often used humanitarian aid to negotiate political space as it traded humanitarian access for diplomatic leniency on human rights abuses. It also taxed humanitarian agencies so heavily that much of the government's war effort was underwritten by these taxes for a number of years before the cash funds came into the pipeline. It continues to do this in reference to the humanitarian efforts in Darfur. For example, the Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs in Khartoum reported that its effort to assist some 3.5 million people who were in need of humanitarian assistance in Darfur was encumbered by government machinations to drain relief efforts of their ability to save lives. For example, since December 2005, the government has required 'three extensions to stay visas,' and each time all visas and travel permits for some 800 international NGO staff working in Darfur must be renewed. 'Until granted, international staff cannot move freely and do their work. In addition, each renewal costs US\$240 per person, thus the two recent renewals of Darfur visas cost the humanitarian community over US\$380,000; funds that otherwise could have been spent on the provision of humanitarian assistance.'¹⁶ An exercise in international goodwill turned out to have tremendous potential for harm at the national level due to the racialized politics of conflict.

Since the latter part of 2002, two issues at opposite extremes have made Sudan a country that arouses conflicting emotions and judgments. The first was the peace negotiations between the government and the south-based SPLA, which had been taking place intermittently for years. Under the auspices of the Inter-Governmental Agency for Development (IGAD) the peace negotiations had reached a promising level by July 2002, when the Machakos Protocol was agreed upon in the Kenyan town of that name. That framework became the basis for the eventual 'comprehensive peace agreement' signed on January 9, 2005. Both ordinary Sudanese, who were desperate for peace, and the mediators who so much desired to see their labors bear fruits, found great optimism in the Machakos accord, and there was hope for Sudan once again. But this peace process was still beset by challenges. The interested parties in the international community who brokered this deal were still concerned as to how to make it inclusive of all Sudanese political forces in order to increase its chances of long-term stability. Many smaller parties and military groups had been excluded from the negotiations and the

were posing a threat to the peace process.¹⁷ In addition, there had already been a lot of talk throughout the process about postwar reconstruction, the cost of which was predictably enormous, and the source of the money for it uncertain. Reconstruction efforts were likely to be daunting given the war-induced destruction and the extreme underdevelopment in the south. Other difficult issues of postwar rehabilitation included the prospects of the return of internally displaced persons (IDPs) – estimated at 4.5 million – and refugees from neighboring countries – said to number about 640,000 – the restoration of what little was left of the infrastructure, and how to implement the agreement itself and hold the parties to honoring their commitments.¹⁸ All these issues continued to pose a threat to the potential spoilers of the peace agreement.

The second issue was that as the south was entering into a brokered peace, the western region of Darfur plunged into yet another chaotic war in which the Arab-led government and its allied Arab militias, the Janjaweed, fought local opposition forces and the African population thought to be the support base for the opposition. As the world community prepared to celebrate the hard-won peace which ended the twenty-two-year-long North–South conflict, a new but not so different violation of rights and assumption of lands and goods with racial ideologies and identities at stake sprang up. As mentioned earlier, the conflict in Darfur arose from a series of political disputes between two groups: the Arabs who make up the government-backed Janjaweed militia and the region’s non-Arab farmers. In 2002 some Arab herders, reportedly at the behest of a growing Arab alliance, engaged in particularly bloody massacres against the settled farmers. This triggered a rebellion against the dictatorship in Khartoum launched by the non-Arab tribes, as the massacres added to the tensions that had been growing over a long period of time. As we will see in the chapter on Darfur, the region had been experiencing turmoil for some time due to droughts and scarcity of resources, recurrent famine in the 1980s (to which the government had responded half-heartedly due to the racial politics outlined earlier), proliferation of firearms due to wars in neighboring Chad, and general exclusion from service provision, which had triggered sporadic violence against Arab traders. In any case, when the Darfurians formed opposition armies – the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) – in their attempt to register the region’s unhappiness with this situation and to change it, the government responded by unleashing the Janjaweed against the entire non-Arab civilian population living in the rural areas. These Arab militias have since engaged in mass killings, rape, lootings and burning of villages, to a degree never witnessed anywhere in Muslim regions of the country in recorded history. The government was, however, quick to announce that the attacks were triggered by tribal hatreds and that it had no role in the violence, but many citizens of Darfur held Khartoum responsible for the atrocities. ‘The government of Sudan has taken advantage of local economic rivalries and political divisions in order to effect its racialized reallocation of resources and is perpetrating crimes against humanity,’ said Mudawi Ibrahim Adam, a human rights activist who monitors the abuses in Darfur. Due to its speed and the extent of its violence, the Darfur conflict quickly replicated the horrors of the NIF’s genocidal efforts in the Nuba mountains in 1992, the southern oil regions between 1998 and 2004, the militia raids in Bahr el-Ghazal since 1983 and the aerial bombing of villages. These actions had been the characteristics of the regime’s war conduct for the previous two decades. In fact, many people in the south wonder how northerners can be surprised at what the NIF is doing in Darfur, as southerners had lived under such circumstances for decades. One informant said:

We sure did not see so many northern Sudanese protesting Khartoum’s atrocities in the south in the manner they now do regarding Darfur. Could it be that northerners find themselves closer to Darfurians in the racial and religious hierarchy in this country?

The Darfur crisis attracted international attention because of the humanitarian tragedy that defined

it and the gruesome manner in which the government-backed Arab Janjaweed militias killed and displaced the African people of the region. Other factors, such as the debates on the role of the international community when faced with acts of genocide, also increased its visibility. As the reports of mass killings continued to emerge from Darfur, a debate ensued as to whether or not to characterize it as genocide. Many major newspapers in the Western world published front page stories of one aspect of the crisis or another and the debate became very much a public affair, prompting the creation of some of very active student organizations and other anti-genocide activist groups in the US, condemning the mass killings, looting, destruction and rape in Darfur. After much debate in the European Union, the United Nations, and the indecisiveness of the African Union – mainly over the definitions of genocide and whether the international conventions on genocide apply to the situation in Darfur – the US sent a special genocide verification team to Chad to interview the refugees, and the State Department finally determined that genocide was indeed being perpetrated by the government and its allied Arab militias. Colin Powell, then the highest ranking African-American in the Bush White House, told the world that genocide was and still is being committed.

Nevertheless, the Darfur crisis prompted some of the most puzzling contradictions in the ways in which international relations work. For example, some countries and organizations, including both the African Union and the UN, preferred the phrase ‘ethnic cleansing’ over ‘genocide,’ while the US described it as genocide, but contrary to what had been assumed – that declaring genocide was being committed would force these countries into action as the instruments of the international conventions on genocide call for – the declaration did not translate into action to stop the killing, and it seems that it was made without the intent to do so. There are many explanations for this inaction in the face of such tragedy, most of which are beyond the scope of this book, but most important for our purposes here are the geopolitical interests of Western countries, local racial politics, and the politics of a Christian conservative White House. For example, while the US was condemning genocide and describing it as ‘the worst humanitarian disaster in the world today,’ as Colin Powell put it, there were concurrent clandestine dealings between many countries and the very regime that was annihilating a section of its own citizens. At a time when the US was regarded as the only country with the resources, political will, and clout in the international community to intervene, the US government invited Salah Gosh, head of Sudan’s intelligence and a man many reports had implicated in the execution of genocide, to Washington. The invitation outraged many groups within Sudan and the US, highlighting as it did Washington’s dual interest in enlisting Khartoum’s help with the war on terrorism.¹⁹ As the atrocities were being carried out even during Gosh’s visit, it was clear that he was not in Washington to discuss how to end the violence, but more likely to hammer out mutual national security concerns. Such dealings reduce the credibility of the US and other countries that acted in this manner as genuine mediators. Inside Sudan, the local politics of racial divide manifested themselves in this environment. In the south and Darfur, for example, the involvement of the US Secretary of State, who was a ‘Black man,’ was greeted with jubilation because of the hope that he might favor their position over that of the Arabs, but local people quickly became suspicious of him when it transpired that he appeared phenotypically closer to the Arabs, especially in view of the inaction of the US government with regard to stopping the massacres. In terms of religion, the government of Sudan had been suspicious or outright critical of the George W. Bush presidency because of the involvement of the Christian right in electing Bush and in criticizing the Khartoum government for its persecution of Christians in Sudan. At times this suspicion translated into fear of invasion by the US, especially in the wake of the US invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq, both of which led many Muslim societies to accuse Bush of an anti-Islam crusade. These myths were used to boost local radical Islamic support and financial and diplomatic support from other Islamic countries.

The Darfur crisis was covered more regularly in the Western media from 2004 when the ten-year

anniversary of the 1994 Rwanda genocide was commemorated in various forums around the world. The pronouncements made at that time by world leaders that ‘We will never again allow genocide to be perpetrated,’ came back to haunt them when it looked as if genocide was being allowed to take place once again, and no one had the will to give ‘never again’ meaning. The question of what to do with the perpetrators of genocide, whether there was a strong international political will to bring them to book, and what to do in order to restore normality to the lives of Darfurians, now added to the issues that made Sudan a continuous concern for many in the world community. The deployment of a peace-keeping force by the African Union, the demands by many Sudanese and some foreign agencies to involve the European Union, NATO, and the UN, have all been the subject of international and national debate. When the US became head of the UN Security Council in February 2006 John Bolton, the US ambassador to the UN, pushed for deployment of UN peace-keeping troops to replace the African Union peacekeepers, as the latter was proving ineffectual in protecting civilians. The final outcome of these debates was still awaited when this book was in its final stages of writing, but the massacres were still going on in Darfur. In September 2006, the UN Security Council passed a resolution to send UN peace keeping troops to replace the African Union force, but the government of Sudan objected to such a force and President Omer Al-Bashir described the resolution as an attempt to ‘recolonize Sudan’.

The escalation of violence in Darfur while the southern peace processes were underway also led to a dilemma among diplomats and countries that sponsored the southern peace deal: the crisis was threatening the viability of that peace – was it not more sensible to seek a resolution that joined the resolving aspects of each conflict in one accord? To attempt to bring Darfur into the southern peace initiative, which had already made unprecedented progress, was to risk slowing down or losing that progress, in addition to the difficulty of actually combining issues of two conflicts that were inherently distinct in their histories and in their root causes. Yet to focus solely on the southern peace while Darfur burnt risked the continuation of the Darfur crisis with its attendant humanitarian catastrophe and its potential to slow down the implementation of the southern peace accord.²⁰ In the end, the mediators made a crucial decision to concentrate on seeing the southern peace agreement through, in the hope that once the SPLA became a partner with the NIF in what was to become known as the ‘government of national unity,’ as the agreement stipulated, attention would then be turned to Darfur. It was hoped that the SPLA would use its position as a partner in the government of national unity to tackle the war in Darfur. There was a presumption that the SPLA had better relationships with the Darfur opposition forces because they had been allies at one time against the NIF regime, and that once it became part of the government of national unity it would be in a better position to bring the two sides in the Darfur conflict together.²¹ Since that agreement, the world and more specifically the people of Darfur who continue to reside in IDP camps within Darfur and refugee settlements across the border in Chad, are still waiting for the SPLA to take up this mediating role, with little prospect of it happening. Meanwhile in the rural areas of Darfur, violence continues unabated and mortality rates remain alarmingly high. Sudan remains in the ignominious company of nations such as Turkey where during World War I close to a million Armenians were massacred by the Young Turks; Hitler’s Germany during World War II; and many other genocidal governments such as the Ethiopian communist regime of Mengistu Hailie Mariam, and the Cambodian Khmer Rouge regime with its ‘killing fields.’

Furthermore, Sudan continues to be a source of international diplomatic speculation and of worry for the ordinary Sudanese in terms of how to bring peace to Darfur, sustain southern peace, influence the Khartoum government to relax its Islamic militant project and give up its sponsorship of terrorist groups, the future of the oil industry, and also what the fate of this giant country will be, especially in light of the continuing commitment to Arabism at the center matched against the rising commitment

to other ethnic and racial identities in the peripheries. Of particular uncertainty, both among the Sudanese themselves and outside observers, is whether the country can really remain a unified state given the possibility that the south will break away after the interim period stipulated by the comprehensive peace agreement,²² and that many regions of the country peripheral to the centers of power might follow the path of the south over the coming decade. In this book, I argue that the history of conflicts in the Nuba mountains, the southern Blue Nile and other contested territories reveals that the populations of these regions seeking autonomy share common points of opposition that transcend any traditional notion of the state. In their quest to form independent states or to join in union with the south, these contested territories all define their will to secede by the neglect shown them and the blatant racial and religious discrimination that underpins it. This study also shows the extent to which any optimism that mass discourses of unity could have sewn is increasingly hopeless. Many Sudanese feel that the longer the conflicts in the northeast, the western region of Darfur and the Nubian north drag on, the more likely it is that these regions will also seek to opt out of the union.

This book is about the ways that Sudan's various regional conflicts cannot be analyzed independently of each other. It is my view that these violent conflicts can only be understood as strands of one interrelated story in which happenings in one geographical region of the country have triggered events in all others. Such an approach is taken as an attempt to break away from the usual fashion in which the contemporary histories of Sudan have been written. All too often, Sudan is depicted as a homogenous country. Especially in the area of political science, law, history, women and gender, and religious studies, a book about a specific region assumes that its arguments hold for the whole nation. Following from that, such scholarship assumed that national unity appeared *sui generis* from the drawing of the borders.²³ Such works have presented an all too coherent picture that portrays Sudan's experience as a logical predictable progression toward a unified cultural character (see Affendi, 1991; Bleuchot and Hopwood, 1991; el-Bakri and el-Wathig, 1983).²⁴

Despite the existence of extensive works of scholarship on the recent history of Sudan, or perhaps because of them, there are three reasons for writing a book on its contemporary political and social history. One is that Sudan's national identity is far from achieved – on the contrary, the country is moving toward disintegration and ethnic-based armed struggles have arisen everywhere since 1983. The southern war of liberation, the Nuba revolts, southern Blue Nile, the Beja rebellions in the Eastern region, Nubian opposition in the far north, and the Zaghawa, the Masalit, and the Fur in Darfur, all paint a picture of a nation falling apart. Moreover, the death and destruction that have accompanied political dissent, and which have left jarring wounds in the hearts and minds of the Sudanese people, spread disunity beyond the places in question and sow the seeds for future unrest.

Like race, religion, and a seemingly natural affinity to one's land, ideas of national unity appear to have a geographical basis in this troubled country. Many Sudanese living in the areas peripheral to the centers of power often say that Sudan has never existed as a unified state, except nominally. The nation has never secured legitimate authority for most of the marginalized groups. This is largely because the state has proved to be more of an extractive power than a provider of services, and has extracted resources from the people through extreme forms of state violence.²⁵ Although there has never been a country-wide survey to ascertain popular opinion, my conversations and interviews with Sudanese from different walks of life have revealed that this sentiment is widespread. As an informant from the south said: 'This country of ours is like a highwayman, it robs our resources and never gives anything back, it says "give me your money, your loyalty, your identity, or you will lose your life".'

Given the violent history of Sudan, it is not surprising that war and its consequences have become the most important subjects of social science and humanities research in the country, notably in the south and the west where wars have been endemic for over five decades, and more recently in the

northeastern province where the Beja, the majority ethnic group in the region, have armed themselves against what they see as a state-supported racial discrimination against them. This research interest in war is indicated by the numerous studies sponsored by the UN,²⁶ foreign governments (especially the donor countries that provide funds for humanitarian programs),²⁷ the high volume of reports of human rights violations,²⁸ reports commissioned by private NGOs,²⁹ and by the large amount of academic literature amassed by individual researchers (Keen, 1994; Harir and Tvedt, 1994; de Waa 1997; Nyaba, 1997; Hutchinson, 1996). The hope that research into the causes and consequences of war, whether such research is purely academic or action-oriented, may benefit from a historical perspective is one reason for the attempt in this study to provide such a perspective.

A second reason for writing this book is that Sudan has been depicted in international circles as a weak or failing state: in fact it is not necessarily a weak state, but rather one where the racially and religiously inspired ruling elite have capitalized on the threats of fragmentation and disintegration to consolidate their legitimacy through further violence. The state has increasingly become a monopoly of a few who have entrenched themselves by increasingly promoting and strengthening the political and military position of their narrow but well-funded support base. It is therefore important to describe some of the reasons why Sudan has gained the attention of the international news media from the 1980s to 2000s, with a view to pointing out some of the misrepresentation of the basic issues. One of the main reasons for this attention, beside the obvious humanitarian tragedies sparked by prolonged conflicts, is that journalism usually sets itself up to be pandered to by the warring factions, as each side vies for the sympathy of the audience – reader, viewer, and listener. Journalism seeks to capture the stories of suffering from a perspective that looks for shock effect and entertainment aspects over informative ones. The result is that the depth of the story is often missed in favor of spectacle, and the potential for misrepresentation is frequently present. Applying this view to a context such as Sudan, where racial and religious sensitivities inform the local discourse about the conflict, means that there is a danger of superficial coverage, which could lead to a misinformed policy-making process in the areas of peace-making, humanitarian aid, and diplomacy. Of course there is a flipside to this, which is that media reporting of crises, when done properly, can be extremely useful in raising international awareness, which in turn can caution international actors about how their roles might exacerbate the crisis or help to design best practices that could ease the tragedies. Media coverage of Sudan has described it as a country defined by famines and a procession of benevolent foreign aid workers, with huge amounts of money donated by Western countries being spent on delivering humanitarian assistance to the starving Sudanese. The resurgence of slavery and the rise of militant Islam along with its role in international terrorism in the 1990s have also taken up much media space. More recently, specifically since 1998, the representation of Sudan's woes in the international media has been dominated by oil-related government atrocities in the Upper Nile region, and by the distressing reports of genocide perpetrated by the government and its allied militias in the western region of Darfur since early 2003. While all these descriptions reflect the realities of life in Sudan and merit attention whether independently of each other or as interrelated factors, what is absent from the picture, especially for those who have been observing events in Sudan from a distance, is a clear connecting thread between these media images on the one hand and state terrorism, human rights violating militias, slavery and genocide on the other. In other words, what has gripped the attention of the world community about Sudan may be read as the usual problems of failing states, corruption, ethnic rivalry, and resource mismanagement that have come to characterize Africa in the post-colonial period, but there are also man-made problems of a different kind. Such depiction of Sudan's conflict has disproportionately focused on the humanitarian tragedies that have resulted from the events above, but it has done little by way of explicating racial and religious nuances of the conflict, the victim

stories about their war experience, and the local perceptions about the causes of the crisis itself.

While media attention has resulted in some criticism of the government of Sudan, in half-hearted international economic sanctions, and international vilification of the government over human rights violations and accusations of sponsorship of terrorism for the last two decades, locally they have produced little else. Such criticism has actually strengthened the state because very little meaningful action is taken by way of a concerted international action that could force the Sudanese regime to desist from rogue behavior. The ruling elites have manipulated the weaknesses of the international system that criticizes them and turned it into a stronger force against the Sudanese people, playing their more militant domestic constituency by darkly warning of an Anglo-American invasion (something neither the British nor the Americans have threatened in recent history) and promising to kill the infidels in the same way they are being killed in Iraq should an American invasion of yet another Muslim nation come to pass. In other words, the government has used international criticism to its advantage by forging a narrow but very strong local support on the basis that the country is being targeted unfairly by the Western world. The government appeals to these privileged few, whose egos are massaged by being described as more nationalist, that they must protect their nation against the West, which the current Islamist government has described as the enemies of Islam.³⁰ Protecting the country means targeting certain population groups, such as those who have complained about poverty in their areas and were therefore suspected of being the local arm of foreign antagonistic countries such as the US or Israel, for elimination. It is therefore important to point out how the international community, while it has spoken out against the government's human rights record, did little more than talk between 1983 and 2003, something that has given the core elite in the successive governments of Sudan a sense that international threats without action are business as usual. For the ordinary Sudanese, international geopolitics has created a twisted logic. Many Sudanese seek international attention because it gives them the hope of possible outside intervention against the regime, but at the same time international criticism of the regime, if it is not followed by action, gives the government in Khartoum the pretext it needs to clamp down on basic liberties on the basis of alleged looming foreign aggression. To many in all the dissenting regions I mentioned earlier – the south, Nubia, the Nuba mountains, the Blue Nile, Beja, Darfur – it seems that international criticism only weakens the opposition and the politically excluded groups. One opposition leader said:

There were times during the second term of Bill Clinton as president of the United States when we wished the Americans would either shut up completely or back up their criticism with some action, because any threatening remark they made against Khartoum was enough to guarantee the Islamists a lot of support from Iran and Iraq and other Middle Eastern countries.

The reverse may also be true – such outside criticism gives the opposition groups false hope of international intervention, and thus prevents them from seeking peaceful settlement. To the credit of the international community, however, while it has failed to stop the killing, there is no denying the humanitarian commitment to relieve the suffering of the war's displaced. The establishment of Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS), an umbrella group comprised of UN agencies and NGOs, brought much-needed aid to the large number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) that make Sudan home to the biggest IDP population in the world. OLS has also provided much support to many communities that were host to the IDPs, especially in the south where it functions as the only source of supplies in lieu of the government.³¹

While the international community has exhibited contradictory behavior – oscillating between sanctions against Sudan on one extreme and what some Western countries have called constructive engagement on the other – it has given the international human rights groups a chance to critique the process of such engagement. Despite its limited effectiveness in saving lives, the presence of the world community through aid programs has enabled many groups and organizations to maintain

contacts with ordinary Sudanese people in their darkest hour. The daily struggles of the people of Sudan during the many years of turmoil came to the attention of the world community because of the humanitarian presence in Sudan. It gave the ordinary people of Sudan the conviction that their voices would be heard as long as foreign aid groups were active in their country. Both the aid community and the Sudanese people have lived and continue to live with the horrors of state terror. Such heroism lies behind the struggle by the ordinary Sudanese to lead relatively normal lives despite the aforementioned horrors and death: to describe this struggle is to suggest that there is a historical, cultural, resource and environmental context to the anguish in Sudan that has so engaged the world.

The history of post-colonial Sudan and contemporary political developments, especially research on Sudan's civil wars that have threatened the unity of the country, has mainly been written by a northern elite who have defined the question of Sudan's unity or fragmentation as the 'southern problem.' Thus the third reason for this book is a reckoning with the particular means of history-telling that have prevailed in the works of these writers (Beshir, 1974, 1975; Fadlalla, 2004; Hasan, 1971, 1973; Abu al-Rahim, 1969; Abdin, 1985; al-Safi, 1986, 1989; Khalid, 1990). Their fields span history, law and political science: they argue that the south has consistently sought ways to opt out of a unified state and that the north must maintain the nation's territorial integrity (Beshir, 1975).³³ This is a moral story where race and religion put Arabs and Muslims in the place of the good citizens who have made a social and political contract for unity. In popular discourse and in certain versions of this story, the south's will to secede is framed as a foreign-instigated desire rather than an independent one. Contrary to what the historical record shows, the common view among northern academics and policy-makers is that the British colonial administration created the division between north and south. To this day and despite the scars of protracted conflicts, there is still much talk among northern intelligentsia of a foreign conspiracy to divide the people of Sudan. Rarely, if ever, do they acknowledge that there has never been any historical oneness between the 'two parts,' or many parts for that matter. The fact that Sudan's history has been rife with if not defined by hostility, whether in disguised forms or outright military action, has become a peripheral viewpoint in such visions. Few writers and politicians in the north acknowledge that the current onward march to subsume the southern populace and appropriate their cultural and ethnic identity into whatever the northern elite desired, which began with the Turkiyya in 1821, has been central to the southern aspiration to secede. It is now the reason why other peripheral regions within the 'traditional' north like Darfur and the northeast have followed the same dissenting path taken by the south. Northern academic discourse on the so-called southern problem goes as far as chastising the ruling elite for not doing enough to make southerners feel a sense of belonging, but never acknowledges the connections between southern grievances and the developments in other regions of the nation.³⁴ There is little, if any, recognition of the historical trajectories and political processes (for example the attitude of the Muslim populations of the north toward non-Muslims) which has culminated in the south moving toward the path of secession. A similar dismissal of regional grievances was recently applied regarding the emerging threats of disintegration posed by the eastern province, from Darfur in the west, and from the Nubian far north. Such a mythico-historical approach – writing the histories of each regional conflict as 'problems arising from within the region and on their own, unrelated to the actions of the center and separate from the events occurring in other regions – has proved deficient at best in providing an integrated history, and has at worst been degenerating into ethnic, regional and racial history; a kind of academic discourse informed by political loyalties and cultural nationalism.³⁶

Likewise, the few works of social science and historical research that are undertaken by southerners have come as a response to the northern discourse on the conflict; a kind of grievance approach to history by both academics such as Francis Deng, the late Dunstan Wai, Leek Mawut, Deng Akol Rua,

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