Genealogies of Racial Relations:
The Independence of South Sudan, Citizenship
& the Racial State in the Modern History of Sudan

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"The government spokesperson said at a press conference on Saturday that 95% of the SPLM members are now foreigners."[1]

On July 9th, 2011, South Sudan became Africa's newest state. This event marked the final stage of the roadmap which was laid out in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). The CPA was signed in 2005 between the Sudanese Government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), and formalized the decision of millions of Southern Sudanese who had voted *en masse* for independence for the South in January 2011. The South had been at war with the North since 1955, even before the independence of Sudan in 1956, and the conflict lasted until 2005, with a ten-year interruption between 1972 and 1983. It has been estimated that in the period between 1983 and

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1. "Sudan Shuts down SPLM-North Offices in Khartoum", *Sudan Tribune* 4 September 2011 online at http://www.sudantribune.com/Sudan-shut-down-SPLM-North-offices,40042 accessed on 11.10.2011

2005 alone, the conflict left two million victims and four million displaced persons within and outside Sudan. Independence Day was, therefore, a day of jubilation for the overwhelming majority of Southern Sudanese in Sudan and around the world.

In Khartoum, the explosions of joy broadcast by the television channels and the celebrations organized by the Southern communities contrasted sharply with the morose mood of the capital.[2] There, the South's independence provoked despair and depression, and some people described it as a "disaster" and a "catastrophe". The streets were empty in the Three Towns (Khartoum, North Khartoum and Omdurman) on that day: some were too depressed to leave their homes, while others feared an outbreak of riots. In spite of the rumours, however, the day passed calmly: people expressed their feelings in terms of nostalgia and a sad acceptance of a *fait accompli*. Of course, there were other views as well. The Justice and Peace Forum Party, well-known for its racially-charged views, rejoiced in the fact that the Sudan had finally "cut

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out the cancer" of the South.[3] Yet this was a minority view. I systematically raised the question of independence with dozens of friends, colleagues and acquaintances in Khartoum, and the opinion that came out from these conversations was quite homogeneous: "we are very sad that our Southern brothers are leaving, but if this is what they really want, we have to respect their decision."

But when I scratched beneath the surface of this aggrieved attitude, a number of ambiguities emerged, especially when I asked people what they thought about what is, to my mind, the most worrying and troubling aspect of the separation, namely the planned expulsion from the North of people who are defined as Southern Sudanese. Although the majority regretted this, they also observed that since the Southern Sudanese wanted separation, there was no reason why they should stay in the North, not because they are not wanted, but because "they will be better off there, at home, among their own people."

This article comprises two sections: in the first, I reflect upon the implications of the new nationality provisions, and interpret them as a worrying form of non-violent racial cleansing. I also discuss the period between the CPA and Independence, which had seemed to point towards a radically new path that has now been severely undermined. In the second part, I attempt to trace a genealogy of racial relations in the Sudan, focusing on colonial times, a period during which the racial state was created as a strategy for combating unwanted social change.

I: North Sudan from the CPA to the Independence of the South

Defining "Southerners"

As far back as January 2011, the Government of Sudan had declared that citizenship would be

withdrawn from the Southern Sudanese, and that no dual citizenship would be allowed. It also mandated that Southerners would be given nine months to organize their affairs, sell their property if they had any, and leave for South Sudan no later than April 2012.[4] These were not merely words: in the Three Towns, social services employees contacted small and large enterprises and shops which employed Southerners, and gave orders that they be dismissed, because they would be soon be considered to be foreigners. Employers might perhaps be allowed to re-hire Southerners at a later date, but not as citizens. The justification given was that the State did not wish to incur any social costs for these people – access to services such as hospitals, schools, and pensions. Now that they finally had their "homeland", their own State had to pay for such things. This is how overwhelming numbers of "Southerners" have been dismissed from all public bodies and private companies, with just a few noteworthy exceptions, notably the Ministry of Energy and oil companies.

During the time of the CPA, the government had created a sort of "Southern quota" in major enterprises and public offices as a part of the agreement, by which 20% of jobs were reserved for Southern Sudanese. There were already signs of problems to come, however. Because companies needed to fill these quotas, they opened the positions up to any individuals who were able to claim Southern "ancestry", no matter how ancient. Cases were reported of people being hired because they had a Southern connection which could be

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3. Fatma Naib, "Bye Bye Juba", Khartoum, 9 January 2011, *al-Jazeera* online at
http://english.aljazeera.net/indepth/features/2011/01/20111919
418645607.html, accessed 26 August 2011

4. For a discussion of attitudes of the National Congress Party (NCP) (and SPLM) to citizenship see Assal 2011: 8-9. The issue was discussed long before separation, and reports were produced by the UN and independent organizations. See *UNHCR-UNMIS Citizenship Symposium*, 6-7 November 2010 available at:
http://www.gurtong.net/ECM/Editorial/tabid/124/ctl/ArticleVi
ew/mid/519/articleId/4821/categoryId/122/UNHCR-The-CPA-
and-Citizenship-Issues.aspx ;
and Bronwen Manby, *International Law and the Right to a Nationality in Sudan*, Open Society Foundation, 2011 in *Sudan Tribune* 24 March 2011, available at:
http://www.sudantribune.com/International-Law-and-the-
Right-to,38385 accessed 20 October 2011.

traced, through either their mother's or their father's side, as far back as the nineteenth century!

Before we proceed further, the meaning of the term "Southerner" is worth exploring. Although it has not been defined once and for all by law, it is implicitly understood that it corresponds to the legal definition which was worked out on the occasion of the Referendum, when it was necessary to establish guidelines of some nature on who could and could not vote.

According to the referendum law, in order to vote, one should *either*:

> "1) be born to parents both or one of them belonging to one of the indigenous communities that settled in Southern Sudan on or before the 1st of January 1956, or whose ancestry is traceable to one of the ethnic communities in Southern Sudan; or,
> 2) be a permanent resident, without interruption, or any of whose parents or grandparents are residing permanently, without interruption, in Southern Sudan since the 1st of January 1956 […]"
> (Manby 2011:11).

It is fairly obvious that in a country like Sudan, the former pre-condition is highly problematic, because, as we shall see, there has been a high rate of intermarriage between people from the South and the North, in particular since the nineteenth century.

Furthermore, the openness of the concept of "traceable ancestry" has very serious implications, because it also affects people who were not even allowed to vote in the Referendum. At the time, it was necessary to provide evidence of "Southern ancestry" in the form of certificates issued by "tribal leaders" in order to vote. This meant *de facto* that Sudanese with roots in the South from the second, third, and fourth generations on did not vote, due to obvious difficulties in providing evidence of this kind.[5] Now, of course, they risk losing their

Sudanese citizenship for the self-same reason. In fact, people are being asked to provide a "tribal certificate" or other evidence of "tribal identity" in order to obtain nationality papers. In cases where this is not possible, nationality papers may be refused, no matter for how many generations a family has been settled in the North. Nationality papers are indispensable: for instance, they are required for candidates sitting for the baccalaureate (and therefore to register for university), to obtain a passport for foreign travel, or to receive social services benefits (Assal 2011: 4-7)[6]. Similarly, anyone who has recently secured a job through the Southern quota will have lost it now that all Southerners have to go "home".

The Stick and the Carrot: Southerners Leaving the North

The National Records Office looked very empty this year following the disappearance of the large numbers of Southerners who had been working there. A year ago, during a conversation with one of them, I asked her if she had any intention of resettling in her "homeland", as the government was offering free travel to the South. She replied that she had no reason to do so: she was married, and her children had been born in Khartoum, and she did not wish to disrupt their upbringing. In addition, there were many obstacles, the first being the language; she could only speak Arabic, because she had moved with her family to the North when she was just a small child. It is important to realize that the security that she had achieved through her permanent job at the National Archives - extremely low-paid and menial though it may have been - was a much sought-after accomplishment, both by Northern and Southern standards, in a situation in which the urban poor are overwhelmingly

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5. I would like to thank one of my informants, "M.", for sharing this important information. He was among those who

were not allowed to vote because they could not produce a tribal certificate.

6. The question of nationality and ethnic belonging is particularly sensitive in Sudan. Munzoul Assal describes the difficulties encountered in establishing good contacts with interviewees because of the attitude of great suspicion provoked by asking questions about the nationality papers (Assal 2011: 4-7).

unemployed, or partially-employed in casual work. I now realize that my question was similar to the one that used to make me angry, when people asked me when I expected to go "home" to Italy, after I had been living in Norway for many years. My question may similarly have looked at best very naïve to my friend, and at worst outspokenly racist, and it certainly implied a threatening and insecure future.[7]

When one enquires about the reasons why Southerners have decided to return to the South, it emerges that many have left because they had to. Some felt that Northern society was irredeemably racist, as they had faced numerous episodes of harassment. According to a January 2011 Carnegie Report, Southerners "are often harassed by government authorities and the camps are targets of periodic police raids."[8] Those who wished to stay because they had secure jobs have now been, or are in the process of being, dismissed. In addition, many have started to feel threatened and insecure. Again, according to the same Carnegie Report, "Bashir's National Congress Party has made threatening speeches about Southerners who continue to reside in the North post-independence", even though President Omar al-Bashir subsequently reassured Southerners that they will be permitted to live and work in Sudan – albeit as foreigners.

Such international reports denounce the harassment and abuses inflicted on Southerners, but seem to find it "natural" that Southerners would seek refuge in their "home" in the South. This position, after all, is only a shade different from the popular idea that Southerners will be better off "at home"[9], an idea which is reinforced by the television and the press. They all give in to this "home" discourse, which is closely connected with the nation-state paradigm that still dominates our understanding of social space. Few things, however, are as unnatural as returning to a certain place because of an undefined "descent" dating back to one to four generations earlier, and even after many years spent living elsewhere. This is why many States permit the naturalization of foreign citizens.[10] What is paradoxical is that Sudan itself has quite generous naturalization provisions: according to the current law, any foreigner can apply to obtain Sudanese citizenship after only five years of residence in the country.[11]

This question reveals an important issue, in my opinion: it is considered sounder and simpler for "Southerners" to leave for a country they may have never seen, rather than to have to address the

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7. Several news sources have reported similar cases. It should be emphasized that the majority are in English or from international new sources such as Reuters. The issue is hardly discussed in Sudanese newspapers, as far as I can discern. See for example: Fatima Naib, "Mixed Feelings about Sudan's Future", *Al-Jazeera* 15 January 2011: online at http://blogs.aljazeera.net/africa/2011/01/15/mixed-feelings-about-sudans-future and James Copnall, "Forced to choose between Sudans", 19 July 2011, *BBC News Africa*, http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-14204148, accessed 27 August 2011.
8. Marina Ottaway, "Southern Sudanese Living in North Sudan," 21 January 2011 online at http://sudan.carnegieendowment.org/2011/01/21/southern-sudanese-living-in-north-sudan accessed 26 August 2011. See also Mark Leon Goldberg, "Thousands of Southern Sudanese Trapped in North Ahead of Split," 7 July 2011 online at http://www.undispatch.com/thousands-of-southern-sudanese-trapped-in-north-ahead-of-split, accessed 26 August 2011.

9. Of course, there are many who would disagree with this view. See, for example, Abu Muhammad Abu Amna: "'ali al-janubiyyin fil-shimal al-tamaska bil-jinsiyya al-sudaniyya" [Southerners in the North should hold Sudanese Nationality] 26 June 2011, online at http://www.sudaneseonline.com/arabic/permalink/5584.html accessed 1 September 2011.
10. International agreements such as the 1961 Convention on the Reduction of Statelessness and institutions such as the International Law Commission recommend citizenship be granted on criteria of primary residence and birth. For a review of recent discussions see Assal: 2001, Manby: 2011 and *UNHCR-UNMIS Citizenship Symposium*.
11. The original "Sudanese Nationality Act" of 1957, amended in 1974, granted citizenship for naturalization after ten years. In 2008, the law was amended and the period was reduced to five years. See: http://www.unhcr.org/cgi-bin/texis/vtx/refworld/rwmain?docid=3ae6b56718, accessed 1 September 2011. For the announcement of the amendment, see "Foreigners can obtain Sudanese citizenship after 5 years of residence", *Sudan Tribune* 29 October 2008, online at http://www.sudantribune.com/Foreigners-can-obtain-Sudanese,29092, accessed 1 September 2011.

problems, abuses and inequalities that they face daily. This is a somewhat ambiguous sensation if it is contrasted with the desolate reaction of many inhabitants of Khartoum to the departure of their "Southern brothers." The carrot and stick approach that the government is using to make Southerners leave may appear to be the final confirmation of a consolidated belief: that they have never been fully considered to be Sudanese citizens, no matter how long they have lived in the North.

By withdrawing the Sudanese nationality of the "Southerners", the government has circumvented problems of social injustice by defining people of Southern descent as legally different, because they are "foreigners."[12]

Unsustainable political pluralism

It would be wrong to suggest that there is no awareness of the importance of racial relations in politics. The most remarkable reflection on this issue is the political ideology of the SPLM, known as the New Sudan vision, and developed by the late SPLM leader, John Garang, who died a few months after the CPA had been signed. The New Sudan vision put the idea that racism has always been one of the most important instruments of domination for the elites. Garang's brilliant intuition was to present the civil war not as an exclusive problem between the South and the North, caused by religious and ethno-cultural differences, but as a problem for the whole of Sudan. According to Elwathig Kameir, an leading ideologue of the SPLM-North,

> "It is, in itself, an attempt at marginalization to define the problem as the "Southern problem." The problem was, thus, redefined as the "problem of the Sudan" and not the "problem of the South" [...]. It is the Sudanese state, epitomized by the power structure in the Center, which needs to be radically restructured in order to accommodate the Sudan's manifold diversity and attend to all forms of

exclusion   and   marginalization   of   its people."[13]

The disastrous story of independent Sudan, Kameir continues, is a direct consequence of the "distortion of self-perception by which an African-Arab-hybrid racial, cultural and religious minority group identifies itself as monolithically Arab-Islamic", and attempts to impose this identity on the rest of the country.[14]

There were many signs that this message was starting to be understood by the leading National Congress Party (NCP) and by the Sudanese. First of all, the CPA represented an historical victory, in that it obliged the dominant elites to accept and validate the political needs of the peripheries. In spite of its many critics and detractors, the CPA has been seen as a success story from many angles: it put an end to an intractable and bloody conflict, and all its major promises, including "free and fair" elections, the referendum and the separation, have been kept. The years between the CPA and secession have been an exciting period, both politically and socially. The Government's puritanical directives were steadily relaxed, freedom of expression was increased,   new   jobs   were   opened   up   to

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12. For a reflection on the "Ideology of difference", see Said 1985 and Maalouf 2000, among others.

13. Elwathig Kameir, "Scenarios and Strategies for the Evolution of the New Sudan", first published in *The New Sudan Vision* June 2008 and republished on various websites in slightly different versions. I use the version at www.cmi.no/sudan/doc/?id=1000. See also http://yasirarman.com/core/?p=537. Both accessed 1 September 2011.
14. Elwathig Kameir, "Scenarios and Strategies for the New Sudan". See also the series of articles he published in *Sudan Tribune*: "New Sudan: Towards Building the Sudanese Nation-State" 30 June 2006, http://www.sudantribune.com/New-Sudan-Towards-building-the,18400; "Enduring the Hazards of "Attractive Unity": The John Garang Calling", http://www.sudantribune.com/Enduring-the-Hazards-of-Attractive,23060 30 July 2007; "SPLM and the Imperative of Internal Dialogue", 23 December 2009, http://www.sudantribune.com/SPLM-and-the-imperative-of,33565; "Towards Sustainable Peace and Structured and Institutional Relations between Southern and Northern Sudan", 31 January 2011, http://www.sudantribune.com/Towards-sustainable-peace-and,37837 . All accessed 1 September 2011.

"Southerners", the economy expanded, and the country was exposed to a certain degree of democratization. According to Ahmed Einas, "The CPA has created an environment where the NCP, in spite of its majority in the Legislative assembly, could hardly adopt legislations without a minimum of consent of the SPLM and of concurrent northern political parties." (Einas 2009:145)

But if this is the case, why have all these openings been so drastically reversed following the independence of the South? A wave of violence erupted in Southern Kordofan, and the situation in the Blue Nile has become increasingly tense. According to a leaked UN Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) report, there have been mass-murder operations in the Nuba Mountains, with house-to-house searches and killings of SPLM supporters, bombs being dropped on civilian neighbourhoods, and kidnappings and executions.[15] Furthermore, the judiciary sought legal means to ban the SPLM-North, using the excuse that it is a branch of a foreign Party[16]; and in September 2011 the SPLM-North was banned. The organ of the SPLM-North, *Ajras al-Hurriyya*, has been suspended, and attacks on SPLM activists have been reported.[17] It is difficult to understand how the government of North Sudan, after so many efforts to reach peace with the South, and when heavy international

sanctions are about to be lifted, can have had the very same reaction to rebellion in the peripheries that has characterized all of post-colonial Sudanese history: elimination by mass killings.

In this light, the expulsion of people defined as Southerners appears to be connected with what is happening in Kordofan and the Blue Nile. Yet it is important to appreciate the wide scope of the expulsion process: with the independence of the South, the government can now legitimately carry out what all preceding governments had tried to achieve, at the cost of great violence and isolation from the international community: the cultural, religious and racial homogenization of Sudan. It is no coincidence that, on the day of the separation, the Sudan government sent the following text message to its citizens' mobile phones: "Name of country: Republic of Sudan. Dimensions: 1,882,000 k2. Number of inhabitants: 33,419,625. Percentage of Muslims: 96.7%. National currency: the Guinea"[18] There will be no accusation of genocide hanging over the heads of the NCP as a result of the expulsion of the Southerners, and yet the outcome will be a bloodless racial cleansing.

I believe that in order to understand how the NCP could have forgotten the immense price of the Civil War so rapidly, it is helpful to review the history of racial relations in the Sudan and the way in which they have been embedded into state politics, and the process of the construction of hegemony since colonial times.

II: Northern Sudan for the Northerners: a Short History of a Project

The expulsion of "Southerners" from North Sudan and the separation of the South appear to be the culmination of a project that commenced about a century ago. Although many feel that it had its origins in the nineteenth century, with the opening of Sudan to the slave trade, it is only with the

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15. UNMIS Report on the human rights situation during the violence in Sudan's Southern Kordofan, June 2011 online at http://www.sudantribune.com/UNMIS-report-on-the-human-rights,39570, accessed on 1 September 2011.

16. "Sudan's NCP to Slap Ban on SPLM-North Party", *Sudan Tribune* 12 August 2011 online at http://www.sudantribune.com/Sudan-s-NCP-to-slap-ban-on-SPLM,39821. The *Sudan Tribune* is an authoritative news agency on Sudan, based in Paris, and thus not subject to censorship.

17. On freedom of press, see "Sudanese Daily to Sue Security Body over Seizure of Copies", 22 August 2011, http://www.sudantribune.com/Sudanese-daily-to-sue-security,39918. On the closing of Ajras al-Hurriya, see: "majlis al-sahafa iughli bakhis ajras" [The Press Council Cancels the Licence of Ajars] 28 July 2011, http://www.ajrasalhurriya.net/ar/news_view_21373.html As to the attacks on the SPLM, at least one was recorded by the above-mentioned UNMIS report, p. 13. All material accessed 28 July 2011.

18. I am indebted to Ali Hussain for having told me about, and forwarded me a copy of, this text message.

Anglo-Egyptian Condominium that the idea of the irreconcilability of the two Sudans emerged, and the South became *de facto* a separate administration, the predecessor of the "one country – two states" system later implemented by the CPA. Therefore most important phases of this history are worth reviewing in order to trace the genealogy of racial relations.

I am using the term "genealogy" in its Foucauldian sense. In its most simple definition, genealogy was for Foucault a point of view of history that focused on the way in which power configures our understanding of reality (Foucault 1984). It is also a history that lacks a transcendental subject at centre stage; in other words, peoples' acts, choices and behaviours are embedded in interiorized structures, belief systems and truth regimes that assign meaning to reality. The genealogy of racial relations is, therefore, an approach that understands racism to be systemic; that is, embedded in institutions, practices, laws, and habits in a way which helps to interiorize it, and causes them to appear to be the natural order of the world (Omi and Winant 1994, Feagin 2006). One practical example of this is that my circle of friends in Khartoum would be horrified if I told them that they were racist, yet they are the same people who, while sad and shocked about the separation, also wish Southerners to go "home" for their own sakes. Far from being a matter of individual choice, racism is often engendered by impersonal power relations. The short narrative below on racism in the history of modern Sudan is a good case in point.

Racial Beliefs and Society from the Turkiyya to the First World War

The period of Sudanese history know as the Turco-Egyptian Rule, or Turkiyya, (1821-1885) is of special importance in the history of the marginalization of the South. This is why this narrative will begin from there, and with the history of the slave trade in South Sudan.

Generally speaking, the Turkiyya established the beginnings of modern Sudan, inaugurating the very geo-political definition of the country, and setting in motion a complete refashioning of the State, with the introduction of a bureaucracy, a modernized army, a new schools system, and so on. The Turkiyya is perhaps best known, however, because it was in this period that the Nuba Mountains and Southern Sudan were "opened up" to ivory and slave traders (Hill 1959). It is a well-known fact that slavery and the slave trade were old- and well-established phenomena in the area (O'Fahey 1973; Spaulding 1985); however, during the Turkiyya, and in particular from 1860 onwards, the slave trade distinguished itself quantitatively and qualitatively from that of previous eras (Prunier 1988). First, the number of slaves drastically increased from an estimated 5,000 slaves per year in pre-Turkiyya times (Prunier 1988: 524) to annual figures of between 20,000 and 60,000 (in peak years) in the 1860s and 1870s.[19] This boom was made possible by the introduction of technological innovations such as steamboats and firearms at a local level. These were initially employed to support geographical exploration; the Western eagerness to discover the sources of the Nile encouraged the Turco-Egyptian government to organize exploratory missions, the main consequence of which was to reveal the treasures of the Nile Basin (Gray 1961). With time, a sophisticated organization, known as the Zariba system, was put into place for the exportation of ivory and slaves. It rationalized and boosted exports, and allowed traders who had initially invested in ivory to reconvert rapidly to the slave trade when ivory stocks dwindled (Johnson 1992).

As a result, a dual population movement took place: first, people who had settled along the Nile north of Khartoum moved to the South to escape taxation and to participate in the slave trade. This had a

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19. The sources for these estimates are: Guillaume Lejean, "La Traite des Esclaves en Egypte et en Turquie", *Revue des Deux Mondes*, 88, 1870, 902, 909 and Schweinfurth, *Au Coeur de l'Afrique,* vol. II 362-363. The former writes of 27,000 slaves per year, and the latter of 53,000. One should not forget, however, that these numbers were estimates.

powerfully international dimension, as it was carried out by slavers from Europe, the Ottoman Empire, Egypt and Sudan. At the same time, a flow of people from ethnic groups such as the Dinka, Shilluk, Nuer, the Azande and so on was enslaved and forced to move towards the North (Moore-Harrell 1998). Some were later resold in Egypt, while others were used locally in agricultural work or domestic labour, or as soldiers in the so-called *Jihadiyya*, the State army (Johnson 1988, Ewald 1990, Prunier 1992, Hill 1995, Moore-Harrell 1999). Military slavery continued and flourished under Mahdist rule (1885-1898). Because of the wars continually launched by the second Mahdist leader, the Khalifa Abdallahi, able-bodied male slaves were requisitioned from their masters for the army. When the British came to Sudan, escaped or liberated slaves and former slave soldiers became the first local recruits to the Egyptian Army.

Slavery did not disappear with the establishment of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, however, and during the first phase of British colonization, government anti-slavery policies were less than half-hearted (Sikainga 1996, Taj Hargey 1998). Significant steps to eliminate it only began after the end of the First World War. It is therefore rather paradoxical that the same period that saw measures against slavery and the slave trade become more effective also marked the birth of the racial State.

To say that the racial state was a colonial project that started after the Great War does not mean denying that people from the centre harboured feelings of superiority to those from the peripheries well before the British occupation of the Sudan. An ideology of slavery which justified the exploitation of enslaved individuals existed well before colonialism, and had solid connections with religious beliefs, such as the desirability of enslaving non-Muslims and the concept of "pagans" as not belonging to the Islamic *civitas*, and therefore being only partially human (Willis 1985). However, any ideology leaves space for re-interpretation and resistance, is determined historically, and should not be disconnected from actual practices. For instance,

the same Turco-Egyptian state that allowed the slave trade to boom also permitted enslaved people to enjoy a certain degree of social mobility, most notably through the army. It is important to bear in mind that Turco-Egyptian rule was a military leadership that, as in other North African States and the Ottoman Empire, relied heavily on a loyal slave army personally owned by the ruler. The army had a privileged position in society, and slave soldiers were assigned administrative roles, and were better off than many Sudanese. The Turco-Egyptian elite itself was trained according to the martial values of the Ottoman Empire, and the Empire had for centuries used slavery as a means of recruiting its highest officers (the Janissaries, the Mamluks, etc.) (Miura and Philips 2000).

Another example of the importance of connecting ideology and practices is the first phase of the Condominium. In accordance with the scientific notions of the time, the British officers who conquered Sudan held firm and outspoken beliefs that there were two races in Sudan, Arabs and Africans, and that the former were superior to the latter. For instance, Sir Reginald Wingate, the Governor-General of Sudan from 1899 to 1916, and his chief advisor, the Austrian Rudolf Carl von Slatin, believed that "African" slaves should not be granted their freedom because they allegedly were incapable of managing their own liberty, prey as they were to uncontrollable instincts and passions.[20] Slatin and Wingate bore a tragi-comic grudge against the employees of the Anti-Slavery Department, and they admitted, not particularly discreetly, that the anti-slavery legislation they devised was created just to mock Anti-Slavery and Aborigines' Protection Society.

Yet it is during their administration that the most important social mobility for people from slavery backgrounds – called *Sudani* at that time – took

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20. See, for instance, the oft-quoted letter from Slatin to a friend about the accusations of racism on the part of the Queen, cited at length in Jok 2001:96, and kept in the Sudan Archive of the University of Durham (SAD) 438/653, Slatin to Mr. Bigger, 6.9.1897, Slatin Papers.

place, even if it was carried out on the basis of racial beliefs. The records indicate that *Sudani* connected with the army could attain the highest military ranks, and were assigned to administrative roles, such as that of *sub-mamur* (comparable with a Sub-District Administrator), which was at the time the highest level of responsibility a Sudanese could hold (Vezzadini 2010). Because the first colonial administrators were army officers – the so-called soldiers-administrators – they shared the same concerns and preferences as the Turco-Egyptian or Mahdist military leadership: they needed good soldiers and officers to defend the State, and the best soldiers were people of Southern or Nuba descent.

Racial notions also affected the domain of labour policies during the first twenty years of the Condominium. The *Sudani,* with their "African physiques", were believed to be the best manual workers; in addition, again because "Africans" allegedly could not control their instincts, they were allegedly "lazy", and had to be put to work so that they would avoid becoming criminals and parasites.[21] In this way, they came to form the country's first working class. This did not necessarily imply exploitation, however; the *Sudani* changed employers quite frequently, according to who was offering the highest rates of pay, because they were appreciated as good workers, and were much in demand.[22] They left their jobs when they considered the pay to be inadequate, had contracts, and salaries which the British constantly complained were too high (Sikainga 1996). It is not unlikely that this would have allowed them to accumulate a certain amount of capital to be reinvested in other activities. A study of the social composition of the Three Towns in 1924 shows that people defined as *Sudani* were present in professions as different as shopkeepers and clerks, army officers and artisans, and unskilled workers and soldiers (Vezzadini 2008, 380-405). A British administrator complained in 1925 that the *Sudani* were one of the social classes most ready to embrace the educational opportunities offered by the colonial State.[23] This is partly confirmed by statistics from the Department of Education, which showed that a few elementary schools, such as Khartoum, included 25% to 50% of pupils from this background.[24] The British soldiers-administrators racially defined people from the peripheries as workers and soldiers, and yet did not erect definitive institutional barriers against attempts by this group to become something more.

A certain degree of social control was already in place, however. For instance, the only colonial secondary education institution, Gordon College, which provided access to good government jobs, admitted a maximum of 5% of *Sudani* each year.[25] There were some professions, such as the judiciary and education, which were completely barred to people of this extraction, because it was believed that it would hurt the feelings of the "Arab" establishment to admit them. The reason was that the colonial state sorely needed to rely on the alliance of the establishment as its intermediary in the management of power. It was necessary to protect their privileges in order to obtain their loyalty and assistance in dealing with the masses. Nevertheless, colonial racial policy remained

21. Slatin to Wingate, 27 January 1900, SAD 270/1/99 : "A great part of the formerly male slaves who have not been enlisted in the Black Battalion have no money, no land, and by nature all blacks are lazy, they are consequently obliged to steal or beg in order to support themselves." There are many other examples of this kind of narrative in Sudan-related documents at the National Record Office (hereafter NRO), Khartoum, and the National Archives of the UK (previously Public Records Office (PRO)), London.
22. Memorandum on agricultural labour in the Sudan [1910], Intel 4/4/29, NRO.

23. Ewart Report on Political Agitation in the Sudan, Khartoum, 21 April 1925, National Archives of the UK, FO 407/201, p. 154.
24. In 1913, people defined as *Sudani* represented 54% of elementary school pupils in Sennar, 28% in Khartoum, and 26% in Tokar. The percentage was lower elsewhere. For a complete table, see the Annual Report of the Education Department 1913, in *Reports on the Finance, Administration and Condition of the Sudan 1913*, vol. 2: 247-8.
25. "Statistic Showing Nationality of the GMC boys, 1914 & 1925 to 1933", in MacMichael to Simpson, Ministry of Education, Cairo, 16 November 1933), Palace 4/1/4, NRO.

confused and inconsistent during this early phase. It was a rather uncertain period with regard to where racial lines lay, and, more concretely, to what people of *Sudani* extraction could or could not be allowed to become.

The 1924 Revolution

Changes were already under way after the First World War and the departure of Wingate when the 1924 Revolution took place, shattering long-held beliefs, and helping colonial administrators to see more clearly where these race lines lay and how society had to be structured. Wingate and Slatin having left, the military administration was slowly turning into a civil administration. The new Governor-General, Lee Stack (1916-1924), was a military man, but the role and governmental authority of the Financial, Legal and Civil Secretaries strengthened, and they were all civilians. The situation in Northern Sudan was mostly peaceful, and the "soldiers-administrators" government was no longer required; it remained in place only in the South, where the security situation needed more violent "pacification" (Daly 1986, Johnson 2003).

Similarly, steps toward the creation of a separate administration in the South had already been devised before the First World War, and a slightly faster pace was achieved after the war ended. In 1903, the South was "opened up" to Christian missionaries. Sunday replaced Friday as a holiday in 1913 in the Lado Enclave, and in 1917 in Mongalla province. The first important provisions of what would be later be known as the Southern Policy arrived after the war, with the Closed District Ordinance, the Passports and Permits Ordinance, and the Permit to Trade Order, issued respectively in 1920, 1922 and 1925, yet these ordinances were initially among the many unimplemented laws present in Sudan. More important, in view of the future administrative separation, was the absence of colonial schools and development plans for the South. Missionary schools compensated for this, but they obviously adopted a different approach to, and

language of, instruction from the Northern government schools (Beshir 1968, Sanderson 1981).

In the North, the government was beginning to perceive the need to formalize their reliance on "tribal" and religious leaders, but not in an exclusionary manner. This is why the period of the Stack administration is known as that of the "Dual Policy", and it included both a program of devolution of powers to local authorities, and the creation of consultative and advisory councils in urban centres. (Daly 1980).

After the First World War, the winds of nationalism also started to blow in Sudan. The British government was not completely opposed to this, as they believed that a carefully- monitored nationalist movement would be a positive counterweight to Egyptian political "machinations". Egypt played a fundamental role, in particular as a catalyst for political change. In 1924, Egypt was leading a strong campaign against British rule in Sudan, and was attempting to alter the balance of power that had made Egypt a rather weak partner within the framework of the Condominium Agreement. The British were quite confident of their grip on the hearts of the Sudanese, however. Signs that this grip was shaky at times did not alarm them, perhaps because the relationship with the local establishment appeared to be so cordial.

The socially subversive impact of the 1924 Revolution was immediately visible, and yet its racial implications emerged only later. The leadership of the national movement known as the White Flag League – Jama'iya al-Liwa' al-'Abiad - included one *Sudani*, 'Ali 'Abd al-Latif, one Northern Sudanese, 'Ubayyd al-Hajj al-'Amin, and three individuals defined as "*muwalladin*", a term used to indicate those of recent Egyptian descent (usually because either the father or the mother was Egyptian, as intermarriage was quite widespread among the Sudanese elites since the Turkiyya). They were all relatively young, had been educated in colonial schools, and worked for the government. Yet the League managed to attract the support of

many different sectors of Sudanese society, from various professional categories, social classes and ethnicities. Officers from the Egyptian Army were among them, but the government did not realize they were involved until very late. A series of demonstrations was organized in June, and in July a wave of arrests led to the incarceration of many League members, but it was only in August that the government discovered a list of army officers who were members of a secret society called the Sudan Union, affiliated to the White Flag League. In the same month, all the cadets from the Military School mutinied. But the most serious episode occurred at the end of November, when Governor-General Lee Stack was assassinated in Cairo, and the British High Commissioner ordered Egypt to withdraw all her battalions from Sudan. The 9th Sudanese Battalion in Khartoum refused to obey orders, and attempted to join the Egyptian battalions which were being evacuated.

The White Flag League and its sister organizations represented a socially subversive movement, not because social revolution was a part of its program, but because Sudanese of all extractions and origins participated, including those from Sudan's peripheries. The movement demanded that people overcome religious and "tribal" differences in the name of the anti-colonial struggle. For instance, during interrogations and trials, some White Flag League members refused to state their ethnic group. Inspired by the mass revolution in Egypt in 1919, they insisted that a successful national movement had to include all social components, and that any emphasis on ethnicity, Arabism or blood meant playing the divide and rule game of the colonial powers (Bakheit 1965, Abdin 1985, Kurita 1989 and 1997, Vezzadini 2008).

It appears that the *Sudani* element, and in particular *Sudani* officers, played a conspicuous role in 1924, but it should be emphasized that this was not a revolution of, or for, the *Sudani,* or even that its numbers comprised mainly elements from this group, contrary to popular perceptions. The reason why the 1924 Revolution is still associated with the

Sudani is the result of a colonial operation that it is very important to analyse because it sets a precedent which still has relevance for present-day politics. The colonial rulers solved the problem of the social threat posed by the nationalist movement by adopting the following strategy: they created the notion that "Arabs" and *Sudani* had different degrees of responsibility for the events, and that the nationalists were not all the same. The *Sudani* were described as a sort of Caliban, dull but arrogant people whose ambition was to be part of the "cream of Sudanese society", lured by malicious Egyptians.[26] They were responsible for having led astray innocent but weak "Arab" youths. Consequently, the latter obtained lighter sentences, typically in the form of exile to very rural locations and extremely mundane jobs. The *Sudani* people – together with those "Arabs" who refused to apologize - received harsher sentences: for example, of the five founding members of the White Flag League, Ali Abdel Latif was the only one who served a life sentence, and he eventually died in a mental hospital in Egypt in 1948 (Kurita 1997). 'Ubayyd Hajj al-'Amin died of illness in the prison at Malakal. Among the four sentenced to death for the November mutiny, the only one who received a last-minute pardon was from a notable Sudanese family, while the three executed were all *Sudani*.

As *Sudani* were deemed to have been responsible for the events, the colonial rulers adopted a more repressive and hostile attitude towards them, and became more prudent when it came to making status, education and occupation coincide. For instance, the elitist Gordon College rapidly became the only avenue for government jobs. The Military College, the institution that had been most open to students from peripheral Sudan, was closed after 1924. In this way, a more homogenous educated elite, which was defined, and defined itself, as "Arab", emerged. The nationalist intelligentsia would no longer be able to overcome its identification with Arabness, to the detriment of a

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26. The most important document which consolidates this interpretation is the Ewart Report, in the National Archives of the UK, FO 407/201.

more comprehensive Sudanese identity. Many of the 1924 "Arab"-defined activists (such as 'Abdalla Khalil, Shaikh al-Bushi, and 'Uthman al-Hashim) would later become protagonists in Sudan's march to independence, while the 1924 *Sudani* nationalists would never return to the forefront of Sudanese politics, with rare exceptions (Kurita 2003). 1924 was for a long period a neglected chapter in Sudanese history, until the ideology of the 1924 Revolution was rediscovered by Garang and the SPLM ideologues, and the revolution has now been appraised to be the most significant historical precedent to the New Sudan Vision.

The 1924 Revolution revealed to colonial officers the urgency of putting a more racially-defined state in place in order to protect social hierarchies. In addition, it set a pattern for dealing with the peripheries: marginalization and political neutralization were used as a means of resolving political instability.

The Aftermath: Indirect Rule, Southern Policy, and Social Construction

British reaction to the nationalism of 1924 and its connection with the construction of a racial state become easier to comprehend if placed in the context of the broader paradigmatic shift in colonial policy after the end of the Great War, known in Sudan and in British Imperial Africa as the turn to Indirect Rule. This policy is indelibly associated with Lord Lugard's book, *The Dual Mandate*, published in 1922. In *The Dual Mandate*, Lugard affirmed that it was essential to let Africans "develop along their own lines", and that every attempt to govern Africa according to European standards was dangerous, and destined to fail. This also meant that different "races" and ethnic groups were to follow their own, authentic patterns of development exclusively.

A great deal has been written about Indirect Rule, and on its consequences for, and impact on, Sudan, with particular regard to the South (Daly 1991, Sanderson 1989). My objective here is only to give

the "big picture" of how the colonial state, once the shock of 1924 had been absorbed, attempted to influence the structure of Sudanese society, informed by the Indirect Rule paradigm.

Indirect Rule provided an authoritative official narrative for interpreting the events of 1924 and learning from the experience; another way to see it is that the 1924 Revolution helped to justify political choices that would scarcely have been acceptable previously. The blame attributed to the *Sudani* was turned into a generalized blame aimed at "detribalized" Sudanese.[27] This term indicated people like 'Ali 'Abd al-Latif, Sudanese of Southern or Nuba descent who, having been born in the North, had lost their connections to their "home", and those Northerners who had only weak connections to their "tribes". The government especially defined educated north Sudanese working for the State, such as Ali Abd al-Latif's friends, in this way. Consequently, the colonial rulers concluded first that detribalization had produced nationalism, and second that the "modern" state was responsible for detribalization.

The connection between detribalization and nationalism can be quite easily understood if we think about the definition of nationhood as a community of "brothers" who share the same (imagined) origin and the same values (Gellner 1983, Anderson 2006). This imagined national community was not consistent with the theory that Sudan was made up of diverse "tribal" cultural clusters, each with its own "authentic" set of values, customs and beliefs. Therefore, at least for the moment, the concept of nationalism was seen as inappropriate to Sudan, and national feelings represented no more than a dangerous aping of something which had been imported from the outside, namely from Egypt. If Sudan had to evolve

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27. It should be remembered that there is a difference between narrative and practice, and the narrative interpretative lens on 1924 was slightly different from the practice of differential punishment mentioned above, which was carried on without much fuss. Again, the main source for the "detribalization" theory is the Ewart Report, FO 407/201.

"along its own lines", on the other hand, the State had to encourage the development of ethnic aggregations or "tribes" as the only authentic social units of Sudan. It is interesting to note that this not far removed from the language adopted by the NCP, as noted in the recent case of tribal certificates.

Secondly, the fact that the leaders of the nationalist movement were State employees reinforced distrust of the applicability of "modern" state ideas to Sudan. It should be remembered that since the eighteenth century, the modern bureaucratic State had conceived society to be a homogeneous continuum of individuals – citizens – who, in theory, were all equal before the State, and were all entitled to have access to the same basic services. The flattening out of social relations implied by this concept of the State was deemed as not only unsuitable for Sudan, but was also dangerous, in that it corrupted the "tribal" nature of Sudanese society.

These theories were concretized by a set of practices and legal structures known as "devolution", according to which State services were to be as limited as possible, while judicial and fiscal powers were to be devolved to tribal leaders. In practice, the expansion of State services ceased from the late 1920s, and administration was reduced to a minimum. The number of pupils in schools, from the elementary to the secondary level, did not increase until the 1940s. Egyptian administrators who were dismissed in 1924 or during the subsequent economic crisis of 1929 were not replaced.

Similarly, the state was to control all other detribalizing influences. With the completion of the Gezira Cotton Scheme in 1925, the agricultural expansion of Sudan made it easier for workers to settle in urban areas. Soldiers from the newly created Sudan Defence Force were recruited locally, and not nationwide as before, and the movement of troops to areas far from their ethnic origins was discouraged. The government tried – rather unsuccessfully - to limit the powers of the religious

"*sada*" (leaders). Furthermore, it attempted – also unsuccessfully – to restrict the movement of individuals by instituting a system of permits granted by the "sheikh of the tribe". The contrast with the period before Indirect Rule can be appreciated by studying, for example, the career of an officer such as Said Shahata, a supporter of the White Flag League, who from 1914 and 1924 was transferred eleven times and sent to places as different as Tumbura in Mongalla (later Equatoria) province, El Obeid, Khartoum, Wad Medani, Wau, and so on.[28]

From the late 1920s, the Southern Policy became a reality: the North and the South no longer shared the same lingua franca, missionary educational institutions expanded in the South with financial assistance from the State, the army recruited soldiers and officers only locally, and Northern traders and Muslim fuqara (wandering holy men) were kept out, so that the influence of Islam in the South virtually disappeared. The two parts became *de facto* administratively separated, and even the styles of administration differed substantially, remaining military and personalistic in the South and becoming more and more formal and distant in the North (Daly 1991). To sum up, the social project of Indirect Rule was to create a racially logical and ethnically organized space, using the Southern Policy, which barred Arabs and Africans from dangerous intermingling, and Indirect Rule, which limited ethnic confusion to the extent possible.

Indirect Rule itself was not to last, and the Southern Policy was officially abandoned in 1946. What did last was the hierarchical formation of society, and the impossibility of communication between the centre and periphery. The Juba Conference in 1947 represented the first important opportunity for discussion among Northern nationalists, the Southern intelligentsia and the British administration. However, none of the promises or

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28. Vezzadini 2008: 220, from the account that Said Shahata left of his own life, which was tape-recorded and is kept at the archive of the Afro-Asian Institute of Khartoum University (IAAS): Said Shahata, IAAS 1455.

recommendations that came out of it were followed. The competition between Britain and Egypt, heightened once again by the 1952 coup by the Free Officers, brought Sudan to an independence unilaterally imposed on the South, without the interests of the Southerners being safeguarded in any way. Thus, in the transitional period between 1953 and 1956, the basic requests of the Southern leadership were disregarded, most notably that of making Sudan a confederation to respect the cultural specificity of the South. On top of this, people from the North began to fill overwhelmingly the posts left vacant by British administrators in the South. The mounting tensions exploded with the mutiny of the Equatorial Battalion of the Sudan Defence Force in Torit in 1955; this was the first episode in the longest-lasting African civil war.

In their march to independence, Northern nationalists did not need the support of the Southern intelligentsia, and did not need to develop an ideology or policies that were representative of the whole of Sudan.[29] The system in which they had grown up reflected an image of themselves as the people best-qualified to lead Sudan to independence, on the grounds of their education, blood and high cultural levels. They sincerely believed that they knew what was best for the South, because they were better-trained and more educated than their Southern "brothers." The self-referentiality of the nationalist elites, and their identification with high Arab culture and Islam, barred those who could not identify with these cultural references from being included, and from shaping the nation-building project. Very early on, armed resistance became the only way to make oneself heard.

In conclusion, whilst during the Turkiyya notions of otherness and the opposition between the centre and the slaving frontier revolved around ideas of Islamic belonging and the dichotomy between freedom and slavery, colonial rule reconstructed the meaning of difference by attributing a racial content to it. More

importantly, it devised a set of State mechanisms and institutions that consistently translated notions of racial inferiority into the practices of daily life. While stigma may have been attached to Southern descent before the First World War, this had not necessarily led to economic or social marginalization. The situation that emerged after 1924 contributed to make the social and working conditions of people labelled as *Sudani* consistent with cultural notions of their inferiority.

Conclusion

The history of racial relations is a fundamental aspect of modern Sudanese history, but it is a distressing, painful, and very political saga. It is very difficult for Northern Sudanese society to acknowledge that racial relations are a primary source of conflict, social suffering, and injustice. Yet to ignore them means not only to forget an important part of the past, to invalidate the experience of millions of Sudanese who have experienced and continue to experience forms of structural racism, but also to create all the conditions necessary for this saga to repeat itself constantly, as is happening now with the upsurge of violence in Southern Kordofan.

This is why Garang's program for a New Sudan was ideologically so radical: it gave political legitimacy, voice and weight to perceptions whose invalidation has been instrumental in the perpetuation of the marginalization of the peripheries. Like the White Flag League, the New Sudan vision warned against claims of racial differences, and aimed to deconstruct them by exposing their nature as a political ideology in the service of maintaining the hegemonic system. Yet the New Sudan vision has become a minority view since the death of Garang, and has been defeated politically with the secession of the South. It is, perhaps, because the aim of the top SPLM leadership was to reach independence that the SPLM made no serious attempt to press for the creation of a reconciliation commission, where issues such as racism and war crimes could be discussed, or to initiate a public debate on the

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29. This analysis owes a great debt to Gramsci (1972) and his interpretation of the Italian Southern Question.

psychological and emotional ravages of civil war displacements and the situation of Southerners in the North. Today, the New Sudan's ideology has been inherited by the SPLM-North, but it is struggling to overcome its image as a rebel movement that represents only the armed periphery.

It is urgent that the new State of Sudan should not only rethink the importance and role of racial relations in its past, but also acknowledge the necessity for collective debate, in which the dialectic between Northerners as conscious and unconscious perpetrators of racist acts and Southerners as victims resorting to violence may finally be discussed.

Acknowledgments

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