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Chapter 19
Liberation from Fear: Regional Mobilisation in Sudan after the 1964 Revolution

Introduction

Following the 1964 Revolution in Sudan, which reintroduced democracy into the country after six years of military rule, several regional movements from Northern Sudan gained representation in parliament. This chapter uses these regional movements as a lens through which to understand the late colonial and post-colonial transformation of subjects into citizens.

In her book *Seeing like a Citizen*, Kara Moskowitz (2019) argues against Frederick Cooper's concept (2002: 97) of a gatekeeper state that substantially controls financial streams in and out of the post-colonial state, and thus the developmental agenda. Instead, Moskowitz suggested that citizens played a central role in shaping these agendas through various forms of cooperation, petitioning and resistance. This was not a linear process, however; it was shaped by a multitude of local bureaucrats and technical officials and their abilities or lack thereof. As a result, "the rural sense of state unreliability" (Moskowitz 2019: 6) became a key feature. Moskowitz describes the encounter between the state and rural citizens in Kenya at a type of local meeting called a *baraza*, at which citizens could register complaints, even though they remained "unsure of the exact process for resolution" (Moskowitz 2019: 7).

While Moskowitz's critique of the understanding of post-colonial states as "monolithic states, with symmetric, ordered aesthetic visions, [which] enacted massive social engineering plans", mostly without feedback from the bottom up (Moskowitz 2019: 9), is well noted, it is important to point out that the form of interaction between rural citizens and the state in this example did not vary very much from the colonial to the post-colonial period, in that it remained centred around a variety of forms of cooperation, petitioning and resistance. While it is true that the post-colonial state might have been more receptive to the wishes of local "citizens," or at least pretended to be, given the undemocratic nature of the post-colonial Kenyan state, post-colonial state–citizen relations were noteworthy for their continuity.

Indeed, Cherry Leonardi and Chris Vaughan (2016) have shown that in the case of Sudan, (certain) colonial subjects did not simply put up with colonial oppression; they challenged decisions taken by the local authorities and local British administrators through petitions and complaints. These people are often referred to in

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colonial records as *al-maẓlūmīn* – the oppressed – but the term "did not connote the passive status of subjection to oppression so much as the active contestation of this oppression" (85). Leonardi and Vaughan thus distinguish the *maẓlūmīn* from *nās* (people), in that the latter reflected Mamdani's notion of subjecthood "in the full sense" (85). As the Condominium government shifted towards a more developmental discourse from the late 1930s, complaints and petitions were increasingly framed in a language of rights, and appealed to a notion of colonial or state law.

The Sudanese example, however, is an outlier in the early African post-colonial experience, thanks to the country's recurring periods of democracy (1956–1958, 1964–1969 and 1985–1989). While decolonisation in Kenya turned subjects into citizens from a formal perspective, Sudan's second democratic period between 1964 and 1969 created the potential for a more substantive meaning of citizenship. In a democratically-organised state, citizens are theoretically not obliged to engage with the state as a separate entity through cooperation, petitioning and resistance; rather, because they form a legal category, they can engage with the state as co-sovereigns, in line with Gianfranco Poggi's notion (2003: 42) of "citizens as sovereigns." This does not mean, however, that all citizens (as individuals) are actually able to fill this role. Indeed, Justin Willis (2007) has suggested that during the elections in the 1950s, "the local meaning of the election may have been as a way of choosing intermediaries with government, rather than selecting the government itself" (497). The transformation of subjects into citizens was therefore not automatic. This chapter explores the role played by three movements – the General Union of the Nuba Mountains (GUN), the Darfur Development Front (DDF) and the Beja Congress – in driving this transformation forward.

The principal thrust of this chapter is that these three regional organisations should not be viewed exclusively, or even predominantly, as political parties, but as movements created to carry the decolonisation process into the regions. By gaining an understanding of them as a part of an emancipatory project, it becomes possible to foreground a gradual process of change in political engagement in Sudan's peripheries. In concrete terms, the chapter argues that the three regional movements increased the ability of individual citizens to exercise their legal rights as citizens in a democratic and independent state in different ways. The term "democratic" is used in a technical rather than a holistic sense, referring to a state with overall free and fair elections that build the foundations of a more meaningful category of citizenship rather than one with a fully-formed civil society and public sphere; in the latter case, the transformation driven by the three regional movements would have needed to have been completed, and not have just begun.

In order to make this argument, some historical background will first be provided for readers who are not fully familiar with Sudan in the 1960s. This will

be followed by an account of the historical emergence of the three movements and a discussion of the aims and logics behind it. Owing to the relative lack of written source material and secondary sources, in the case of the GUN and the DDF, the chapter is mostly based on interviews with early members of the movements. ʿAbd al-Fātiḥ Tiya Kāfī, Phillip Kalo Ramaḍān Kardela, and Yūsif Jibrīl were all founding members of the GUN, with Phillip Kalo being elected to parliament in 1965. Nūr Tāwir Kāfī Abū Raʾs has been a women's and Nuba rights activist for her whole life. In 1962, when she was at high school, she co-founded the Nuba Women Association. She was the first woman from the Nuba Mountains to study at the University of Khartoum, where she enrolled in 1965. All the interviews were conducted in Kadugli at the home of Yūsif Jibrīl, who also acted as a facilitator. ʿAlī al-Ḥājj and Aḥmād Dirāj were both founding members of the DDF, and Dirāj was elected to parliament as an independent in 1965. Both were living in exile when they were interviewed, Dirāj in London and al-Ḥājj in Bonn. In the case of the Beja Congress, the research is primarily based on three (semi-autobiographical) accounts by members of the Beja intelligentsia. Muḥammad Adrūb Ūhāj, a professor of Arabic, who is also one of the foremost writers on Beja language, poetry and literature, graduated from the University of Khartoum in 1966 (Ūhāj 2006). Aḥmad ʿUthmān Tūlanāb Ūdīn, a Beja activist who participated in the Beja Club conferences in the 1950s, was born in Sinkat in 1937 and had a career in football as a player for al-Hilāl and later as a club manager (Tūlanāb 2007). Abū Fāṭima Aḥmad Onūr Maḥmūd, who is considerably younger, was born in Kassala in 1966. He has worked as a teacher and for various civil society organisations and has written about Beja issues (Maḥmūd 2009).

Historical Background

In terms of the historical background, three observations will help contextualise the regional movements of the 1960s. This section will first briefly discuss the unique nature of colonisation in Sudan, and will then move on to the resulting conditions of independence and the 1964 Revolution. Because Southern regional politics formed an important framework for the regional movements in Northern Sudan, this section will also briefly mention the Southern context for each of the three topics in the historical background.

After the Ottoman-Egyptian occupation of Sudan had been ended by a millenarian uprising under the leadership of the Mahdī in 1885, the British decided to lead a campaign against the Mahdist movement, which they viewed as a source of instability. Lord Kitchener re-established control over Sudan in the name of

Egypt, creating the so-called Condominium in 1899 under the sovereignty of two colonial powers, Britain and Egypt. The unique construction of the Condominium meant that Sudan was *de jure* governed by a semi-independent governor-general. The administrative personnel who worked in Sudan were not part of the colonial service, but a "*sui generis*" Sudan Political Service (Kirk-Greene 2000: 164). In 1922, the British established an administration along the lines of indirect rule, which was known in Sudan as the "native administration" (Abdul-Jalil, Mohammed, and Yusuf 2007; Bakheit 1965: 131–183). Most Sudanese therefore experienced the colonial state in a decentralised form; it was with good reason that Mamdani described the structure of indirect rule as "decentralized despotism" (1996: 62–108). Besides the native administration, the colonial state was characterised by the all-powerful district commissioners: "the Sudan government was popularly known to Northern Sudanese as 'the government of Inspectors' (hukumat al-mufettishin)" (Hamad 1995: 244). Only in the late colonial period was the native administration replaced by a notion of local government, which was increasingly integrated into the colonial state as a whole rather than being principally linked to the district commissioners as a decentralised interface and a replacement for the central state (Leonardi and Vaughan 2016: 87–89). In addition, administration in the Condominium was characterised by what might be described as extensive compartmentalisation. While a certain level of disaggregation – or *divide et impera* – is a normal effect of indirect rule, in the case of Sudan different groups were separated in additional ways, most importantly through the Southern Policy, which disconnected the Southern from the Northern provinces (Abdel Rahim 1966; Mayo 1994), and in the North, albeit to a lesser degree, through the Nuba Policy (Abdelhay 2010; Salih 1990).

Since Britain's principal motivation in Sudan was to secure Egypt and the Suez Canal, the condominium government focused on maintaining peace at the lowest possible cost. While the areas on the Nile bordered the strategic transportation axis – the first section of the Sudanese railway from Wadi Halfa to Atbara had been built to enable Kitchener's occupation – and were of some economic interest, particularly with the expansion of Sudanese cotton production, the rest of Sudan, including Kordofan, Darfur and the Southern provinces, was at best of secondary relevance to the British. Indeed, the "pacification" of the Nuba Mountains and the Southern provinces continued long after the condominium administration had been established in the riverain heartland (El Zailaee 2003: 52–71), and Darfur even remained independent until it was reintegrated during World War I. This imbalance in the level of attention was powerfully reflected in investments, and most importantly in the number of schools built in the different regions: for example, there were only two intermediate schools in the Nuba Mountains in 1947 (Sanderson 1963: 243). The small number of inter-

mediate schools resulted in an even smaller number of students who continued on to secondary education at Gordon Memorial College in Khartoum. Between 1934 and 1944, 4,696 pupils joined GMC; 75% were from Khartoum or Northern Province and only 4% from Kordofan and 3% from Kassala Province, with just four students from Darfur (Beshir 1969: 200). Essentially, the centre–periphery differences in Sudan, with the centre being the areas close to the Nile in Northern Sudan and the periphery being everywhere else, were the result of a socio-economic imbalance that if not actually created during the Condominium, was very much intensified by it.

When Sudan became independent in 1956, the decolonisation process was heavily conditioned by the structure of the Condominium. The British had integrated the Sudanese into the administration of the territory over the years, including through the Advisory Council for the Northern Sudan in 1944 and the more powerful Legislative Council in 1948. This took place fairly late in comparison to other British colonies in Africa, however. For example, in the Gold Coast colony, nine of the fewer than thirty members of the Legislative Council had been Africans since 1925, and this Council was comparatively more powerful than the Advisory Council in Sudan (Sederberg 1971: 181). It is difficult to interpret these steps as a transition to Sudanese independence in 1956. In fact, in 1950, condominium officials concluded that it was too early to think about a ten-year transition period towards independence (Beshir 1974: 174–175). Sudan's independence less than six years later must therefore be understood in the light of the Free Officers Revolution in Cairo on 23 July 1952. The new Egyptian government and the British agreed to conduct elections in Sudan, which were held in November 1953. The elections were won by the National Unionist Party (NUP) under the leadership of Ismāʿīl al-Azharī, with the Umma Party under ʿAbdallāh Khalīl coming second. In late 1955, this parliament voted unanimously for independence, which was concluded on 1 January 1956. It is clear from this that local Sudanese pressure notwithstanding, it was primarily the dynamics between the two co-domini that secured independence. Thus, unlike in other British colonies in Africa, the nationalist movement was never forced to institutionalise systematically throughout the country.

With the creation of the Legislative Council, the Southern Policy and its separation of the Southern provinces from the rest of Sudan came to an end. The condominium government held a conference in Juba in June 1947 at which selected Southern representatives discussed their position on the matter. The conference decided in favour of including the South, which according to Howell (1978: 106) also marked the beginning of organised Southern politics. During the negotiations between the British and the Egyptians after the Free Officers Revolution, Major

Ṣalāḥ Sālim[1] secured Southern support through a remarkable visit, still believing that Sudan would eventually choose unity with Egypt (Sabri 1982: 109–111). After a relatively long separation, the Southern provinces were not reintegrated into Sudan gradually, but were suddenly reattached. Shortly before independence, in 1955, a lack of trust led to a mutiny by Southern soldiers of the Sudanese army in Torit. For the new government in Khartoum, conflict in the South underlined the relationship of internal division and sovereignty, making the idea of autonomy or federalism a no-go from the start.

During the transition from the elections in 1953 to independence in 1956, British and Egyptian administrators were systematically replaced by Sudanese under a process known as Sudanisation (Sconyers 1988; Al-Teraifi 1977). The Sudanese were selected based on their qualifications and seniority of service. However, due to the extreme imbalance of the country's schools, the vast majority of qualified staff came from the Nile Valley. Sconyers (1988: 72) quotes a British administrator who reported that "in the South there was absolutely no one available". As a result, out of the slightly more senior positions, only two assistant district commissioners and two Mamurs[2] were Southern Sudanese, leading one Southerner to exclaim "it appears [. . .] that our fellow Northerners want to colonize us for another hundred years" (quoted in Al-Teraifi 1977: 131). However, this inequality in the Sudanisation process affected regions in Northern Sudan such as Darfur and Kordofan similarly, and since the administrative service was national, newly-appointed administrators from Kordofan or Darfur were not necessarily appointed to serve in their respective regions.

Moreover, for the riverain Arabic elites, the division of Sudan into North and South, the presence of missionaries and the use of English as the language of instruction in some schools were all seen as colonial legacies, and so Arabisation and Islamisation campaigns were a central aspect of decolonisation for them (Seri-Hersch 2020). This attitude created an idea of being Sudanese in which a true Sudanese was supposed to be Muslim and Arabic-speaking. Not only did this stratify the country into a centre in which "real" Sudanese lived, and a periphery for the rest, but from the perspective of the periphery, it was also easy to see Arabisation and Islamisation as an imposition from outside that replaced one form of colonial control with another.

After independence, Sudan experienced a brief period of democratic rule characterised by a variety of economic, financial and regional crises. Eventually, in reac-

1 Ṣalāḥ Sālim was one of the Free Officers who came to power in Cairo in 1952. He was responsible for the Sudan portfolio in the Free Officers cabinet.

2 An administrative rank below district commissioner.

tion to the instability of the parliament, Prime Minister ʿAbdallāh Khalīl handed power over to the military less than three years after independence (Mihatsch 2021). Although the army was temporarily able to stabilise the economic situation, it also escalated the conflict in the Southern provinces. Discussions on the conflict at the University of Khartoum led to large-scale protests planned by a variety of professional organisations unified under the umbrella of the Professional Front. Days later, Ibrāhīm ʿAbbūd agreed to resign in order for a transitional government to be formed (Berridge 2016: 20–23). As a result of the non-inclusive nature of the decolonisation process and the rapid military takeover by an army that was largely of colonial making, the 1964 Revolution was perceived by many people as a "real decolonisation". As Willow Berridge has argued in her seminal volume on civilian uprisings in Sudan:

> Participants often saw the 1964 Revolution as a kind of continuation of the independence struggle. [. . .] the public saw in their military rulers 'another image of the colonizer', observing that the generals wore exactly the same uniforms and even the same caps as their colonial predecessors! (Berridge 2016: 31)

Although, as Berridge pointed out, the October 1964 Revolution was mostly driven by the urban middle classes and elites in Khartoum (Berridge 2016: 34–37), the revolutionary moment also created an opening in which new imaginaries could emerge.

If one considers that the revolution was triggered by a discussion on the conflict in the Southern provinces, although it would be an overstatement to argue that it was the situation in the South that caused the revolution, the two aspects were still intertwined. This created a public sphere that was, at least at first, more willing to engage with the Southern question and the other peripheral regions more generally (Willis 2015: 294). At the same time, it marked a shift in terms of the organisation of Southern political leadership; after the revolution, Southerners in Khartoum, who had begun to organise underground, formed the Southern Front as a reaction to the Professional Front, which had run the protests. The Southern Front pushed the newly-selected Prime Minister to accept their candidates for the cabinet instead of hand-picking his own candidates. As Abel Alier remembers it: "One of the things people in the Southern Front did not like was Northern Sudanese political leaders selecting Southern representatives without consultation. [. . .] We said, this is to be stopped."[3] As a result, a number of Southerners joined the cabinet and the five-man Supreme Council that replaced ʿAbbūd as President.

The Revolution thus provided an excellent catalyst for other regional movements and concerns about the nature of the Sudanese nation as well as local development.

3 Abel Alier, personal interview, Khartoum, 26 February 2011.

That is not to say that it caused the emergence of these regional movements, however; rather, it was a moment of crystallisation. While the GUN and the DDF both emerged after the Revolution, the Beja Congress had existed since the 1950s. The three movements were not the only regional organisations to emerge during this period. Others include the Union of the Southern and the Northern Funj in Blue Nile, which failed to enter parliament, or the Union of the Sons of Halfa in Northern Province and a similar organisation in the Abyei area, both of which were purely social associations.[4] There were also the Kordofan Front[5] and the Union of the Sons of Dongola, which were principally opposed to the local form of Native Administration,[6] and the Sons of the Misseriya, which was concerned with employment possibilities along the new railway line in the West.[7] Had Sudan remained democratic in 1958, it is likely that there might have been similar, but asynchronous, trajectories at an earlier stage in the various regions and at different moments in time. Rather than being the cause, 1964 gave clear visibility to a development that might otherwise have been more blurred.

The General Union of the Nuba Mountains

The Nuba Mountains form a hilly region in Central Sudan approximately as large as Austria. Kadugli, the administrative centre, is 590 kilometres south-west of Khartoum. The Nuba Mountains are comparatively densely populated, and are very green and fertile during the rainy season. They are mostly populated by Nuba and Baggara Arabs. According to Sudan's first census in 1956, there were over half a million Nuba in Sudan. They speak various languages and are partly Muslim and partly Christian. The term Nuba does not describe a single tribe or ethnicity, but a geographical grouping of various non-Arabic-speaking people (Stevenson 1984: 4).

The British only engaged in the Nuba Mountains quite late on, and when they did, they faced a relatively fortified community that was suspicious of outsiders. As a result, it was well into the 1920s before local resistance in the Nuba Mountains against colonial occupation was suppressed (El Zailaee 2003: 52–71). The administration implemented a "Nuba Policy" along the lines of the Southern Policy as a result of which Nuba and Arabs living in the Nuba Mountains were governed by two separate local administrations (El Zailaee 2003: 115–135). Nuba were only allowed to enrol in mission schools, and military recruitment of Nuba was more or less halted

4 These organisations were mentioned to me in various interviews.
5 *Al-Ayyām*, 15 March 1965, 6–7, and 25 May 1965, p 1.
6 *Al-Ayyām*, 4 April 1965, 5, and 9 April 1965, p. 1, and 31 May 1965, p. 1.
7 *Al-Sūdān al-Jadīd*, 18 May 1965, p. 5.

(El Zailaee 2003: 136–188). Nevertheless, they were not disconnected from the rest of the country, firstly because there were Arabs living in the Nuba Mountains and secondly because there was a large number of Nuba migrant labourers. The Second World War ended the Nuba Policy when the British recruited 6,000 Nuba and dispatched them to North Africa to fight against the Germans (Salih 1982: 337–392).

The GUN was not the first attempt at politically organising the Nuba. The cotton farmers of the Nuba Mountains had attempted to form a farmers' union similar to the union of the tenants of the Gezira as early as May 1952. The Nuba Mountains Farmers' Union (it called itself a union, but neither the colonial state nor later governments ever agreed to register it as such officially) was a broad coalition of Nuba farmers, Nuba notables and Arab traders. The Farmers' Union supported the NUP in the 1954 elections after the NUP leader and later Prime Minister Ismāʿīl al-Azharī promised to register them as a union and to address their key grievances. Additionally, the Umma was perceived as "pro-British," which hurt its electoral position in the Nuba Mountains. Once the NUP came to power, its leaders failed to keep their promises, leading to the radicalisation of the Farmers' Union, in part under the leadership of the communist movement[8] (El-Battahani 1986: 269–321).

In 1957, the Nuba Mountains General Union, which despite its similar name is not to be confused with the GUN in the 1960s, was founded in Khartoum and the Nuba Youth Club was formed in Dilling. The leaders of these organisations supported the Umma Party in the 1958 elections, but "failing to gain any concessions in return for their support for the Umma, the Nuba intelligentsia became increasingly disillusioned with the Northern political parties" (El-Battahani 1986: 356). Support for these different parties can be understood in terms of negotiating and engaging with the state, rather than engaging in it. The *ḥukūma* was now represented by the national political parties, but remained the "other".

In 1959, an organisation called the Nuba Sons emerged in Khartoum and replaced the Nuba Mountains General Union. The Nuba Sons focused on organising a tax protest against the poll tax (*diqniyya*), which the Nuba still had to pay at the time.[9] This tax had been abolished in most places in Sudan where it still existed after 1956, including for Arabs in Southern Kordofan, but not for Nuba (El-Battahani 1986: 362–371). El-Battahani (1986: 360–361) observed that because the poll

8 *Al-Ḥaraka al-Sūdāniyya li-l-Taḥarrur al-Waṭanī* (HASUTU) was founded in 1945 in Cairo and moved to Khartoum in 1946. It participated in the 1953 elections under the umbrella of the Anti-Imperialist Front, winning one seat. The movement was closely interlinked with the worker's movement and various unions. After the 1964 Revolution, the communist movement officially founded the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) (El-Amin 1996a, 1996b, 1997; Fawzi 1957; Warburg 1978).

9 A poll tax is a fixed sum that must be paid by each individual. It was a common colonial form of tax.

tax was "retained in the Nuba region, and not in most other regions of Sudan, [it] came to be interpreted as an indication of the continuing 'colonial' or subordinate status of the Nuba." Their protest was ultimately unsuccessful, however. All these organisations were interest or pressure groups that sought to influence politics, but not to participate directly. It was only after 1964 that this position changed.

In the days following the civilian uprising against Ibrāhīm ʿAbbūd, a new organisation with the provocative acronym GUN was founded.[10] It was created as a result of three different formative processes that took place simultaneously and within a conducive political environment. The first group who were central to the establishment of the Union were students. In 1964, nine students from the Nuba Mountains entered Khartoum University. They were not the first students from the Nuba Mountains to attend, but in previous years they had always been only one or two in number. Yūsif Jibrīl, who was one of the nine, recalled:

> There were some students before us. Two, one, two, every year. But our group was nine. The Nuba people became very happy. They made a big celebration for us in Khartoum. Oh look at our people, our students, our boys, they entered university. Yes, they were very happy because of that.[11]

One can easily imagine that being among the first to be able to go to university, the students must have felt an enormous responsibility towards their people. The fact that they entered the university in a "larger" group and enjoyed the support of other Nuba in Khartoum was very likely to have given them additional motivations and a greater sense of responsibility. They also entered Khartoum University at a time when the students there were highly politicised, and with the overthrow of ʿAbbūd in late 1964, politics dominated the public debate. All of these factors made their decision to form some sort of Nuba organisation seem inevitable. Nūr Tāwir, who entered the university one year after Yūsif Jibrīl as the first woman from the Nuba Mountains,[12] noted: "You grow up as a politician if you like it or not, because it is forced on you."[13]

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10 The Union was founded in Khartoum in late 1964 and merged with other Nuba organisations in early 1965.

11 Yūsif Jibrīl, personal interview, Kadugli, 5 March 2010.

12 Women were allowed to study at the University of Khartoum from its establishment in 1956 and in the Khartoum branch of Cairo University since its creation in 1955. Nevertheless, the number of female students was low, and by 1964 only 50 women had graduated from the University. In the four years that followed, 93 women graduated. The number of female students from the peripheries was even lower. In 1968–1969 only one female student from the Southern provinces was enrolled, with one from the Beja communities and one from the Nuba communities (Saad 1972: 175–76).

13 Nūr Tāwir Kāfī Abū Raʾs, personal interview, Kadugli, 5 March 2010.

At the same time, there were a large number of Nuba living and working in Khartoum. Nūr Tāwir remembered: "In Khartoum we were thousands, because there were many Nuba in the army and also many who had left the place because the Nuba Mountains were very poor and had no services."[14] The Nuba in Khartoum had already started to organise, not politically, but in social groups such as lending societies. ʿAṭrūn ʿAṭiyya, who was an employee in the Ministry of Finance and later became the first leader of the GUN, had been involved in these social groups, which he organised to help the Nuba people in Khartoum. Yūsif Jibrīl remembers the beginning of the Union:

> We, the nine students and some leaders of the social societies founded in Khartoum, they were working in the government as employees, and the students who entered University of Khartoum ahead of us, we sat together and discussed. We met in the house of ʿAṭrūn ʿAṭiyya in the beginning, and then we moved the meetings from there to the University of Khartoum Students Union Club.[15]

In Khartoum, they discussed their objectives and elected ʿAṭrūn ʿAṭiyya as the first head of the Union. Among these objectives, the General Union of the Nuba Mountains called for Sudan to be organised as a federal state and for the separate province of the Nuba Mountains, which had been integrated into Kordofan by the British in 1928 (El-Battahani 1986: 122), to be re-established. It also asked for the abolition of two taxes that were collected in the Nuba Mountains – the previously-mentioned poll tax (*diqniyya*) and a so-called air tax (*māl al-hawā'*).[16] Finally, it asked for all kinds of services and development, including streets, dams, schools and hospitals.

At the same time as the Union was being formed in Khartoum, the Nuba organised themselves in the Nuba Mountains in an association called the League of the Sons of the Nuba Mountains. ʿAbd al-Fātiḥ Tiya recalled how they organised the first committee in Kadugli with members from the neighbouring towns, and when they learned about the Union that had formed in Khartoum, they merged the League with it.[17]

During this period of the interim government in Khartoum, the GUN petitioned the government to abolish the poll tax and the air tax. The government agreed to do so, and according to Phillip Kalo, who was a parliamentarian for the GUN between

14 Nūr Tāwir Kāfī Abū Ra's, personal interview, Kadugli, 5 March 2010.

15 Yūsif Jibrīl, personal interview, Kadugli, 5 March 2010.

16 The air tax was a cattle tax. If you had twenty-five cows you would be taxed for thirty, allegedly because the number of cattle was only established every couple of years. The tax on the five non-existent cows was called the air tax.

17 El-Battahani mentions an additional group in El Obeid called the Nuba Mountains Sons Union, which "was an all-Nuba organisation, and its leadership came from amongst the Christian educated Nuba, and included traders, teachers and Catholic priests." (El-Battahani 1986: 372)

1965 and 1968, it was announced on the radio that the Union had submitted this petition and that the taxes were going to be abolished.[18] Naturally, this victory proved very useful when the GUN began campaigning in elections. As Yūsif Jibrīl remembered, "This was one of the reasons that gave us a strong ground when we came to the area and addressed the people."[19]

When the election in April 1965 came around, the students, who were too young to run themselves, campaigned for the Union candidates. Reliance on these students, who were back home for the vacation, reduced the resources that were needed to a minimum. The shortage of resources was demonstrated by the fact that other parties would offer voters lorries to drive them from their village to their designated polling station, which was often in a different village. The GUN did not have the means to do this and therefore resorted to a trick:

> The most expensive is to carry voters from their villages to the voting centre. [. . .] I told my [prospective voters] you go and tell these people [that you are] going to vote for [their candidate], whether Umma or NUP, and this is the symbol for voting. And they will say yes, you are my voter, then let's go. They get in the car and take them to the centre and when they vote they vote for me anyway. [. . .] So they [Umma and NUP] paid for us.[20]

These strategies proved highly successful. The Nuba Mountains had twelve electoral districts at the time, and the Union won in eight of them. The youngest of the new parliamentarians was Phillip Kalo, who managed to arrange to be cleared to run although he was only 23. Five of the new parliamentarians were primary school teachers, two worked for the church, including Philip ʿAbbās Ghabūsh, one worked for the agricultural cooperation of the Nuba Mountains and ʿAṭrūn ʿAṭiyya worked in the Ministry of Finance.[21]

The Darfur Development Front

Darfur is the most western region of Sudan. It stretches along the western border from Libya in the north along Chad to the Central African Republic in the south, and

18 Phillip Kalo Ramaḍān Kardela, personal interview, Kadugli, 6 March 2010.

19 Yūsif Jibrīl, personal interview, Kadugli, 5 March 2010.

20 Phillip Kalo Ramaḍān Kardela, personal interview, Kadugli, 6 March 2010.

21 The parliamentarians for the GUN were: Zakariyyā Ismāʿīl (Kadugli Town), Kabbāshī ʿUthmān (Kadugli South), al-Bahār Kirya (Om Dorein), Phillip Kalo (Hayban at-Tira), Ibrāhīm Kuku Angelo (Aturu), ʿAṭrūn ʿAṭiyya (Kadugli West and Miri), Qamar Ḥusayn Raḥma (Talodi South) and Philip ʿAbbās Ghabūsh (Dilling West). One candidate for the NUP from Laqawa, Sayyid Fajrallāh, also worked with the GUN on an unofficial basis.

is approximately as large as Spain. El Fasher, Darfur's old administrative centre, is 800 kilometres west of Khartoum. It is very dry in the North, while the Western and Southern regions are more fertile. Extensive agriculture is carried out in the Jabal Marra region. According to the 1956 census, 1.3 million people lived in Darfur at the time of independence, approximately 13% of the total population of Sudan. During this period, Darfur was inhabited by mostly nomadic, Arabic-speaking groups such as the Bani Husayn and Rizaygat and by mostly sedentary and semi-nomadic non-Arabic speaking groups such as the Fur and the Zaghawa. The vast majority of its population is Muslim. Darfur was an independent sultanate until 1874, when it fell to Turco-Egyptian Sudan. During the Mahdiyya (1885–1898), Darfur became one of the most important support bases for the Mahdī's religious movement, the *anṣār*, and when the Mahdī died, he was succeeded by Khalīfa ʿAbdullāhi, a Darfuri from the Taaisha tribe. After the defeat of Khalīfa ʿAbdullāhi by Anglo-Egyptian forces in 1898, Darfur once again became an autonomous sultanate. It was only in 1916, when the new regime had consolidated its reign and the British began to be concerned about Ottoman influence in the sultanate, that Darfur was incorporated into Sudan once again.

The role of the Condominium in Darfur was even more minimalist than it was in the East, the Nuba Mountains and the south. As Julie Flint and Alex de Waal (2008: 11) have pointed out, "Britain's only interest in Darfur was keeping order. It administered the province with absolute economy". A "native administration" along the lines of indirect rule was set up, tribal structures were adapted to fit the needs and expectations of the Condominium and Arabs were placed in a superior position to non-Arabs. "The doyen of these reactionary orientalists was Harold MacMichael" (Flint and de Waal 2008), who wrote an account of the Arab tribes of Sudan – part history, part colonial-style ethnography – which for many years formed the basis of British understanding of Sudanese society (MacMichael 1912, 1922). Development of the economy and services was largely ignored: economic development options were not even considered until 1945. In terms of schools and the numbers of primary and secondary school graduates, hospitals and doctors, Darfur was one of the least developed provinces of Sudan (Flint and De Waal 2008: 12; Daly 2007: 179–181).

After independence, thanks to widespread support for the *anṣār* and the Mahdī, Darfur became a power base for the Umma Party, which was founded by the Mahdī's son Sayyid ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Mahdī (1885–1959). It is necessary to add two qualifications, however: first, the support of traders in urban centres allowed the NUP to win various seats from the Umma; and second, people voted for the Umma who

did not consider themselves to be *anṣār*.[22] Indeed, voting patterns could be quite complex, as demonstrated by Vaughan with regard to the election in 1953, when the situation was additionally complicated by the Socialist Republican Party, which had been created by the British (Vaughan 2015: 191–196). Darfur was also a breaking point between the family of the Mahdī and the family of Khalīfa ʿAbdullāhi. As early as in 1957, some members of the Khalīfa's family (ʿIzz al-Dīn al-Mahdī, Muḥammad Dāwūd and ʿUmar) felt that the Umma was exploiting its position in Darfur without giving anything back to the region, and they tried to form a breakaway party. Their attempt was successfully prohibited by Sayyid ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Mahdī, however (Abdel Salam 1979: 229–233).

According to ʿAlī al-Ḥājj, the first time the issue of marginalisation of Darfur in newly-independent Sudan was discussed in a public forum was at a conference in El Fasher in the summer of 1956, which was organised by Maʾmūn Muḥammadī and the Darfur Students Union. After the conference, they supposedly went to Nyala, where they organised a rally and discussed the issue of the underdevelopment of Darfur. As ʿAlī al-Ḥājj says, this was when "people were starting to get aware."[23] As mentioned previously, ʿIzz al-Dīn al-Mahdī attempted to organise an Umma breakaway in 1957, but failed. In 1962 or 1963, he tried to organise the Darfuris a second time, this time in support of Ibrāhīm ʿAbbūd. ʿAlī al-Ḥājj, who attended the meetings in Khartoum as one of the students from Darfur at the University of Khartoum, says that this attempt eventually failed when no specific development commitments for Darfur were made.[24]

In November 1964, just after the popular uprising against ʿAbbūd, the first meetings that eventually led to the formation of the Darfur Development Front (DDF) took place. As had been the case with the General Union of the Nuba Mountains, similar social groups also contributed to this development, including Darfuri students at the university, Darfuris in the unions and the civil service and a handful – fewer than ten, according to ʿAlī al-Ḥājj[25] – of university graduates.[26] In the case of the Darfur Development Front, it was Aḥmād Dirāj who operated as a catalyst, bringing the right people together and creating an initial momentum.

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22 This is based on conversations Sean O'Fahey had while travelling in Darfur in the 1960s. Sean Rex O'Fahey, private conversation, Bergen, February 2009. The observation is also in line with those made by traders in other parts of Sudan, such as Arab traders in the Nuba Mountains, who according to El-Battahani were also closely associated with the NUP.

23 ʿAlī al-Ḥājj, personal interview, Bonn, 4 September 2010.

24 ʿAlī al-Ḥājj, personal interview, Bonn, 4 September 2010.

25 ʿAlī al-Ḥājj, personal interview, Bonn, 4 September 2010.

26 Aḥmād Ibrāhīm Dirāj, personal interview, London, 19 June 2010.

The early meetings were held at the Khartoum University Students Union Club. Around fifty people attended them: some were civil servants, graduates and union leaders, but the majority were students. The DDF published its first statements the same November, and went on to organise a large rally at the Horse Racing Club in the south of the city, to which all Darfuris in the capital were invited. According to ʿAlī al-Ḥājj, more than thousand people attended this meeting, during which the DDF elected a committee and its leadership: Aḥmād Dirāj was elected as president and ʿAlī al-Ḥājj as his deputy.[27]

The DDF then sent out delegates, including Aḥmād Dirāj, to tour Darfur, organise rallies and speak to the electorate, local leaders and party chapters to raise awareness of the problem of underdevelopment in Darfur and to pressure political parties to put up local candidates in elections, and not candidates who had been "exported" from Khartoum. In the 1950s, the Umma in particular would field candidates from elsewhere in electoral districts in Darfur whom they wanted to select as ministers, because the constituencies in Darfur were viewed as safe Umma strongholds. A candidate like this had no relationship with Darfur, and so after the election, he would go "back and become a minister, but knew nothing about the area he is elected from and he would not serve the people."[28] However, as Vaughan has shown, the difference between the 1950s, with the exported candidates and the 1960s, with candidates who actually represented Darfur, has been overstated. The question had already come up in the 1950s, when certain candidates were attacked for their perceived "Easternness" and as early as 1953, the Umma leadership in Khartoum was often unable to impose its choice of candidate (Vaughan 2015: 191–196).

In the 1965 election, the DDF did not propose its own candidates, but supported any candidate from any party who was from Darfur and had the necessary education to be a voice for his community. After the elections, the DDF organised a conference in El Fasher and invited all the elected parliamentarians from Darfur to discuss the specific regional issues and grievances of Darfur.[29] ʿAlī al-Ḥājj explained the purpose of the conference:

> We told everybody to be in his party, but we have issues for Darfur, we want you as a block to support these issues. We are not interested if you are Umma or Communist. We are only interested in our issues and for you to support them. That is why we were able to make a conference in El Fasher, that is a conference for the parliamentarians, the parliamentary group who was actually elected in 1965. There were 24 of them. That conference was chaired by

27 According to interviews with Aḥmād Dirāj and ʿAlī al-Ḥājj. Aḥmād Ibrāhīm Dirāj, personal interview, London, 19 June 2010. ʿAlī al-Ḥājj, personal interview, Bonn, 4 September 2010.

28 Aḥmād Ibrāhīm Dirāj, personal interview, London, 19 June 2010.

29 *Al-Ayyām*, May 23 1965, 6 and May 26 1965, 1.

> me. It began on 25 May 1965, and after three days, we made a charter and in that charter we talked about decentralisation of the government and other things, but decentralisation was very very high on the profile.[30]

With this conference, the DDF attempted to commit the parliamentarians from Darfur to occupying themselves with any question that touched on development of the region. Their aims were very similar to the ideas of the Beja Congress and the General Union of the Nuba Mountains, but the strategy was different. While the Beja Congress was actually a party and the members of the GUN ran as independent candidates, the DDF was working with parliamentarians from various parties.

Nevertheless, two candidates did actually run as independents in the name of the DDF. One was Aḥmād Dirāj, who won the election in Zalingei North. In the spirit of the DDF's cooperation with the established parties, Dirāj later found a political home in the more progressive "Ṣādiq wing"[31] of the Umma Party. As an independent, he would have been in a more neutral position and may have had more leverage over other parliamentarians from Darfur, while at the same time, as a member of Umma he was able to join the government as a minister. ʿAlī al-Ḥājj says that Dirāj's decision to join the Umma was "controversial,"[32] and even Aḥmād Dirāj himself said that joining Umma was a mistake in the sense that afterwards he was "too lenient with the political parties." At the same time, he argued that it was also the right decision in that he was able to influence politics and help the modernisation process within the Umma Party along. By this he mainly meant the ideological reorientation of the Ṣādiq wing of the Umma Party, which in 1967 formed an alliance with a strong regional outlook called the New Forces Congress, which included the Sudan African National Union representing Southern Sudan and the Islamist Islamic Charter Front (ICF), with some support from the Beja Congress.[33]

The Beja Congress

Eastern Sudan had been unified as Kassala Province during the colonial period. Kassala Province began just east of Khartoum and was slightly smaller than Germany

30 ʿAlī al-Ḥājj, personal interview, Bonn, 4 September 2010.

31 Shortly after the death of Sayyid ʿAbd al-Raḥmān al-Mahdī, his son Ṣiddīq al-Mahdī also died. This led to a power struggle over control of the Umma Party between Ṣiddīq's brother Imām al-Hādī, who took over as leader of the *anṣār*, and Ṣiddīq's son Ṣādiq al-Mahdī. This eventually led to a split in the Umma into two wings, which continued until the Nimayrī coup in 1969.

32 ʿAlī al-Ḥājj, personal interview, Bonn, 4 September 2010.

33 Aḥmād Ibrāhīm Dirāj, personal interview, London, 19 June 2010.

in area. It included Sudan's entire shoreline along the Red Sea. Its capital was Kassala town, which lies 420 kilometres east of Khartoum. Over half the inhabitants of the province were Beja, while another quarter belonged to various Arab groups. The Beja people lived mostly in Sudan, but also in Egypt and Eritrea (Paul 1954). They were divided into clans, which included the Hadendowa, the Bani Amer, the Amarar, and the Bishariyin, among others. A total of 650,000 Beja lived in Sudan in 1956. With 260,000 members, the Hadendowa were the largest group. Most Beja speak a dialect of Beja, with the exception of the Bani Amer, who speak a dialect of the Eritrean Tigre language. Nearly 80% of the Beja lived in Kassala province in 1956. The Beja were predominantly devout Muslims, mostly adhering to the Khatmiyya Sufi *ṭarīqa*, but many Hadendowa were part of the *anṣār*. Most Beja lived a pastoral, semi-nomadic lifestyle, with some being permanent or temporary wage and migrant labourers (Morton 1989: 66).

Sawakin had been the most important port city on the Red Sea coast for centuries. It dates back to the times of Ptolemy, and for many centuries it was a magnificent and important harbour town that also served as a harbour for Muslim pilgrims travelling to Mecca from as far away as Nigeria. By the early 19th century, however, the town's commercial importance had already faded. The Swiss traveller and orientalist Johann Ludwig Burckhardt visited it in 1814 and found two-thirds of the houses uninhabited. The Egyptians tried to revive the harbour in 1865, but although it managed to weather the attacks from the Mahdī's forces, the British decided to develop a new harbour fifty kilometres further north, one that was larger and more suitable for the naval trade they expected to develop, which they called Port Sudan (Berg 1993). The British administrators brought in Arab families from the Nile to run the new city and business was mostly taken over by immigrants from the Middle East. The Beja had to compete for low-paid jobs in the port (Morton 1989: 66–67). The primary focus of the British in the East was on Port Sudan and the cotton plantations in Gash and Tokar. The semi-nomadic Beja were of little relevance except as regards their "pacification," as a result of which the British restructured the local leadership (Young 2007: 18). Worse, the British economic and development focus further deprived the Beja tribes (Pantuliano 2006: 710).

The Beja began to organise themselves systematically for the first time in 1952 with the establishment of the Beja Club, as a reaction to the modern colonial state. The Club had all the customary social functions of a club at the time, but it also established three committees: the first focused on education with a literacy campaign; the second on relations with the government, demanding minor jobs in the administration; and the third, most importantly, on worker issues, forming the first union of dockworkers to demand additional rights from foreign companies. The Club was a direct reaction by the Beja leaders to their community's low status, poor education level and restricted access to government resources such as health ser-

vices. Shortly before independence, a preliminary political committee was formed within the Club and soon thereafter a memorandum in support of federalism that explicitly demanded a division of power and resources was sent to the new national government (Tūlanāb 2007: 74–79). The Club did not become directly involved in national politics at this point, however, and in the 1953 elections, it supported the NUP candidates.

Shortly after independence, in May 1956, members of the government party who were affiliated with the Khatmiyya Sufi *ṭarīqa* broke away and formed the People's Democratic Party (PDP). The PDP then joined a new government, in a coalition with the Umma. After the division of the NUP, the Club sided with the PDP due to religious allegiances; as previously mentioned, many Beja were also members of the Khatmiyya. At the same time, the leaders of the Beja Club continued their struggle on local issues by organising a conference to discuss Beja issues. This first Popular Conference of the Beja Tribes demanded more jobs, more education, and access to schools for adults. These demands were not met by the government, and a larger conference was organised on 7 June 1957 with the aim of securing a mandate from the people to work for Beja rights. The conference looked explicitly at the economic and social problems and lack of rights of the Beja, and concluded that independence had not made any difference for them (Tūlanāb 2007: 80–102).

In the run-up to the 1958 elections, Dr Ṭāhā ʿUthmān Belya attempted to be nominated in one constituency as the PDP candidate. Although he was able to obtain local support, the leadership of the party in Khartoum disagreed. Muḥammad Sirr al-Khatim al-Mīrghanī, the patron of the PDP, preferred a non-Beja candidate. After a protracted struggle between the two sides and a broken promise by Khartoum to give up their candidate, both ran for the PDP, and because they split the vote, they lost the election to the NUP candidate (Tūlanāb 2007: 103–108). This experience demonstrated to the Beja leaders that further cooperation with the PDP and the Khatmiyya sect was not in their interest, and they therefore decided to form their own political organisation (Ūhāj 2006: 79–91), and on 11 October 1958, they founded the Beja Congress at a large meeting in Port Sudan. It is interesting to note that this meeting was so much on the national radar that even Prime Minister Khalīl attended in person (Maḥmūd 2009: 131–133). However, only 36 days later, Khalīl handed over power to Ibrāhīm ʿAbbūd, ending Sudan's first period of democracy.

After the 1964 revolution, the Beja Congress regrouped, this time with the express aim of running as a political party in the elections. The Umma Party decided to support the Beja in their attempt to select candidates, and to rally and mobilise voters. This move by the Umma must be interpreted as an attempt to weaken the PDP and NUP, which were stronger in Kassala Province than the Umma. The Umma in turn were allowed to nominate a small number of their own people as part of

the Beja Congress. The party won eleven seats,[34] a victory that was at least partially due to the fact that the PDP, its main competitor, boycotted the election (Ūhāj 2006: 137–147). Compared to the GUN, the Congress had longer experience and a higher level of institutionalisation. It was formally registered as a political party, but it would be a mistake to overstate the extent to which the Congress was formalised at this stage.

Decolonising the Peripheries

The main demands of the three movements were very similar. First, they all wanted some form of devolution of power to the provinces. Second, they all opposed what they perceived to be "exported candidates." Umma and NUP would send candidates from Khartoum whom they wished to nominate as ministers in the next government to places they viewed as safe seats; certain electoral districts in Darfur were seen as safe by Umma, and districts in Eastern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains were seen as safe for the NUP and PDP. Both demands were fed by a broader grievance that decolonisation was perceived as the replacement of one foreign power by another.

The independence movement never needed to expand beyond the riverain centre. The Northern Sudanese peripheries – the Nuba Mountains and the east, even more than Darfur – were objects rather than subjects of independence. If 1964 was a "continuation of the independence struggle" (Berridge 2016: 31) for the riverain elites in Khartoum, this was even more true for the students and young graduates from the peripheries. As previously mentioned, during the decolonisation process, administrative positions that had previously been held by British, Egyptians and a few other foreigners were now given to Sudanese. This process, which was dubbed "Sudanisation" at the time, was often described by interviewees as "Northernisation": that is, a process by which jobs were given to the elite from the riverain centre, who were on average better-educated. As Iris Seri-Hersch has pointed out in reference to Southern Sudan, this Northernisation process extended beyond the replacement of administrators into fields such as education (Seri-Hersch 2020: 783). Arguably, this was equally true for the Nuba Mountains. Interestingly, even an interviewee in Port Sudan associated with the Beja Congress used the term

34 Ten candidates won on the Congress ticket. Muḥammad Aḥmad ʿAwaḍ was nominated in Kassala by the PDP, and when the party decided on a boycott, he ran anyway and switched his allegiance to the Beja Congress after the election.

"Northernisation."[35] In Darfur, the complaint was more about domination by "Easterners," but this essentially reflected the same concern. As has been explored in the historical background, the October Revolution created a space in which various regional movements were able to drive discussion of this relationship between the centre and the peripheries forward. Various associations in the regions had already posed questions about their underdevelopment in various ways and had tried to tackle these problems, either through social initiatives or by petitioning political parties or the military government. After 1964 they began to engage more directly in the state and as part of the state.

Berridge argues that "October 1964 did represent a truly national revolution" (Berridge 2016: 37). However, soon after that year, this opening up of an opportunity for a different national narrative was shut down by politicians from the centre who were too afraid that demands for regionalisation or federalism might lead to a loss of power for the riverain elites. Importantly, the idea of a federal Sudan was not rejected by everyone in the central Sudanese elite, but by its politicians. Bashīr Muḥammad Saʿīd, a close associate of Ismāʿīl al-Azharī and the editor of *al-Ayyām*, wrote a number of op-eds in support of federalism. He believed that it would be good for the development of Sudan, but warned that Sudan might otherwise face "dismantlement, division and destruction."[36] He called on the Umma and the NUP to give the issue of regional governance their attention and study the possibility of decentralisation,[37] but he realised that although the parties were worried about the emergence of regional competition, they made no effort to understand the underlying problems in the periphery.[38] The most significant reaction was a law banning any groups calling for secession,[39] and some time later the Prime Minister called on the media not to report any further about regional political movements.[40]

If one evaluates the impact of the three movements from a perspective of party politics, one sees that their role is often downplayed, in part because the GUN and the Beja Congress were much less successful in the 1968 elections and the DDF ceased to play a relevant role. Nevertheless, they did play a role in driving the process of turning subjects into citizens forward. Although the parties did not win as many seats in the subsequent elections, the practice of "exported" candidates ended. As regards the Nuba Mountains, ʿAbd al-Fātiḥ Tiya stated: "After 1965 the big

35 Conversations over coffee in the market of Deim al-Arab with various current and former Beja Congress leaders.
36 Bashīr Muḥammad Saʿīd, Op-ed, *al-Ayyām*, 10 March 1965, p. 3.
37 *Al-Ayyām*, 20 May 1965, p. 3.
38 *Al-Ayyām*, July 26 1965, p. 3.
39 *Al-Sūdān al-Jadīd*, 24 May 1965, p. 1.
40 *Al-Ayyām*, 20 June 1965, pp. 1, 8.

parties selected candidates from the Nuba Mountains and did not bring them from outside anymore."[41]

This indicates more than a "technical" modification in the nomination processes for parliamentary candidates: it points to a changed relationship with parliament and the national political system. The Beja Club and the Nuba Mountains Farmers Union tried to make deals with the national parties in the 1950s, meaning that they perceived politics in Khartoum as something separate, as something to negotiate with, similar to the colonial state. The Beja Congress, the GUN and in a different way the DDF pushed for their own representation in Khartoum. Like the Southern parties, which have struggled with the expectation of representing the South, a label that artificially homogenises a highly diverse region (Willis 2015), the Beja Congress and the GUN were ultimately unable to represent the full diversity of their regions, and they were never able to reproduce their early success in later elections. Nevertheless, regional representation was later carried forward through the local candidates elected for the national parties. Thus, the regional parties of the 1960s allowed the Nuba, Beja and Darfuri to view Sudan increasingly "as a citizen," in the sense of being co-sovereign in the political process.

While it is important not to overstate the impact of the mid-1960s, as the decolonisation of Sudan's peripheries has been a long and complicated process that has arguably continued until today, the movements contributed centrally to a transition that, as Leonardi and Vaughan have shown, began in the late colonial period. By making this transition, the inhabitants of these regions claimed a space in the state, essentially expanding it to the peripheries, a form of bottom-up state-building, a continuation of what Leonardi and Vaughan described in relation to the late colonial period: "We might understand these local processes, including the politics of citizenship, as central to the very processes of state formation" (Leonardi and Vaughan 2016: 96). This political transformation is also reflected in a statement by Nūr Tāwir:

> [With] the policy of the closed districts, we were literally shut out from life in Northern Sudan. And you can say that 99.9% of the people were illiterate. They did not know about life except where they lived. So we did not have many people to go into parliament and we did not have a lot of people to go into government. Even for elections they would come from the North. [. . .] Even the elders – we had our own judiciary system, we had the Makk with the king, we had the ʿUmda and we had the Sheikhs to organise life here – did not think it was important what was coming from the North. Because this was their life, they were not educated, they were living like outside history. So you cannot expect that these people suddenly, when Sudan became independent, would have political awareness and would begin to ask for their rights or fight for their rights with the Northerners. No, this was a really long process.[42]

41 ʿAbd al-Fātiḥ Tiya Kāfī, personal interview, Kadugli, 6 March 2010.

42 Nūr Tāwir Kāfī Abū Raʾs, personal interview, Kadugli, 5 March 2010.

This is where the Beja Congress, the GUN and the DDF came in during the 1960s. Building on to the social clubs, the first graduates to return home with a university education and a few individuals who had experience with working for the government, they functioned, as ʿAbd al-Fātiḥ Tiya put it, as an emancipatory project.[43] This did not end with the 1968 elections or the 1969 Nimayrī coup, but has continued to the present day, with the regional question possibly being the central challenge for the post-Bashīr transition. One *al-Sūdān al-Jadīd* journalist described the emergence of these movements succinctly in 1965: "It is not ethnicism or regionalism, but the beginning of a liberation from fear."[44]

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43 ʿAbd al-Fātiḥ Tiya Kāfī, personal interview, Kadugli, 6 March 2010.

44 Muḥammad Aḥmad al-Tijānī, Op-ed, *al-Sūdān al-Jadīd*, 16 May 1965, 3.

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