

KORDOFAN INVADED

Kordofan Invaded: Peripheral Incorporation and Social Transformation in Islamic Africa, ed. by Endre Stiansen and Michael Kevane. Leiden: E.J. Brill (Social, Economic and Political Studies of the Middle East and Asia) 1998. xiv, 303 pp. ISBN 90-04011049-6

At a time when several African states, Sudan among them, seem on the verge of dissolution, it is important to re-examine how nations are formed. Understandably, most scholarship places state structures as the central focus of analysis. But as the co-editors of this volume argue, this tends to ‘naturalise the state as an element of society’, to make it seem inevitable, necessary and sufficient (p. 9). Taking a different approach, Endre Stiansen and Michael Kevane present a multifaceted study of Kordofan, ‘one of the largest peripheries of Islamic Africa’ (p. 10), examining the many ways that periphery and centre, province and state, have interacted over the centuries. In eleven well-written and unusually complementary essays, focusing on such things as tribes, *ṭarīqas*, unions, trade diasporas and ethnic identities, the authors describe the complex and dynamic processes that have shaped Kordofan’s past and Sudan’s present.

The editors’ carefully-crafted introduction situates these studies in the contemporary scholarship on Africa and Sudan before turning to the ‘invasions’ that have transformed Kordofan over the last roughly four centuries. The first of these, the military invasions, begins with the eighteenth-century contest for Kordofan by the rival Keira and Funj states and continues through periods of Turco-Egyptian, Mahdist, Anglo-Egyptian, post-independent and Islamist rule; ‘pacification’ of the Nuba Mountains figures especially prominently here. The tripartite ‘cultural invasion’ is next

considered, examining the ways religion, state and tribe have altered identities and pulled Kordofan into Nile Valley culture. Islam is here represented by the *ṭarīqas* and their ‘transcendence of the local’ (p. 23), while the editors underline the dynamic between religious practice, state interests and competition for resources. The state’s role in cultural invasions is seen in its insistence upon an uncontested political community (often, an ‘Islamic’ community) and its institutions (for example, Gordon College) that have promoted a sense of the modern. The role of tribes in altering identity—and government manipulation of this identity—is a theme well-developed in several of the essays. Here the editors succinctly review the ‘reprocessing of ethnic identity’ (p. 31) with a fascinating account of the Shanabla/Hamar during the Mahdiyya and Condominium. Finally, the editors consider the ‘market invasion’ of Kordofan, critiquing the dominant paradigms of economic analysis and arguing for an economy characterized more by continuities than dislocations. Central to their discussion is the Kordofan gum trade of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Closing the introduction, the editors show how Sudan’s institutional instability and accompanying economic stagnation have affected Kordofan, citing as examples the fiasco of ‘Islamicized’ banking and the deleterious effects of national identity expressed at the local level. A final, sombre assessment of Sudan’s possibilities leads to the essays themselves, which describe in different ways how invasions from the centre have shaped Kordofan’s society; but also, importantly, how Kordofan has contributed to the creation of Sudan.

Essays by Jay Spaulding and Kurt Beck serve as the bookends of this collection. Spaulding’s ‘Early Kordofan’ traces the history from ancient times to the collapse of Keira rule (1821), drawing on linguistic and archaeological evidence as well as documentary sources. The central theme of the essay—the socio-economic and political changes initiated by the rise of middle-class traders in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries—will be familiar to any reader of the

Spaulding oeuvre. Here it is rehearsed with admirable clarity and confident style. Kurt Beck's 'Struggle over a proper lifestyle' continues the theme raised by Spaulding (and developed by others), detailing how a Nile Valley cultural hegemony has come to attain its state of near-complete incorporation of Kordofan. After reviewing the cultural legacies of Turco-Egyptian *jallāba* and Mahdist social policies, Beck describes in fascinating detail the 'civilising project' of the present NIF-backed regime: an 'Islamisation of everyday life' (p. 257) that encompasses matters of dress, speech, eating, personal habits, and so on. Considering the economic cost of resisting this process, as well as the success of the NIF in couching nationalist discourse in the language of Islam, one is left supposing that the success of this process is all but ensured.

The remaining nine essays are presented in rough chronological order. Stiansen's 'Gum arabic trade in Kordofan' examines changes in gum production and marketing in the nineteenth century, carefully distinguishing between Egyptian government and private merchant exploitation (called here 'formal' and 'informal' types of imperialism). This essay, like others in the volume, is especially attentive to the complexities of land tenure. A companion piece is Mustafa Babiker's study of the early twentieth century, entitled 'Land-tenure in Kordofan: conflict between the communalism of colonial administrators and the individualism of the Hamar'. Critiquing academic theories of colonial land tenure, Babiker provides two case studies that illustrate the realities of settlement, organization and gum production in Dār Hamar. Similar to Daly's contribution, this essay contains gems on British racial ideas and the colonial penchant for inventing tradition.

David F. Decker's 'Females and the state in Mahdist Kordofan' concerns state intervention in Kordofan's social structure. Most interesting is a Mahdist attempt to reclassify women's legal status (as chattel, 'captive free' *mayram*, and Anṣār wives), illustrated by an incident in 1890 when the

Khalifa apparently included freeborn women in the state's share of booty (*khums*) to be distributed to the Anṣār in Omdurman. This, in any case, was the Khalifa's intention: was the order ever executed? Likewise Decker states that 'the Khalifa dictated not only at the individual level who could marry, but also at a mass level who would be divorced and remarried' (p. 99). Moderating this argument is the recollection of Babikr Bedri (*Memoirs*, I, 213-14) that the Khalifa sought to classify Ja^cālīyīn women as booty after the 1897 Matamma massacre, but abandoned the idea in light of its political dangerousness. Elsewhere, this reviewer has written about the Khalifa's failed attempt to intermarry segments of the riverain and western Sudanese communities. It is perhaps the sheer volume of official Mahdist correspondence concerning the affairs of ordinary people that suggests greater actual control by the Khalifa than may have obtained. It should also be noted that while the Khalifa strategically settled many of his western followers in the Nile Valley, Kordofani communities were recreating themselves in the *ḥayys* of Omdurman, sustaining old social ties even across ethnic and religious lines. These comments notwithstanding, Decker's essay contains a subtle appreciation of social and legal status and firmly situates Mahdist policy in its deeper sudanic context.

M.W. Daly's 'Great White Chief: H.A. MacMichael and the tribes of Kordofan' conclusively lays to rest the idea of an exclusive and fixed Sudanese 'tribe'. Through a close reading of MacMichael's two major works, *The Tribes of Northern and Central Kordofan* (1912) and *A History of the Arabs in the Sudan* (1922), Daly explains how Kordofan's tribes have always been in a state of flux, an argument supported by other contributors to this volume. Perhaps more interestingly, he describes the ironic value of MacMichael's works, which were used by proponents of Indirect Rule to justify a policy of empowering 'established' Sudanese tribes! MacMichael's works, Daly writes, were 'warmly received, deeply misunderstood, and probably little read' (p. 110). Revealing of British social and racial attitudes during the

Condominium, this is one of the few scholarly essays one wishes to read aloud.

The remaining five essays touch upon the issue of identity in a variety of contexts. Ahmed Ibrahim Abu Shouk's 'Kordofan: From tribes to *naẓīrates*' is a study of the politics and process of Indirect Rule, highlighting the conflict between Kordofan's tribal leaders and the Khartoum *affandiyya*. The fluid nature of Kordofan's tribes is illustrated by the Hamar and Bidayriyya in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, but the essay's chief contribution is its detailed discussion of the use of Native Administration by a succession of regimes from Condominium to post-independence. Elsewhere, Kordofan's integration into riverain culture and a market-oriented society is the subject of Awad al-Sid al-Karsani's 'Religion, ethnicity and class: The role of the Tijāniyya order in al-Nahūd town'. The only contribution to focus on a Sufi *ṭarīqa*, this essay discusses how the Tijāniyya came to control the economy of western Kordofan and the consequence of its failure to evolve a national organization. Of central importance is the Tijāniyya's creation of a 'supra-ethnic identity' (p. 192) incorporating a variety of groups, including the West African 'Fallāṭa'. Because the story is a compelling one, readers may wish to know more about how three otherwise anonymous merchants 'emerged as Administrative Presidents of the order' and controlled its internal and external affairs in western Sudan (p. 185). Included is an excellent summary of the history of the Tijāniyya in Kordofan.

The experiences of two non-Arab peoples of Kordofan are the subject of contributions by Stephanie Beswick and Martha Saavedra. The former's essay, 'The Ngok: Emergence and destruction of a Nilotic protostate in southwest Kordofan', explains the conditions under which a stateless society consolidated politically in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The use of oral sources, itself worthy of notice, is particularly evident as Beswick reviews the complex relations between the Dinka and their Baqqāra neighbours. An impor-

tant contribution is the claim of Dinka origin for the Mahdi's wife Maqbūla, mother of Sayyid °Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mahdī, who has long been regarded (by other than the Ngok) as of Fūr lineage. Beswick states that 'this belief is universal' among the Ngok (p. 153); it may be, but one imagines that most Anṣār, including the Sayyid's family, would take vehement exception. (Curiously, Francis Deng does not appear to have made this claim in any of his works.) While historical certainty is unlikely to be reached on the subject, the ensuing debate should be interesting.

Martha Saavedra's essay, 'Ethnicity, resources, and the central state: Politics in the Nuba mountains, 1950-1990s', explores the meaning of being 'Nuba' within the context of national politics and agricultural production. Noteworthy is Saavedra's discussion of the history of Nuba ethnic identity and its shaping through contact with the Hawazma Baqqāra and *jallāba* farmers. Nuba political activity since the late Condominium is succinctly reviewed, and the author underlines the effects of regimes from the May Revolution to the Bashīr junta on the political economy of the region. A sombre conclusion addresses the dangers of 'hardening identities' for Nuba Mountains peace and development.

Heather J. Sharkey's essay, 'Arabic literature and the nationalist imagination in Kordofan', stands apart from other contributions in that it concerns the place of Kordofan (or rather, the place of the *idea* of Kordofan) in the creation of a Sudanese national identity. Focusing on the works of four influential twentieth-century authors, Sharkey describes the 'literary incorporation of Kordofan' into Sudan (p. 166), and the ways that Kordofan's idealized Arab heritage and romanticized landscape came to 'enhance' Nile Valley culture. It is interesting to learn that one does not have to be a *khawāja* to write: 'There I discovered a new world of enchantment. Among those simple nomads I came to know purity, beauty, and nobility' (Ḥasan Najīla, *Malāmiḥ min al-mujtama' al-sūdānī*, 1964, 305). Not surprisingly, the Kordofanis themselves did not share these sentiments.

In this extremely well-edited volume there are a few flaws. The three illustrations—interesting but not very helpful—should either have been dispensed with or supplemented. Likewise, a more detailed map with physical features was needed. Typographical errors are hard to excuse, but this is the fault of the press. Some readers may notice a few errors of fact: for example, the Mahdi did not establish Omdurman as his ‘capital’ (p. 18) and General ʿAbbūd was only 58 years old, hardly ‘elderly’, when he assumed power (p. 238). None of this detracts from the value of the book, however, which is a veritable primer on the all-important issue of identity and a model for collections of regional studies. It should be required reading for all Sudanists and of great interest to many other scholars. One hopes that it is translated into Arabic and distributed in Sudan, where encouraging discourses about ‘invasions’ is most needed.

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