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for South Sudan and Sudan

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Front cover photograph: Joining hands for freedom, peace and justice (Credit: Haringey Welcome).

Contents

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Editorial

We are pleased to welcome you to Issue 68 of *Sudan Studies*. Our thoughts are with everyone who has friends and relatives in Sudan and those who have had to flee. Events in Sudan have cast a cloud over all of us.

This issue begins with tributes to **Professor Herman Bell**, who died in February after almost a lifetime of engagement with Sudan and Egypt that centered on the peoples of Nubia, who straddle the two countries.

The situation in Sudan is the subject of our first three articles. As the journal is published only twice a year, it is not possible to give up-to-the-minute information but we can reflect the situation at the time of writing in June 2023. Journalist **Gill Lusk**, our chairperson, has written reflections on the 'War on Sudan' and human rights activist **Dr Afaf Elhag** about its impact on health services. This is followed by a report about a wonderful picnic held by **Waging Peace** and **Haringey Welcome** in London in June to commemorate **Sharif Barko** and others lost during the more than twenty years of genocide and war in Darfur.

This is followed by two articles about education in South Sudan by **Kepo James** and **John Benington**, both of whom spoke at the last SSSUK Symposium in October 2022. Both are writing at the policy level about education: Kepo takes as his subject 'Quality Education' and the training of teachers from his perspective as head of Yei Teachers' Training College while John discusses girls' education, with a focus on Ibba Girls' Boarding School in Western Equatoria.

Our final article is a report of the launch of our President **Leila Aboulela**'s new book, *River Spirit*. This took place at SOAS in March and was attended by many SSSUK members and others. Former U of K lecturer **Judith Hepper** reviews Leila's enchanting new novel**.**

Our other book reviews also have a historical theme. In a major review article **Douglas H. Johnson** looks at a new edition of both volumes of **Winston S. Churchill**'s famous 1899 work, *The River War*. Meanwhile, **Joanna Oyediran** reviews **Hamid Dirar**'s riveting account of his childhood as a nomad in Sudan, *The Amulet*. **Peter Woodward** reviews **Russell McDougall**'s volume *Letters from Khartoum*, comprising the letters of **Dr R. Ewen**, who taught English Literature in Sudan in the 1950s and 60s.

There is no 'News from Durham' in this issue but we hope to have a bumper edition in the next one. Please keep a look out in your email and on our social media for the notice about our next Symposium and AGM, which we hope to hold in September this year. The minutes from the last AGM were in Issue 67 of the journal. We hope to see many of you there!

Obituary

Professor Herman Bell
1933 - 2023

Herman Bell died in February this year after almost a lifetime of engagement with Sudan and Egypt that centered on the peoples of Nubia, who straddle the two countries.

Herman was born in Virginia USA in 1933 and studied at different universities both there and in Europe, including Berlin and Oxford, before taking his PhD in Linguistics from Northwestern University in 1961, focusing on language and culture in Nubia. The project to build the High Dam at Aswan was getting under way and the filling of the dam - now Lake Nasser or Nubia - would inundate the towns and villages of the Nubian communities who lived along the Nile. Herman took on the task of registering the names of all the affected settlements along the river before many of them were submerged.

In 1973, Herman accepted a post at the newly formed African and Asian Studies Unit at the University of Khartoum. Established under the leadership of Yousif Fadl Hassan, it became a dynamic and exciting center for the arts and social sciences and Herman worked closely with a fellow linguist, Sayed Hurreiz. One notable project resulted in the publication of *Paradise Lost in Nubia*, which included numerous rare photos and documents from the region. For the rest of his life, Herman maintained his interest in and concern for the impact on local communities of building dams in Sudan.

Herman left Khartoum in 1979 and in 1980 moved to the King Faisal University in Saudi Arabia. By 1993, he was back in Oxford, where he became Dean of Academic Affairs at the Oxford Academy of Advanced Studies, a post he held until 2003. He also became an Honorary Fellow at the Institute of Arab and Islamic Studies of the University of Exeter. Well into his 80s, Herman continued to travel and write in numerous publications, notably in the Nubian studies journal *Dotawo*, constantly showing his concern about the impact of dam building on the Nubian people and with a particular emphasis on women's education.

Herman leaves his wife Ann and his children, Bethany and Jordan.

Peter Woodward

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We are enormously saddened by the death of the eminent scholar Professor Herman Bell, on 7th February 2023 in Oxford.

I first met Herman in Oxford in 1992. At that time, we used to attend a weekly seminar on North and East Africa at the Anthropology Department at Oxford University, which was organised by Professor Wendy James and her husband, Dr Douglas Johnson. When I was working at the Pitt Rivers Museum from 1995-2000, Herman attended a presentation I gave on the use and function of multimedia in preserving the oral tradition of culture and the arts in Sudan, based on my master's thesis at Oxford Brookes University. At that time, Herman and I, with our friend Dr Mohamed Jalal Hashim, the Nubian scholar, used to meet regularly every Thursday afternoon. In 2005, Herman commissioned me to design an interactive multimedia map of Nubia's land and people for the launch of his book, *Paradise Lost: Nubia before the 1964 Hijra*.

As good friends, we used to visit each other's homes and talk about Sudan. In the period between 2008 and 2017, through my responsibilities working for Age UK as IT development manager for Oxford City, and in collaboration with Oxford Brookes University, I was managing a community development project to organise IT training courses for retired seniors. I was very pleased when Herman joined the project, as he was keen on learning modern digitisation methods of copying, restoring and preserving his old pictures, and working on creating databases that enabled him to manage his Nubian photograph collections.

Herman's rare historical photographs were those that he and his wife, Ann, had taken in Sudanese and Egyptian Nubia between 1962 and 1964. The photos captured the lifestyle and art of the Nubians before the forced evacuation of 1964. Their camera was an eyewitness to this 'Hijra', now regarded as one of the largest forced migrations in modern history.

Herman continued to visit Sudan and work on collaborative projects with his former colleagues and students. He was very interested in the issues concerning the Nubian language and in geographical names in the Nubian region. He also supported an educational charity for women from conflict areas. He discussed these issues with great enthusiasm in his numerous academic papers and publications.

In 2009, Herman published *Paradise Lost*, which was produced in Khartoum by the DAL Group. He documented, through more than 200 high-quality photographs, the life of Nubians in their historical homeland and their migration in 1964 from northern Sudan to its east, to New Halfa.

Professor Herman visited us to express his deep sorrow after hearing about the massacre in Khartoum on 3rd June 2019. The shocking news that we were receiving from Khartoum, concerned the dispersal of the General Command

sit-in, which had then been taking place for over two months. This act of evil was carried out by the armed forces affiliated to the Military Council and backed by the Rapid Support Forces of Janjaweed militias.

That day, I suggested to Herman that his sympathies lay with all the Sudanese population, who were still living with the horror and shock of what that group had committed. I recorded with Herman a video that can be accessed through this link: https://youtu.be/RlELjPg1No4. It was recorded in my house in Oxford, in a spontaneous and unplanned way.

Herman and his family loved Sudan with all its ethnic and cultural diversity, and his connection with Sudan and its people lasted over the past six decades. Herman was always keen to attend the activities of the Sudan Programme at St Antony's College, Oxford University, organised by Dr Ahmed al Shahi and Bona Malwal. Herman had a vast knowledge of Nubian civilisation and its languages, and he encouraged and inspired the work of Sudanese scholars in this field.

Personally, I am grateful to Herman for guiding me to shape my research proposal to be centered on the contribution of singer-songwriter Mohamed Wardi (1932-2012), to the development of Nubian *tambour* music.[1] He encouraged me greatly to keep up my studies of Nubian music and the playing of the *tambour* instrument. In fact, Herman gave me a Nubian *tambour* as a present. We had many meetings to discuss my research proposal. I am very proud that Professor Herman and his colleague in Nubian studies, Professor Kirsty

[1] A lyre, known as *kisir* in Nile Nubian languages and *tambour* in Sudanese Arabic.

Rowan, were the ones who wrote a recommendation for my application to Bath Spa University.

We can draw consolation, knowing that his works, writings, research, and intellectual contributions to Sudan will survive; his close association with Sudan, its people and its history will remain.

Ahmed Abdul Rahman is a Sudanese musician and composer who has lived in the UK since 1991. He is currently researching for a PhD.

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Our chair of SSSUK Gill Lusk remembers Herman as a good friend of SSSUK and warm, welcoming, unpretentious, highly intelligent and perceptive.

Herman wrote a comprehensive review of Griselda El Tayib's illustrated volume *Regional Folk Costumes of the Sudan* in *Sudan Studies* 61, January 2020 and also reviewed *Toponymy of Ishkeed and the Revitalization of an Endangered Nubian Language* by Abdel Halim Sabbar in *Sudan Studies* 58, August 2018.

Editor, Sudan Studies

War on Sudan

Gill Lusk*

The horrifying battles launched on 15th April 2023 are not stages in a war to defend the country but a war to destroy the country. This is not a war **in** Sudan, as headlines suggest, it is a war **on** Sudan. A war on the people, on the fragile environment, on the buildings, and on the country's institutions and its very fabric, its very memory. This is not a "civil war" between rebels and government, or between political groups: this is a war within the regime itself and it is a war against the Revolution that began in 2018, because for all the forces now[1] at war – the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF), the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Islamist movement that drives the conflict – this is an existential struggle: their very existence is at stake. For all three elements, it is a fight to the death.

Air strikes against East Nile Hospital, Khartoum by the SAF (Credit: MAXAR).

Each side thought it could win. In particular, the national army, the SAF, appears to have expected a lightning victory. This was Russian President Vladimir Putin's mistake in Ukraine, the result of personal arrogance and

[1] Wars change constantly, which is challenging for a twice-yearly publication. I have tried to reflect on some longer-term aspects; the information in this and the accompanying article on health is believed to be accurate at press time in late June 2023.

East Nile Hospital, Khartoum after air strikes by the SAF on April 15th 2023 (Credit: Human Rights Watch).

military ignorance. Similarly, the SAF Commander-in-Chief, General Abdel Fatah Abdel Rahman el Burhan, who also heads the ruling Sovereignty Council, and his top brass clearly believed their own propaganda. They thought they could easily wipe out the RSF, whom the regular army has long seen as a band of deniably useful but under-trained mercenaries.

The RSF are led by Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, aka Himedti, who was until May El Burhan's deputy – effectively national Vice-President. So fiercely have they fought each other that it is easy to forget that this pair jointly launched the *coup d'état* in October 2021 which terminated (temporarily, it is universally hoped) Sudan's precious Democratic Transition, led by Premier Abdullah Hamdok. It is also often forgotten that years ago, both were active participants in the government-ordered ethnic cleansing in Darfur, a policy developed by the Islamist regime from 1990. By the 2000s, the slaughter was being globally defined as "genocide", with the International Criminal Court issuing arrest warrants for President Omer el Beshir in 2009 and 2010. El Burhan served in the army, Himedti was a leader of *Janjaweed* Arab militia, which is why the RSF, over 100,000-strong and formed of many of the same men, are still widely known as "*Janjaweed*", even though they are officially part of the

national army and indeed fought in Yemen as the Sudanese contingent in the Saudi Arabian-led war against Houthi rebels.

To bolster their murderous assaults on the civilians and on each other, both sides have indulged in a propaganda war of an intensity also never seen before in Sudan. El Burhan has played the national army card, Himedti the anti-Islamist card, but both have had little resonance among Sudanese and virtually none abroad. Reports abound of Islamist agents from the General Intelligence Service working for both belligerents, which raises more questions about the nature of the conflict. It is widely believed that, amid already rising tension, fighting broke out on 15th April 2023 because Himedti was informed that the SAF were about to attack his RSF, so he moved pre-emptively. Many believe the trap was set by the Islamists of the former regime. When peace comes, as it will one day, it is to be hoped it will provide scope for full investigation of who did what and why. Accountability looks like a distant dream but hopes of eventual trials still flicker, as they have, with some success, in previous bloody wars, from Germany to Bosnia to Liberia. Meanwhile, war crimes and crimes against humanity continue apace and fraught activists do their best to monitor them. Paradoxically, the fear of being held internationally accountable is one factor that keeps the leading protagonists at war. Victory looks more tempting than life in prison.

Yet no victory is possible: this is defeat on an epic scale. After nearly two months of brutal fighting, on 7th June the army, the SAF, shelled El Yarmouk military factory in south Khartoum, smothering a densely populated area with noxious smoke from a fuel depot, as one alarmed doctor immediately texted me. A week later, suffocating smoke was still filling the neighbourhood: the military regime did not even have the capacity to extinguish a fire it had itself lit. The national army had attacked its own most important manufacturing facility because the paramilitary RSF had taken over the plant. Militarily, its reckless tactics contrasted strongly with the precision strikes of the Israeli military, which had bombed the plant in October 2012 as it produced missiles that the National Congress Party regime under Omer Hassan Ahmed el Beshir was supplying to the Palestinian Islamist movement HAMAS in Gaza.

This year's bombing of El Yarmouk is however only one among a storm of daily airstrikes, primarily on civilian and often civic buildings, by an air force that had previously rarely fired a shot in anger. The bombardments are aimed – though usually without "surgical precision" – at dislodging RSF fighters from people's homes or from hospitals and other institutions they have commandeered. Any self-respecting army would send in troops, perhaps special forces, to clear the building, rather than expensively and irresponsibly using aircraft or heavy artillery, as the SAF have systematically done. "Sudan has no

army anymore!" complained one veteran politician, "and especially, there is no infantry". This, he noted, was one effect of 30 years of Islamist rule.

The result is to depend on long-range firepower. As we have seen in the Russian invasion of Ukraine, this can then produce devastating and apparently indiscriminate damage. "The whole thing that is being committed by both the SAF and the RSF is extremely irresponsible. The civilian population are bearing the full brunt of it," commented a long-time activist in one of Sudan's armed resistance movements. The scale of violence and of destruction have shocked even those habituated to considering military action a political necessity.

As in Ukraine, it is often impossible to know whether the large scale destruction of civilian life and property is primarily indiscriminate or targeted. Either way, it may in itself constitute a war crime under international law. This long-distance and contemptuous assault on civilians also makes the Sudan fighting look like an invasion rather than an internal or defensive war. It is certainly offensive in every sense of the word.

Clearly, not all attacks are indiscriminate: Sudanese tell me they have no doubt that many, including long-range firing, are targeted. In the second week of June, for example, the Saudi Embassy in Khartoum was attacked by men wearing RSF uniforms. What aroused particular suspicion, though, was the fact that several Saudi buildings were simultaneously targeted. "It may be circumstantial evidence", observed one Sudanese lawyer, "but this was very well planned and Himedti has no interest in attacking the Saudis, whereas the Islamists do". Riyadh and Washington have been jointly mediating to try to agree at least a humanitarian ceasefire. Since the Revolution flowered, i.e. over four years before this April's battles erupted, reports abounded of "shadow militias", as the Islamist guerrillas are often known, donning RSF or SAF uniforms for "false flag" operations.

That raises the issue of what the Islamists hope to achieve, beyond simply returning to full power, as their leaders explicitly and increasingly declare, particularly on social media. The international community's expressed aim of restoring Sudan's transition to democracy is clearly not what the *Keizan* of the NCP regime intend to happen. The phrase "democratic transition" resounds somewhat more loudly from Western than Arab or even African governments, and certainly than from Russia or China. Yet no government has demonstrated much in the way of decisive action and that is grist to the mill of the comrades of Omer el Beshir, widely seen as currently led by Ali Ahmed Kurti, former Foreign Minister and founder of the People's Defence Force, which fought in the war in South Sudan and in other places where Islamist rule was challenged.

So why destroy what you hope to control? That very question was often

asked about the decades of genocide in Darfur committed by the National Islamic Front-NCP regime. One part of the answer in Darfur was ethnic: many Islamists adhere to an Arab supremacist version of their ideology, as the equally Islamist Taliban used to complain about some of Usama bin Laden's forces who took refuge in Afghanistan after leaving their base in Sudan in 1996. In Darfur, it was easy for the Khartoum regime to manipulate the competition – traditionally latent and if necessary resolved by customary mechanisms – between Arabic-speaking pastoralists and the farming tribes who mostly spoke African languages as their mother tongue.

The theme of seeking to control re-emerges, though. Many in the NIF-NCP regime at the start of the Darfur conflict in the early 1990s believed that, as in South Sudan, they would never be able to dominate this vast area. In Darfur, people – including 'Arabs'– practised a particularly easy-going interpretation of Islam. It also boasted an erudite tradition: historically, the region had founded its own 'Darfur School' of Islam in Egypt's Al Azhar University, the *alma mater* of much Islamic teaching. The NIF regime was thus challenged on two fronts. It therefore sought to control the land but was content to get rid of as many of the people as it could. At least 400,000 have been killed, some believe far, far more. The estimate of 300,000 already proffered to The United Nations Security Council in April 2008 by John Holmes,[2] then the UN Under-Secretary General for Humanitarian Affairs and later Chairperson of the United Kingdom's Electoral Commission, is still widely used by journalists and others, as if the killing had not continued to this day, more than 15 years later.

By mid-June, Darfur was in flames again; the devastation beset Zalingei, Nyala and most of all, El Geneina, the capital of West Darfur, whose name means the"garden" or "orchard". There will be no harvest this year for most farmers. Tens of thousands set off on foot towards Chad, risking life and limb in a last desperate hope of survival as RSF and SAF fought each other to the death in their town, slaughtering civilians with equal enthusiasm. Locals blamed mainly the *Janjaweed* but as in the battles in the Three Towns national capital, responsibility could not always be neatly attributed. Shadow militia, as the Islamist fighters are usually known, donned the uniforms of others and sometimes none at all, operating in the literal and political shadows. Activists seeking to record events for history and potential future trials were threatened and often killed. No forensic scientists would be testing this ballistic evidence; no journalist able to record the facts of mass murder. Indeed, with streets littered with bodies in El Geneina and Khartoum alike, the main concern apart

[2] https://news.un.org/en/story/2008/04/256942

from grief, and personal and family safety became giving people a decent burial – and helping to stave off a public health catastrophe to add to that already unfolding. Resistance Committee activists, and Red Cross workers struggled to bury the dead.

It is not lost on friends and acquaintances from the Nile Valley that they and their families are now experiencing the pain and destruction that their fellow countrymen and women in Darfur and the Nuba Mountains have undergone for decades. It is not only ethnicity and language that separate these communities: class and education all play their part. Now destruction of all they hold dear has brought them a little closer together. With their ardent debates and revolutionary comradeship, the brave young protestors from the Revolution that rose in 2018-19 had already sown healthy seeds of "truth and reconciliation" among Sudanese from diverse backgrounds.[3] Could the crimes committed against their own citizens by the country's armed forces light yet another candle of understanding in the darkness of destruction?

Never have metropolitan Sudanese witnessed such destruction or felt such collective trauma. Everyone seems to have lost at least one relative or friend. The treatment is also collective: time-tested family and community structures come to the rescue. However, many people will need health and material support long after the war ends – as end it must. Many civil society organisations have been labouring quietly on building a post-war future or on bringing help to those who have lost everything. Doctors have led in setting up aid networks, where well-wishers can contribute time or money, including remittances from abroad. International aid organisations have been hampered at every turn, with relief supplies blocked or stolen, visas refused, staff threatened. Blocking humanitarian aid can be considered a war-crime and someone may pay one day. In the short-term, though, many have been wondering how a government that is unable to administer any normal public services is still able to obstruct aid supplies to its own citizens, the very people it is supposed to protect but is in fact killing. People point to well-known names in key posts.

The resilience required to cope with this crisis is breath-taking. Many Sudanese have commented that Sudan's army "attacks only its own people". No need for this army of a narrative about a "foreign enemy" or even armed rebels. It is simply attacking its very own paramilitary units, collaterally slaughtering the civilians it has sworn to protect and destroying the infrastructure of an already poverty-stricken country it is supposed to defend. Most agree that the Islamist movement is driving this suicidal hurtle over the cliff and certainly social media have been full of enthusiasm from declared Islamists. Asked why

[3] See. 'Spring of Hope', *Sudan Studies* No. 60, July 2019.

the Islamist Movement would be so ostensibly self-destructive, one Sudanese analyst told a June conference: "Because they want *tabula rasa*." A clean slate? That could sound ridiculous. It is not – not for the minority who cling to an absolutist ideology claiming to be following God's orders. This is precisely the strategy followed in Darfur from the early 1990s, when the ruling NIF turned the Arab superiority tenets of the Arab Gathering (*Tijamu el arabi*) into a genocidal war against the "African" people of Darfur. It is an additional reason why Himedti has difficulty persuading the public that his recently declared opposition to Islamism gives him the moral high ground.

A lack of moral justification for either protagonist does not necessarily make policy easier for interested foreign governments. In an era when foreign intervention is more widely seen as aggression than it was two decades ago, the likelihood of Western boots on the ground is small. Various Arab regimes have had allies on one side or the other but continued their traditional juggling game: for instance, Saudi Arabia benefitted from RSF forces in its own intervention in Yemen but was still able to act as a mediator in June's Sudan ceasefire talks in Jeddah. The African Union (AU) had suspended Sudan after the Burhan-Himedti 2021 coup but struggled to provide a mediation team with effective democratic credentials. Sudan is a member of the AU and Arab League, and the majority of the population is Muslim, yet at United Nations Human Rights Council on 11th May 2023, not a single AU, Arab League or Muslim majority country backed a UK motion to extend rights monitoring and the role of the UN special rapporteur. The motion nevertheless passed.

Some Sudanese hoped for more feisty UN intervention but with Russia and China unwilling to back any Western proposals at all at the UN Security Council, with a long record of UN Peace-Keeping ineffectiveness and Khartoum's manipulation in Darfur, and with no peace to keep in any case, a force of blue helmets looked a distant prospect.

Sudan thus presents the world with a stark new problem. How do you stop such a war, when there are no sides to take except those of the civilians, who are completely uninvolved in the fighting? This needs some innovative thinking: many felt that sanctions – strong targeted ones – would at least be a start. It is certainly time for governments that derive their legitimacy from free elections based on human rights and the rule of law to do more to help Sudan's own proud transition to democracy and the beleaguered civilians who support it. Western and some other governments loudly backed Sudan's peaceful, civilian Revolution four years ago but have found it harder to act to protect those same civilians under attack from the men officially designated to protect them. One thing the world's political and military experts will need to turn their minds to when peace breaks out is what to do with an army and

an official militia that have shown themselves capable of wantonly destroying the country's people and environment, thereby completely losing the trust of those they supposedly serve.

* Gill Lusk has worked in or on Sudan since 1975, mainly as a journalist.

The War in Sudan: the Impact on Health Services

Afaf M. Elhag*

On 15th April, six days before the Dawn of the Eid celebrations, war broke out in Khartoum. It was a time when people were vulnerable, drained by the month-long fast while enjoying the holiest days in hopeful anticipation of the Night of Destiny (*Leilatu Alqadr*), which is worth a thousand nights. Then into our quiet home far from home, there came the bolt of my sister-in-law being martyred among the first victims by a stray mortar shell: Najwa, an ophthalmologist retired less than a month before her demise. She had been looking forward to joining her youngest son in the United States in a few months.

So the peace of the holiest month of the year was overturned and the joy smothered in plumes of heavy smoke. Many Sudanese were out of the country – the usual habit of spending Ramadan in Cairo for the last ten days or in Mecca, performing *Umrah*, the Minor Pilgrimage.

The destruction in the fighting between the Sudan Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary force that is officially part of SAF, has had a vast and indiscriminate impact on civilians and been targeted and planned as far as health services are concerned. The health service

East Nile Hospital, Khartoum after air strikes by the SAF on April 15th 2023. (Credit: Screen capture of online video images).

East Nile Hospital, Khartoum after air strikes by the SAF on April 15th 2023. (Credit: Screen capture of online video images).

is already precarious and for 14% of the population non-existent whatsoever, with the budget allocation of the pre-Revolution *Ingaz* ("Salvation", the National Congress Party) government less than 2% of national income.

According to the Sudan Doctors' Interim Union on 12th June 2023, the total deaths of civilians were 958, with 4,746 injured. The death toll is for the whole country but is only for those reaching hospital and is therefore an under-estimate. These figures exclude the unreachable areas of heavy fighting and those which are otherwise difficult to access. The real toll of deaths and injuries is

expected to be far higher, especially in areas of intense conflict, such as West Darfur and other parts of the region.

In Khartoum, with about ten million inhabitants, 67% of 89 main Hospitals were out of service, while 29 were functioning only partially or just providing an emergency service. Several health facilities face the risk of closure imminently as supplies, water, electricity and medical staff run short.

The movement of medics is greatly hindered by direct attacks on ambulances (11 so far were targeted). The El Nur ("Light") Institute for Blind People had received a donation of 11 vans: all were seized by the *Keizan* regime. Its founder, Elbaghir Ibrahim Ahmed, was one of Sudan's earliest ophthalmologists and a patriotic philanthropist. Now, the Institute has been raided and destroyed, and the only Braille printer in the country was looted, said a family member. Over the door of the hospital stands this Koranic inscription:

فَإِنَّهَا لَا تَعْمَى الْأَبْصَارُ وَلَكِن تَعْمَى الْقُلُوبُ الَّتِي فِي ...
الصُّدُورِ (٤٦)

Verily, it is not the eyes that grow blind, but it is the hearts which are in the breasts that grow blind.

Regional hospitals have been affected equally if not more so, particularly in Darfur, Kordofan and in areas where fighting has predated that in Khartoum. The only renal dialysis centre in El Geneina closed down. Without dialysis, many kidney patients will die. No fewer than 17 hospitals suffered direct bombardment. East Nile Hospital in the east of Khartoum serving 1.5 million people is an example. Armed soldiers occupied and evacuated 21 hospitals by force.

Looting of hospitals by armed factions is rife – drug stores, doctors' residences, the stores of the Red Crescent were not spared. Those hospitals still running are in danger of imminent closure, including specialised centres, such as Khartoum Teaching Hospital, the Eye Hospital, Cancer Centre and Renal Unit. Oxygen cylinders, fuel, medicines and emergency kits are dwindling fast. A few supplies managed to get through during ceasefires but by no means enough. The main maternity hospital in Omdurman with its large neonatal unit is out of service.

Some provincial hospitals are still holding on and offering services in El Fasher, El Obeid, Nyala, Kassala, New Halfa, Merowe and Karima. However, there is obviously no influx of supplies or equipment nor any maintenance service, compounded by the frequent power cuts and water shortages.

On another note is the environmental hazard of the bodies piled in streets and abandoned buildings. Proper identification and funeral rituals have been forcefully denied, with some people being buried in their own homes. They include a Coptic anaesthetist and her sister, while a Khartoum University student was interred in the University courtyard. By the third week in June, there were reportedly no more corpses on the streets of Khartoum, thanks to the efforts of the Red Crescent, the Red Cross and trained volunteers from the neighbourhood youth resistance.

Not the least to mention is child care, as the mounting daily death toll of infants and toddlers in Mygoma Orphanage provides heart-breaking testimony. After electricity and water shortages during the early days of fighting, 50 out of 330 infants, toddlers and young children died, according to medical staff talking to Aljazeera Television. In early June, the Red Cross and Red Crescent managed to evacuate the remaining children to Wad Medani in the Gezira.

Evacuees have a bitter story to tell, about having to flee with the simplest of clothing on: a *jallabiya*, simple *tobe*, flip-flops to tread a long journey across the desert. A journey with no rest or service facilities, and subject to the exploitation of bus drivers and others *en route*. By 23rd May 2023, 132,000 refugees had reached the Egyptian border, as per the Displacement Tracking Matrix for Sudan of the United Nations International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

Many succumbed to their chronic diseases or to dehydration in the desert heat. Those who made it to the border had to face long waits with no resources. The Sudan Doctors Union of the UK managed to install a temporary clinic at Wadi Halfa on the Egyptian border.

According to the IOM's Displacement Tracking Matrix consulted in late June, 1.4 million people had been displaced by the 23rd May, a large majority being internally displaced in various Sudanese states. Over 319,000 had

fled across borders: this was before June's massive exodus from Darfur. At that time, the largest share had gone to Egypt. Smaller numbers left for other neighbouring countries, namely South Sudan, Ethiopia, Chad and Libya. Some went into the Central African Republic. Numbers are hard to monitor and constantly changing.

In Omdurman, my hometown, several people moved from one neighbourhood to another in the same city, as Omdurman suffered less shelling and fighting than Khartoum. Nevertheless, there have been times of extreme conflict, as RSF occupied buildings and SAF attacked them with long-range fire.

Looking for the silver lining in this unprecedented cloud, there is some bright side. Foremost is the solidarity that the Sudanese people have demonstrated, reassuring us that we still keep our heritage. Around three-quarters of people displaced have been housed by relatives and strangers alike.

The internal movement includes medical experts, who have taken their skills to rural hospitals and performed complex surgery, which would not have been available otherwise. *Altaghyeer* Sudanese Electronic Newspaper told the story of three senior doctors who went to Dongola and performed complex operations that were not available before in urology, bone and eye surgery. Young doctors and even medical students had to step up to specialist and consultant level, performing procedures such as a Caesarean section by the light of a mobile phone or a blood transfusion at the roadside. Some doctors risked holding home clinics.

On a final note, it seems opportune to make a few recommendations:

The first is simply to Stop the War!
Then 2, consider supplies of medicine for chronic diseases. Sudanese doctors in the diaspora and human rights organisations such as Sudan's Doctors for Human Rights are working collaboratively to address these issues with the help of international partners.
3. Cancer patients are particularly at risk, with the already few and under-resourced cancer centres available now non-existent.
4. Vaccinations and public health issues. As the situation gets worse and the rainy season approaches, the danger of epidemics grows, especially cholera, typhoid and malaria.
5. Disease surveillance and outbreak prevention and control.
6. Laboratory issues: the main national laboratory in Khartoum is out of service after being occupied by the warring factions. The premises have been badly damaged and equipment dismantled, with reagents facing expiry.

We pray that all this will be memories soon and that the Phoenix will rise with a New Sudan.

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* Dr Afaf M. Elhag, MBBS, DCP, FRCPath., Consultant Histopathologist, Hull University Hospitals, Kingston upon Hull, East Yorkshire. Co-founder, Sudan's Doctors for Human Rights.

20 Years of Genocide in Darfur: a Commemoration Picnic

Charlotte Martin*

On a hot and sultry day in mid-June this year, members of the Darfur community in the UK met for a commemorative picnic organised by Waging Peace[1] and Haringey Welcome.[2] The event was centred around a bench in Alexandra Palace Park, London, which is a memorial to Sharif Barko (also known as Majed Hassan).[3] Sharif fled Darfur and made a life for himself in Haringey, only to be killed in renewed violence in El Geneina when he returned for a family visit in 2021. The West Darfur capital is once more at the centre of appalling violence, with many people not knowing if their loved ones are alive or dead. We also met to mark the 20th anniversary this year of the internationally recognised start of the Darfur genocide.

Image of the campaign logo (Credit: Waging Peace).

Photo of the plaques (Credit: Charlotte Martin).

[1] Waging Peace works to support Sudanese refugees to build meaningful lives in the UK. See: http://www.wagingpeace.info/

[2] Haringey Welcome has made a podcast about Darfur which can be found at: https://twitter.com/HaringeyWelcome/status/1665689789037674502

[3] Sharif's story is available on the Holocaust Memorial Day website at: https://www.hmd.org.uk/resource/sharif-barko/

As the organisers had hoped, it was both a sad and solemn occasion but also one that celebrated life and the solidarity that is possible among people. There were tears and lots of hugs and meetings between old and new friends. There was also delicious food, from *salata aswad* to lemon drizzle cake and coffee from the local café. Darfurians travelled from many parts of southern England to come to the picnic and commemorate Sharif and others who have died in the Darfur genocide. There were also many friends and supporters of Darfur from Haringey Welcome and other organisations, including SSSUK.

After we had eaten, Sonja and Maddy from Waging Peace led a 'circle', where speakers talked, in Arabic and English, on a range of subjects dear to their hearts: about Sharif, about Darfur and the current conflict. They included Saif, who reminded us that the war in Darfur had really begun in 1998 and that since then, life has gone on, however difficult the circumstances, with people being born, marrying, giving birth and so on, but that now there is an extreme situation once again in El Geneina. Dr Martin Stern MBE., a survivor of the Holocaust and friend of Darfur, ended his moving presentation about genocide with a reminder that we all have a voice and that we must use it to speak up and keep reminding people about Darfur and its people. Hadeel read out a message from David Lammy, the MP for Tottenham. The leader of the Massaleit community in the UK also spoke movingly. Many who spoke had lost their relatives in recent violence, but found it important to use their voices anyway.

Saif with Maddy and Sonja from Waging Peace (Credit: Charlotte Martin).

Hadeel (Credit: Charlotte Martin).

Dr Martin Stern, MBE. (Credit: Charlotte Martin).

Many other participants shared their thoughts and grief and pain with the group and were comforted. It was not the deaths alone that were causing pain but not knowing where loved ones are or if they are still alive, as there had been no news for many weeks. El Geneina is surrounded by the Rapid Support Forces, who are killing and looting at will. Some of the women present sang for the group, which was heart-breakingly moving. We then joined hands and called for "Freedom, Peace and Justice" in both Arabic and English.

Joining hands for freedom, peace and justice (Credit: Haringey Welcome).

At the end of the ceremony, participants were given blue ribbons to tie on Sharif's commemorative bench and asked to think about a loved one who was in their hearts. It was a fitting end to an important and moving occasion.

Photo of the bench and the ribbons (Credit: Charlotte Martin).

* Charlotte Martin is the editor of *Sudan Studies*.

Quality Education in South Sudan, Coming to Terms with the Reality

Kepo James*

Introduction

This article is in two sections. The first presents an overview of the meaning of quality education and the global frameworks on which the agenda for such education is constructed. The second surveys the terrain of South Sudan in relation to quality education. It highlights some of the most prominent policies in which quality education is anchored in South Sudan and the basic challenges to implementation, with a specific focus on areas that need strengthening.

What is Quality Education?

Quality education has become central to meeting the aspirations of any nation. This is not to say that the countries of the world have all followed its path. For most of the 20th century, educational developments in Africa were inextricably linked to national and international politics, and these have played a significant role in shaping education. Globally, numerous campaigns have been organised against poor educational delivery. At the beginning of South Sudan's nationhood, calls were made to increase funding in order to deliver quality education. Since then, however, education has continued to struggle with issues of standards.

Quality education is a term that has been used and abused many times, and a working definition is necessary. Generally, the term 'quality' is used descriptively to describe characteristics as well as normatively to present a value judgment. In comparative terms, it has been used to compare the standards of things of a similar nature in order to pass a value judgment: i.e. 'this is better than that'. In general terms however, quality education is about whether learning is taking place and if that learning is taking place correctly. The aim of quality education is to benefit the learner and ensure success and good outcomes. Quality education also depends on how society defines the purpose of education and whether it's relevant in the context in which it takes place.

Quality education can be measured at different levels: international, national, sub-national, local, community and school. It requires deliberate efforts and decision-making processes to make it happen across all these levels. At the national level, it involves a policy-making process that affects the entire education system. Schools may also be required to implement international policies that are repugnant to the local context and the way of life of indigenous people or their aspirations. Education systems can therefore

be contested when global frameworks are not aligned appropriately to the national framework.

International Frameworks for Educational Quality

While the notion of quality education can be traced back to the fathers of philosophy centuries ago, more recently the concept has been driven by various global frameworks. Several conventions recognise education as a fundamental human right.[1] The narrative of quality education has its roots in different places in these documents and volumes of material have been written to unpack this concept.

International frameworks suggest that quality education can be achieved through various approaches, including the implementation of competence-based curriculum and learner-centred techniques to teaching and learning including participatory methods of teaching, problem-solving pedagogy, concrete learning through objects and field trips or educational tours. Learning is expected to be self-driven where the teacher acts only as a guide. Quality education is also expected to be achieved through ensuring that the curriculum content is relevant to the context and needs of the consumers and the children, taught by qualified and highly motivated teachers. Moreover, it is also expected that the teachers can receive adequate and timely pay, and undergo regular evaluation. It is also important to have regular reviews of education policies and frameworks so as to meet changing educational needs. Quality education also requires the integration of both academic and vocational skills into the education curriculum. Ultimately, however, the main requirement in achieving quality education is teacher training and the professional development of teachers, with a focus on improving their competence, knowledge, skills, values and attitudes (including personal attributes), knowledge of the subject matter, teacher practices in the classroom and knowledge of and commitment to their pupils. In order to achieve this, judicious investment in teacher training centres (including virtual learning centres) is crucial where teachers can be trained in various activities to improve their quality in areas of information and communication technology (ICT) for learning, and developing teaching and learning resources etc.

South Sudan's struggle for Quality Education: A historical trajectory

1899-1955: Anglo-Egyptian Condominium. Colonial Education was contested

[1] For example Article 26 of the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights. This is reinforced by Articles 13 and 14 of the 1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights. The 1990 Jomtien, World Declaration on Education for All, the 2000 Dakar Framework on Education for All (EFA), the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Sustainable Development Goals.

as irrelevant by indigenous Sudanese communities. Generally, the children of chiefs and children considered to be of questionable character attended school at this time.

1956-1971: Constant criticism of the education system by Southerners during this period. The education system was viewed largely as hegemonic, aimed at Islamisation and Arabisation, and a tool for the repression of liberties.

1972-1982: These were years of semi-autonomous rule in the South and those in which a significant number of schools were established. During this time, school students enjoyed some level of social prestige. It was a relatively comfortable setting as the education system provided adequate educational facilities, free education, free board and lodging, and a stipend for the students.

1983-2005: Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/SPLM) Liberation Struggle. The education system was largely in the hands of the community, churches and other faith-based groups, and the Civil Authorities of New Sudan (CANS). Operation Lifeline Sudan (OLS) was established in 1989 and the Secretariat of Education (SOE) much later, in 1998-9, and both played a crucial role. While the support of the humanitarian agencies was limited, they made an important contribution to education through the provision of scholastic materials to some schools. It was also during this time that the first Education Policy of the New Sudan and Implementation Guideline was established in 2002 (Sommers 2005).

2005-2010: The Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) witnessed the emergence of many International non-governmental organisations (NGOs) with a huge say in the education system. Community and faith-based schools remained an active part of the education sector during this time.

2011 onwards: After independence, the government of South Sudan started to take an interest in education. Many community schools became government schools, while the government established a dozen others through various funding mechanisms, including the Constituent Development Fund. The support of humanitarian agencies continued. Schools and pupils both increased in number. In 2012, 1,365,757 children were enrolled in primary school (Education Management Information System, 2012).

The policy frameworks underpinning quality education in independent South Sudan
2011 saw the drafting of the National Transitional Constitution. Articles 29 and 38 talk about education and affirm it as the right of all. The government made its intention clear: that every citizen had the right to education. The

Education Act of 2012 was the second most important document that shaped the education agenda and it injected new impetus into the search for quality education, which was emphasised alongside access and inclusion. The South Sudan General Education Strategic Plan 2012-2017 (RSS 2012), formulated around the same time, contained similar emphasis.

The South Sudan Curriculum Framework, adopted in 2014, stipulated the need for relevant education capable of producing successful life-long learners, and creative and productive individuals who were also environmentally responsible members of society. Education was to be anchored in a shared commitment to the values of human rights and gender equity, respect and integrity, peace and tolerance, compassion and social justice, democracy and national pride. Overall, the principles of the South Sudan education system as outlined in this document aimed to nurture a culture of excellence that supported innovation, creativity, continuous improvement and effectiveness, and an environment of empowerment that promoted independence, individual learning, critical thinking, problem-solving and emotional intelligence. Also, a culture that built national pride and identity within an understanding of global citizenship. The students' competence was to be measured in critical and creative thinking, communication, cooperation, and culture and identity. These goals were to be achieved through a competence-based curriculum and an approach to learning that promoted the construction of new knowledge and ideas.

The curriculum ranged far and wide including language and literature, mathematics and additional mathematics, history, geography, agriculture, citizenship (including civics), peace education (including human rights), physics, chemistry, biology, music, dance, drama, fine art, design, crafts, sports, games, physical activities, health education and religious education (either Christian or Islamic). Elements such as information and communication technology and technical and vocational training were integrated into the school curriculum too. Environmental awareness and sustainability, peace education and life skills formed the greatest part of cross-cutting disciplines within the curriculum. Integrated into the school programme were physical activities and sports, personal development and life skills programmes (including guidance and counselling), community involvement and peace education, school gardens, drama and music.

Inclusion and meeting Special Educational Needs was also emphasised, focusing on creating effective learning environments, providing appropriate support to learners with special needs, providing specialist equipment or materials where appropriate and varying teaching approaches where necessary to ensure that all learners are learning.

In addition to formal educational programmes, further aspects of education, such as Alternative Education Systems (AES), Alternative Learning Programmes, and Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) formed part of the education agenda.

In summary, the ground was set for everything that would improve the quality of education, including a wide range of policy frameworks. For example, in 2017, another Education Strategic Development Plan was launched for the period 2017-2022 (South Sudan Education Strategy 2017) in a bid to improve the quality of education. Its major components were:

1) Implementation of the newly adopted curriculum.
2) Teachers' professional development, with a focus on upgrading the skills of existing teachers.
3) Inspection, supervision and school management.
4) Assessing learning outcomes.
5) Payment of teachers' salaries.

Despite these efforts, many areas of education policy have yet to be implemented, hindering the fulfilment of the national aspiration for quality education. In the next section, I outline some of the factors that have hindered its development in South Sudan, focusing on three areas: the disproportionate number of male teachers, the low qualification level of teachers and the lack of public-private partnerships in the education sector.

Although the government of South Sudan has worked imaginatively and creatively with its education partners to try to address some of the emerging issues in teachers' education, with good initiatives that have produced some results, including ensuring a curriculum for teachers' education as well as the development of standards for education and various other educational policy documents, nevertheless, due to the enormous needs, many areas still lag behind.

Factors hindering the development of quality education in South Sudan

A Disproportionate number of male teachers in the education sector

The statistics in Table 1 show a marked under-representation of women in the teaching workforce. For example, in 2016, the number of female teachers in primary schools stood at 14% while males comprised 86% of a total of 25,987. We see this disproportionality all through the years from 2008. While the vision of South Sudan is to train more teachers to improve the quality of the education system, these statistics reveal that women continue to form a minority of the work force. On the one hand, this is due to the injustice of the past and on the other hand, it is due to a lack of rigour in addressing the issues.

*Table 1. Statistics for Primary School Teachers in South Sudan 2008-2016.**

* There is no data for the year 2014.

Year	Total	Male	% of Total	Female	% of Total
2008	25,912	22,739	87.8	3,173	12.2
2009	26,575	23,144	87.1	3,431	12.9
2010	26,658	23,372	87.7	3,286	12.3
2011	26,549	23,181	87.3	3,368	12.7
2012	28,029	24,451	87.2	3,578	12.8
2013	27,709	24,211	84.4	3,498	12.6
2015	25,115	21,288	84.8	3,827	15.2
2016	25,987	22,388	86.0	3,599	14.0

Author's summary. Data taken from Education Management Information System (EMIS) Reports 2008-2016.

One of the serious issues affecting women is the lack of economic support and adequate services at the institutions of learning. Many young girls who wish to enrol for teacher training have little or no access to scholarships, scholastic materials, subsistence allowances or healthcare services. This, combined with the poor facilities that exist in the training institutions, has led to poor recruitment to and retention of women in the teacher training colleges. In addition, most training colleges do not have facilities that provide a conducive learning environment for women with children and especially lactating mothers. Another common problem mothers face is what to do with their children while studying under tight conditions at the colleges. The result of these obstacles is that the vast majority of schools have a low number of female teachers. It is widely acknowledged within educational discourse that the under-representation of women has a significant impact on the quality of the education system. If not addressed, the unequal representation of women in the education sector will continue to perpetuate more injustice against women and impact on the life chances of the girl child.

To address this challenge, a radical shift in thinking and support mechanisms is required. This support should involve subsidising tuition and offering targeted scholarships in the colleges to women, so as to close the gender gap that has existed for years. It would also ensure that female teachers stay at colleges and that they are fed and accommodated, thus removing barriers that deny them access to education. In addition, women should be allowed to report for their studies together with their children who are below school age. This would represent a radical shift in which both the mother and her children

receive free meals and accommodation services at the College. This measure is necessary for the sake of their future and the development of quality education. It would also contribute to empowering women economically. Some of these women depend on education for their future as they are often denied assets and other family resources since they are expected to be married off for bride wealth away from their parents' home.

On the positive side, the government has encouraged women's participation in all sectors of society. The evidence of an increase in the number of women in politics, for example, is attributed to this encouragement but this success needs to be replicated in all sectors of the economy. In the education sector, access to scholarships to join the colleges is key in this regard. Encouraging the education of girls through affirmative action will ensure that they access college and university education in order to compete favourably with their male counterparts. Affirmative action will provide an environment for women to thrive including working outside the home. Targeted support and increasing the availability of scholarships has a huge potential to unlock the barriers that hinder women's participation in the education sector.

Low Teaching Qualifications

One of the main issues affecting education in South Sudan is a lack of trained teachers; EMIS reports indicate that a huge number are not trained due to gaps in the implementation of planned teacher training.

Table 2. Primary School Teachers' Qualifications in South Sudan.

Category	Percentage
Not Completed Primary Education	4%
Primary Certificate	28%
Secondary Certificate	56%
Diploma and above	5%
Unknown	7%

EMIS, 2016

When considering teacher training, we ought to remind ourselves of how this is done. Generally, there are two models: 'In-service' and 'Pre-service' training; South Sudan has adopted both as viable means to train teachers. Unfortunately, equal attention has not been given to implementing them. Teachers' education programmes are largely skewed towards the in-service model, which is viewed by many as cheap and easier to implement than the pre-service model. There are flaws in this rationale as it is not clear that in-ser-

vice training is necessarily cheaper. The most significant costs in teacher training are those related to the salaries of the trainers, which are the same in both cases. As teacher trainers are already a part of the regular payment structure in South Sudan, it makes no sense not to utilise them in training teachers through both methods.

Moreover, money is not the only issue; there are long-term impacts arising from the decision to rely primarily on in-service training, as my own experience of working in the teacher education sector over the last twenty years suggests. In-service training deals mainly with teachers who are already working within the educational system. This approach excludes many young men and women who would like to join the profession but have no schools from which they can be selected for training. Furthermore, there is little attempt to attract bright recruits to the teaching profession.

The other problem with a mainly in-service approach is that it limits teachers to working within a particular region as in-service training takes place mainly during school holidays. The lack of flexibility in the system continues to keep teachers cocooned within their regions of origin and practice, preventing many of them from travelling to other parts of the country to live outside their own culture of origin. This is not healthy for a young democracy such as South Sudan that is striving to build national unity and cohesion. Pre-service training provides a more flexible system that allows students to travel and learn from other environments. Yei Teacher Training College has provided a good model of this, where students are recruited from all over the country and enabled to live, eat, play and learn together, representing a truly national character. This is fundamental for building unity and cohesion.

In order to improve the quality of teachers and hence the education offered to students, a competitive approach should be taken to teacher recruitment; taking on only those with good qualifications and ensuring periodic evaluation of them, dropping those with lower standards. A radical shift is required that ensures investment in both in-service and pre-service teachers' education. This will not only ensure that a significant number of teachers are trained but also teachers with a national character.

Weak Private-Public Partnerships (PPP)

The development of a shared vision on a national issue such as quality education could help to unite the people of South Sudan. PPP promotes the notion of the public and the private sector (community and faith-based schools) working together. This model has worked effectively elsewhere, including in the East African region, of which South Sudan is a member.

The constitution of South Sudan stipulates that education is the right of

every child and this includes those attending faith-based and private schools. This is a great wisdom from the law-makers who developed the constitution, as South Sudanese have a long history of working together in the education

Early photo of the College, 2012.
(Credit for all photos: Yei Teacher Training College, South Sudan).

Representatives of female sponsored students and members of faculty at YTTC, 2022.

Students in practical sessions at the College's science lab, 2013.

sector. For example, during the long civil war (1983-2005), a good model was established where the SPLM worked together with the humanitarian agencies and the community to ensure the provision of education to the children in the rural areas of Southern Sudan. The continuity of the education sector drew its strength primarily from this model.

After independence in 2011, there was a radical shift in this way of working. Schools became compartmentalised into government, faith-based, community and private. While this was well-intentioned and meant to provide an administrative structure and facilitate accountability mechanisms, unfortunately it has not been well understood in some quarters. The perception held by some, especially those in the public and humanitarian sectors, is that private and faith-based schools should be left on their own and not benefit from public resources (both government and humanitarian funding). This interpretation doesn't seem to represent the nature of South Sudanese society, which is largely a communitarian and collectivist society with thin lines between the life of the community with their belief systems and the state. South Sudan ought to continue to set an example in working together in practical terms, as it has done before. This includes the movement of ideas, resources and technology among the partners.

Students in practical farming sessions in the College Gardens, 2012.

Other measures needed to improve the education sector

In addition to the above, in order to achieve quality education, attention has to be paid to enhancing the quality of leadership, strengthening governance and management frameworks in the schools, regular reporting and providing targeted support to meet the needs of teachers in training institutions. Most important is to upgrade the salaries and incentives of the teachers and ensure that the schools have adequate teaching and learning resources and facilities. Strengthening data-gathering and information management systems at all levels of the education system, and a strong commitment by all stakeholders to the learning of their children, are some of the safest avenues for strengthening the education system in South Sudan.

Conclusion

This paper has provided a brief analysis of how to achieve quality education. South Sudan's policy framework provides mechanisms for improving the quality of education in the country. However, the implementation of these frameworks is constrained by numerous factors, thereby presenting a reality that is different from what is planned.

The agenda for teacher training and gender equity in education will remain

largely rhetorical or even inimical if existing disproportionate gender disparities continue. The low capacity of teachers and funding of the education sector have not been addressed. A lack of trained teachers and an education system that marginalises one section of the population (women) could prove counter-productive to the country's vision for quality education and will have drastic consequences for the country's future. Implementing quality education without addressing these challenges will simply shift the timeline for disaster. It could also lead to a tacit rejection of the teaching profession and the education sector as a whole, thus affecting the broader agenda and discourse on quality education and national development and cohesion.

In this article, I critique the problematic ideological stance that in order to improve the quality of the education system, South Sudan should rely on in-service teacher training. While in-service training provides an essential catalyst to improving the quality of the teaching force, we should be cautious about seeing it as an end in itself. The model that is recommended by this paper is one that promotes both the in-service and pre-service teacher training as highlighted in the national teachers' training strategic policy frameworks. This is particularly important given the fact that the majority of teachers currently teaching in South Sudan's classrooms are untrainable through in-service methods, due to their low academic qualifications.

A framework that promotes public-private partnerships is needed in order to address the current disconnect between public and private institutions in accessing public funding and resources. While the national vision of education is to promote quality education, its realisation has been hindered by a non-inclusive practice of resource distribution that favours public institutions. There is a need for a new approach that offers more inclusive financing to address the challenges of education in the country. South Sudan's freedom was born out of the contribution of all and thus the country's resources need to benefit all, including the children who are learning in private and faith-based institutions. We can borrow from the approach of other countries where teachers in government-recognised faith-based schools are paid by the state as long as they offer the national curriculum and are inclusive in their admission policy.

In summary, the first expectation of this paper is that the country can increase the number of female teachers in schools in order to create the required change in the education sector. Secondly, South Sudan must implement its teachers' education policy and provide both in-service and pre-service teacher training. In that lies the promise for quality education for the country.

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*Kepo James is at the tail end of his PhD studies in the UK. He holds an MA in Educational Leadership and Management from the Institute of Education, University College London. He has worked in the education sector for over 20 years and has an in-depth understanding of the wider impact of policy frameworks on the education sector, not only within the context of South Sudan but also across the East African Region. He is currently serving as the Principal of Yei Teacher Training College in Yei, South Sudan. The views expressed in this article are his own and not those of the Yei Teacher Training College.

A Beacon of Hope for Girls' Education in South Sudan?[1]

John Benington*

Introduction

This brief article draws on immersive action research for a book I am writing about the first ten years of Ibba Girls' Boarding School (IGBS) and the Friends of Ibba Girls' School (FIGS). The book aims to be a critical account of the period from my first visit to Ibba in 2009 through to my most recent trip in November 2021, just prior to the Covid-19 pandemic.[2] During that 10 year period, I and other FIGS Trustees and volunteers made over 30 visits to Ibba. Each lasted around two weeks, living and working on the campus as a part of the school community, from morning assembly at 7am until lights out at 10pm, taking part in classroom lessons, meals, and meetings with staff and students and other stakeholders in the community.

As close partners in the development of IGBS from the beginning, I and other FIGS Trustees and volunteers have tried to subject ourselves to critical questioning from other Trustees who have never visited South Sudan; from the South Sudanese diaspora in the UK and by regular attendance at, and contributions to, seminars of the Sudanese Programme founded by Dr Ahmed Al Shahi at St Antony's College, Oxford, which bring together academics, policymakers and practitioners.

In this article, I first give an account of the beginnings of IGBS and FIGS, before reviewing the design principles which guided the development of IGBS as a pioneering girls' boarding school in South Sudan. Thirdly I reflect on the strategy which informed FIGS as a UK charity and then finally make some comments on the challenges facing both IGBS and FIGS, and their ambitious plans for the future.

Beginnings

In 2008, the author and Jean Hartley (both then Professors at Warwick University Business School in the UK) were asked by the interim Government of South Sudan to travel to Juba to run a series of workshops on public leadership and management, to help prepare newly appointed ministers and officials

[1] The author spoke on a panel with Kepo James about the 'Challenges of Education South Sudan' at the SSSUK Symposium in October 2022. His subject was 'Education as a crucial arena and catalyst for liberation in South Sudan'.

[2] Ibba is in Western Equatoria State on the marram road between Maridi to the East and Yambio to the West and is close to borders with the Democratic Republic of Congo and the Central African Republic.

for civilian government and for the transition to independence following the referendum. One of those officials, Nagomoro Bridget, was then working in the new Ministry of Commerce, Trade and Industry, with Anthony Makana as Minister.

These workshops were held at the Juba Bridge Hotel and sitting beside the Nile one lunchtime, Bridget told John about a recent dream she had had, in which she felt called to set up a boarding school for girls in Ibba, the village in Western Equatoria State where she had been born and brought up. At that time, she was one of very few girls in South Sudan to have had schooling beyond puberty (roughly Primary 4, aged 10).

Nagomoro Bridget. "In 2001 when I came back to Ibba for a visit, I saw there was no light for the women in particular, and no future in terms of education, self sufficiency and liberty. I felt that I must do something to educate the young women of ten years old for tomorrow."
Credit for all photos: (Copyright of Friends of Ibba Girls School, South Sudan).

Bridget asked John and Jean to help her turn this pioneering vision into reality, by developing a detailed strategy and action plan for a girls' boarding school, and helping to raise the finance needed to build and develop it. Bridget soon resigned from her job in the national government in Juba and returned to Ibba village.

Bridget quickly set about mobilising active support for her vision from a wide network of people and organisations, including local women, parents, traditional leaders and elders, clergy from all denominations, educational non-governmental organisations (NGOs), teacher training colleges, and ministers and other officials at national, state and county levels. She was later appointed as Commissioner for Ibba County (the first female County Commissioner in the whole of South Sudan at that time). This gave the girls' school proposal a stronger mandate within the community and led to the setting up of a broad-based steering committee which led the decision-making until the

legal constitution of a body of South Sudanese Trustees and Governors at the formal opening of the school in 2014.

Bridget donated a large plot of family land for the school and also inspired the *boma* (village) Chief, Severio Atoroyo, to give an adjacent plot of land – making a total of 73 acres available. Chief Severio later donated a further plot to provide land for dormitories and a small farm that would help the school grow some of its own food on site and teach the students more about organic labour-intensive agriculture.

We raised some funds to commission Malcolm Worby, an architect with substantial experience in green and sustainable building in South Africa and East Africa, to prepare a site development and buildings plan. Bridget, Malcolm, John and others visited other similar projects in South Sudan (including schools and teacher training institutes in Juba, Maridi, Yambio and Yei (where James Kepo was and still is the principal) to learn from their experience. They also visited Gayaza Girls' Boarding School in Uganda, which has been in existence for over 100 years and has been crucial to the formation of a cadre of female leaders in Uganda.

Ibba school from the air

This careful consultation process with the local community and other stakeholders led to a development plan for the site and buildings, and a school plan and guiding principles for the first ten years of IGBS. These principles were captured in two key legal documents: the registration of Friends of Ibba Girls'

School as a UK charity in 2011; and Ibba Girls' Boarding School as a community school under South Sudan law in June 2014.[3]

Yoane Kumbonyaki, one of the first teachers, appointed in 2014. "When I was a child because of the civil war I had to walk out of this country [to Central African Republic] to be safe. Now because of education, I am back here as a teacher. I want to teach a new generation. I want to help these girls become agents of change in their communities."

The ten design principles of IGBS as a pioneering girls' boarding school.

1. IGBS is designed as a community school not a private or a state school. It is a partnership between the local community; the Parent Teachers' Association (PTA); state and local government; churches of all denominations; and other stakeholders including FIGS as partners and main funders for the first period of the school's development.

2. IGBS is based on core Christian values but actively welcoming to people of all faiths and none. The school aims to cultivate a critical questioning approach to knowledge and to learning, wherever that may lead.

3. IGBS focuses on girls from ten to 18-plus years, because during this period in South Sudan, few girls have had the chance of education beyond primary level 4 (because of poverty, tradition, domestic labour, childcare, early marriage, pregnancy by 14 or 15 years of age, high maternal mortality).

4. IGBS provides an integrated pathway from upper primary to secondary (with stepping stones from Primary 4 to 8 straight through to Senior 1 to 4), on the same school site. This aims to counteract the very high dropout rate of girls from schooling in South Sudan at the end of primary. The IGBS school community was designed to grow in nine modular stages, recruiting a new

[3] The opening of the school was delayed by the outbreak of a further phase of the 50 year civil war.

cohort of ten-year-olds each year, aiming for nine classes of approximately 40 students each, reaching its planned total of 360 primary and secondary students in February 2022-23

5. A residential boarding school education, so that girls from the whole of Western Equatoria can attend and study safely for nine years, shielded from competing demands (for domestic labour, childcare, early marriage, social unrest), in dormitories with live-in matrons and a caring environment.

Residential accommodation: bunk beds and mosquito nets in the dormitories.

6. A commitment to "excellence without elitism". IGBS is open to all students with the potential and commitment to learn, whatever their background, status or income. A three-cornered informal "contract" is negotiated between the school, the parents and each student, to do their best to make use of this exceptional opportunity for study and learning.

7. A curriculum embracing learning with "both the pen and the hoe", combining academic knowledge with vocational and life skills, e.g. agriculture, sewing, embroidery, sport, music, drama, debating and voluntary service within the local community.

8. Preparation for the transition from school to work. IGBS students are

equipped with the knowledge, skills and confidence to go on to further or higher education, or to train for the professions (teachers, nurses, doctors, lawyers, accountants, engineers), skilled trades (digital programming, vehicle maintenance, plumbing, electrical), social enterprises and small businesses.[4]

9. An aspiration to become a beacon for girls' education in South Sudan: a tried and tested "demonstration project" with a commitment to sharing and comparing IGBS experience with other schools and teacher training institutes in Western Equatoria State. This is based on methods of "knowledge exchange and transfer of learning" into the culture of each different school, according to their distinctive context. We have called this process "not copy and paste, but graft and transplant" (Hartley and Benington 2006).

10. Aiming to ripple out the lessons from IGBS horizontally, by raising funds to support a national learning network of "beacon" schools across each of the ten states in South Sudan.

Reflections on FIGS strategy compared with some other NGOs

The UK based charity FIGS has a strategy for IGBS that includes a commitment to long term bottom-up community development and capacity building work, rather than the short term, single-issue, top-down project work characteristic of many larger NGOs and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs).

FIGS combines investment in infrastructure (rainwater harvesting, solar pumped water and lighting; school buildings etc) with investment in people (students, teachers, nurses, matrons, cooks, grounds maintenance and night watch staff), and in resources for learning (e.g. textbooks for each student, laptop computers and satellite internet, a projector for showing and discussing films, and a school library with fiction and non-fiction books, including sections on African fiction, history and politics).

We aim to invest in indigenous economic and social development, to empower, uplift and upskill individuals and communities so they can become self-sustaining and reduce their dependence upon external aid ("hand ups instead of handouts"). Examples being explored include production and sale of local honey; an embroidery and weaving cooperative; growing and market-

[4] FIGS and IGBS medium to long term strategy is also designed to help students to make the transition not only from primary to secondary but also from secondary to tertiary education. Supporting the transition from school to work includes providing technical vocational education and training (TVET), skill development, livelihoods and jobs.

Support staff are crucial: Cooks preparing food.

IT skills for Secondary pupils. ITSchoolsAfrica and Turing Trust gave IGBS some refurbished computers.

ing macadamia nuts and medicinal herbs and, in the longer term, high quality teak and mahogany wood.

We recognise that the "exit strategy" for our work in South Sudan (which like the Democratic Republic of Congo, Central African Republic and Chad are dominated by militarised regimes rather than democratic governments and the rule of law) may take longer than in countries like Uganda, Tanzania and Zambia, where there are well established government institutions, and a higher level of economic and social development.

We take very seriously the sporadic upsurges in violent conflict in Western Equatoria and in South Sudan more widely, and the need for continuous assessment of the risks for students, families, teachers, support staff, PTAs and governors. However, we are committed not to withdraw our support for IGBS because of the conflicts in South Sudan (as several NGOs have done) but to maintain our support for the students and staff through thick and thin, so that students' education is not disrupted and their potential dissipated.[5]

FIGS also has a commitment to contribute to environmental sustainability and the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. We share our knowledge and experience of sustainable building methods (using as much solar power, local materials and local labour as possible) and sustainable agriculture and skills for self-sufficiency and livelihoods. All students gain experience in working on the school farm and we are also developing a working partnership with Solidarity's organic labour-intensive model farm in the Riimenze community, on the road between Ibba and Yambio. Solidarity's project is designed as a more realistic and sustainable alternative for farming in the rural areas than dependence upon big imported tractors, which are quickly abandoned when they run out of spares and diesel.[6]

We do not see IGBS as a stand-alone institution but envisage the school campus as a hub for local economic, social and cultural development (e.g. sharing its solar lighting, satellite internet and library of books to give local people opportunities for study, sports and drama and during the vacation, for adult education (e.g. with classes in literacy, numeracy, sewing, embroidery, car maintenance, etc).

FIGS has worked in one place and one project for the past ten years, which

[5] We know that this may require us to mobilise not only short-term direct financial support to tackle dire humanitarian need (e.g. hunger, malnutrition, disease, poverty, loss of income) but also medium term funding (e.g. to provide bursaries for students and good pay and training opportunities to retain staff loyalty and continuity) as well as a longer-term planning horizon for sustainability of the school (e.g. through creation of an endowment fund or income generating projects linked to the school).

[6] https://solidarityssudan.org

provides us with a depth of knowledge and experience. By comparison, many larger NGOs work across several countries and many projects, which gives them breadth of knowledge and experience. One challenge and opportunity for FIGS is to spread and scale the learning from IGBS as a tried and tested demonstration project, using our expertise in improvement of science methods, horizontal knowledge exchange networks and peer-to-peer learning methods. We have a detailed proposal for developing this but have so far failed in our funding bids (See the next section on challenges for the future).

Many schools in South Sudan are aligned with particular religious or ethnic groups (e.g. linked to the Roman Catholic church or the Episcopal Church of England and Northern Ireland; or one of the 64 tribal groups) whereas IGBS is deliberately designed as a community school, with trustees, governors, staff and students drawn from people of all faiths and none. Faith schools have had the advantage of providing relatively stable structures and institutional channels for their work in South Sudan but now run the risk of reproducing European Protestant-Catholic divisions at a time when the country desperately needs to find sources of unity rather than division. The IGBS approach aims to build bridges across potentially damaging religious divisions but runs the risk of leaving the school more vulnerable to volatile change due to its isolation from the institutional structures provided by the churches in South Sudan.

FIGS and IGBS have also deliberately developed close working partnerships with Republic of South Sudan (RSS) government structures at county, state and national levels, both with politicians and civil servants/officials. This is designed to ensure that IGBS works within the framework of RSS government policies and procedures, (e.g. using the South Sudanese national curriculum, text books and exams). IGBS is now being seen as a Beacon School for South Sudan, increasingly invited to share its experience with ministers, district and state governors, INGOs, donors and so on. However, the changes in RSS government structures and people since the outbreak of civil war in 2016 mean that FIGS/IGBS must keep adjusting to new government structures, policies and procedures, often at short notice, and carefully avoid any party-political bias.

Challenges for the future

The statistics on education in South Sudan are stark. It is one of the toughest places in the world to start and complete an education, particularly at secondary level (Windle Trust, 2017). Conflict and internal displacement have disrupted lives and broken educational opportunities. Trauma is widespread. A recent (2021) confidential unpublished survey by Fields of Life in Western Equatoria found poor quality infrastructure for both primary and secondary

FRIENDS OF IBBA GIRLS' SCHOOL SOUTH SUDAN

Strategic Plan On A Page

Secure Today

Consolidate 360

- Secure the school for immediate future
- Short/medium term funding gap
- Complete building work
- MoU

Secure Future

Secure 50 years

- Lasting funding stream (Strengthen South Sudan focus)
- Robust Governance (Governance and Board Reviews)

Beacon

A Beacon School

- Teaching quality improvement network
- Influence burgeoning educational model for South Sudan

Community

A Local Resource

- IGBS as a resource for the local community
- *Options include: Adult training – Water pump – Solar electricity – Farm – Health*

Crosscutting Themes

Fundraising Strategy	Develop a short & long term approach to funding which secures future of IGBS
Governance Arrangements	Strengthen FIGS UK & IGBS Governors and Trustees to ensure strongand effective independent governance
Partnerships	Build relationships in Ibba and WES, with national influencers, and with international bodies

Activities

Fundraising Strategy Development	Supporter engagement
Governance Review	Partnership building in S Sudan
MoU negotiation	Influencing work with Government
Building projects	Teacher & leadership development

Targets

Raise £500,000 by end 2023
Complete next phase of building by Autumn 2021 and finish school by 2023
360 girls in education by 2023
MoU negotiation complete by December 2021

schools but also few teachers, even fewer qualified teachers, and problems with teacher motivation, recognition and reward.

Education is well documented as a cornerstone of peacebuilding, and of economic and social development, improving the lives of individuals and communities, improving health outcomes and life chances by fostering local economic opportunities. Teaching quality is a key component of schooling – what goes on in the classroom between teachers and students is a major predictor of the quality of learning.

South Sudan, like many African countries, has a severe shortage of teachers which cannot be addressed through pre-service qualifications alone. In-service development of existing teachers is critical, as this means that teachers can continue to teach and are not removed from their workplace. In addition, they are not working in isolation, their skills improve on the job by cementing links between theory and practice, and it can be a source of pride and recognition to undertake in-service training, particularly if educational credit and qualifications can be gained.

If funding can be raised, one of FIGS's and IGBS's ambitions for the future, therefore, is developing a programme of in-service teacher professional development (ISTPD), using Ibba Girls' School as a hub for a network of schools working together to lift the quality of teaching in Western Equatoria and across the country. Our ten years of tried and tested experience at IGBS demonstrates the many and varied benefits for teachers, students, parents and the wider community that can flow from this. Students at the participating schools may also be inspired and supported to become teachers themselves.

Another of our ambitions for IGBS and FIGS is to develop a demonstration school farm, using the 100-acre site at IGBS. This has multiple benefits for the students and the local community, providing technical/vocational training for students, fresh food for students and staff, reducing the food bill at the school, and strengthening agricultural skills and knowledge in the local community. This will also contribute to emerging national markets. Agriculture is a key national priority within South Sudanese government policy.

If funding can be raised, a farm manager, who has a teaching qualification, will be appointed for three years in the first instance. The initiative will involve the development of a detailed farm plan for fruit trees, crops and animals. Some of the work will be built into the school's vocational curriculum. A costed business plan will be developed, for seeds, tools, labour and supervision of students on vocational work.

This will also provide opportunities for adult education more broadly, including small-business skills. We will aim to encourage parental engagement as in a rural community where few have experienced the benefits of education,

the school can be a valuable hub for development and increasing self-reliance, social enterprise and local economic development.

Conclusion

As I write this in June 2023, seismic shifts have been taking place in geo-political relationships globally (Russia, Ukraine, Libya, Hungary, Turkey, Syria, Iran, Egypt, Sudan, China) with major consequences for sub-Saharan Africa including South Sudan. The country's political, economic, social, technological and ecological/environmental development are thus thrown into high levels of volatility, uncertainty, complexity and ambiguity.

Mercifully, Ibba Girls' Boarding School remains safe and secure, and 360 primary and secondary students and staff are resuming their work for next term as planned. The security guards who have always been posted at the school gates, and the regular patrols of the campus with torches throughout the night, help to reassure students, staff and parents that good quality education can continue in spite of all the wider uncertainties.

In addition, the national Minister of General Education and Instruction recently signed a Ministerial Order to protect (in perpetuity) the land, buildings and assets of IGBS for continued use as a community boarding school, and as a resource for the whole of Western Equatoria State, and eventually for South Sudan as a whole.

The Ministry also signed a memorandum of understanding with IGBS and FIGS Trustees and with Windle Trust International, which has been commissioned to act as their managing agents in South Sudan and Western Equatoria State. Windle Trust has more than thirty years' experience of educational and development work in sub-Saharan Africa, and in the Sudans, and will be appointing staff to work in Ibba and Yambio in partnership with the new chairpersons of FIGS and IGBS Trustees, and with the Head Teacher and staff of IGBS.

These measures are designed to empower and strengthen the African governance, leadership and management of IGBS to manage the transition to the next phase of IGBS development for the next three to five to ten years. This will also help to "de-colonise" FIGS's relationship with IGBS, and prevent the kind of micro-management which is often characteristic of the pioneers of ambitious ventures such as IGBS.

Hopefully IGBS, working in partnership with government, the churches of all denominations, traditional leaders, and people and organisations of all faiths and none, will continue to act as a beacon of hope and light for girls' education in South Sudan.

A luta continua!!

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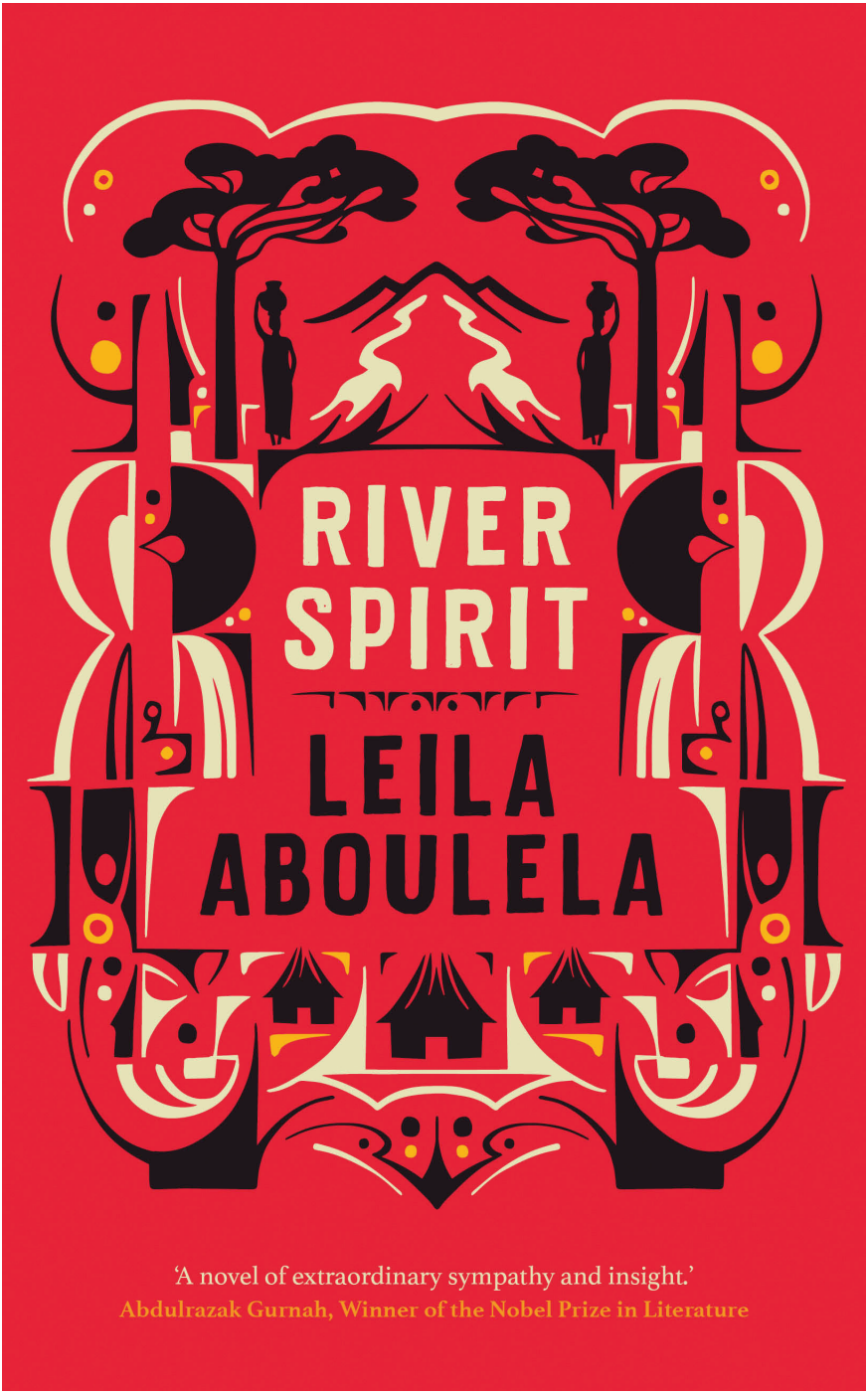
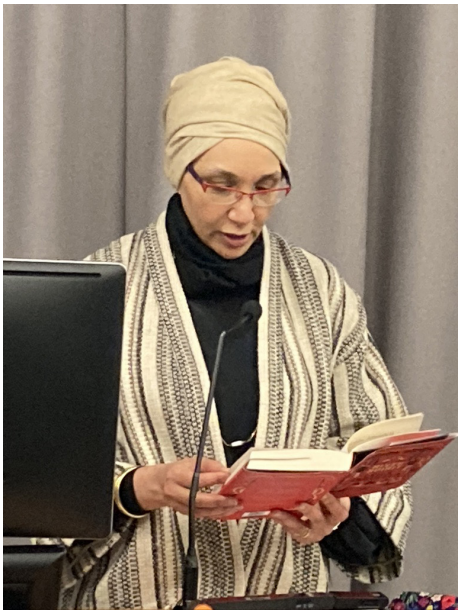
* John Benington CBE, Emeritus Professor of Public Policy and Management, Warwick University, Coventry UK. Founding Chairperson of Friends of Ibba Girls' School, South Sudan.


RIVER SPIRIT
LEILA ABOULELA
'A novel of extraordinary sympathy and insight.'
Abdulrazak Gurnah, Winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature

River Spirit: A discussion between Leila Aboulela and Fergus Nicoll

The lecture theatre at SOAS was filled with an expectant hush on 6th March 2023 when members of SSSUK, the Centre for African Studies, students and friends gathered to hear novelist Leila Aboulela tell us about her new book, *River Spirit*. Our expectations were not disappointed.[1]



A long-time SSSUK member, Professor Lutz Oette of the Law Department and the Centre of Human Rights Law, chaired the session. Leila, who is President of SSSUK, was in conversation with Fergus Nicoll, a retired BBC journalist and author of several books on the Mahdi and Mahdist history. Fergus is also a former SSSUK Committee member and a long-standing supporter of the Society.

Their conversation began with Leila reading from the prologue of her book, which is set mainly in the Nuba Mountains in 1881. It starts from the viewpoint of Rabiha, who sets out to warn the Mahdi about the imminent attack of 'Turks' who are occupying her village and seeking out the 'Mahdist Rebels'. She sets out to run across the mountains to the Mahdi's camp to warn him of the threat that faces him, thinking all the while of why she needs to do this and the challenges that face her.

[1] Credit: All photos Charlotte Martin.

The Nuba Mountains, December 1881

Rabiha steps out of her hut, sets out to warn the Mahdi. The night is lit by a full yellow moon. She must not be seen by the soldiers surrounding the village. The governor of Fashoda is on the move, intent on annihilating the Mahdi once and for all. She must get to him first. Sounds of a shuffle, a pant: she turns to see the old hunting dog following her. She bends down, rummages in the ground, finds a mango stone, and throws it at the dog. She picks up a chewed bit of sugarcane. It is still in her hand when she reaches the outskirts of the village. The vegetation thickens and rising out of the shadows is a Shilluk warrior. Spear in hand, muscular torso above his loincloth, the physique of a wrestler. She stiffens, drops the bit of sugarcane. Fight or run, fight or run? She reaches for her knife. She turns so that he can see her in full. Curves, breasts, glow of shoulder, long braids. She forces her body into limpness, hangs her long neck in submission, hides her hand behind her back, palm tight over the knife. He approaches, first with caution, then the start of a swagger. Makes low soothing sounds as if she were a skittish calf, lone antelope, stray prey. He must be near enough now to scent the sandalwood she uses in her hair to drench the smell of grease; she can see the decorative row of bead-like scarring across his forehead. He drops his spear; she waits a beat and aims down at his stomach. There is hardly any sound apart from the thud of his body on the ground. She looks around, grabs his spear, and runs.

After the reading came a fascinating question-and-answer session between Fergus and Leila that covered a range of topics and reflections from the book. He first asked about the strong role of women in the novel, which is particularly striking as histories of this period are usually about men and from a male perspective. One of several strong female characters in the book, Rabiha foils the attempt of the local Ottoman commander, Rashid Bey, to catch the Mahdi. Her commitment to the Mahdi is personal: her father has suffered hardship under the Turks and she is willing to make the sacrifices necessary to make the run to warn him. There are other important female characters in the book, notably Akuany from Malakal. The women in the book are all of different ages and from different areas of Sudan.

This raised an issue of sources of information and the research that Leila had undertaken. Fergus asked her what she had found that was new in the sources that had been missed by others. She replied that she had been put in touch with blogs and Facebook posts that discussed Rabiha's role in protecting the Mahdi and speculated about what had happened to her: this had provided the inspiration for the prologue. Rabiha had originally appeared in Chapter 9 but then her role had become so important that Leila had moved her to the beginning of the novel.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Fergus next asked about the structure of the book: some characters are written in the third person and some the first person, while General Gordon is written in the second person, addressed as "You". How did Leila decide on this? Leila said that she was 'passing the baton', as she didn't like an empty page and was always looking for flow in the narrative. This led her to trying out different voices. As a fiction author, she wants to generate a large amount of words and contrasting textures in her work so that characters are not all the same.

Fergus said that most people have heard only about the battle of Omdurman and the death of Gordon in Khartoum and don't know the Sudanese story and the places Leila has written about. The real story of this era was a pan-Sudanese story, said Leila. That is why there is a map at the front of the book. There is always movement and women move, too, and *en route* they live their lives, form relationships, have babies and so on.

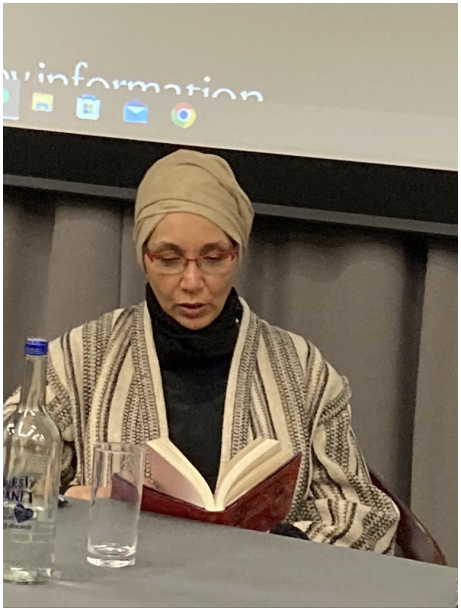
At this point, Leila read again from the book at Fergus's request choosing the start of Chapter 17, which is written from the point of view of one of the main characters, the young Akuany, from Malakal, who had been enslaved, had her name changed to Zamzam and was taken to Khartoum. The extract illustrated her connection to the river and how it was an enduring aspect of her life. For many readers, Akuany represents the 'River Spirit' of the title.

Khartoum, May 1884

As soon as she had arrived, the river—huge and strumming—claimed her. After years in the desert, she felt welcomed by the water, knowing it to be the timeless companion, the one that ran without effort, gave without needing, sang and sang the ancient tunes she had heard in her childhood, the songs she had yearned for and listened out for, that she had only half understood, but it did not matter, because listening was more important. She could strive to understand at her own leisure, tomorrow or the day after or the day after; the river would still be there for her, patient and strong, rich and always flowing in the same direction.

In the khawaja's paintings the river was stiff. It didn't move, it didn't sing. Instead of smelling like a river, the paints had an odious smell. And yet he thought well of his art, acted as if it were the most important thing in the world. Claimed that it was valuable, was curious about the color of her tongue, how it compared to other parts of her body. He disgusted her with his poking and examinations, his insistence on paralyzing her on canvas. In response, she would glare at his paintings, cursing them. Her curses, melodious and repetitive, unnerved him, and that filled her with satisfaction.

Fergus then returned to the questions, asking, "What about Gordon?"



LA: He isn't so well known and important now – after the film with Olivier in it, "Gordon of Khartoum", he was very well known. His diaries are so rich. I can understand why people write about him.

FN: There are not so many novels about the Mahdi?

LA: Gillian Slovo wrote one[2] and then there was one called *The Longing of the Dervish*[3] which was a Sudanese novel originally published in Egypt. There is another one too that hasn't been translated.

FN: What is the attitude to the Mahdist period in Sudan?

LA: The Sudanese syllabus is very pro-Mahdi but *The White Nile'* [4] is very pro-Gordon and many have read that. There is not much middle ground. The legacy and attitudes in Sudan are to do with particular family experiences and the sides which one's family ancestors took at the time. There is also an attitude that this period was heavily nationalistic, and every other country was the enemy. Mahdism was severely hostile to Egypt and the Ottoman Empire despite the fact that they were fellow Muslims.

The audience was then given a chance to ask Leila questions about the book and the process of writing it. Questions were asked about the title and the effect of the Mahdi period on Sudanese identity. Further questions about history and views of Sudanese history were put to both Fergus and Leila.

Conclusion

After the session ended there was a small reception in the foyer and Leila signed her book for the participants. All agreed that the evening had been a

[2] *An Honourable Man*, 2012 tells the story of the siege of Khartoum in 1884 and the attempt to send a relief force to Gordon's aid.

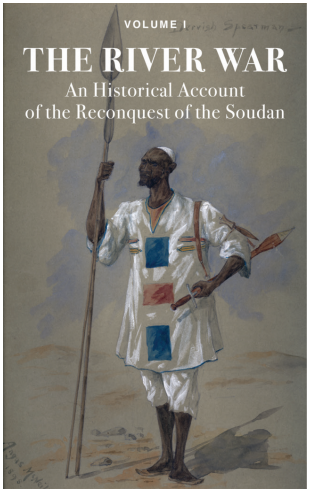
[3] *The Longing of the Dervish*, 2014, is by Hammour Ziada and the English version (2017) is translated by Jonathan Wright. The novel "examines the social conflict between white Christian and Islamic Sufi cultures in Sudan."

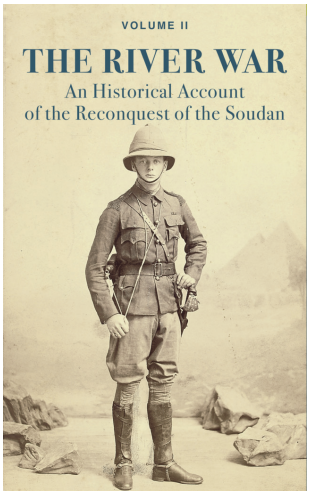
[4] *The White Nile*, 1960 is by Alan Moorehead and "covers the Victorian era of East African exploration."

magical experience that would stay in our memories for years to come. Our only regret was that we were not able to record the event so that it could be shared on our website. A review of *River Spirit* by Judith Hepper can be found in the Book Review section of this issue of *Sudan Studies*.

Book Reviews

Winston Spencer Churchill, **The River War: An Historical Account of the Reconquest of the Soudan,** edited by James W. Muller, South Bend IN: St. Augustine's Press in association with the International Churchill Society, 2021, volume 1 (cclv + 432pp), volume 2 (xxvi + 846pp) (ISBN 978-1-58731-700-2 for both volumes), $150.00.





I first came across Churchill's *The River War* in an abridged version of an abridged edition in *Frontiers and Wars* (1962), a collection of his earlier war reporting. Churchill was my boyhood hero and that volume began my introduction to the contemporary sources of the period, and more importantly it inspired a deeper interest in Sudan and the Sudanese. Since that time Churchill's *River War* has reappeared in one form or another along the path of my Sudanese researches. I spent more time than I probably should have reading the original two volume edition I found in the SOAS library (which I hope they have since withdrawn from the open shelves given its rarity and value) when I was supposed to be beginning my doctoral research on southern Sudan. Soon after that I was fortunate to attend a Sudanese Staff College presentation of the Battle of Omdurman, based on 'Ismat Zulfo's massive Arabic *Karari* (then being translated by Peter Clark) and conducted on the site of the Karari battlefield. More recently when editing the Sudan volume for the British Documents on the End of Empire Project I came across Paulo Logali's urgent telegram to Churchill objecting to the All-Parties Agreement between the Egyptian government and the northern Sudanese political parties that side-lined southern Sudanese interests and was about to become the basis of a new Anglo-Egyptian agreement on Sudanese self-determination. The soon-to-be co-founder of the all-southern Liberal Party appealed to the soon-to-retire British Prime Minister: 'As human beings Southern peoples determined decide their future …you fought Battle of Omdurman to safe [*sic*] Sudan and earnestly hope you not help sell us.' Implicit in this reference to the founding event of the Condominium and Churchill's (exaggerated) role in it, is the liberation of Sudan from tyranny and slavery

that had been the moral justification of the Reconquest, and the imminent betrayal of those on whose behalf the battle was allegedly fought. The victors of Omdurman were, in Churchill's own words, about to 'scuttle'.[1]

This new edition of Churchill's original two volume history of the reconquest of Sudan is produced by the International Churchill Society. Its publisher, St. Augustine's Press, specialises in conservative commentaries on political and religious issues current in the US, so the reader can expect that this new publication is more about Churchill and his place as a 'partisan of Western civilization' (according to the dust jacket blurb) than about Sudan. As important as that weighty issue is, for our purposes I will focus on what this new edition can tell us about Churchill's lasting impact on subsequent histories of the Reconquest of Sudan, and what contribution this edited re-issue makes to the study of Sudan.

The first thing to say about this edition is that it is a genuine labour of love and a very handsome production. In 231 pages of front matter (including a posthumous foreword by Churchill's daughter Mary Soames, a 146-page introduction, and fifty-one pages of a new bibliography) the editor explains his editorial apparatus and the significance of bringing out a new edition over a hundred years after its initial publication. The original two volume edition was subject to numerous abridgements and reductions over several decades, and the editor set out to restore the original text, at the same time as noting different published variants. He has approached this task with the meticulousness of a medievalist painstakingly reconstructing an ancient text from scraps of manuscripts written in different hands, but also with the awe of a votary handling holy writ.

The reconstructed text can be read at different levels. The restored excised passages are printed in red, while the text retained in subsequent abridgements is printed in black. The editor's footnotes are denoted by lower-case letters to distinguish them from footnotes in the original. They alert the reader to changes in punctuation, capitalisation, spelling of individual words and phrases as they appear in different editions, identify persons mentioned in the text, and convey other information. This might be more information than many readers will want, but with practice it is soon possible to discriminate between notes on textual matters, and notes with additional historical material.

There is more to this restoration than the multi-coloured, multi-level text. In addition to restoring ninety-three pages of the original appendices the edi-

[1] Paulo Logali to Churchil [sic], 22 November 1952, FO 371/96914, JE1051/441, The National Archives, Kew. See also Douglas H. Johnson (ed.), *British Documents on the End of Empire, Series B, Volume 5, Sudan. Part II 1951-1956* (London: The Stationery Office, 1998).

tor has included another 345 pages of new appendices consisting mainly of Churchill's additional writing on Sudan from 1898 to 1958. This edition retains all the original maps, including twenty-three fold-out maps omitted from subsequent editions, all of Angus McNeill's original drawings, to which the indefatigable editor managed to locate and include an additional twenty-three of this Seaforth Highlander's eyewitness sketches. While Churchill was dissatisfied with the way the pictures appeared in his book, they have an authenticity lacking in most drawings that were worked up for the contemporary illustrated papers. The illustrations are supplemented by twenty-five additional photos from Durham's Sudan Archive.

The editor gives a convincing answer to the question of the lasting impact of Churchill's account of the Reconquest. First, and quite obviously, the author is Churchill, best known now as Britain's wartime prime minister, but his influence began well before that. Churchill was well-connected as the grandson, nephew, and cousin of the Dukes of Marlborough; his father had been a rising star in the Conservative Party and despite his spectacular political and personal self-destruction his memory still commanded some loyalty. Churchill's own account of how he used this network into which he had been born to obtain both a posting to the army of reconquest and a commission as a newspaper correspondent is included as a revealing appendix. The editor's comprehensive bibliography of all the various editions of The River War, and his inclusion of samples of Churchill's other publications on Sudan and his own role in the Reconquest, illustrates how assiduously Churchill kept his name before the public when Britain's involvement in Egypt and Sudan was a prominent political issue throughout his political career. Unlike his fellow journalists and the occasional brother officer who chronicled the events of 1896-98 as participant observers, Churchill attempted an historical reconstruction of events. About a third of his first volume was devoted to a description of the years preceding the Reconquest so that his book could be understood as a comprehensive account of both Egypt and Britain's 19th century involvement in Sudan. Nearly all other contemporary accounts of the Reconquest take either 1896 or 1898 as their starting dates, so Churchill's River War became the one-stop shop for the Reconquest, even in its abbreviated editions. Then of course there is the matter of his writing style: dramatic, heroic, almost visual in its impact, impossible for less-gifted subsequent authors to overlook, and tempting for them to imitate or quote.

'The River War tells a grand story', the editor concludes in his introduction, 'and its themes, its characters, its judgments, and its prose amply justify its return to print. For the twenty-first century reader, it offers a definitive account of the reconquest of the Sudan and a thoughtful exploration of the

problems of war, empire, race, and religion that Churchill first encountered in the late Victorian era—which are very much still our problems today' (p. clxxx).

Well, not exactly. This is where one would have hoped that the editor would have been more analytical. Churchill arrived in Sudan only after the battle of Atbara and was present only for the final advance to Omdurman and for the battle itself. He was, after all, a minor participant in those events he describes, but a non-participant for the rest of the Reconquest and all the years building up to it. The demands of a vigorous narrative style carry with it the danger of embellishment, exaggeration, and invention, all of which Churchill was often accused throughout his political career. If his *River War* is to be presented as a **definitive** account of this period in Sudanese history, then the accuracy of his descriptions and judgment must be confirmed. He must be judged not only against what he could have known at the time, but what subsequent research and scholarship has been able to establish. The editor includes an extensive bibliography of both contemporary and scholarly works, many of which were used (usually without attribution) in the editor's footnotes. They often correct minor points in Churchill's narrative, but they could have been employed with more effect as a test against Churchill's narrative.

This is not the place to give a detailed critique of Churchill's reconstruction of Sudanese history prior to the Mahdiya, or of his stereotypical depiction of the 'two main races' of the 'human inhabitants of the Soudan', or of the editor's acceptance of the relevance of that depiction to current affairs. The ethnography of Sudan is far more complex than was known in the nineteenth century, and far more complex than today's journalistic division of the Sudan between the 'Arab Muslim North' and the 'Christian and Animist South', to which the editor obliquely alludes. The history of state-building and slavery in the Nile Valley is also better known now than it was a hundred (or even fifty) years ago, and we can no longer accept Churchill's summary of several centuries of Sudanese history during which the 'dominant race of Arab invaders was unceasingly spreading its blood, religion, customs, and language among the black aboriginal population, at the same time it harried and enslaved them' (vol. I, 16). Instead we will focus on the 'grand story' as both Churchill and the editor tell it.

The first problem arises early with origins and terminology. 'The revolt of the Sudanese Dervishes was an early instance of political Islam,' the editor writes in his introduction, 'a sort of Muslim revivalism, in collision with Western Modernity.' This characterisation strays from Churchill's own account which attributes the rising to Turco-Egyptian misrule, rather than to contact with the 'West'. 'They called themselves the Ansar,' the editor continues. 'The

British called them the Dervishes,' a term he continues to use throughout his introduction, and which he defines inaccurately as 'military monks' (p. xl). This is a case of where the editor is misled, as Churchill was misled, by such nineteenth century sources such as Wingate's *Mahdiism and the Egyptian Soudan* for an understanding of the ideology and inner workings of the Mahdiyya and the Mahdist state. P. M. Holt's ground-breaking *The Mahdist State in the Sudan* is listed in the new bibliography, so the editor had the opportunity to consult a more accurate and nuanced description of the Mahdist faith. Holt's 1968 introduction to the second edition of Wingate also highlighted deficiencies in Wingate's translations of Arabic documents and his understanding of both Islamic theology and Mahdist doctrine, but this useful critique is absent from the bibliography.[2]

The outline of the rise of the Mahdi follows pretty much that of the Mahdi's former prisoners Fr Ohrwalder and Rudolf Slatin, both of whose books were produced under Wingate's supervision: Wingate appeared as the author of Ohrwalder's memoir and the translator of Slatin's. Both men later recanted statements attributed to them in these books. The account of the siege and fall of Khartoum also follows Wingate, including the unlikely scene of Gordon dying, unresisting, on the stairs of the palace. There is another, more likely account of Gordon's death, collected by 'Ali al-Mahdi long after the battle of Omdurman and recorded in 'Ismat Zulfo's *Karari*, a book listed in the new bibliography. In this version there is no dramatic pause on the palace stairs, no assailants mad with 'religious frenzy' stabbing him in many places; rather Gordon is shot during the confused night-fighting and was identified by his assailants only after he was killed.[3] There is other evidence that suggests something similar, and while it is not possible to say with certainty how Gordon died, it is possible to conclude conclusively that he did not, and could not have died as Wingate depicted.[4] As copiously footnoted as the chapter on 'The Fate of the Envoy' is, there is no hint of an alternative ending. As the western reporter in the film The Man Who Shot Liberty Valance said, 'When the legend becomes fact, print the legend.'

Churchill characterised the Mahdist state that replaced Egyptian rule as a military regime that 'was probably the worst' in recorded history, and the editor repeats this without comment in his introduction (vol I, p. lxii). He

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[2] P. M. Holt, "Introduction to the Second Edition", in F. R. Wingate, *Mahdiism and the Egyptian Soudan* (London: Frank Cass, 1968): v-xv.

3 'Ismat Hasan Zulfo, *Karari* (trans. Peter Clark) (London: Frederick Warne, 1980): 22.

[4] Douglas H. Johnson, 'The Death of Gordon: A Victorian Myth', *Journal of Imperial and Commonwealth History* 10/2 (1982): 285-310.

was apparently unaware that some of Churchill's contemporaries with greater knowledge of the Mahdist regime formed a different opinion. In a book not cited in the new bibliography, Major A.B. Thruston, a former Egyptian army intelligence officer who was part of the Egyptian army that invaded Dongola in 1896, wrote that most of his fellow officers 'now suspected that perhaps we had judged the Dervishes harshly'. One such officer ('who is now a Major-General') even said that 'he would rather be a Berberi under their rule than one of certain subject races under the western powers. On being asked to justify his statements, he adduced the condition of the Matabele under England; of the Malagasy under France; East African Negroes under Doctor Peters and Germany; the Red Sea Arabs under Italy; the Armenians under Turkey; the Congo Negroes under Belgium; Cubans under Spain; all Negroes under Portugal; Red Indians under the United States, and English and Kaffirs under Mr Kruger!'[5]

In summarising Churchill's description of the Khalifa Abdallahi's hold on power the editor writes 'Abdullahi invited his clansmen to settle in the capital, generously encouraging them to dispossess those whom they displaced, and they became fiercely loyal to him' (vol I, p.lxiii). He makes no reference to P. M. Holt's very different assessment, based on internal Mahdist documents and contemporary Egyptian army intelligence reports. The hijra demanded of all Baggara was often resisted. Holt wrote 'it is erroneous to think that the Ta'aisha came gladly to Omdurman like desert wanderers entering a new land of milk and honey, or that their stay in the capital was a willing sojourn.' The British dogma that the Khalifa's administration was 'an unbearable tyranny' was contradicted by evidence then being gathered by Egyptian Military Intelligence.[6] Churchill might not have been aware of contradictory evidence when writing his own narrative, but the accuracy of Churchill as historian still must be judged by what we now know of the events he described.

Churchill brings more authenticity to his description of military events of the Reconquest, and especially to those where he was an observer, but even here we must be cautious in accepting his version of events. The correspondents who covered the first two years of the Reconquest, 1896-97, naturally focused on the Egyptian army as there were no significant British army units involved. At the same time the successes of the Egyptian Army were attributed to the British officers in charge and redounded to the credit of British arms in general. In the final stage of the Reconquest the focus of correspond-

[5] A.B. Thruston, *African Incidents* (London: John Murray), 1900: 258.

[6] P. M. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan 1881-1898. A Study of its Origins Development and Overthrow* (Oxford: Clarendon Press (1958, 2nd ed. 1970): 161, 204-06.

ents covering the war switched to the British units involved, even though the Egyptian Army formed the majority of the Anglo-Egyptian force, and arguably did most of the fighting. Churchill frequently praised the soldiers of the Egyptian army, both Egyptian and Sudanese, especially when they were on their own, unsupported by British troops. But when it came to sharing credit between British and Egyptian troops he wasn't always so generous. He was unwilling to give full credit to two units who contributed significantly to the Anglo-Egyptian victory — the Egyptian cavalry and the Sudanese infantry of MacDonald's brigade.

I apologise in advance to those readers who are less than fascinated by the details of military history, but in many ways this lies at the crux of assessing Churchill's reputation as a military historian. The two most critical moments of the battle were when the mounted brigade of Egyptian cavalry, camel corps, and horse artillery managed to decoy the Green Flag division of the Mahdist army away from the main battlefield into the firing range of the gunboats on the Nile, and then double back to threaten the flank of the same division when it had managed to return to the battle field and was poised to turn the flank of MacDonald's brigade of one Egyptian and three Sudanese infantry battalions. MacDonald's brigade had been attacked on their front by the Black Flag division, the largest division of the Mahdist army, and had to change fronts quickly to face the new attack on their flank. When that charge was halted by the combined gunfire of MacDonald's brigade, supported by the field artillery and the camel corps, the Egyptian cavalry then charged on the Green Flag's flank and dispersed them. After having done all that the cavalry then turned towards Omdurman to try to prevent the Khalifa's escape. The manoeuvres both the infantry and the mounted soldiers performed were intricate and required both skill and precision. So how did Churchill — who was away on another part of the battlefield at the time — describe them?

The Egyptian cavalry had to perform a fighting retreat while luring the Green Flag into an ambush by the gun boats, sometimes dismounting to fire their carbines, at other times mounting up and moving further away. At one time they had to prepare to charge their pursuers in order to help the slow-moving camel corps to escape: 'The British officers believed that a terrible charge impended…But the ground was bad; the enemy's force was overwhelming; the Egyptian troopers were prepared to obey – but that was all. There was no exalted enthusiasm such as at these moments carries sterner breeds to victory' (vol. II: 115). Well maybe so, but we will have to see whether such exalted enthusiasm carried the sterner breed of the 21st Lancers, to which Churchill was attached, to victory or disaster.

The Sudanese infantry of MacDonald's brigade bore the brunt of battle.

Having seen off the main charge of the Black Flag division, and having turned to face the Green Flag, the Sudanese were preparing a charge of their own when British reinforcements arrived. Churchill's account is worth quoting extensively:

At this moment the Lincoln Regiment began to come up. As they doubled along the rear of the X[th] Soudanese, the blacks looked around. In the days when British regiments were known by numbers, each of which had a glorious significance, the Lincolnshire was called the 10[th] Foot. Officers and men still cherished the famous number…and throughout the war they called the X[th] Soudanese "our black battalion" – to the intense delight of those military savages. The Soudanese had for the most part ceased firing, having come to the end of their ammunition, and were waiting with fixed bayonets for the hand-to-hand conflict which now seemed inevitable. Suddenly they saw the English regiment – their own English regiment – coming to their help. All along the line they turned a succession of grinning faces, and emitted wild cries of satisfaction and welcome. But the English were intent on business. As soon as the leading company…cleared the right of MacDonald's brigade, they formed line, and opened an independent fire obliquely across the front of the Soudanese…The independent firing lasted two minutes during which the whole regiment deployed. Its effect was to clear away the leading groups of Arabs… section volleys were ordered. With excellent discipline the independent firing was instantly stopped, and the battalion began with machine-like regularity to carry out the principles of modern musketry, for which their training had efficiently prepared them and their rifles were admirably suited. They fired on an average sixty rounds per man, and finally repulsed the attack' (vol II, 148).

So, according to Churchill the Lincolnshire regiment saved the day. But what about accounts by persons who witnessed or participated in these events?

A comprehensive description of the battle was published in the first official *Sudan Intelligence Report* of 1898. It stated, 'With the utmost coolness and precision, MacDonald changed front to receive this second charge which was delivered with great dash. He was successful in repulsing it before the British brigade sent to support him could render material assistance, though the Lincolnshire Regiment did prolong his line to the right, and fired a few rounds.'[7] General Archibald Hunter, who commanded the Egyptian division later wrote, 'MacDonald changed front and best [*sic*] them off alone, I sent the Lincolns to him but he did not require them. Then the Cavalry finished them off.'[8] One of

[7] *Sudan Intelligence Report* #60 (25[th] May to 31[st] December 1898): 7.

[8] Hunter quoted in P. Harrington and F. A. Sharf (eds), *Omdurman 1898: The Eyewitnesses Speak* (London: Greenhill Books, 1998):155.

the officers in the British brigade ordered to MacDonald's support reported, 'Our brigade got orders to double up in support (it was a mile distant) and we wheeled round, and went full out under the blazing sun…When we arrived the crisis had passed. The enemy fell back…'[9]

Perhaps the final word should be left to H. L. Pritchard, MacDonald's "galloper" who relayed messages between MacDonald and the general staff in the rear and had a front row view of the action. He concluded 'As soon as MacDonald saw the Lincolnshire Regiment on his right, he ordered the cease fire (the brigade had only two rounds a man left), and riding out in front, ordered the brigade to advance. The bands struck up, the Sudanese shook their rifles aloft, and though keeping good time and steady pace, they literally danced along; several of them produced whistles which they blew vigorously…Colonel Broadwood had for some time been hovering on the Dervish left with the Egyptian cavalry, waiting for the right moment to charge…sullenly they gave way, then broke and fled, and instantly Colonel Broadwood saw the moment he had been waiting for had come, and charged in with his cavalry, turning their retreat into a rout'[10]

So kudos to the Sudanese and Egyptian infantry and cavalry, as well as to their commanders. Just how well did the British lancers stack up against this record?

The 21st Lancers were a relatively new regiment and had never been in action before. Prior to the battle they had mainly been on scouting duty, and after the repulse of the first attack on the Anglo-Egyptian lines they had been ordered to prevent a retreat to Omdurman. On their way they were lured into an ambush. Thinking they were charging a line of a few riflemen they found themselves embroiled with a couple of thousand spear and swordsmen. After managing to ride through that *melée* they dismounted and dispersed their enemy with carbine fire but were too badly mauled to take any significant part in the battle afterwards. Anglo-Egyptian casualties for the entire battle were relatively light. The total British losses were twenty-nine dead and 131 wounded, of which the 21st Lancers had lost twenty-one dead and fifty wounded: the highest casualty rate of any unit in the entire force.[11]

As a war correspondent it was legitimate for Churchill to describe in full detail the one action in which he was a participant. As a historian of the cam-

[9] J. Meredith (ed.), *Omdurman Diaries 1898: Eyewitness Accounts of the Legendary Campaigns* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1998): 188.

[10] 'An Officer', *Sudan Campaign 1896-1899* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1899): 213-14.

[11] 'Casualty and Ammunition Returns at Battle of Khartum', Appendix 12, *Sudan Intelligence Report* #60 (25th May to 31st December 1898): 41

paign, it was not legitimate to undervalue the effort of the Egyptian cavalry. Churchill attempted to justify the Lancers charge, but that is likely because he was aware that within the field army it was regarded as a mistake. Major F. I. Maxse (later General Sir Ivor Maxse), Brigade Major of the 2nd Egyptian Brigade later wrote, 'The Lancers' charge was not only unnecessary, but had the greater advantage of incapacitating the regiment from the performance of the particular duty it was brought to the Sudan to accomplish – namely the capture of the Khalifa – and the fact that both officers and men behaved with great gallantry in a nasty place is no excuse for a blunder.'[12] General Hunter was equally critical, 'Despite this heroic episode, during which three of five VCs given in the battle were won, the Lancers failed in the mission entrusted to them, for they had to return to camp after their charge without learning, for instance, the whereabouts of the prestigious soldiers of the Khalifa's own Black Flag, still uncommitted to the battle and then lurking behind Surgham,'[13] and which later charged MacDonald's brigade. An officer in the Lincolns wrote at the time 'But we hear the charge was a great error, and K. [Kitchener] was furious.'[14] It was left to G. W. Steevens, Churchill's rival and the American journalist H. L. Mencken's favourite war correspondent to sum up: 'The blunders of British cavalry are the fertile seed of British glory…'[15] It would be fair to say that in contrast the Egyptian cavalry won less glory by accomplishing more.

Throughout his long life Churchill was a prodigious author and it is possible to selectively quote him on almost any side of an argument. In *The River War* he alternately praised and condemned the Mahdi, the Khalifa, the apparatus of the Mahdist state, the Mahdist warriors, the Egyptian and Sudanese soldiery, and Kitchener himself. It is the duty of subsequent historians to judge how well-informed his descriptions and judgements were. Churchill was an eyewitness to the founding events of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium of Sudan, but he was only one eyewitness, and a minor one at that. The editor is to be congratulated for producing a definitive edition of the book *The River War*. A **definitive** account of the Reconquest of Sudan has yet to be written, and perhaps it never will.

Douglas H. Johnson

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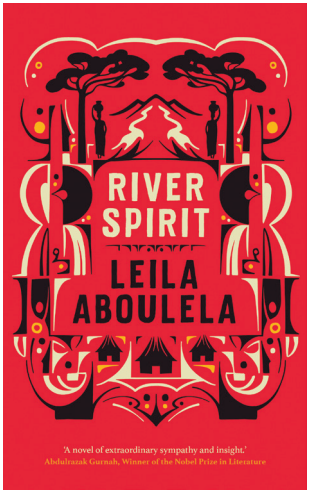
[12] F. I. Maxse, *Seymour Vandeleur. The Story of a British Officer* (New York: Longmans Green, 1906): 288.

[13] A. Hunter, *Kitchener's Sword-Arm: The Life and Campaigns of General Sir Archibald Hunter* (Staplehurst: Spellmount, 1996): 96-7

[14] J. Meredith (ed.), *Omdurman Diaries 1898: Eyewitness Accounts of the Legendary Campaigns* (Barnsley: Leo Cooper, 1998): 188.

[15] G. W. Steevens, *With Kitchener to Khartum* (Edinburgh: Blackwood and Sons, 1898): 273.

Leila Aboulela, **River Spirit,** Saqi Books, London, 2023, ISBN: 978 0 86356 917 3 hardback, £16.99.



Leila Aboulela's new novel, *River Spirit*, is to be recommended as essential reading for those who are interested in, or enjoy memories of, Sudan.

Set in the last years of the nineteenth century, the book describes the final years of Egyptian domination, of Ottoman invaders – seen as infidel Turks – and Rashid Bey's attack, brilliantly foiled by the Mahdi and his followers. The Mahdi appears as a saviour, calling for a revival, a new experience of 'the sweetness of faith'. To the convert, 'He is my home'. Followers flowed: 'Farmers found his name written on leaves, inside aubergines, traders found it etched on ostrich eggs, schoolboys found it scratched on watermelon seeds and he was present in the dreams of elders and in the hallucinations of the mad'. He brings together, under his banner, a divided people, and leads them against another 'infidel army', the British. It is no drawback to his cause that the people are eager to follow his exhortations to stop paying taxes to the infidel. Then Egypt itself is under British occupation, rendered powerless.

These events create a strong narrative, which Aboulela tells through the eyes of a cast of characters, notably Akuany and Yaseen, divided by war, and Yaseen's sister Halima. Akuany, now named 'Zamzam', is enslaved, powerless, until bought by the painter from Scotland, who aims to capture her beauty in his portrait. Through his unfamiliar gaze we see Sudanese life, vividly created: the lonely vastness of the desert, the lines of belching camels, their gait skilfully captured, the enveloping, choking power of a *haboob* (superbly described in Chapter Eight), the souk and the cattle market, the *angereb,* the bed which must be moved into the shade, and above all the River, the Nile, which, for the child Akuany, is 'the spirit of who she was'. We feel the breeze through the palms and breathe in 'the fresh, heavy smell of lime trees and guava'.

Central to the book is the issue of the slave trade. Back in England… and in Scotland… politicians are calling for reform. The Queen herself desires to end the iniquity. The name of Hicks is whispered: he is against the trade, and finally the great General Gordon insists that there should be an end to slavery. From every angle, practical and moral, the arguments are rehearsed, and make for a clearer understanding of this central part of Sudanese history.

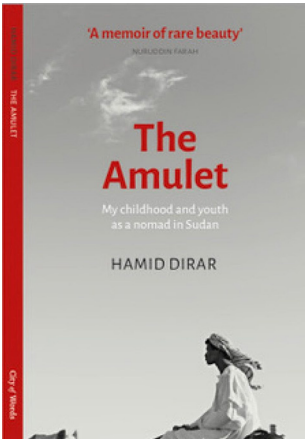
Aboulela handles a big cast of Turks, Egyptians, British and Sudanese

(including the Mahdists) with ease. In Chapter Eight, for example, she describes the 'medley of clothes that Robert attempts to paint: Sudanese *jellabiya*, *tarbush* with European suit, traditional Turkish, traditional Egyptian, Shilluk men from the south with little more than a loincloth'. She has some tremendous set pieces, not least that describing the Mahdi and his followers advancing on Khartoum, an event which we see through the eyes of Gordon as he waits for the relief force… or, for a martyr's death. It is a powerful narrative that Aboulela has to tell, with every now and then an interlude: the beautiful description of the desert at night which opens Chapter Three, for example, and the superb description of Zamzam's first glimpse of her 'old friend', the River, the White Nile, and her plunge into its 'mellow, moving water'.

Read '*River Spirit*'. It is a wonderful book!

Judith Hepper lived in Khartoum, where she taught in the University English Department from 1981 to 1984, when she returned to England to teach at a Sixth Form College in Hampshire. She has now retired to Dorset. She has published her autobiography, *A Dome of Many-Coloured Glass*, and a collection of poems in *A Shining Place*.

Hamid Dirar, **The Amulet: My childhood and youth as a nomad in Sudan,** City of Words, London, 2022, ISBN: 978-1-9160783-1-4 paperback, £9.99, Kindle Edition £4.99.



The Amulet is a rare and moving memoir by Dr Hamid Dirar of his boyhood and coming of age amongst Hadendowa and Shukriya nomads in Eastern Sudan in the 1940s and 1950s. This is the story of a *khalig ruhu*, (a man who creates himself) - a term used by a Shukriya leader to describe one of Hamid Dirar's maternal uncles, but equally, if not more, applicable to the author himself.

Faced with little support from his mother's family and active opposition from his father, the author overcomes multiple hardships to become the first in his family to attend school, graduating from a prestigious government boarding school in Port Sudan. Dr Dirar eventually became a biochemist who taught in universities in the U.K., the U.S and Sudan. He is the author of *The Indigenous Fermented Foods of the Sudan: A study in African food and nutrition* (1993). Not long after publication of *The Amulet*, Hamid Dirar, died in Bahri in April 2023.

More than simply a memoir, the book commences with a detailed history of Hamid Dirar's ancestors from the 19th century onwards. The first chapters explain how his father's family, who were primarily Mahas from Nubia, were regularly forced to migrate, as a result of the Turco-Egyptian and British invasions and war between the Mahdists and the Jaaliyin, as well as pressure on the land, which could only feed a limited number of people, even in good years.

A recurring theme is the prejudice directed against people deemed to have African physical features – frizzy hair, darker skin and broad noses. Indeed, Hamid Dirar is much more forthcoming on what can be a sensitive topic in Sudan than other Sudanese writers. Perhaps this is because as a child, he experiences such prejudice, particularly from his forceful maternal grandmother, Diya. African features are associated in Diya's mind with the enslaved people who, before their liberation when she was young, served her. She is disappointed with Hamid Dirar's nose and skin colour, preventing his early circumcision, the defining feature of an Arab male.

Hamid Dirar repeatedly exposes the contradictions at work in relation to anti-African prejudice. He notes "as among all the nomadic tribes, there were fair-skinned people with straight hair as well as very dark people with woolly hair". He also focuses later in the book on the prejudice directed by sedentary

people towards nomads, something he experiences directly as his contact with the wider world increases.

Dirar takes intense pride and delight in many aspects of life. He gives us beautiful, detailed descriptions of various Hadendowa and Shukriya ceremonies – weddings, circumcisions, funerals. However, Dirar's writing about ordinary life, whether hunting, food preparation, animal husbandry or seasonal migration is equally absorbing.

Hamid Dirar is, however, frank about the cruelty he witnesses in his childhood, especially cruelty directed towards women. His family exercise strict control over the lives of female relatives, who risk severe violence if they transgress. He points out that women freed from enslavement have much more opportunity for self-expression socially, even choices of sexual partner, but ultimately have even less protection from abuse than pastoralist women.

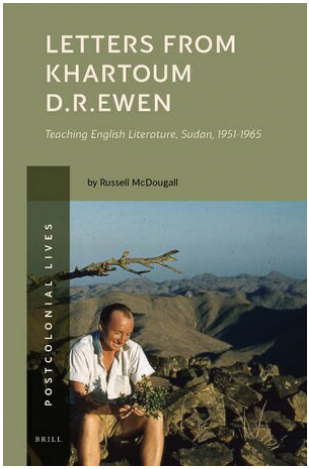
The author describes communities exploring how to respond to social change brought on by the interventions of the British. One of his maternal uncles wants to move the family away from the impact of these changes into ungoverned spaces, while another uncle wants to embrace a "settled and more civilized life". The roles of women and men have already been impacted by the freeing of enslaved people. What initially appear in the book as occasional flashes of modernity – the appearance of a *khawaja* with *haram* corned beef and of the first men wearing trousers in Khashm El Girba – speed up as Hamid Dirar becomes older with the emergence of a shanty town at the Blue Bridge where travellers, villagers and nomads mix for the first time. By the time Dirar is grown up, the small village of Khashm el Girba has grown into a town and its natural environment has been depleted due to the influx of new residents. His writing has a new tone of regret.

At some points I was impatient for the narrative to move a little faster. However, I felt compensated by the beautifully crafted descriptions of the natural world; the rituals of the Shukriya and the Hadendowa, and the rich characterisation, equal for both men and women, who appear in the book.

The Amulet should delight any reader who cherishes a well-told story. The book, supplemented by a genealogy, glossary and map, provides more than enough context to be enjoyed by all of us, Sudanese and non-Sudanese, who have not been exposed to the ways of pastoralist life.

Joanna Oyediran is an independent consultant with expertise in human rights and philanthropy.

Russell McDougall, **Letters from Khartoum. D.R. Ewen. Teaching English Literature, Sudan, 1951-1965**, Brill, Leiden, 2021, ISBN: 978-90-04-46109-3 hardback, €145.



This book is the first in a new series edited by Russell McDougall, Mala Pandurang and Michael Griffiths in the series 'Postcolonial Lives'. McDougall was a personal friend of Ewen and received his personal papers following his death in 2018. The book is described as a "partial biography". At its core it is about Ewen's life and teaching in Khartoum and is largely sourced from the many letters that he wrote, especially to his mother in his home city of Aberdeen, and the secret diary that he kept throughout his years in Khartoum. At the same time the author has made use of a range of secondary sources to give a historical sketch of Sudan as it changed from being a condominium, in theory established jointly by Egypt and Britain in 1898 but in effect under British rule, into an independent state in 1956. Ewen thus had a bird's eye view of the transformation, and the direct effect it had on the University College of Khartoum (linked to London University) as it became the independent University of Khartoum, one of the first such institutions in British-ruled Africa.

Ewen grew up in modest circumstances in Aberdeen. His father died young and Ewen was brought up by his mother, to whom he felt closely attached throughout her long life. Many of the quotations (there are no complete letters) are from his usually weekly letters home to her. After schooling in his home city, he joined the Royal Navy during World War II before studying English Literature at the universities of Aberdeen and then Oxford. Looking for an academic post in 1951, a friend suggested applying to what was then still called the Gordon Memorial College in Khartoum.

On arrival in his home-to-be for the next 14 years he was in time to witness the hurried departure of the country's British rulers and to learn his place in the changing social scene. Khartoum was very much at the centre of the complex manoeuvres of the political transformation. The Sudanese nationalists, though mainly of two rival parties, were able to manoeuvre first to push out the British and then to deny Egypt's aspirations to unite Sudan again with the country which had ruled it between 1820-1885. As a novice academic Ewen was on the fringes of a quite small British hierarchy led by the Civil Secretary of the Sudan Political Service, Sir James Robertson, a fellow Scot from

Dundee. There was a busy social scene into which most of the British were drawn, based around the Sudan Club, an attractive building of nineteenth century Turco-Egyptian origin, where in his early years Ewen took many of his meals. He was a somewhat unorthodox character but fitted in well particularly with his academic colleagues. One close friend was the historian G.N. 'Sandy' Sanderson: Years later Sandy was to be one of the founders of SSSUK. Ewen turned out to be something of a *bon viveur*, the two of them jointly hosting what sound like very colourful parties – some in fancy dress. Another friend was Frank Stansfield who was also to become a loyal member of SSSUK. Both men were also travelling companions on Ewen's tours around Sudan and neighbouring African countries.

Ewen was also to participate in the making of the University of Khartoum. The purpose of teaching English Literature was, in the words of the author, "to remake the Muslim Sudanese [of the north] – there were few women or southern Sudanese – as the proxy agents of British culture who would administrate the first independent nation in Africa". In many ways Ewen was somewhat divided in this role. At times he proved very sympathetic to his students as they tried to bridge two cultures, Islamic and British; and he made many firm friends amongst the first Sudanese academics in the university. At the same time, he showed exasperation at the naivety and low standards of many in his classes. He was also somewhat aghast at the readiness of students to become involved in national politics: indeed in 1964 the university was to be at the centre of events that led to the downfall of Sudan's first military regime. However, on balance he became more attached than critical, and in his later years was a very popular head of one of the halls of residence.

After Sudan he taught in Canada and engaged more in academic publication but, as McDougall notes, he had clearly been shaped by his formative years in Sudan: "Ewen was…. re-made by his relationships with his students and colleagues, and by his own teaching innovations", as indeed were many of the young non-Sudanese staff who came after him.

Reading this long book, I felt personal empathy with 'Mr Ruin' (as his students often addressed him), perhaps largely because I arrived in Sudan in the year after he left, first teaching English in Kosti and later Western Political Thought at his old university – and duly contracted 'Sudanitis'. I also personally knew a number of the people mentioned, both Sudanese and non-Sudanese. But it is a very long book with considerable commentary interspersed on the national and international context of which Ewen was essentially a bystander; and there is also a good deal on his domestic arrangements which many who do not know Sudan, and more particularly Khartoum, may find of limited interest.

Peter Woodward

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Charlotte Martin,
Editor,
Sudan Studies,
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Colchester,
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