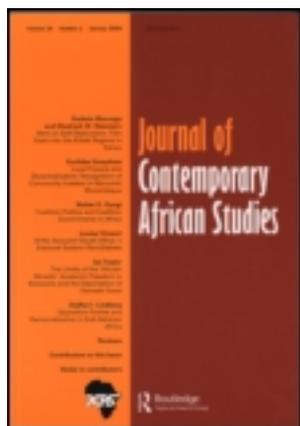


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Sudan's elusive democratisation: civic mobilisation, provincial rebellion and chameleon dictatorships

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Sudan's elusive democratisation: civic mobilisation, provincial rebellion and chameleon dictatorships

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Sudan experienced two inspirational popular uprisings that brought down military dictatorships, but the 'Arab Spring' passed it by. This paper analyses social movements and armed resistance within the dualistic structure of Sudan's centre and periphery. A pattern of alternating military and parliamentary government has been superseded by a militarised political marketplace, in which patrons and clients bargain over temporary loyalties, alongside secessionist movements and a residual urban civic activism. The paper examines the popular uprisings of 1964 and 1985, examining their short-term success but long-term failure, and reviews the last 20 years' of abortive efforts to stage a 'third *intifada*', noting the difficulties of simultaneously pursuing civic uprising and armed insurrection, and of aligning the objectives of liberal democracy and ethnic self-determination.

Keywords: Sudan; popular uprising; civic activism; democratisation; resistance

Tunisia's Zine El Abidine Ben Ali was the third Arab dictator to be toppled by a non-violent popular uprising. The first was Gen. Ibrahim Abboud (October 1964) and the second was Field Marshal Jaafar Nimeiri (April 1985). These Sudanese experiences were entirely overlooked in the enthusiasm for the apparently unprecedented 'Arab Spring' of 2011. To take one example among many, Mona Eltahawy wrote, 'I'll forever cherish 14 January 2011 – the day Zine al-Abidine Ben Ali fled Tunisia, his 23-year rule toppled by 29 days of popular uprising. A real revolution for a change. It is the first time Arabs have toppled one of their dictators' (Eltahawy 2011).

Such neglect is not new: Sudan's experience hardly figures in the literature on non-violent movements in the Middle East: Stephen Zunes (1999) makes only a single reference to Sudan while Maria Stephan (2009) overlooks the country entirely. There is a comparable shortcoming in the literature and on democratisation and civil society in Africa: volumes written or edited by Peter Anyang' Nyong'o (1987), Michael Bratton and Nicolas van de Walle (1997) and Giles Mohan and Tunde Zack-Williams (2004) all mention Sudan only in passing. Sudan also remain at best marginalia in the comparative literature on non-violence and democratic transitions. For example, Gene Sharp (2005) and Peter Ackerman and Jack Duvall (2001) exclude Sudan from their lists of cases of non-violent struggle.

Possible explanations for the neglect of Sudan's *intifadas* (popular uprisings) is that they appeared *sui generis* at the time they happened, and were overshadowed by

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ongoing civil wars and tarnished by the failures of the democratic regimes that followed. However, precisely because of these problematic contexts and legacies, there is much to be learned from the Sudanese experience. This paper seeks both to document and to analyse the successful and unsuccessful examples of non-violent popular resistance in Sudan.

The two successful *intifadas* and the subsequent failure to stage a third *intifada*, must be understood in the context of Sudan's post-colonial political economy. Popular resistance to misgovernment in Sudan has been bifurcated into a non-violent civic mobilisation in the central part of the country and violent insurrection in the peripheries, reflecting the differences in economic development and modes of governance between centre and peripheries. Additionally, the political economy of the centre has itself changed. Sudanese democrats face the dual challenge of political liberalisation and the governance of diversity, but have failed to develop a formula that can deal simultaneously with both. The consequence has been that civic opposition has been limited in scope and potential, while popular armed struggle has never held out a realistic prospect of achieving political transformation at the centre.

The 1964 uprising

The October 1964 Popular Uprising against the military dictatorship of General Ibrahim Abboud was the first such instance in Africa or the Arab world. Its successes and failures illuminate the wider challenges of such a socio-political movement in Sudan, and more widely.

Abboud took power in 1958 at the invitation of civilian rulers who had thrown up their hands in despair at the intractability of Sudan's problems. It was an anomalous coup: an act of resignation by parliamentary leaders rather than aggression by soldiers. But the army soon showed its authoritarian face. There was immediately a series of attempted counter-coups by dissenting military officers supported by opposition parties, notably the Sudan Communist Party. But, as a leading communist academic noted, 'The abortive coups taught the political movement important lessons. The first was that military dictatorship could not be defeated by unilateral military action' (Al-Gaddal 1995, 84). Thereafter, the trade unions and opposition parties turned to non-violent political action including marches to present petitions to the junta, strikes by railway workers and others, and hunger strikes by political detainees (84–86). These actions culminated in the October uprising, which was post-colonial Africa's first successful display of people's power. Mansour Khalid, who was a young radical at the time, writes (1990, 199):

The October revolution, which cost in total thirty-six lives and injuries to more than a hundred, was indeed a people's revolution, sparked off by years of misrule by a military dictatorship—an instantaneous uprising by the man in the street... The victorious masses, in the uproarious days of October, were chanting in the streets: '*la Za'ama lil gudama*' (no leadership for the antiquated). Those days formed a proud moment in modern Sudanese political history, a moment which promised so much for the Sudan...

The basis of the organisation of the uprising was an alliance of professionals and professors, with the leaders of Gezira Tenants Association¹ and Sudan Workers Trade Union Federation, and Sudan Communist Party. They established the

National Front for the Professionals, using the University of Khartoum staff club as their headquarters. The agenda was a hastily drafted set of demands including the end to dictatorship, and immediate moves towards democracy, peace in southern Sudan (where there was civil war), land reform and modernisation of national institutions. Across the river in Omdurman, the leaders of the banned political parties quickly followed suit and formed the National Front for Political Parties. Anticipating, correctly, that a swift holding of democratic elections would return the same parties to office, their focus was on democracy. The alliance between the two fronts was tactical but effective. They turned out a large demonstration. The army responded by shooting and killing a student. The death of this student, on 19 October, became the focus of outrage and further demonstrations, notably when 30,000 people turned out for the funeral. The Professionals Front called for a general strike and further demonstrations. As Mahgoub (1974, 190) noted, 'anyone who could walk appeared to be on the streets'.

The united national front opened negotiations with the regime, while peaceful street protests continued. The critical moment occurred when military officers refused to open fire, and opened discreet contacts with the opposition front. After a further week, Abboud handed over to a transitional government, with himself as its titular head. Ten days later, he stepped down and went into quiet retirement. Political parties were unbanned, press censorship was lifted, political prisoners were released, the University of Khartoum was given back its independence and a 'round table' conference on the problem of southern Sudan was organised. The uprising succeeded in its immediate goals, with spectacular success.

Elections were held less than six months later and returned a parliament dominated by the sectarian parties – which had not initiated the protests but responded with alacrity, echoing many of the slogans of the demonstrators. The political programme of the Professionals Front had been much wider and included measures such as constitutional reform, ending the war in southern Sudan, reform of rural administration, agrarian reform and broadening political participation to increase representatives of marginalised sectors of the community, all measures to which the political parties had long been opposed. The traditionalists out-manoevered the radicals by the simple measure of calling for elections based on the old first-past-the-post system, as a result of which they were able to ignore or bypass the more radical agenda. Sadiq al Mahdi, the young leader of the Umma Party, symbolised both the hopes of the radicals and then their disappointment, as his vacillation and readiness to accede to the demands of the conservative Islamists, led him to squander his goodwill and time in office.

Mansour Khalid (1990, 200) writes, 'The great tragedy of the October revolution was that these opportunities were all allowed to slip by. Instead the country embarked on another four years of political buffoonery'. The country slipped back into political paralysis, confessional politics, and war, culminating in a coup by radical 'Free Officers' in May 1969. Led by Colonel Jaafar Nimeiri, the 'May Revolution' was inspired by the example of Egypt's Gamal Abdel Nasser. Nimeiri presented himself as a progressive who intended to complete October's unfinished radical agenda. Ironically, many of the professionals who had participated in the 1964 uprising welcomed the 1969 coup and its promise of revolutionary modernisation, although in time they again became disillusioned (Khalid 1985).

The October Revolution, nonetheless, had three historic achievements. The first was that it liquidated a military regime and restored a liberal political system. The second was that it convened the Round Table Conference on the problem of the south. Southern leaders, including some associated with the Anyanya rebellion, participated. Unfortunately the Round Table did not resolve the war, but it laid the intellectual, political and policy foundations for the agreement reached in Addis Ababa seven years later to bring the first civil war to an end (Alier 1990, 29–40). The third was the power of example, (El-Affendi 2012, 1–2):

What Sudan's October 1964 experience offered was a definitive road map to freedom, the assurance that mass protests, even when spontaneous and largely uncoordinated, were going to lead to a decisive restoration of democracy, rather than chaos or civil conflict. The whole experience and the achievements associated with it became a source of inspiration and immense pride for the Sudanese.

The 1985 uprising

The Popular Uprising that overthrew Field Marshal Jaafar Nimeiri in April 1985 was inspired by and modelled upon the 1964 uprising. Nimeiri's 'May Regime' had, after 15 years in power, become discredited, discoloured by corruption and financial bankruptcy, by the adoption of a crude and brutish form of Islamic law, its great achievement of peace with southern Sudan undermined by unravelling the Addis Ababa Agreement and a return to war, and its promise of transforming Sudan into a 'breadbasket' mocked by the country's worst famine for 70 years. Nimeiri had become a political chameleon, constantly reshuffling his alliances, blatantly concerned only with power for its own sake. Colonel John Garang, leader of the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA),² ran a much-listened-to radio station that blamed the country's ills on Nimeiri and demanded that he leave at once. The most notorious outrage was the execution for apostasy of the venerable leader of the Republican Brothers, *Ustaz* Mahmoud Mohamed Taha on 18 January 1985.

Ustaz Mahmoud was the leader of a minority sect in Sudan and erstwhile ally of Nimeiri who had denounced Nimeiri's version of Islamic law (Ibrahim 2008). He was tried and executed for apostasy, a crime that did not exist on the statute books at the time. This act, whether from irrational vengeance or an attempt to cower the opposition, succeeded in uniting virtually all Sudanese society against the regime. It was a classic instance of 'backfire' (Hess and Martin 2006). Among others, it made the Islamists fear, rightly, that Nimeiri might next turn on them. All felt that if a respected Islamic scholar of advanced years could be executed for apostasy, no-one was safe. The gatherings to mourn *Ustaz* Mahmoud became the occasion for trade union and professional leaders to begin discussing how to organise regime change, and they immediately established the Trade Union Alliance. From this emerged the National Alliance for National Salvation (NANS), which coordinated the uprising. The model of 1964 was on their minds: 'it is impossible to understand the April 1985 intifada without reference to that earlier display of people power which has captured the popular imagination ever since' (El-Affendi 2012, 1). They were also keen to avoid the mistakes of the leaders of that uprising (Woodward 1990, 201).

A second trigger for popular outrage was the famine, which aroused the conscience and provided a focus for voluntary mobilisation. Not only was the hunger a dramatic indication of the failure of Nimeiri's vaunted project of turning

Sudan into a major food exporter, but the government also denied that the famine existed and refused to call for relief. Among the activists who organised to provide famine relief, and to make the point that the famine was an indictment of the politics of the government, was Taiser Ali:

What made the famine issue very felt in society was the number of young kids moving in the residential areas asking for food. This was very shocking to people. It was pivotal in mobilising people, better than distributing one million leaflets. (African Rights 1997, 43)

The activists linked up with the Doctors' Union and concerned individuals within the Ministry of Agriculture, who were affronted at official denials. The issue escalated when the government ordered the forcible removal of drought migrants from the outskirts of Khartoum's twin city, Omdurman. The order could not be enforced, and the refusal of cadres from the ruling party to carry out their instructions, emboldened the opposition.

A third specific trigger was austerity measures imposed by the government, especially increases in the price of food. In the 1970s, Nimeiri had borrowed vast sums to finance accelerated development, based on wishful thinking about the timing and rate of returns. When the development failed to materialise and the loans were due, Sudan became locked into a spiral of default, austerity, and new loans as the US and western creditors bailed out Sudan (Brown 1988). In early 2005, the sums became too high and the patience of the US Treasury ran out. Nimeiri understood well that his austerity budget threatened the stability of the government, and flew to Washington DC on 4 April to plead with President Ronald Reagan for a new financial lifeline. His meeting at the White House the following day won him a reprieve, too late.

The organisation of the 1985 *intifada* involved a similar spectrum of groups to its predecessor, but was more carefully planned. Because the largest trade unions (railway workers and Gezira tenants) were weaker than 20 years earlier, professional associations took the lead. One of the lawyers who was active was Yoanes Ajawin, who explained:

The option that was possible was civil disobedience. By that time there was no military component of the underground trade unionists and activists. This was due to the insecurity prevailing in the military [due to dismissals and reshuffling]... it was difficult to figure out who is who in the army. Therefore an *intifada* with military backing was not envisaged. It became apparent later, in March, that there were some army officers who could support an uprising, provided that they were put in a situation of choice between the regime and the people. This meant to us the option of a successful civil disobedience campaign that would bring the machinery of state to a halt. Some areas of action were mapped out by marking roles to specific trade unions. Engineers and technicians, especially for the service sectors, light and water, were targeted. Doctors, lecturers and lawyers were also given specific assignments to pioneer civil disobedience... Every trade union had its own steering committee, two in fact, both an official one and an alternative, so if the members of the main one were arrested, the alternative would continue. It happened that on 1 and 2 April, most of the steering committees were arrested, so that it was the second layer in most unions that took over. (Quoted in African Rights 1997, 47–48)

Demonstrations started on 27 March against price increases in basic commodities. After five days, as the protests gathered momentum, and the security forces began to

round up the suspected leaders, for the first time the steering committee demanded that Nimeiri should hand over power to the people. On 2 April, the ruling party organised a counter-demonstration in Omdurman, but the turnout was paltry. The demonstrators were emboldened, and the biggest protest happened on 4 April, as Nimeiri was leaving to fly to Washington DC. Street children threw stones at the motorcade. The banks were closed as their workers joined the columns in the streets, marching behind lawyers and judges who, despite the extreme heat, led the protests in their full judicial regalia. At this point the leaders of the alliance began to realise that they might actually succeed. Taisier Ali explained:

Before that, even that morning, my personal feeling—we did not discuss it but there was a silent consensus among us—was that it was going to be a long struggle. We could look around and see that in Africa, struggles were always a long haul . . . the security forces were spreading rumours that if we attempted to challenge the regime there were going to be rivers of blood in the streets of Khartoum. (Quoted in *African Rights* 1997, 51)

Concerned that simply demonstrating one day after the other ran the danger of boredom and of unleashing unruly elements, the alliance decided to call for a ‘dead city day’ on 5 April: everyone stayed at home. It was a success and a strong indication of the organisational control and discipline of the protesters. The plan was that this would be followed by the biggest demonstration of all on 6 April, marching directly on the Presidential Palace, when Nimeiri was scheduled to return.

The NANS was keen to keep Nimeiri out of the country if at all possible, recalling coup attempts in the 1970s when he had (on one occasion) escaped from his captors to rally the troops, and another when loyalists had held on for long enough for Nimeiri to fly home and save the day. Among the trade unionist members of the alliance was an air traffic controller who was asked to change the duty roster for the night shift on 5/6 April so that he would be in charge at the time when Nimeiri’s plane was due to fly back. He signed in for duty and gave the instruction that Sudanese airspace was closed, so that the president’s plane was forced to divert to Cairo.

It was a close call. The army and police command debated late into the night of 5 April what they would do if the demonstrators overran the barricades around the Palace and the army headquarters. Some generals wanted the army to shoot, others not (El-Affendi 2012, 6–7). In the early hours of 6 April, the army units that had been ordered to take positions at key points in the city were recalled and the generals commanding the units in and around Khartoum announced that the army had ‘sided with the people’, and had formed a Transitional Military Council (TMC). Instead of demonstrating in front of the Palace, the crowds stormed Kober Prison and released the political detainees inside.

Three days later, the Minister of Defence, Lt. Gen. Abdel Rahman Suwar al Dahab, assumed the leadership of the TMC and said that a transitional civilian government would be formed under the TMC umbrella, to be followed by elections after a year. He kept his word. But the sequelae of the *intifada* were sadly similar to those following October 1964. Even the cast of characters was much the same: army officers who had held powerful positions in the last years of Nimeiri continued in post, Sadiq al Mahdi became prime minister again following the 1986 elections, and again disappointed.

The alliance had anticipated, perhaps naively, that Garang would immediately rush to embrace the new government and its promise of democracy. Garang's speech on SPLA Radio on 22 March called for 'building a new and democratic Sudan' and focused a personal attack on Nimeiri's record (Garang 1987, 25–36). But after the *intifada*, in a speech on 9 April, while saying that 'the SPLA/SPLM wholeheartedly supports the popular uprising', (39), Garang condemned the new regime as a 'gang of generals' who 'have stolen the victory of the masses. They will not hand over power to the people'. Demanding that the generals resign and hand over power to the people within a week, he said: 'There is no difference between this military junta and that of Nimeiri . . . No matter what clothes a hyena puts on, it is still a hyena' (42). In this speech, Garang insisted that the SPLA was the highest form of representation of the people and repeated many times, 'we will continue to fight', until the ideals of the SPLA had been achieved. The members of the alliance in Khartoum were desperately disappointed: Garang's rejection tipped the political scales against them, and his continuation of the war empowered the army.

The SPLA's opposition proved a self-fulfilling prophecy that highlighted the divergent priorities of radicals from the centre and the peripheries. While those in the centre prioritised civil and political freedoms, those in the peripheries considered liberal rights to be meaningless without measures to recognise equality in diversity.

The old sectarian political parties that had been marginal to the organisation of the protests were the major beneficiaries at the elections, held precisely on schedule 12 months later, in which they won a plurality. The subsequent years of parliamentary rule were disorganised, with confessional politics displacing any real agenda of peace and reform. A new factor was economic crisis. With unhelpful timing, the IMF suspended Sudan for non-payment of debts just one month before the April 1986 elections.

Learning from the disappointments of the 1960s, the groups that had spearheaded the protests were prepared to take to the streets again, to the extent that there was even talk of an *intifada* against an elected government. One instance was in response to the undeclared civil war in Darfur in 1987–1988, in which the government of Sadiq al Mahdi was complicit in so far as it had quietly allowed Libya to use Darfur as a rear base for supporting its proxy militia fighting in Chad. The National Council for the Salvation of Darfur, led by Khartoum-based professionals, was created in March 1988 and organised a 'silent demonstration' of 40,000 people that month, with a petition protesting the involvement of Chadian and Libyan forces in Darfur (Harir 1994, 170–171). It did not immediately resolve the crisis but it helped to press for a Darfur inter-tribal peace process, which came to a successful conclusion in June 1989.

More common was a divergence between political attention, including press coverage, parliamentary debates, strikes and demonstrations, which focused upon material issues of concern to urban dwellers, and neglect of issues of concern to remote rural populations. For example, in 1987 and 1989 there were protests against government plans to remove subsidies on wheat to urban residents, forcing the government to reverse its policy. The bread subsidy was not only massively expensive, comprising 7% of government spending at the time, but also a major obstacle to Sudan reaching agreement with the IMF, which was the requirement for unfreezing international loans and enabling Sudan to climb out of its financial black hole. In May 1987, a donor representative described the government's economic reform

package: ‘the current position may be 95 percent of the way but the crucial five per cent is missing’ (African Rights 1997, 102, 103). The ‘crucial five per cent’ was the removal of the wheat subsidy, on which the government backed down, and the IMF broke off negotiations.

By contrast there were no protests over famine in southern Sudan and among southern migrants fleeing the war zone to come north. Southern Sudanese MPs tried to raise the issue in parliament in 1988, but government response was a dismissive, ‘we are doing all we can’, and the issue gained no traction outside the small southern caucus. The Sudanese press, remarkably free and uncensored at the time, showed no interest in the issue. The SPLA was unhelpful: its military policies were a contributor to the famine, especially through its tactic of blocking relief to southern towns controlled by the government and shooting at civilian aircraft. The southern famine migrants did not become a political scandal in the way that the 1984 drought migrants had been, to the extent that when a train full of starving famine migrants arrived at Khartoum railway station in April 1988, and six children died at the station itself, the only paper to report on the incident was the *Sudan Times*, edited by the veteran southern politician Bona Malwal. The railway station is across the street from Khartoum’s central hospital and the University Faculty of Medicine, and doctors and nurses rushed across to the platforms to assist, but not even the Communist-run paper *al Meidan* carried the story (African Rights 1997, 98–101).

The only conclusion that can be drawn from this is that the Sudan Government considered the Northern urban populace to be first-class citizens, to whom it was answerable, whereas Southerners were second-class citizens or not legitimate citizens at all, to whom it was not in the least accountable. Many Northern urban people appeared to agree (African Rights 1997, 103).

The political economy of state power and resistance

The character of Sudanese political resistance reflects the country’s political economy. This has historically taken an accentuated dualistic form. Since the colonial era, Sudan has been characterised by extreme socio-economic inequality. While Khartoum and its environs resemble a middle-income country, the outlying regions, notably Darfur, eastern Sudan, the ‘two areas’ of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, and the recently-independent South Sudan, are some of the poorest places on the planet. Even the far north of Sudan adjacent to Egypt, the historic heartland of the Nile Valley civilisations and the homeland of much of the elite that governs Sudan, is poor. In the 1970s, investment and services were concentrated in Khartoum (Mahmoud 1984). When the government changed the currency in the early 1990s, it discovered that 90% of the banknotes in circulation were in greater Khartoum.³ After Sudan became an oil exporter in 1999, leading to an accelerated growth in public spending, about 90% of the investment in infrastructure was in Khartoum (World Bank 2007). Today, there are eight bridges across the Nile in Khartoum (and two more under construction), four elsewhere in northern Sudan and just one in South Sudan.

The inequality between centre and periphery is reflected in distinct forms of governance, which in turn have shaped modes of resistance. Most writing on Sudanese inequality focuses on the detrimental impacts of such extreme disparities, and indeed these have been a major contributor to Sudan’s recurrent crises. However,

there is another side to this coin, which is that the relatively high level of development within the centre has facilitated the emergence of a sophisticated political culture, reflected in strong traditions of a multi-party system, civil society, liberal higher education and social movements.

During the British imperial occupation (1898–1955), economic development was focused to the Nile Valley in northern Sudan, notably in the Gezira Scheme, the capital Khartoum and the railway town of Atbara. The Gezira created a class of tenants and an agricultural proletariat. In parallel, the two pillars of conservative political support to British rule – the ‘two Sayyids’, Abdel Rahman al Mahdi and Ali al Mirghani, heads of the Ansar and Khatmiyya sufi sects, respectively – were rewarded for their loyalty with vast irrigated landholdings along the Nile and in eastern Sudan (Niblock 1987). Outside the riverian provinces, there were just a few tiny enclaves of development. Khartoum and the Gezira attracted migrant labour, notably from western Sudan but also from as far away as Nigeria.

The central provinces and the main towns were administered by an emergent civil service with local councils, alongside a ‘native administration’ system which had the principal aims of maintaining the authority of the two Sayyids and providing a means of regulating the affairs of pastoral nomads.

The rest of Sudan was neglected. The southern provinces, Darfur and the Nuba Mountains were ‘closed districts’, governed by government-approved chiefs under the supervision of colonial officers: the native administration of tribal leadership system in full flower. Areas such as Darfur and Kordofan were maintained as labour reserves, and all were administered with maximum parsimony so that they imposed the minimum financial cost on the treasury in Khartoum (Daly 1991).

These patterns of economic development and governance continued after independence in 1956. Attempts to accelerate the economic development of the peripheries were haphazard and short-lived, and businessmen who accumulated capital in the provinces tended to re-invest it in the centre (Mahmoud 1984). Internal flight of capital was, unsurprisingly, followed by internal migration of people, and the central provinces and the major towns grew fast with labour migrants and displaced people arriving from the hinterlands. There were successive attempts to abolish the ‘native administration’ system of local government, but the reforms were not properly financed or implemented, leaving a de facto choice between ‘native administration and no administration’ (Morton 1996), and native administration was resurrected – at first informally, as local people simply chose village and district chiefs to run the administration, and later formally, as a form of local government on the cheap.

Patterns of political mobilisation followed similar lines. In Khartoum, the commercial or industrial cities of Wad Madani, Atbara and Port Sudan, and the Gezira scheme, ‘modern’ forms of organisation based upon trade unions, professional associations, tenants associations, and university students became established (Niblock 1987; Sikainga 2002). These were typically well-organised, literate and radical. On these foundations, the Sudan Communist Party became the most powerful such party in sub-Saharan Africa. These movements also maintained close links, both alliances and rivalries, with the sectarian parties and their leaders.

Alongside these class-based forms of mobilisation, the Ansar and Khatmiyya leaders founded two rival political parties, the Umma Party and the Unionist Party. These parties, rivals but sharing similar conservative political agendas, dominated

Sudanese political life during periods of parliamentary rule, 1953–1958, 1964–1969 and 1985–1989. The leaders of the sects had quasi-monarchical stature: a photograph from 1959, just after General Abboud took power, shows him greeting Sayyid Abdel Rahman al Mahdi. President Abboud is bowing like a supplicant holding the proffered hand of the Imam of the Ansar, who is standing straight, gazing imperiously over the General's head.

The sectarian parties were banned by Nimeiri in 1969, whose army then stormed the Ansar stronghold of Abba Island, killing thousands. The Khatmiyya leadership, traditionally non-militant and ready to acquiesce with the power of the day, did not resist, but Nimeiri set about trying to dismantle its power structure. Ostensibly a military dictator, Nimeiri found that he could rule only by repeatedly shuffling alliances, his rule marked by an astonishing trajectory from left to right, revolutionary secularist to militant Islamist. Nonetheless, as soon as Nimeiri was removed, the old patterns of loyalty immediately reasserted themselves (Al-Shahi 1986). Such was the electoral dominance of these parties that many of progressive political figures, who would otherwise have been drawn to secular political parties, preferred to remain within the established sectarian parties, influencing them from within.

In the peripheries of the north, the stranglehold of the sectarian parties was stronger still: the Unionists in the east and the Umma Party in the west. They were challenged by a succession of regional parties drawing upon constituencies that identified themselves as marginalised, and which mobilised on the basis of ethnicity and grievance, especially land alienation, and which flirted with armed rebellion. Part of the reason for turning to violence was that provincial parties could not command the financial resources needed to compete in elections, another part was that civil politics was accompanied by land alienation and labour market discrimination – non-violent but deeply exploitative mechanisms of ‘becoming Sudanese’ (Doornbos 1988).

Guma Kunda Komey (2012, 6) sums up the logic whereby provincial movements became ethnically particularist and armed:

Four common features characterize the various ethno-political movements in Sudan. First, they arose in the regions whose populations are largely of African origin in response to persistent exclusion and marginalization by the central state. Second, in pursuing their political endeavours, these regions form a loose political solidarity in some national issues of common interest, particularly in their demand for a federal system. Third, these movements pursue their demands to the central government on the basis of their ethno-territorial affiliations, with each region progressively becoming a spatial expression of belonging and attachment, a source of economic livelihood, and an icon for socio-cultural identification. Finally, in response to their persistent political marginality and socio-economic deprivation, these regional movements gradually shifted from peaceful and political to armed movements coupled with a change of loyalties from national to regional levels, with each region (land) being concretized as a political category with a specific character, image and status in the minds of its inhabitants.

The logic of ethnic particularism leads to self-determination and ultimately secession, as has been the case with the independence of South Sudan in July 2011. During Sudan's civilian interludes, the northern parties penetrated little into southern Sudan, and political parties identifying themselves as ‘African’ won elections. However, these southern ‘African’ parties were invariably fragmented,

and were further undermined by the fact that all elections between 1955 and 1986 were held during periods of war in the south, with voting impossible in most constituencies. The two provinces of Bahr al Ghazal and Upper Nile returned just sixteen MPs to the 1986 parliament, perhaps a quarter of their demographic due. Most of all, these parties functioned in the shadow of the armed movements, namely the secessionist Anyanya (1963–1972) and the SPLA (1983–2005) and its numerous splinters and rivals. Peaceful political mobilisation had little traction during the parliamentary periods of 1964–1969 and 1985–1989, each of them periods of war. During the peaceful decade that followed the Addis Ababa Agreement that ended the first civil war in 1972, southern political leaders were members of the single party, the Sudan Socialist Union, and southern politics was infamously schismatic and patronage based.

The logic of separatism, once it entered Sudanese political discourse and practice, has been impossible to reverse. It culminated in the southern vote for separation in January 2011 and the implementation of that decision six months later. The rebellions that followed in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile, and the still-unresolved conflict in Darfur, are also stoked in part by separatist sentiment, although their leaders avow otherwise.

The Sudanese army was, for the first three decades of independence, a repository of secular nationalism with a tradition of mounting coups d'état of all political shades. The country has the dubious distinction of having the largest number of coup attempts in Africa, with eight coup plots, nine failed and two successful coups between 1956 and 2001 (McGowan 2003). The Sudanese left had a deeply ambivalent attitude towards the military during this period, justifiably fearful of military rulers, but also worried that without a strong army the southern separatists would divide the country, and encouraged by the modernising and radical tendencies among some members of the officer corps. The Egyptian 'free officers' Gamal Abdel Nassir and Mohamed Naguib⁴ were heroes on the Sudanese left.

During the 1980s, accelerated after the Islamist coup of June 1989, Sudanese politics was refashioned. Instead of the alternation between military rulers, who changed their ideological colours in response to political circumstance, and dysfunctional parliamentary governments, Sudan became an Islamist experiment pitted against ethnic rebellions, which so eroded the country's institutions that politics became a marketplace of loyalties, auctioned to the highest bidder. In the early 1990s, this transformation took the form of a polarised confrontation between an Islamist government and army, headed by President Omar al Bashir and Hassan al Turabi, and a southern-led rebellion of the marginalised, led by Garang's SPLA. Each had its own totalising project, albeit more in rhetoric than reality. Having overthrown a weak elected government, the Islamist-military coalition systematically and violently dismantled the trade unions, political parties and civil society, at the same time, as economic adjustment eviscerated the economic base of the trade unions and professional associations. The Islamists had identified the most immediate threat to their rule as arising from urban constituencies, and were determined to cow them into submission or drive them out of the country. By and large, they succeeded.

Bashir was an oddly reticent military dictator, spending much of his political energies balancing the contending factions within the Islamist movement, the government and the army. He shifted his ideological colours too, but this particular

chameleon always stuck to shades of Islamist green. An outwardly weak leader, Bashir perfected the art of political balance within a fractious elite.

The SPLA, meanwhile, espoused a project of ‘New Sudan’. Initially aiming for a united socialist Sudan, after 1989 this became a united secular Sudan consisting of an alliance of the ‘African’ marginalised people of southern Sudan and other peripheries ganging up on the centre. By far the most powerful opposition force, the SPLA was able to bring under its wing the remnants of the northern opposition to Bashir in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), but these latter forces were always the junior partner. The SPLA fighters’ not-so-secret objective was the separation of southern Sudan, a project entirely at odds with the NDA goals of a secular revolution in Khartoum. The circle was squared by John Garang’s rhetoric of ‘New Sudan’ and his predilection for maintaining several parallel political tracks, each with its own ideological colour, at the same time. The credibility of a unified opposition project was sustained up to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in January 2005. It was fatally damaged when Garang died in a helicopter crash in July that year.

While the war appeared as an ideological encounter – a ‘war of visions’ – and its leaders tended to articulate it that way (Garang 1987; Deng 1995), in the field the war was increasingly conducted in a disorganised manner reflecting the nature of governance. Just as native administration had been local government on the cheap, successive governments used local militia to conduct counter-insurgency on the cheap, most notoriously in Darfur. The war destroyed or compromised all forms of local government, turning tribal chiefs into the intermediators for mercenarised tribalism. Overall, much of rural Sudan degenerated into a ‘political marketplace’ (de Waal 2009), in which the government sought to police its frontierlands by means of renting the loyalty of local strongmen. For the people unfortunate enough to live in these frontier zones, survival required them to draw upon the same kinds of skills that they had needed to negotiate the slaving frontiers of the nineteenth century. The experience of the war shows that the personal character of men in authority, and the management of local patronage systems, was more important than political affiliation and as important as ethnic identity. This is described in fascinating detail for the front-line areas of Blue Nile by Wendy James (2007, 99, 100):

[local people] focused particularly on the personally aggressive behaviour of the guerrillas, rather than on any big cause; they pointed to the kind actions of a few of the government soldiers, or even the SPLA fighters, even by name. As in the other civilian testimonies I have heard, they do not praise or blame distant leaders; they observe the massive power of the hakuma [government], the government’s breaking of a mission vehicle, the burning of houses (and later aerial bombing)—as well as the terrific sounding guns of the SPLA—as something over which they have no more control than over the powers of nature. You have to be pragmatic, to go with the demands of the situation inflicted on you at the time . . .

She continues to explain how individuals maintained links with people in authority on both sides:

A similar kind of tolerance towards persons seems to be extended to the political or military arena. I have rarely heard, at the local level, of individuals in the front-line zones being blamed for supporting one side or another. Certainly in this relatively early

stage of the war in the Blue Nile, individuals on whatever side were praised for personal decency or blamed for personal cruelty, but not for being caught up in one or another armed organization.

The communities living on the front line were pragmatic in their loyalties. When the SPLA attacked in 1989, 100 members of the government's 'Popular Defence Forces' 'just dispersed, and disappeared. They took the guns they had been using and went, took the path to the SPLA . . .' (106). Their instructor was arrested and interrogated but saved by good inter-personal relations with his counterparts on the other side. James comments, 'We can glimpse through these stories how elusive are the front lines of a civil war, especially when even the official lines move back and forth over a period of years, and personal ties, obligations, and debts, even debts of life, override the formal choreography of the oppositions of conflict'.

For community leaders who have learned not to trust anyone in authority, access to resources dispensed by government authorities has often been the key to determining political affiliation, at least on a time-limited basis. Those resources include money, jobs, weapons and protection, and sometimes the right to pillage one's neighbours. The clients' power derives from their ability to defect to the other side, or act independently by shooting up a police station, burning some trucks or shops, or chasing away landowners or administrators. The government can respond by burning a village, stealing livestock, raping women and killing men and boys, as its signal of seriousness over paying the minimum price for loyalty. Bargaining between patrons and clients over the price of loyalty has become the dominant feature of governance in the Sudanese peripheries. This modernised form of patrimonialism is barren soil for the emergence of social movements.

Urban Sudan changed too. The 'new Sudan' that emerged was neither the Islamists' vision of a moral society nor Garang's of a transformed polity, but rather a rapidly urbanising society, its economy dominated by the informal sector, dependent on oil-funded patronage systems and remittances from Sudanese expatriates working in the Arabian peninsula.

The end of Sudan's second north-south war with the signing of the CPA in January 2005 was heralded as the opportunity for peace and democratisation. The agreement established a Government of National Unity to govern for the first part of a six-year interim period, during which time elections would bring to power a truly legitimate democratic government, followed by a referendum in which southern Sudanese could vote for unity or secession. However, the underlying logic of the peace process, and the interim period, was patronage and rentierism. The economic basis for the negotiations leading to the CPA was the exploitation of Sudan's oil wealth, which lies chiefly in southern Sudan, and which allowed for a 13-fold increase in the national budget between 1999 and 2006 (World Bank 2007; de Waal 2010). The government and ruling National Congress Party (NCP) had changed into a patronage mechanism, motivated solely by staying in power. The SPLA feared the imbalance of power that would follow exclusive northern control of oil resources, and wanted a share. The money itself allowed for a massive increase in public sector employment and for putting not only the SPLA, but also all southern militias and numerous others, on the public sector payroll. This was the peace dividend: jobs, contracts and rapid primary accumulation. The vastly expanded patronage resources at the disposal of the NCP also hastened the decay of its conservative sectarian rivals.

The CPA demanded two different and equally ambitious tasks, namely the democratisation of the whole of Sudan and self-determination for southern Sudan. In the event, democratisation was made subservient to self-determination. Many of the problems that have arisen since the independence of South Sudan in July 2011 can be attributed to the incompatible demands of the CPA. Indeed, faithful implementation of the CPA was a practical impossibility for a state with the limited capacity and huge political challenges of Sudan in the years after 2005. Meanwhile, the contradictions between the different logics of resistance – national democratisation and separatism – were never fully addressed by Sudanese or the international community. Many Sudanese democrats nourished a dream that combined nostalgia for the civility of the small-town Khartoum of an earlier era, and ideals of liberal democracy and ethnic pluralism.

In particular, northern Sudanese spent much of the interim period in a state of denial about the imminence and the implications of southern separatism. This was true across the political spectrum. The secularist left in Sudan, including most civil society leaders, saw southerners as their natural allies against an Islamist establishment and was passionate about preserving national unity. In part they feared that, without South Sudan, northern Sudan would be condemned to Islamist hegemony. However many southerners, while sympathetic to the secularists, felt that they were being patronised and exploited, and asked why southerners should fight and die only for an alternative section of the northern elite, albeit a more liberal one, to inherit power. Only occasionally did Sudanese frankly recognise that secular democratisation and southern self-determination were profoundly at odds and begin openly to debate the implications.⁵

Dreams of a third *intifada*

The Sudanese, who are experienced in leading successful uprisings and civil disobedience movements against dictatorial rule (which they did in 1964 and again in 1985), are certainly able to do it for a third time to finally liberate themselves from the tyranny and totalitarianism of the [colonially] inherited state and its current and similar regimes. Then, perhaps, there would be a new opportunity for building a new Sudan out of the Sudanese collective order and its emerging good society. By that time, surely, the Sudanese ‘habits of the heart’ that ameliorated and moulded the Sudanese character and its deeper sense of civility (not the state or its regimes) would help them examine themselves, create new political communities, produce a new social contract and thus ultimately support and maintain conditions of democracy, freedom, equality and human dignity (Gallab 2011).

This is the dream. But so far there has been no third *intifada* in Sudan, despite an international environment far more conducive to democratisation and human rights. The underlying reasons for this lie in the changed political economy of the country, while immediate factors are to do with the repressive actions of the military-Islamist government and the weakness and indecision of the opposition.

Immediately after the coup of 30 June 1989, the new government immediately set about dismantling civil society with unprecedented ruthlessness. The trade unions, professional associations, civil society organisations and political parties were banned and many of their leaders imprisoned and others forced to flee abroad. The Sudanese who had led the 1985 *intifada* saw clearly that the Islamist government

saw them as a threat and was determined to stamp out the threat. Nonetheless, the dreams of a third *intifada* were nurtured almost as soon as the military took over.

The opposition umbrella National Democratic Alliance (NDA) was founded in Kober Prison by political detainees in the months following the 1989 coup. It consisted of political parties, trade unionists and professionals. An external wing was organised in 1990 in London. From the outset, the NDA leaders sought an alliance with the SPLA. While the SPLA continued its own armed struggle, principally in southern Sudan but also expanding to the 'Two Areas' of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, and seeking new fronts in eastern Sudan and Darfur, the NDA developed the idea of a 'protected *intifada*' – an uprising in which the civilian demonstrators would be assured of military intervention from rebel forces if the army did not capitulate. The idea was never properly explained, and it contains within it the inherent tension between the two different forms of opposition in Sudan.

In 1996 there was a series of street protests in Khartoum and other cities, largely non-violent, calling for democracy. The internal wing of the NDA was deeply involved in the organisation, and called on the external leaders, especially the NDA Chairman *Mawlana* Mohamed Osman al Mirghani, to return to Sudan. However, Mirghani was comfortable in Cairo and preferred to remain there, and the moment passed. Also, the SPLA excluded its NDA allies from the on-off peace negotiations with the government, and partly as a consequence the NDA parties in exile began their separate talks with Khartoum and the remnants of the trade unions and professional alliance became disillusioned. When change came, it came from within the regime, with a split between the group headed by Turabi and that led by Bashir. This coincided with the opening of Sudan's oil wells and the beginning of Sudan's brief but spectacular rise as an oil producer.

The advent of oil revenues compelled the SPLA to cut a deal with the north if it were to survive. It did so with the 'Machakos Protocol' of July 2002, named after the Kenyan town where the negotiations took place. This provided the blueprint for the CPA, signed in January 2005. Both documents contained within them the twin objectives of democracy and self-determination, with the Khartoum government conceding self-determination for southern Sudan because it was confident that Garang was a committed unionist, albeit one determined to create a 'New Sudan' in which the 'African' population of the marginalised regions would have a dominant role. However, democratisation took a back seat, especially after the death of Garang in a helicopter crash in July 2005, just three weeks after he was sworn in as First Vice President, and in the wake of the Darfur conflict and the arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court for President Bashir, which ruled out the possibility of Bashir stepping aside voluntarily.

It was against this background that the CPA's 'mid-term elections', delayed by almost two years, were held in April 2010. The elections were an opportunity for the civilian parties and their sympathisers in civil society, so long playing only minor roles, to reassert themselves. Their obvious choice was to ally with the SPLM, which was the natural leader of the secularists and whose 'New Sudan' rhetoric possessed wide appeal. Unfortunately, the opposition parties failed to take advantage of this opportunity, mainly because of internal dissension and disorganisation. The civilian parties had not expected the elections to take place on schedule and therefore, had not prepared for them. Most notably, they made no effort to encourage their supporters to register to vote. They were stuck in reactive mode, taking their cue

from foreign commentators rather than mobilising their own constituencies. The only exception was the breakaway Islamist party, the Popular Congress Party (PCP), headed by Turabi, but its support base had a significant overlap with the ruling NCP and it was unable to capitalise on the democratic opening. By contrast, the NCP registered its members en masse and made sure they turned out. By the time the opposition realised that the election would indeed be held in April 2010 it was too late for them to organise properly. At this point the NCP began to realise that it had overdone its electoral engineering and its win would be embarrassingly large. So the NCP wanted its rivals to compete, and even gave the Umma Party money to fund its campaign. But at the last moment the SPLM led the opposition parties in northern Sudan in an electoral boycott, giving the NCP almost a clean sweep in the north. As noted by one commentator (Abdalla 2010a):

Rigging, fraud and corruption, there were. Voters excluded from the poll, last-minute registration and a roundup of voters with hastily-issued residence certificates which may or may not have matched the names on the voters' roll, all will surely be documented by the observers. These had no material consequences for the outcome of last week's election in Sudan. The ugly result of the election was determined long ago by the material forces that have driven Sudanese political life . . .

Having condemned the opposition parties for incompetence, Abdalla concluded that 'the true ugliness of this election is not the clumsy fraud that the NCP cadres practiced here and there, but the sadder reality that manipulation and rigging were not needed'. The model for the 'ugly election' is competitive clientelism (Lust-Okar 2009), a paradigm developed to explain the puzzle of why competitive elections so often yield conservative outcomes in the Middle East and North Africa. Under such systems, the point of the election is for the voters to select a candidate who will be most in favour with the ruler, and consequently will be able to secure the most resources for his or her constituents. The voters are not choosing an advocate for their interests but an intermediary for securing patronage (commonly known as *wasta*). In the context of the NCP's dominant and well-funded patronage machine, it made eminent sense for constituents to compete in electing candidates who most resembled Sudan's famously ugly leader, confident that ugly MPs would be closest to the president.

In southern Sudan, the election was similarly an exercise in competitive clientelism, further accentuated by the fact that the SPLM and SPLA constituted army, party and government in a single bloc, albeit one riven by internal cleavages based on ethnicity and personal loyalties.

For the international election monitors, the election was framed as a hurdle to be cleared so that Sudan could approach the bigger challenge of the referendum in southern Sudan. For example, the European Union Election Observer Mission said, 'The April 2010 elections in Sudan marked a crucial step in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, which brought decades of civil war to an end'.⁶ The original idea that the elections would result in a broad-based government that was well-placed to organise an all-inclusive debate on the nature of the Sudanese state, such that the alternatives of unity and separation could fully be aired, and the CPA-based option of 'one country two systems' could be given a chance to demonstrate that it was working. Instead, two consolidated centres of patronage emerged, in competition with one

another. The lesson of the election was that resources determine the victor, who then takes the spoils.

The elections did spark some citizens' mobilisation. Dismayed with the NCP and the sectarian parties, some young Sudanese founded an organisation called Girifna, 'we are disgusted.'⁷ Describing itself as a 'non-violent resistance movement,' Girifna used its website and social media to promote a sixteen-point programme for democratic change focused on the resignation of the NCP government. From ad hoc beginnings at the time of the 2010 elections, Girifna became the leading exponent of change from below led by young people, many educated urbanites.

The January 2011 referendum in southern Sudan coincided precisely with the demonstrations in Tunisia and Egypt and the early weeks of the Arab Spring. While Sudan's northern neighbours were facing historic changes comparable to the Sudanese uprisings of 1964 and 1985, Sudan itself was undergoing an equally momentous change of a quite different kind. Some Sudanese democrats hoped that the combination of the government's loss of political capital following the loss of the south, and the examples of people's power in Tunisia and Egypt, would lead to the third Sudanese *intifada*. Some argued that the liberation of South Sudan from the malignant grip of Khartoum would be an example for and a prelude to the liberation of the rest of the country (Gallab 2011). Groups such as Girifna, organizing among the Sudanese youth and using mobile and Internet technology, seemed to hold out the promise of replicating the uprisings.

Their moment appeared to come in July 2012, when the government announced dramatic austerity measures, including a 40% cut in civil service employment and steep rises in the prices of basic commodities. These were occasioned by the secession of the South and the loss of oil revenues, which had constituted 45% of the national budget and about 80% of foreign exchange earnings. Although the government had anticipated the financial gap as early as 2010, and the central bank had made sound estimates for the economic consequences of continuing business as usual without making the necessary adjustments, the government delayed taking any action until there was a financial crisis including inflation and a rapid depreciation of the Sudanese pound. When the cuts were announced, a series of street protests followed, mainly organised by young people including the youth wings of opposition political parties. The government was concerned, more by the causes of the discontent than by its manifestation. And in due course the protests fizzled out.

Thus far, there has been no uprising. There are several possible reasons, all of them actively debated by Sudanese. One is that the 1964 and 1985 uprisings required planning and coordination, derived from the discipline of collective organisation, and in Sudan today, no such planning and organisation exists. A second possible reason is that the Sudanese Islamists, who were a minor factor in 1964 and sided with the demonstrators in 1985, are divided. Some Islamists remain with the NCP in government, and others are with the PCP in opposition. But all the Islamists recognise that, because of their long stretch in power, they cannot play the opposition card in the way that their brethren in north Africa were able to. Any revolutionary change is likely to disadvantage them. Consequently, although the Islamists share many of the same grievances as the secular opposition, they are unlikely to join street protests that might have unpredictable consequences. Linked to this, the Sudanese security forces are themselves more adept than their north African counterparts at dealing with civic protest. The Sudanese government was active in

supporting the revolutions in Egypt and Libya, and its security agencies have been effective in monitoring, deceiving and fragmenting the opposition.

The opposition was divided as to whether it was primarily an alliance of provincial insurrections against the centre, or a repeat of the 1964 and 1985 uprisings. Yasir Arman, Secretary General of the SPLM-North and the most eloquent spokesman of the northern opposition, presented it as both. He explains the ‘Northern question’⁸ as ‘a crisis emanating from the lack of an inclusive national project of nation-building’ (Arman 2012, 1). He describes in some detail the crimes of the current government and diagnoses the deep-rooted malaise in the Sudanese polity. He argues that the secession of South Sudan has not resolved the ‘Northern question.’ (2):

A new political and geographical South has emerged in the North: it is obvious that Sudan will not remain without a new geographical South after the old traditional South has gone. It is equally obvious that the old South was not a geography—it has a human dimension in the first place; it was the long struggle for recognition of diversity, democracy and social justice that continues in the new South of the Northern Sudan.

Arman’s diagnosis of the ‘Northern question’ is not only analytically incisive but strikes a chord among many people in Sudan, especially those in the new southern borderlands of Southern Kordofan and Blue Nile, and other peripheries. However, among many Sudanese, the term ‘the new South’, raises the spectre of continued war leading ultimately to another separation. This has left Arman’s potential constituents in Khartoum fearful and uncertain. Arman proceeds to identify ‘the way forward for change’ (2012, 5):

The SPLM-N and the Sudan Revolutionary Front,⁹ taking into consideration the rich experience of the struggle of the Sudanese people against the genocidal regime and the dictatorship of the National Congress, are adopting four means to change and overthrow the regime. The means are inter-related and inter-connected and they converge in the daily life and day-to-day struggle, and they have mutual impact on each other:

- (1) Popular uprising as it has been the case in October 1964 and in April 1985.
- (2) The popular armed struggle that has been waged by the Sudan Revolutionary Front.
- (3) Diplomatic pressures and solidarity with the Sudanese people from the continent and the international community.
- (4) The comprehensive peaceful settlement, which can only be achieved as a result of the continuous pressures on the regime, emanating from the popular uprising forces and the armed struggle and the diplomatic pressures and solidarity with the Sudanese people that will lead to the overthrow of the regime or its acceptance for a holistic, just, peaceful settlement.

The first problem with this is that the constituency that supports means number one, an *intifada*, is profoundly fearful of means number two, armed rebellion. They recall Garang’s speech on 9 April 1985 that dashed their hopes. A second difficulty is that reliance on means three, international pressure, deeply divides Sudanese. International ostracism has contributed to painful economic sanctions, isolation and regime paranoia. Some writers argue that external orientation has contributed to paralysis of the civic opposition:

One sarcastic Sudan-based non-governmental organization (NGO) worker has another explanation [for the lack of a third *intifada*]. Remarking on the fact that leading opposition figures have been busy courting international support against the regime, he quipped, 'The revolution has not yet erupted in Khartoum because the opposition is too busy mobilizing in Washington DC!' (El-Affendi 2012, 13)

A third problem is that the leaders of the armed insurgency do not coordinate with, let alone lead, the non-violent movement, but assume that they will be the beneficiaries of regime change. Consequently, as with many opposition movements with a divided constituency, unity is maintained by adopting an extreme position, with the components of the coalition rallying around what they oppose. This makes tactical alliances more difficult and strategic agency almost impossible. Thus, the SPLM-North has resolutely condemned the Islamists and the army, thereby alienating important groups that could be the key to the possibility of gaining power. The de facto strategy of Arman and his comrades may simply be to survive and wait for a more propitious moment. This may be the most workable approach, as the Government of Sudan has an astonishing propensity for making elementary and far-reaching misjudgements that could incite a popular uprising at any time. The civic opposition to the government is weak, but the government itself is very fragile, and survives only by luck and an effective strategy of divide and rule.

Conclusion

The Sudanese case is instructive in its singularity. During the heyday of military rulers in Africa and the Middle East, Sudan was a democratic anomaly; when the democracy wave was in full flow in sub-Saharan Africa, it was ebbing in Sudan, and when the Arab Spring was in bloom, Sudan was gripped by separatism.

Sudan's popular uprisings were internal affairs. As El-Affendi (2012, 10) writes of April 1985: 'in spite of Nimeiri's relative isolation, the protestors did not seek or benefit from foreign support. In fact Nimeiri was probably the first leader to be toppled while being entertained at the White House'. The Sudanese imitated no-one but themselves. Their means of communication were elementary: during the two successful uprisings, most landline telephones in Sudan did not work and mobile phones did not exist. What was useful was an inspiring model and effective organisational models drawn from the experience of running trade unions and professional associations, and the resulting tactical acumen and organisational leadership.

From a contemporary perspective, the clearest lesson from the Sudanese uprisings is their limited constituencies and transient gains. In both cases, democratic gains were undermined by a combination of conservative political parties that could readily win a plurality at the polls, and the militarised confrontation between the provincial opposition and the army and security forces. For democrats, the Sudanese case poses starkly the divergent logics of opposition in the centre and in the peripheries, marked most bitterly by Garang's rejection of the outcome of the 1985 *intifada*. In the years since that uprising, the Sudanese political economy has become less hospitable to civic resistance, with the decline of public institutions and public spiritedness and the rise of a dynamic and well-resourced patronage market-place. Nonetheless, the examples of those two remarkable, if singular, instances of

non-violent resistance to tyranny from civil society, provide a continuing inspiration to Sudanese democrats.

Notes

1. The Gezira scheme is the world's largest irrigation project, and produced most of the country's cotton, the major export at that time.
2. Garang was Commander in Chief of the SPLA and Chairman of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), its political wing, which became a political party in 2005.
3. Abdel Rahim Hamdi, former minister of finance, personal communication.
4. Naguib was born in Khartoum to an Egyptian father and Sudanese mother and moved to Egypt at the age of 15.
5. See the exchanges between Abd al-Wahab Abdalla and Khalid al-Nur on the blog 'Making Sense of Darfur', (Abdalla 2009, 2010b; Al-Nur 2010a, 2010b).
6. EU Election Observer Mission, The Republic of the Sudan, Executive and Legislative Elections-2010, 'Preliminary Statement: Sudanese elections show significant deficiencies against international standards but pave the way for future democratic progress', Khartoum, 17 April 2010.
7. www.girifna.com.
8. Arman is alluding to a long-running political debate in Sudan about the 'Southern question' that implicitly problematized southern Sudan. By contrast, Arman identifies the seat of the problem in the north.
9. An alliance of armed groups including several Darfur rebel factions.

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