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Chapter 1
Re-examining the "Sources of the Sudanese Revolution": Discussing the Social History of Sudan after the December 2018 Revolution

"Sources of the Sudanese revolution" is an expression used by Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Nugud (Secretary-General of the Sudanese Communist Party from 1971 to 2012) in the 1990s. What he meant by this was the need to explore the historical roots of revolution: that is, the legacy of the Sudanese people's struggle throughout history.[1] In the context of the present political situation in Sudan (the outbreak of the December Revolution in 2018, the fall of the Bashīr regime and the subsequent revolutionary developments, which are still under way), the question of the "roots of the Sudanese revolution" has obviously become very real and tangible, in the sense that we are witnessing new expressions of revolutionary energy by the Sudanese people on a daily basis. This chapter is an attempt to revisit the "sources of the Sudanese revolution" at this particular moment in time, based on this sense that we are witnessing a highly crucial stage in the struggle of the Sudanese people.

Prologue: Social History Versus Political History?

When we talk of "social history", we often imagine it to be in contrast with "political history". But is this dichotomy between "social history" and "political history" relevant? This is the first point that must be re-examined before we begin our discussion.

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1 This idea was expressed by Nugud in his writings in 1996. Needless to say, the concept of the "Sudanese Revolution" itself needs re-examination now, after the independence of South Sudan (2011), and we might talk instead about the sources of "Sudanese Revolutions". Evidently, the concept of the "Sudanese Revolution" was based on the vision of Sudanese Marxist thinkers in the 20th century, who, while admitting the existence of different sources of revolutionary inspiration, were still determined to achieve a single "Sudanese Revolution" in the future, which was to be the culmination of all the previous revolutionary experiences in Sudan. The same idea is revealed in the title of a well-known document issued by the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) in the 1960s, *al-Mārksiyya wa-Qaḍāyā al-Thawra al-Sūdāniyya* (Marxism and the Problems of the Sudanese Revolution). See *al-Ḥizb al-Shuyūʿī al-Sūdānī* (1967) 2008.

In fact, if we go back to E.P. Thompson's classical work on social history *The Making of the English Working Class* (Thompson [1963] 1991), we see that it was a study of the radical tradition of the English masses in the early 19th century. Again, if we examine the preeminent works by French social historians such as Georges Lefebvre ([1947] 1989) and Henri Lefebvre (1965), we note that they are in-depth studies on the French Revolution, as well as the Paris Commune, among other topics. When we go back to the starting point of social history, therefore, we find that the original intention was to examine the "historical roots of revolution". Social history started as a "social history of revolution", so to speak, and was therefore very radical and political from the beginning.[2]

Secondly, when we come to the case of Sudan (especially if we take into account the significance of what has been happening in Sudan since December 2018), we sense that the issue – that is, the need to read social history as a "study of revolution" – is even more actual and crucial, because what happened in Sudan in 2018–2019 was truly significant and impressive: ordinary people overthrew one of the most dictatorial and oppressive regimes in modern Africa and the Middle East.

We might examine its importance in comparison with the 1964 "October Revolution", or even with the Mahdist movement of the 19th century (1881–1898). The October Revolution has often been described as the "most important event in the political history of modern Sudan after the Mahdist movement."[3] If we compare the ongoing revolution (the December 2018 Revolution) with the October Revolution, however, we could argue that while the October Revolution was a ground-breaking event in Sudanese history, the current revolution is even more impressive because of its scale and the perseverance of the people, and because of the greater difficulty of the circumstances surrounding it. General ʿAbbūd's regime (1958–1964), dictatorial as it was, was not as oppressive and inhuman as that of ʿUmar al-Bashīr's National Islamic Front (NIF) regime. Also, in the 1960s, the international conjuncture surrounding revolutions and national liberation movements in the third world in general was more favourable, while the current Sudanese revolution has taken

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2 Needless to say, this is not to deny the other important aspects observed in the course of the development of "social history", such as its interest in unchanging (rather than changing) elements in society, and hence, the far-sightedness, so to speak, of its perspective, and its interest in family history, demography, gender, mentality and so on. It is noteworthy, however, that even in these cases, the attitude of social historians, who apparently avoid "politics" in a narrow sense, is based on an expression of a desire for an in-depth grasp of the meaning of the course of human history in the long-term, and is often based on a radical political consciousness.

3 See *al-Ḥizb al-Shuyūʿī al-Sūdānī* 2010: 30. This remark by the SCP is interesting in itself, as it reveals that the Mahdist movement, religiously motivated as it was, has been highly esteemed by the Sudanese Marxists as an anti-imperialist struggle.

place in a totally isolated, and even desperate, situation. This revolution might therefore be even more significant than the October Revolution, and it may be the "most important political event in Sudan" since the Mahdist movement.

There is also something very special and unique about it, in the sense that it is literally "the people's revolution", a revolution by ordinary people. It may be true that the key concepts of the revolution such as "political general strike" (*iḍrāb siyāsī*) had already been advocated by eminent revolutionary thinkers such as ʿAbd al-Khāliq Maḥjūb (1927–1971) and his colleagues in the Sudanese Communist Party, and again, the idea of "New Sudan" based on citizenship was presented by John Garang (1945–2005) and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM). What is remarkable, however, is that in the course of the current revolution, the heritage of all these "revolutionary predecessors" and their experiences, aspirations and ideas were suddenly revived, lived and shared by ordinary Sudanese people. Watching scenes from Sudan on television during the revolution (in which demonstrators raised their slogans proudly, were interviewed by foreign news reporters and explained their position calmly and convincingly), one had an impression that every participant had suddenly begun to talk and behave as if he or she were ʿAbd al-Khāliq Maḥjūb, John Garang, Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Nugud or Fāṭima Aḥmad Ibrāhīm (1930–2017, a prominent member of the SCP and the first female MP in Sudan). It is as if everyone suddenly reached the stage of revolutionary thinkers, and consequently what had been advocated by Maḥjūb and Garang became common sense for ordinary people. Such a phenomenon, rare as it might be, can sometimes take place, especially in the time of a great revolution, we might assume.

This reminds us, incidentally, of an expression used at the time of the Mahdist movement, that everyone who participated in this movement had the *"rutba* (status) of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī" in the eyes of God (Abū Salīm 1990: 338). ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī (1078?–1166) is a highly revered figure in Sufi circles, being generally regarded as the founder of the oldest Sufi *ṭarīqa* in the Muslim world, the Qādiriyya. In the context of the Sudanese Mahdist cosmology, al-Jīlānī functioned as an intermediary between Prophet Muḥammad and the Mahdī, always present at the spiritual meetings (*ḥaḍra*) the Mahdī had with the Prophet. Still, in the course of the Mahdist movement, there was a sense that "everyone was ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī".[4]

Something similar happened in Sudan in 2019, when everyone was ʿAbd al-Khāliq Maḥjūb, John Garang, or Fāṭima Aḥmad Ibrāhīm. What mattered now was the feel-

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4 On the significance attached to al-Jīlānī in the context of the Mahdist ideology, see also Abū Salīm 1990: 77–81. The Mahdist official uniform, the patched jacket, is also connected with al-Jīlānī's image, as we will discuss later.

ings and actions of ordinary women and men, and not of the traditional political leadership. In this sense, too, we might argue that the idea of social history, which explores the experiences and aspirations of ordinary people, has become something very actual and crucial.

I Glimpses of the "Sources of the Sudanese Revolution"

Having emphasised the importance of exploring the popular roots of revolution, I will now offer evidence from the historical experiences of the Sudanese people and their significance. Needless to say, what follows is not meant to be a comprehensive survey, just glimpses drawn from some potentially interesting examples.

1 *Ṭabaqāt Wad Ḍayfallāh* as Records of "Everyday Ways of Resistance" in Pre-Modern Sudan

As we know well, *Ṭabaqāt Wad Ḍayfallāh (Kitāb al-Ṭabaqāt fī Khuṣūṣ al-Awliyāʾ wa-l-Ṣāliḥīn wa-l-ʿUlamāʾ wa-l-Shuʿarāʾ fī al-Sūdān),* which was compiled by Muḥammad al-Nūr bin Ḍayfallāh around 1805, is the most essential reading for the study of pre-modern Sudanese society (Ḍayfallāh 1985). Containing biographies of the prominent Sufis (270 entries) who lived in the days of the Funj Sultanate (from the 16th to the early 19th century), the book is rich with information about the social and economic situation in pre-modern Sudan as well, and has been extensively used and analysed by historians, both Sudanese and non-Sudanese (Hasan [1967] 1973; McHugh 1994).[5]

When we examine this very famous text from the point of view of social history, we discover that it is about the "Sufi way of resistance", according to which, for example, Sufis made a "gesture" of disobedience towards the Funj ruling elites, or acted as an "intermediary" (*shafāʿa* or *ḥajz)* between the local people and the Funj authority, thereby protecting the rights of the people. We find that the decisive factor underlying this whole process was hunger (famine), as demonstrated by an anecdote according to which a certain distinguished Sufi turned the bark of a date tree into

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5 The importance of the *Ṭabaqāt* as an indispensable source of the nature of Sudanese society used to be understood by British colonial officials as well, as Harold MacMichael's work reveals (MacMichael [1922] 1967). The significance of Sudanese studies by colonial administrators will be discussed later.

silver in order to save the people.[6] Another Sufi, when asked by a visitor "which is the greatest name of Allah?", took him to the kitchen, where food was being prepared for the poor.[7]

Another important point is that women played a crucial role in pressuring Sufi sheikhs and forcing them to do something about social justice. There are interesting anecdotes in the *Ṭabaqāt* in which women protest against social injustice (lack of food, heavy taxation and the gap between the classes, especially in the time of famine), even by insulting and provoking the sheikhs, and succeed in pressuring them to show a gesture of "a Sufi way of resistance"[8] (see also the chapter of Amel Osman Hamed in this volume).

2 The Emergence of the Modern Sudanese State as a Colonial State and the Beginning of Popular Protests: the Mahdist Movement

The geopolitical entity known as "modern Sudan" was created in the 19th century as a result of its invasion and conquest by the Ottoman-Egyptian regime of Mehmet Ali and his successors (*Turkiyya* in Sudanese Arabic, 1820–1881). It is remarkable that as soon as this colonial state came into being, there was an outburst of popular protests against colonial oppression and exploitation, of which the Mahdist movement was the most important and successful. According to Muḥammad Saʿīd al-Gaddāl, a Sudanese historian who published several important works on the subject, the Mahdiyya was the first fully-fledged revolutionary movement in modern Sudan (al-Gaddāl 1985, 1986, 1993).

We cannot analyse all the aspects of the Mahdist movement, which are complicated and manifold, in this chapter, but it is impressive to observe how it revitalised the "Sufi way of resistance". The Mahdists adopted the "*jubba muraqqaʿa*" (patched jacket), which had been the symbol of asceticism, poverty and equality in traditional

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6 An anecdote concerning Shaykh Muḥammad b. ʿĪsā b. Ṣāliḥ al-Jaʿlī al-Bidayrī "Suwār al-Dhahab", no. 230 (Ḍayfallāh 1985: 348).

7 An anecdote about Shaykh Idrīs (great grandfather of Shaykh Muḍḍawī b. Barakāt b. Ḥamad b. Idrīs), no. 223 (Ḍayfallāh 1985: 361).

8 It is reported that, when a disciple of Shaykh Idrīs b. Arbāb, who was on an errand for his shaykh, tried to buy a sheep from a reluctant village woman, she refused, and when he insisted, she protested, saying: "Are the strong grabbing from the weak? Take it away from me, but I won't sell it to you." Apparently, this shocked the shaykh, who had intended to buy this sheep to feast his guests (Ḍayfallāh 1985: 58–59). Again, when it happened that on the inauguration day of Shaykh al-Gaddāl as the *khalīfa* of his order, tax collectors entered the village and began levying animals, a woman came to the shaykh, who was dressed for his inauguration ceremony, to protest, mocking him, which forced him to take an action to resist the tax collectors (Ḍayfallāh 1985: 81–82).

Sufism, as their uniform. As we have seen, the image of ʿAbd al-Qādir al-Jīlānī was revitalised and used as a source of inspiration.[9]

The Mahdist movement not only revitalised the image of the traditional "Sufi way of resistance", which goes back to the days of the Funj Sultanate, but also appealed to a more "Islamist" discourse, so to speak, connected to the waves of Islamic reformism that were prevalent in the 19th century Middle East, frequently invoking concepts such as Sharia (Islamic law) and *bidʿa* (heretical innovation). On closer examination, however, we find that these concepts also were reinterpreted and given specific implications or concrete content, reflecting the social problems caused by colonial oppression in 19th century Sudan. For example, in the context of the Sudanese Mahdist discourse, the most typical case of *bidʿa* practiced by the Turkiyya regime was the levying of *diqniyya* (a poll tax) in the Western provinces, which was much resented by the local population (Abū Salīm 1990: 180–181).[10] Again, even the concept of *hijra* (immigration) – the *hijra* to the Mahdī – which was of the utmost importance in the Mahdist movement, can be interpreted as an extension of a pattern of popular reactions towards colonial exploitation that were actually observed in Northern villages many years before the advent of the Mahdist movement: people were beginning to flee from their villages to avoid the heavy taxes imposed on *sawāqī* (waterwheels, sing. *sāqiya*) by the Turkiyya government.

For the purposes of making a comparison with the current revolution in Sudan, a more impressive aspect may perhaps be that the Mahdist leadership was very conscious from the outset of the importance of alliances (or coalitions) between different social and regional forces. Thus, for example, the Mahdi made a *hijra* to the Nuba Mountains in the earliest stage of his movement. He instigated Southerners such as the Dinka to drive the "Turks" away from their land, promising them

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9 For the significance of the patched jacket (*jubba muraqqaʿa*) in the context of the Mahdist ideology, see the description of a spiritual meeting (*ḥaḍra*) in which, curiously enough, al-Jīlānī himself expounds on the issue (Abū Salīm 1990: 80–81). It is interesting to note that, here, in the course of the *ḥaḍra*, one of the Mahdī's disciples (the Khalīfa ʿAbdullāhi) complains to al-Jīlānī that the *jubba muraqqaʿa* is now "denied and shied away from" by the people. For the original implications of the *jubba muraqqaʿa* and the changing attitudes of the people in pre-modern Sudan, see also Ḍayfallāh 1985: 176, 193, 218. It reveals that while the patched jacket was the symbol of asceticism and stood for poverty and aloofness from worldly affairs, it subsequently came to be associated with somewhat negative connotations, and was even disdained, especially by the wealthier Sufi "establishment" such as the Shādhiliyya shaykhs.

10 While the official position of the Turkiyya government was that the *diqniyya* (poll tax), which was mainly imposed on the nomadic populations in Western provinces such as Kordofan, was not jizya (a tax levied on non-Muslims, *dhimmi*, in accordance with Islamic law), the Mahdists considered it as such, and hence condemned it, arguing that the imposition of jizya on Muslims was *bidʿa*.

self-rule in the future.[11] The choice of four *khulafā'* ("caliphs", sing. *khalīfa*) is very impressive in itself. One of them, Khalīfa Muḥammad Sharīf, a cousin of the Mahdī, was from the North (*awlād al-balad),* but the rank of the first Khalīfa was given to Khalīfa 'Abdullāhi, a Baggara from Darfur province. Another was Khalīfa 'Alī wad Ḥilū, from the nomadic tribes in the Gezira. There was even an attempt to recruit a *khalīfa* from Libya in view of the future campaign to liberate Egypt from British occupation. The existence of a Darfur factor, and of conscious efforts to make an alliance between different "marginalised areas",[12] is remarkable.

The idea of alliances between peoples of different marginalised areas actually dates back to the 1860s, as demonstrated by the famous mutiny by *jihādiyya* (slave soldiers) in Kassala in 1864–1865. It is reported that the mutineers organised themselves into four different groups: "Dinka", "Nuba", "Fur" and "Muwalladīn" (that is, people from the marginalised areas brought up in the North) (Shuqayr [1903] 1981: 240–241).[13] This bears a striking similarity to the SPLM.[14]

It is significant that from the 19th century – that is, from the very outset of the emergence of modern Sudan as a colonial state – the alliances between different social and regional forces were regarded as a "cornerstone" of the revolution, and great importance was attached to them.

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11 For the initial Mahdist attitude towards the Dinka, see Shuqayr (1903) 1981: 411. This attitude seems to have been welcomed by the population of the South, and they actually rose up against the "Turks" (Shuqayr [1903] 1981: 414).

12 As we will see, it was in the course of the popular struggle against the dictatorial regime in the 1990s that the concept of "marginalised areas" (*al-manātiq al-muhammasha*) finally crystallised. It was as a result of intellectual efforts, first by the Sudanese communists in the 1970s and 1980s and then by the SPLM in the 1990s, that the question of unbalanced development (that is the gap between "the centre" and "marginalised areas") was understood to be one of the fundamental problems of the Sudanese state. In retrospect, however, we see that the question of the growing gap and the contrast between the centre (the North, and especially Khartoum as a stronghold of colonial administration) and the other less developed (or underdeveloped) areas (such as the Western provinces, which had been conquered more recently, and whose populations were socially more nomadic) in Sudan as a colonial state had been recognised from an earlier period, and people were conscious of the problem. The choice of *khulafā'* from different areas and social groups is in itself a reflection of this awareness.

13 For the mutiny by the *jihādiyya* soldiers in Kassala, see also Sikainga 2000.

14 On the nature of the SPLM and its composition (the existence of battalions based in different areas such as the South, the Nuba Mountains and Darfur), see Garang 1987. The significance of the idea of the "New Sudan" advocated by the SPLM in the 1990s will be discussed later.

3 The Significance of the 1924 Revolution (the White Flag League Movement)

As for the 1924 Revolution, a number of scholars, both Sudanese and non-Sudanese, have made considerable contributions (Bakhīt 1972; Abdin 1985; Kurita 1989, 1997; Vezzadini 2015). We will confine ourselves here to pointing out some of its most conspicuous aspects.

One of the most interesting of these is the insight shown by its leadership into the *regional* context surrounding the movement, and a sort of strategic thinking in the idea of a "joint struggle" by the people of neighbouring countries. Thus, the White Flag League (which played a central role in the 1924 Revolution) simultaneously advocated the causes of Sudanese nationalism and the "unity of the Nile Valley" (unity between Egypt and Sudan), in view of the fact that both Egypt and Sudan were under British occupation and were the victims of British imperialism.

This idea was eventually inherited and developed by the communist movement in the 1940s, when young communists in Egypt and Sudan worked in close cooperation, and the slogan of "*kifāḥ mushtarak*" (the joint struggle) of the Egyptian and Sudanese peoples was adopted by the Egyptian Movement of National Liberation (EMNL). The young Sudanese communists who were active in the EMNL subsequently founded its counterpart, the Sudanese Movement for National Liberation (SMNL), today's Sudanese Communist Party.[15] It is interesting to note in this context that the founding members of the SCP, such as ʿAbd al-Khāliq Maḥjūb, al-Tijānī al-Ṭayyib Bābikr and Khālida Zāhir, were the generation of sons and daughters of the 1924 revolutionaries. A sense of continuity with the 1924 Revolution can be observed among them, especially in the case of al-Tijānī al-Ṭayyib.[16]

Interestingly enough, however, sympathy between Egyptian and Sudanese revolutionaries and attempts at cooperation had existed even in the 1880s at the time of the Mahdist movement. It is reported that when Alexandria was bombarded by the British in the course of the ʿUrabist Revolution in Egypt, the people of Sawakin (which was also a port city) were deeply concerned. There was an attempt at solidarity with the ʿUrabists on the part of local population, led by ʿUthmān Digna, who was later to become a famous Mahdist commander. For their part, ʿUrabist intel-

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15 On the history of the SCP, see Kurita 2019. For the genesis of the concept of the "joint struggle (*kifāḥ mushtarak*) of the Egyptian and Sudanese peoples" advocated by the EMNL, see al-Saʿīd 1987: 737–738.

16 Al-Tijānī al-Ṭayyib Bābikr, a leading communist activist, was a son of al-Ṭayyib Bābikr, who had been a member of the White Flag League and was an active participant in the 1924 Revolution, becoming the leader of the League in Shendi. For al-Tijānī's esteem for the role of his father's generation in the national liberation struggle, see his defence before the military court held in 1982 during the Nimayrī period (Bābikr 1982: 26–27).

lectuals such as Yaʿqūb Ṣannūʿ, an Egyptian Jewish journalist better known as Abū Naẓẓāra, expressed support for ʿUthmān Digna when, in the course of the Mahdist movement, its military activities in Eastern Sudan intensified in 1883–1884.[17]

The 1924 Revolution is also important because it was the first one in which educated young "professionals" played a leading role. The so-called "effendis" (government officials and army officers), who played an essential role in the 1924 Revolution, were the precursors of the young professionals (lawyers, doctors, engineers and university professors) who have played a central role in subsequent Sudanese revolutions such as the October Revolution and the December 2018 Revolution.

4 Struggles after Independence

Sudan has also witnessed popular struggles and revolutions since independence. This is because the Sudanese state's colonial structures – an oppressive and undemocratic state apparatus coupled with unbalanced economic development – were inherited, and even reproduced after independence. In this sense, the Sudanese people's struggle for the democratisation of the Sudanese state can be regarded as an extension of their national liberation struggle.

When we examine these revolutions, we need to pay special attention to the role of the working masses (workers and peasants), such as the railway workers and the tenants of the Gezira cotton plantation. Ahmad Sikainga's work on Atbara is important in this context. Whereas researchers in the field of Middle Eastern Studies in the 1990s tended to concentrate on the so-called "Islamist" movements as the only meaningful and successful mass movements in this region, Sikainga stressed that even in Middle Eastern and Muslim countries like Sudan, secular and democratic social forces such as workers played important political and social roles (Sikainga 2002: 177–179).

The culmination of the popular struggle after independence was, of course the October Revolution in 1964. While the most comprehensive narrative of the October Revolution was produced by the Sudanese Communist Party, its name *Thawrat al-Shaʾb* ("The People's Revolution") points to the fact that the revolution was not the product of a specific political or social group, but rather the result of a continuous struggle by a variety of social forces that comprised nearly all the strata of Sudanese society: workers, peasants, professionals, students and women (al-Ḥizb al-Shuyūʿī

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17 For the interaction between Sawakin and Alexandria during the ʿUrabist revolution, see Jackson 1926: 23–24. For the positive attitude shown by Yaʿqūb Ṣannūʿ towards the Sudanese Mahdist movement, see, for example, Abū Naẓẓāra, 3 March 1883; and 27 October 1883.

al-Sūdānī 1964). Although the revolution itself took place in October 1964, it had actually started earlier, because it was the outcome of a struggle that had been constantly under way for many years since independence in 1956. Two decades after the October Revolution, the *intifāḍa* (popular uprising) of 1985 took place; again, this was the result of many years of struggle against the dictatorial Nimayrī regime (Niblock 1987; Fawzy-Rossano [1978] 1981; Berridge 2015).

II The Remarkable Features of the December 2018 Revolution

The most striking feature of the December 2018 Revolution is that the Bashīr regime, which was one of the most oppressive regimes in the Middle East, with its overwhelming state apparatus for violence and suppression, was overthrown by the ordinary people, by common citizens, notably young people and women. This was a highly impressive and positive phenomenon, but it might at the same time have been a result of the fact that the country's traditional political leadership had been weakened and then destroyed by the Bashīr regime throughout its 30-year dictatorial rule, and had virtually disappeared. It was because of this disappearance of traditional leadership that ordinary citizens were finally compelled to confront the state directly. This was, therefore, simultaneously a very remarkable and very desperate situation. Paradoxically, since the state had a monopoly of all the military and security resources, non-violence became the only weapon left to ordinary citizens. A parallel might be drawn here with Gandhi's pacifist strategy in the anti-colonial struggle of the Indian people; since the colonial state monopolised all means of violence and held too much power, and there was therefore no room for an armed struggle, non-violence became the only alternative for the ordinary people under colonial rule.

Both young people and women played conspicuous roles in the movement. As to why women were so active, and why they rose up and took part in politics, it was firstly because they had no choice, considering the dire economic situation and the hardships in daily life caused by the Bashīr regime's policies. As Fāṭima Aḥmad Ibrāhīm used to say, "politics enters the kitchen" whether you like it or not. Politics do not leave you alone.[18] Then there was the question of the so-called "Islamist" ideology and "Islamist" values advocated by the regime, which especially targeted women and violated their human rights. The Bashīr regime oppressed every citizen

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[18] An expression used in her speech at a political meeting in 1987 (during the democratic period after the 1985 *intifāḍa*) at Khartoum University, in an address to students. For the experiences of Fāṭima A. Ibrāhīm, both as a pioneer woman activist and as a leading member of the SCP, see Ibrāhīm n.d.

and violated the rights of every Sudanese, but, as half of the population, whose rights were especially violated in the name of "Islam", it was women who became most keenly conscious of the oppressive nature of the NIF regime.

Women are also important as the mothers and sisters of the *shuhadā'* ("martyrs") – the victims of the dictatorship who had been arrested, tortured and killed by the Bashīr regime. In the course of the revolution, the families of the *shuhadā'* (such as the victims of the violent suppression in September 2013) took an active part in demonstrations. It is interesting to observe certain similarities with Latin America, where in countries like Chile, for example, the families of the victims who were oppressed by the Pinochet regime have played an important role in the democratisation process. Women played their roles as the mothers and sisters of political victims, but in the course of the current revolution women themselves eventually became victims, as many were, as we know, killed, or beaten, tortured and sexually abused.[19]

Another important point that has been revealed in the course of the revolution is that the fate of the "marginalised areas" such as Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and the Blue Nile, and that of the popular struggle in the centre (Khartoum) are now inseparable. For 30 years, the Bashīr regime suppressed democratic movement in the centre and, at the same time, violently repressed the people of marginalised and underdeveloped areas such as the South, the Nuba Mountains and Darfur, waging war on these areas and carrying out genocide. It was as a result of this policy of the Bashīr regime that the fate of the marginalised areas and the democratic movement in the centre ultimately became inseparable, as the same forces that committed genocide in Darfur were now killing demonstrators on the streets of Khartoum.[20] Violence has therefore now reached Khartoum. Darfur and other battlefields of the so-called "civil wars" in the marginalised areas have now all been brought back into the centre, Khartoum. For this reason it was inevitable that in the course of the revolution, the call for democracy and the call for peace were one and the same. One of the most popular slogans during demonstrations was "*ḥurriyya,* **salām,** *ʿadl ijtimāʿī*" ("Freedom, **Peace**, Social Justice"). As the "Declaration of Freedom and Change" signed in January 2019 made it clear, the main purpose of the revolution was to stop all the "civil wars" in Sudan (Sudanese Professionals Association 2019). This shows that experiences of war and genocide are important sources of revolution, but perhaps this is nothing new.

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19 In the course of the bloody suppression on 3 June 2019, women were especially exposed to excessive violence. See Association of Sudanese Lawyers & Legal Practitioners in the UK 2019.

20 In addition to the atrocities committed against the protesters by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF, ex-*janjawīd*) in June 2019 (Rābiṭat al-Muḥāmīn wa-l-Qanūniyyīn al-Sūdāniyyīn fī Barīṭānyā 2019), it was reported that the *janjawīd* were actively involved in the bloody suppression of popular demonstrations on the streets of Khartoum in September 2013.

Since it has now been more than 100 years after the Mahdist movement, it is difficult to imagine the feelings of the people who took part in it, but if we look closely, it strikes us that the situation was just the same. The history of the Turkiyya in the 19th century was one of colonial conquests: the North was conquered in 1820–1821, the Nuba Mountains (South Kordofan) and the South were invaded and finally, in the 1870s, Darfur was first conquered by al-Zubayr Pasha and eventually officially incorporated into the territories of the Turkiyya. The Mahdist movement started at precisely this point. Let us ask ourselves and try to understand what the experiences of the Sudanese people were throughout all these eventful years of colonial conquests in different parts of the country. What were the experiences of Khalīfa ʿAbdullāhi? Why did the peoples of the Western provinces participate in the Mahdist movement and migrate all the way to Khartoum to take part in the siege of the city?

In the case of the 1924 Revolution as well, we must pay more attention to the meaning of the series of military campaigns in Sudan during the early days of the Condominium. This was by no means a peaceful period. Military campaigns against local protests were going on continuously in areas such as the Nuba Mountains (for example, the uprising led by Feki ʿAlī) and the South, and Darfur was re-conquered in 1916 as a result of a military operation against its last sultan, ʿAlī Dīnār, which can also be seen as part of the First World War.[21] So we might pose such questions as: what did ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Laṭīf, the leader of the White Flag League in the 1924 revolution, witness in the Nuba Mountains, Darfur and other areas when he was serving there as an army officer? What were his feelings as both a Sudanese and a member of the colonial army at the same time?

III Images of "Sudanese Society" Contested

In the conference that formed the basis of this book, we addressed the topic of "Sudanese society" (*al-mujtamaʿ al-sūdānī*), and in this chapter I have chosen to discuss the "Sudanese revolution". Needless to say, however, we are faced with a fundamental question: is there such thing as Sudanese society? And this gives rise to another question: is there such a thing as a "Sudanese revolution"?

We must start from the basic fact that modern "Sudan" was created, as we have seen, as a result of colonial invasion and conquest. Sudan came into being as a colonial state, and is therefore by definition artificial, lacking in unity and both politically and economically unbalanced. At the same time, however, although Sudan

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21 On the series of military actions carried out against the peoples of the "marginalised areas" in the early Condominium period, see Daly 1986. In the case of the South, especially, see Johnson 1994.

came into being as a colonial state, there have been continuous efforts and struggles to build a democratic "Sudanese nation (*umma sūdāniyya*) or "Sudanese society", which is not – and cannot be – homogeneous, but is based on the concept of citizenship (that is, it is open to everyone, irrespective of race, religion and gender), democracy and justice.

The concept of the "Sudanese nation" as advocated during the 1924 Revolution might be regarded as an example of such an effort. While the British colonial administration was already beginning to introduce a divide and rule policy based on the dichotomy between "Arabs" and "blacks", and trying to deny the existence of a Sudanese nation, the participants in the 1924 Revolution sought to overcome this dichotomy, regarding themselves only as "Sudanese".[22] The leader of the White Flag League, ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Laṭīf, whose mother was a Dinka, was in a sense the embodiment of this sort of Sudanese nationalism.[23] It is interesting to note in this context that the famous book by Ḥasan Najīla, *Malāmiḥ min al-Mujtamaʿ al-Sūdānī* (Glimpses of Sudanese Society), is in effect essentially dedicated to the memory of the 1924 revolution and a homage to the martyrs to the ideal of a democratic Sudanese nation.[24] The vision of the "New Sudan" (*al-Sūdān al-jadīd*) advocated by the SPLM and later adopted by other democratic forces in Sudan can be regarded as another example of this effort.[25]

If we become aware of the existence of the ideological struggles over "what is Sudan" and "what is the nature of Sudanese society", we discover that even academic knowledge about Sudanese society (or societies in Sudan) inevitably has its own political implications and has played a role in the colonial context. Anthropology in particular has been in a rather sensitive position, because while anthropologists conventionally tended to focus on the study of traditional societies and traditional social institutions such as "tribes", their studies sometimes served as a tool of the "indirect rule" and "native administration" policies introduced by colonialism.[26]

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22 When the participants in the revolution were asked about their *jins* (race) during their interrogation in prison, they initially tried to reply that they were only "Sudanese". See al-Sayyid 1970: 59.
23 On the concept of "Sudanese nation" as expressed in the course of the 1924 revolution, the nature of the White Flag League and the social background of its leader, ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Laṭīf, see Kurita 1989, 1997.
24 See Najīla (1959) 1972. Muḥammad ʿAbd al-Raḥīm (ʿAbd al-Rahīm 1952) is another instance of a historian who expressed an interest in writing the social history of Sudan.
25 It is noteworthy that the concept of the "New Sudan" initially advocated by the SPLM was later also adopted during the struggle against the Bashīr regime by political forces in the North, and became the official policy of the National Democratic Alliance. See Garang 1987; National Democratic Alliance 1995.
26 On the subject of the subtle relations between anthropologists and colonial administrations, the case of Edward E. Evans-Prichard has been analysed in some detail by Douglas Johnson (especially in

After independence, however, some Sudanese anthropologists became aware of the danger of this colonial aspect of their own discipline, and produced works – especially in the 1970s – that analysed "tribal" societies in depth, radically deconstructing the very concept of the tribe (see Ahmad 1974).[27]

The colonial and reactionary tendency to invoke "traditional" social institutions such as "tribes", arguing that they are the essence of "traditional Sudanese society", still persists today. If we look for an example from among the most recent political developments since the outbreak of the present revolution, we might even find one in the 2019 Constitutional Document. Its Article 23:5 stresses the importance of representing the interests of "*mukawwināt al-mujtamaʿ al-sūdānī*" (components of Sudanese society) such as "*al-ṭuruq al-ṣūfiyya wa-l-idārāt al-ahliyya*" (Sufi orders and native administrations [tribes]) in Sudanese politics.[28]

IV A Social History of Counter-Revolution

At the beginning of this chapter, I pointed out that social history began as a "social history of revolution" and stressed its innately political nature, but here I should also stress another point: the necessity for a social history of "counter-revolution", namely historical studies on the social roots and backgrounds of counter-revolutions. E.P. Thompson's *The Making of the English Working Class* is a masterpiece of the social history of revolution, but it also deals with the question of "counter-revolution". Examining the nature of Methodism, Thompson revealed how the advent of this religious sect, which became active in early 19th century England, can be regarded as a sort of counter-revolution against democratic movements like Chartism.

If we wish to explore the possibilities of a "social history of counter-revolution" in the case of Sudan, following Thompson's approach, it might be meaningful to analyse the National Islamic Front, for example, or the question of *ṭāʾifiyya* (sectarianism) from this point of view.[29]

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terms of Evans-Prichard's attitude towards C.A. Willis, a British colonial official). The career of H.A. MacMichael, who was a colonial official and an "expert" on Arab tribes in Sudan (see MacMichael [1922] 1967), is another interesting case.

27 For a more recent attempt to analyse the nature of "tribe" and its political and social function in Sudan from a Marxist viewpoint, see Khiḍr 2016.

28 See "al-Wathīqa al-Dustūriyya li-l-Fatra al-Intiqāliyya li-Sanat 2019" 2019: 15–16.

29 On the history of the Muslim Brothers in Sudan and the ideas of Dr. Ḥasan al-Turābī, see Aḥmad 1982; El-Affendi 1991. While these works tend to concentrate on conveying the thoughts and ideas advocated by Islamists and the history of the Islamist organisations as explained by

If we want to go deeper, perhaps we need to examine the "roots of counter-revolution" that exist in the very heart of a revolution (or somewhere very close), because if one really wants to destroy a revolution, it must be done not from the outside, but from within, from its very base, from where the social and economic crisis exists in its most condensed form. In the case of Sudan, we see that the condition of the "marginalised areas" and the social forces connected with these areas can be crucial factors, both in a positive and negative sense. For example, is it not possible to study a person like "Ḥemēdtī" (Muḥammad Ḥamdān Dagolō) – the *janjawīd* leader, who now leads the Rapid Support Forces and is a member of the military council – from the perspective of social history? A study of Ḥemēdtī, who is of Baggara origin in the West, a Rizaygat, and has quite unexpectedly come to play a decisive role in central politics in Sudan, might prove quite interesting, and may shed new light on the question of who Khalīfa ʿAbdullāhi was.

Again, we might examine the importance and (possible) danger of the armed movements in marginalised areas. Although the resistance by the people of these areas is quite justified and they have been playing a positive role in the revolutionary process, there are also risks, since history teaches us that these movements often develop their own logic as armed groups, are easily manipulated by regional or global actors and sometimes show separatist tendencies, eventually destroying the unity of Sudan. This is in contrast with the importance of *unarmed* movements by the people of marginalised areas, who in spite of oppression by the central government, have chosen not to take up arms, but to struggle in nonviolent ways, in alliance with democratic forces in the centre.

Finally, if we want to consider a "social history of counter-revolution", we must examine regional and global contexts as well. I will give some examples. If we are to examine the nature of NIF as a case study of "counter-revolution", we must try to locate our analysis within the regional context as well. This is because, as we know well, the emergence of this sort of "Islamist" force is not an isolated phenomenon in Sudan, but was part of similar developments observed in the Middle East in the 1960s and 1970s. We must therefore pay attention to the dynamics of revolution and counter-revolution in the Middle East as a whole.

Another example is the question of the colonial roots of the Arab *janjawīd*, which is a different topic, but one that might be of interest. Even when we are dealing with an apparently local phenomenon like the *janjawīd*, we are sometimes surprised to find out that this form of mobilisation of tribal militia was initially tried out by the British as well, and thus has a colonial background. In the course of the Nyala upris-

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them, we might need to make more effort to locate these discourses in the context of the current Sudanese political map.

ing in 1921 (led by the Feki Suhaynī), the British colonial authorities mobilised "Arab friendlies" under the command of the Taaisha and the Beigo tribal leaders, supplying them with "tea and sugar" to keep them awake during the anticipated attacks. Of course, this is not directly connected with the current *janjawīd*, but it reminds us that the *janjawīd* is not something new that was invented by an uncivilised African dictatorship like the Bashīr regime, but that the same method was tried by the colonial administration as well.[30]

We might also pay attention to the phenomenon of "administrative pilgrimages" (an expression initially used by Benedict Anderson) of colonial officials and hence that of the transmission of counter-revolutionary measures in the empire. Reading *The Ethnic Cleansing of Palestine* by Ilan Pappé, an Israeli historian, we are surprised by the rather unexpected information that the Haganah (the main pre-state Zionist militia, which played a major role in what Pappé described as the "ethnic cleansing" of Palestine in 1948) was initially organised and trained by a British officer called Wingate. This was not Reginald Wingate himself, but a son of his cousin, Orde Charles Wingate, who had also served in Sudan before going to Palestine, and had been engaged in military operations there (Pappé 2006: chapter 2). Similarly, if we examine the history of the first large-scale popular uprising in Palestine (1936–1939) and its suppression, we come across British officers who had been in Sudan in 1924, such as Hubert Huddleston.[31] So it turns out that the 1924 revolution in Sudan and the popular uprising in Palestine were suppressed at the hands of the same people.

Furthermore, if we take into account this phenomenon of "pilgrimage" of colonial officials within the empire and the transmission of counter-revolutionary measures and ideas, there is a possibility that the dichotomy between the "Arab" and "non-Arab", which was an attempt at racial classification for colonial purposes, was transplanted from Sudan to Palestine. As we have seen, in the case of Sudan, the dichotomy between "Arabs" and "blacks" was initially stressed by the British colonial administration in order to destroy the 1924 revolution, and as Sikainga has shown in his book *Slaves into Workers*, later developed into a more sophisticated racial policy for managing the labour market in a colonial state.[32] In the case of Palestine, although the initial nature of the problem was not "Arabs versus Jews" (because the

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30 On the Nyala uprising and the use of "Arab friendlies" (tribal militia) by the colonial administration, see: "Niyala Uprising, 1921", Darfur1/19A/102, National Records Office, Khartoum, Sudan.

31 Huddleston, who was responsible for the suppression of the mutiny of the Sudanese battalions in 1924, later served in Palestine during the popular uprising of 1936–1939. H.A. MacMichael himself, who held the office of High Commissioner of Palestine from 1938 until 1944, had been in Sudan and accumulated his expertise on the "Arabs", as we have seen.

32 On the implication of "racial" classifications introduced in Condominium Sudan as a method of managing the labor market, see Sikainga 1996.

indigenous Palestinians included Arab Muslims, Arab Christians and Arab Jews), but a conflict between the local inhabitants and the Zionist settlers, it increasingly came to be portrayed in the course of the British mandate as an "Arab-Jewish conflict", thereby racialising the concept of "Arab" in the process. If we examine the careers of British colonial officers in Palestine, we discover that in the context of the British Empire, colonial experiences in Sudan and Palestine were more interlinked than we might imagine, with transmissions and interactions between the two regions.

Conclusion

At the beginning of this chapter, we posed the question of the relevance of a "social history of Sudan". We might safely conclude it by arguing that the perspective of social history is important, and almost indispensable, for the study of the history of Sudan, especially for examining the question of the "sources of the Sudanese revolution", the historical backgrounds of popular movements in the country. We have seen how by introducing the perspective of social history, the classic literature on Sudanese history, such as *Ṭabaqāt Wad Ḍayfallāh* and the Mahdist proclamations, can be read and interpreted in a new light. These texts tell us about the roots of popular resistance in Sudan, about how ordinary people, including women, struggled in search of social justice, and had recourse to various ways of resistance.

If we look at the history of popular movements in Sudan since the Mahdist movement in the 19th century, we discover that although "Sudanese society" did not exist *a priori*, since modern Sudan itself was a colonial and artificial state, there have always been struggles by ordinary people who have tried to unite in the face of oppression, achieve social justice and build a democratic society in which everyone can live together, including the populations of "marginalised areas", despite differences in race, religion and gender. We might argue that if "Sudanese society" exists, it does so in the midst of these struggles by the people.

It is important to note at the same time that popular movements in Sudan have not taken place in isolation, but always in complicated regional and international contexts, inspired by developments in the outside world, and learning lessons through this process. Building regional solidarity has been an important issue in revolutions in Sudan, as the strategy of "joint struggle" with the Egyptian people, advocated by the 1924 revolution and later developed by young communists in the 1940s, reveals. Regional and international factors are also important when we examine the nature and dynamics of "counter-revolutions" in Sudan, the study of which would be another interesting topic of a social history of Sudan.

Since December 2018, Sudan has been in the midst of revolution, and we are daily witnessing dramatic political developments and an almost unprecedented outburst of revolutionary energy on the part of the Sudanese people. Our knowledge of the historical roots of popular movements in Sudan acquired through the perspective of social history helps us gain an insight into the nature of this revolution, and enables an in-depth understanding of the significance of resistance by different forces such as women and marginalised areas. An examination of the social history of Sudan has tremendous potential. It teaches us about the heritage of the popular struggles that have unfolded throughout the history of this country, and about the richness, depth and complexity of these struggles. It teaches us, too, about the challenges being faced, and about the contexts in which these struggles have been taking place.

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