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Source: *Arab Studies Quarterly* , Summer/Fall 1990, Vol. 12, No. 3/4 (Summer/Fall 1990), pp. 33-53

Published by: Pluto Journals

Stable URL: https://www.jstor.org/stable/41857884

FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO THE POLITICAL ASCENDANCY OF THE MUSLIM BRETHREN IN SUDAN

Riad Ibrahim

INTRODUCTION

IN RECENT YEARS, and particularly following the Iranian revolution, a great many students of Middle Eastern and Islamic societies have attempted to uncover the causes of what appeared to them to be a growing trend of Islamic fundamentalism throughout the Arab and Muslim world. A common theme throughout most of this scholarship has been a preoccupation with the social and psychological impact of colonialism and its accompanying processes of modernization and Westernization which, seen as alienating large segments of people in Islamic societies, are believed to have greatly contributed to the rise or "revival" of Islamic fundamentalism.

John Esposito, for example, contends that there is a consensus among all revivalist movements in that they are a reaction to the failure of Western models which have failed to "produce a viable authentic political and social synthesis which is both modern and true to indigenous (i.e., Islamic) history and values."[1] Similarly, Fazlur Rahman, in a discussion of the roots of modern Islamic fundamentalism, points to the colonial experience of Muslim societies which, in his view, created a "psychological hiatus in the Moslem mind." Rahman further contends that it is the "arrogance" and "self-righteousness" of the West which has led to the advent of Islamic revivalism in recent times.[2]

Nafissa Ahmad El-Amin similarly explains the reasons behind the turmoil in Sudan as well as other Muslim countries as stemming from a "superficial Westernization" where the indigenous system was neither vitalized by the impact of the Western system to develop from within, nor was it a violent upheaval in which the old system was swept away in favor of the new

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order. Furthermore, this process has gone beyond society as to stamp the individual with dualism.[3]

Without belittling the contributions or downplaying the intellectual sophistication of these and other scholars, one can point to a common theme among them which perceives Islamic societies and Muslim individuals as existing in a state of psychological limbo, torn between their traditional Islamic heritage and their desire to enter the modern age. Moreover, within this context they become particularly susceptible to the vigor and militancy of what appears to a large number of them as being the natural and indigenous alternative, Islam. However, while this type of analytic framework, preoccupied with the search for a so-called authentic identity, is valid to the extent that it emphasizes the disruptive and exploitive role of European colonialism, it is largely a descriptive paradigm which, in attempting to uncover the psychological motivation behind Islamic revivalism in general, ignores the particularistic character of these movements. The general assumption is that there is one Islam to which all Muslims adhere and, indeed, that these Muslims see a definitive Islamic identity which they all must strive to attain.

A less descriptive but closely related thesis is one which emphasizes the disruptive nature of modernization the components of which include rapid or uneven economic growth, urbanization, and an increase of social and political mobilization facilitated by the expansion of education. Henry Munson, Jr. has pointed out that inherent in this thesis is the notion that "the modernization process results in the erosion of traditional social bonds which in turn engenders unrealizable aspirations in emergent social groups, notably the new middle class."[4] Thus, while one group of authors has sought to describe the psychological motivation of Muslim fundamentalists, another has attempted to delineate the process under which this development may occur.

An important preoccupation with the latter group is the problem of rural-urban migration (urbanization) which is seen as rendering people susceptible to "revolutionary or fundamentalist doctrines while uprooting them from their traditional way of life."[5] Here, however, I would disagree with Munson's critical appraisal which claims that urbanization has been shown not to cause severe social and cultural disruption in the Muslim world,[6] although clearly one should point out that to the extent that some disorientation occurs it is often limited to specific social groups. Nevertheless, it would be difficult to find fault with his argument that this process does not necessarily entail recourse to Islamic resurgence, particularly since the rural-urban poor (who constitute the bulk of the migrants in the cities of the Muslim world) have played a minor role in the Islamic movements of the past two decades.[7] Moreover, while uneven economic growth has resulted in social turmoil in terms of hardships and inequities, this in itself has proved

insufficient in explaining the varying degrees of success among the various fundamentalist movements.

In cases where urbanization, coupled with educational expansion and lack of employment opportunities, does occur, it naturally engenders frustration particularly among the educated and newly mobilized classes. However, while this partially explains the attraction of fundamentalism (as Munson and others have noted), it fails to clarify for us the very nature of this development; that is, while it hints at the socio-economic underpinnings of this attraction, it seems simultaneously to assume that the very ideas of the fundamentalists may be at the root of their political ascendancy. This need not in itself be a contradiction, but it is clearly more useful to understand which factors take precedence over the others, if only to discover why other "alternative" political movements have failed. An analysis of this kind may prove all the more useful in cases such as Sudan where orthodox and fundamentalist Islamic doctrines have historically played a limited role as sources of "nativist" or indigenous ideological inspiration.

In the case of the Sudanese Muslim Brethren, which is our concern here, the above frameworks, whether stressing the defects of modernization or the disruptions caused by foreign domination, fail to explain why this movement has managed to achieve political dominance in recent years and leave one positing more questions than articulating answers. For example, assuming, as Esposito, Rahman, and even Sudanese scholars such as el-Amin believe, that the traditional leadership in Sudan as elsewhere has not been able to provide a viable political and socio-economic system in the post-independence era, why is it that the Muslim Brethren, rather than other alternative movements such as the Communist party, have gained more of a foothold in Sudanese politics in recent years? Is this a result, as many scholars contend, of the increasing attraction of their ideas to the "alienated" and "frustrated" segments of society, or are there more structural factors that account for their ascendancy? Moreover, what, if any, social groups identify with and support the Muslim Brethren in Sudan, and for what reasons?

Our argument in this paper is that historical and structural factors, rather than nebulous psychological ones, can more easily enable us to understand the reasons underlying the growth of the Muslim Brethren in Sudan. While colonialism and the processes of modernization in Sudan have greatly affected the destiny and attitudes of large segments within Sudanese society, the impact has been a result of structural factors which, combined with Sudan's unique historical experience, have contributed to the rise of the Muslim Brethren's power. Moreover, we shall also point to the relation of this movement to the Sudanese social structure so as to more concretely answer the questions posed above. Prior to embarking on this analysis, however, it is important at this juncture to first attempt an interpretation of the true political weight of the Muslim Brethren in recent Sudanese politics, a

factor which has perhaps made it one of the most influential and powerful movements of its kind in the Arab World.

THE MUSLIM BRETHREN AND THE REVOLUTION FOR NATIONAL SALVATION

When, on June 30, 1989, a military coup d'état resulted in the downfall of the third democratic experiment in governance in Sudan's post-independence history, few in the country did not point to the Muslim Brethren as its engineers and supporters. This contention, or rather accusation, arose not from the political profile of the new military junta, whose members were all practically unknown to the population, but rather the very timing of the coup pointed to a not so incidental alliance between the leaders of the so-called Revolution for National Salvation (*Thawrat al-Inqath al-Watani*) and the Muslim Brethren organized under the banner of their political party, the National Islamic Front (NIF). A brief survey of the events immediately leading up to this coup and the political and social forces involved not only serves as an indictment of the NIF's role in the coup, but also contributes to an understanding of the Muslim Brethren's political agenda.

In December 1988, widespread strikes and demonstrations erupted in Khartoum, led primarily by the newly revitalized workers' and tenants' unions and the federation of professionals, civil servants, and artisans.[8] These were the same social groups which in the 1950s and 1960s made up the bulwark of support of what was then the extremely influential Communist Party of Sudan (CPS), and which were largely responsible for the downfall of the first military regime in Sudan under Ibrahim Abboud (1958-64), as well as the second one under Ja'afar Nimairi (1969-85).[9] This time, with the Communist party poorly organized as a result of being purged by Nimairi in the early 1970s, these social groups once again took to the streets, calling themselves the Modern Forces (*Al-Quwah al-Haditha*) in clear opposition to the country's traditional parties which since independence have dominated the political scene.

Their actions stemmed from the frustration caused by the petty inter-party squabbling involving the traditional Sufi- linked Umma and Democratic Unionist parties, as well as the National Islamic Front (NIF) which had joined with the Umma party to form a majority in Parliament. The primary demand of the Modern Forces was an immediate end to the civil war which since 1984-85 had drained the economy and impoverished the nation. Their call was for a peaceful solution toward the war involving the southern rebel movement of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA), and the repeal of the 1983 sharia-based September Laws in order to facilitate its speedy resolution.[10]

Two months later, in February 1989, a group of high ranking military officers joined the Modern Forces' cause. They submitted a memorandum to the civilian government warning that it must stop dragging its feet and seek an immediate solution to the war. They stated their own refusal to continue in the pursuit of a military solution to the conflict. Taken together, these events led to the drafting of the National Memorandum for Peace which was subsequently signed by all the major political parties, except for the NIF which opted to leave the ruling government and form an opposition front. This turn of events compelled the prime minister, and leader of the Umma party, Sadiq al-Mahdi, to form a new coalition incorporating members of the professional, trade, and workers' unions into the new government which was now in a position to recommend peace talks based on an agreement signed in Addis Ababa in December of the previous year by the leader of the SPLA, John Garang, and Muhammad Osman al-Mirghani, head of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and spiritual leader of the Khatmiyya religious sect. This agreement called for the repeal of the 1983 September Laws and the postponement of the implementation of sharia law until a truly representative constitutional conference (*mu'tamar disturi*) could be convened following a cease-fire agreement.[11]

In mid-June 1989, the government announced that a Council of Ministers meeting would be held on July 1st which was to formally repeal the September Laws contingent upon the review of a legal committee comprising representatives from all political parties. On July 4th, three days after this "peace gesture," a delegation from the new government in Khartoum and the SPLA were to meet to iron out a permanent resolution to the civil war in the country.[12] Peace finally seemed at hand, and the September Laws as well as more pervasive sharia legislation were to be if not cancelled, then at least postponed until further deliberation.

However, twenty-four hours before the scheduled repeal of the September Laws and only four days prior to the peace talks, a group of mid-ranking officers, most of them in their middle 30s, took over the Republican Palace, the Parliament, and the National Broadcasting Station, and simultaneously captured the most influential party and union leaders throughout the capital city. Declaring their "revolution" as being one opposed to inter-party opportunism, and executed for the purpose of eliminating rampant corruption and the salvaging of the bankrupt economy, they formed the Revolutionary Command Council under the leadership of Omer Hassan Ahmad al-Beshir and called for a Revolution for National Salvation.

Many observers of these events quickly pointed to a link between the Muslim Brethren and their stated ambition of reclaiming their influence after being marginalized following widespread support for a swift resolution to the country's economic problems by way of ending the civil war. The now common view is that the Muslim Brethren and their highly organized security apparatus greatly contributed to the success of the June 30th coup

d'état for essentially two reasons, the first being because a peace agreement seemed imminent and based on the repeal of the only genuine program of the Muslim Brethren – the application of sharia law in all aspects of social, political, and economic life. The second reason, related to the first, stems from the Muslim Brethren's historical antagonism toward the so-called Modern Forces which economically and ideologically are closely linked to the Communists, or more accurately leftists, in the country. That these largely secular forces had been incorporated into the new government greatly alarmed the Muslim Brethren and their supporters who felt that this turn of events would threaten the very existence of their movement.[13]

It should also be noted that upon assuming power the new military regime implemented policies clearly targeted against these forces even more than the traditional parties which the regime ousted. While dissolving all parties and structures of the constituent assembly, the new military leadership imprisoned a disproportionate number of members belonging to the workers' and professional unions. They also banned all independent press publications, forcibly retired over 300 senior officers, and replaced hundreds of civil servants with NIF members and their sympathizers.[14]

THE MOVEMENT'S ORIGINS WITHIN A HISTORICAL CONTEXT

At this point it is important to turn to an explanation of the origins and rise of the Muslim Brethren in Sudan which, taken within their proper historical and socio-religious context, can offer us great insight as to the reasons behind the movement's political ascendancy.

A well known Sudanese scholar and politician recently observed that Islam in Sudan, particularly since the 19th century, has been of an "eclectic and diverse variety."[15] Muslim missionaries who came to Sudan from Egypt, the Hijaz, and the Maghreb in the 12th and 13th centuries brought with them the *turuq* (Sufi orders), which by the early 1800s became firmly established in the country as the most profound and pervasive form of religious and political influence. Sufism, as opposed to the more orthodox Islam of the ulema, became institutionalized, and was based on the teachings of such turuq as the Qadiriyya, Shadhilliyya, Majdhubiyya, Tijaniyya, Khatmiyya, and Samaniyya. Moreover, prior to independence it was the leadership of the more influential turuq which became the key agents of social change, engineering a number of revolts, first against Turco-Egyptian rule and later against the British colonizers.

Among the first Sufi orders to be established in Sudan were the Qadiriyya, following the path of Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani (1077-1160), and the Shadhilliyya, following the teachings of Abu al-Hassan al-Shadhilli (d. 1258). The former was introduced into Sudan from Baghdad by Taj al-Din al-Buhari, who in the middle of the 16th century settled in the central Gezira

region. It continues to have a strong following in that part of the country but over the years has split into three branches: the Sadiqab, the Ya'qubab, and the Arakiyyin.[16] Consequently, a distinctive characteristic of the Qadiriyya order in Sudan is the looseness of its organization and the diversity of elements within it. The fact that it is organizationally diffuse has meant that despite having a substantial number of adherents it has not carried the political weight of other more centralized turuq.

The Shadhilliyya tariqa is generally believed to have been brought from the Maghreb in 1445 by Sherif Hamad Abu Dunanan, who in that year settled in the northeast district of Berber. Today it has a small following among the tribes of the Red Sea coast, but it has been described as a "school of Sufi doctrine rather than an organized order."[17] As such, it can be found in Sudan (as elsewhere) mainly in derivatives such as the Majdhubiyya and has been influential primarily in affecting the doctrines of other turuq in Sudan. Nevertheless, its Majdhubiyya offshoot, by virtue of its highly centralized character, was able to serve as a coherent political force in the past. Majdhubiyya adherents are widely known to have resisted the Egyptian occupation of Sudan (1820-1881) and they strongly supported the Mahdist movement against the British in the latter part of the 19th century.[18]

Among the less politically significant orders is the Tijaniyya, whose adherents are derived primarily from migrants of West African descent. These migrants, most of whom function as wage laborers in the cotton schemes of the Gezira, have carried little weight in Sudanese political life.[19]

Of greater historical importance have been the Khatmiyya and Samaniyya turuq, both of which have played major roles in modern Sudanese politics. The Khatmiyya, or Mirghani order, was initially founded in Sudan by Muhammad Osman al-Mirghani (1793-1853) who developed it along the spiritual teachings of the Idrissiyya order in the Hijaz. Al-Mirghani eventually modified the traditions of the tariqa, emphasizing the "sanctity" of his own family's leadership and consequently firmly centralizing the hierarchical structure of the order.[20] However, it was not until the leadership of Osman al-Mirghani's son, al-Hasan, that the Khatmiyya order became firmly entrenched in what is now the northern and Kassala provinces of Sudan. Upon al-Hasan's death in 1869 the succession passed to his son, Muhammad Osman Taj al-Sirr, who was responsible for mobilizing the tariqa's followers to support the Turco-Egyptian regime and to actively oppose the revolutionary movement of Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi, thus setting the stage for the political rivalry between these two families that has lasted to the present day.

For its part, the Samaniyya is the basic tariqa of the Hamer tribe of Kordofan and of the Fadniyya East, sub-tribe of the Ja'aliyyin, but it is most strongly represented along both banks of the White Nile and in the agriculturally rich Gezira region of central Sudan.[21] Introduced from the Hijaz by Ahmad al-Tayyib ibn al-Beshir around 1800, the Samaniyya is most sig-

nificant in terms of the influential Mahdi family which it originally counted among its adherents. The spiritual and political leader, Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi, was an ardent follower of this order prior to declaring his revolution in 1881 against British authority. Although today the Mahdi family has developed an autonomous following of *ansar* (supporters), it continues to find its doctrinal inspiration in Samaniyya teachings.

More to the point is that throughout Sudanese history the great influence of "popular" Islam (over the orthodox and fundamentalist variety) greatly explains the very slow growth of the Muslim Brethren movement in the 1940s, 50s, and 60s. During this period the process of Western colonial penetration of the country did not engender recourse to fundamentalist feeling on the part of the people who, while clearly conscious of the harmful effects left by the British, sought refuge within their respectively varied identities vis-à-vis the different turuq.

This is not to say, however, that orthodox Islam has had no institutional foundation in Sudan. The Turco-Egyptian conquest of the country beginning in 1820-21 brought with it the sharia, which previously had a minor role in Sudanese life, although nominally the people adhered to the Maliki school of Islamic jurisprudence (*madhhab*).[22] Tribal and popular Islamic custom was in most respects the effective law. The Egyptian administration established a formal hierarchy of qadis and muftis within the context of a system of religious courts designed to administer sharia according to the Hanafi madhhab. They also built a number of mosques and facilitated the education of a significant number of Sudanese ulema.[23] Thus, the traditional and more indigenous Muslim leadership of the Sufi orders was confronted with a rival group, more alien in its outlook, and closely associated with a foreign occupying force. This continuing source of tension significantly contributed to the development and eventual success of the Mahdi revolution and in its subsequent marginalization of the ulema class. Furthermore, as more than one historian has noted, the intellectual austerity of orthodox teaching has always paled beside the emotional vigor and vitality of the Sufi orders:

> The remote and legalistic religion of the Ulema could not easily constitute a living creed for the mass of the population—especially for the rural people, distant as they were from the big mosques of the great cities. Sufism, named after the simple woolen clothing (suf) for travelling holy men, came therefore to fill an important human need: putting forward 'paths' (turuq) whereby individuals could attain experience of God.[24]

This truism in northern Sudanese history clearly repudiates the contention among many authors that fundamentalist Islam offers a unifying indigenous identity for many Muslims who, in feeling slighted by foreign domination, have increasingly sought in it a moral, political, and even economic refuge. What is clear, at least in the Sudanese case, is that orthodox Islam, even in its most fundamentalist variety, has never played a

formative role in determining the nation's economic and political fortunes. This is true not only of the period of Turco-Egyptian rule but also, as we shall see below, of the British condominium era. Having stated this, however, one is still left with the question of what factors have contributed to the seemingly surprising ascendancy of the Muslim Brethren in Sudan. In my view, an historical and socio-economic approach to this phenomenon offers a more viable explanation.

By the 1940s, a number of educated Sudanese youth began to seek alternatives to the political dominance of the two most powerful turuq in the country: the Mahdist-led Umma party and the Khatmiyya-led Ashiqqa (later DUP) party. The reason for this was the knowledge on the part of an increasing number of Sudanese youth that the leadership of both these turuq had been openly opposed to the anti-colonial movement in the country,[25] and also that both had greatly profited from British patronage, which in Kitchener's own words, sought to "acquire the confidence of the people by being thoroughly in touch with the better class of native."[26]

This "better class of native" eventually emerged along traditional sectarian lines and under the banners of the Umma and Khatmiyya turuq which were destined to dominate Sudanese civilian politics to the present day. By characteristically playing one sect against the other, the British managed to greatly promote the economic fortunes of the Mahdi and Mirghani families who comprised the leadership of the Umma and Khatmiyya sects, respectively. Consequently, under British patronage the Khatmiyya was able to consolidate its economic power in the urban areas of the northern and eastern regions, where its control of retail trade was the basis for the formation of local petty traders and a commercial bourgeoisie. Similarly, the British colonialists went about reestablishing the Mahdi (Umma) family's status as the premier landlord, agricultural, capitalist class by returning to them previously confiscated agricultural lands and by supplying them with the capital necessary to develop large-scale pump and mechanized agricultural schemes.[27]

Nevertheless, by the end of the Mahdiyya era (1881-1898) it was in no way apparent that the Mahdi and Mirghani families would so completely overshadow other Sufi-linked movements as to effectively marginalize the latter both politically and economically. The families of both sects had for all practical purposes been eliminated—the Mirghani family during the Mahdist period (1881-1898) at which time their opposition to the movement forced them into exile in Egypt, and the Mahdi family who were crushingly defeated and had most of their property confiscated following the British reconquest of the country in 1898.

The revival of the religious and political power of these two families, in addition to being bolstered chiefly by British financial patronage, was partially influenced by factors internal to the order or movement. However, this process itself greatly depended on the extent to which the various Sufi

religious leaders were in a position to accumulate funds contingent on a number of factors: whether the tariqa was highly centralized (such that all contributions and dues flowed to a single leader or family, as was the case with the Mahdists and the Khatmiyya) or decentralized (such that funds flowed to a dispersed and localized leadership, as with the Qadiriyya and Shadhilliyya orders); whether the leadership was oriented toward involvement in the economy (i.e., the Mahdists and Khatmiyya) or viewed its role primarily in terms of spiritual and doctrinal services (as did the Shadhilliyya); and, perhaps most importantly, whether the tariqa's membership resided in an area where incomes were rising (and hence where the population could afford to make significant contributions, as was the case with the followers of the Mahdi family situated in the fertile Gezira plain).[28]

Viewed along the above criteria both the Mahdists and the Khatmiyya were well placed to emerge as the two most dominant political forces in the country, taking full advantage of the period in which British authorities decided to take an active part in promoting their respective economic fortunes.

By the late 1920s the then leader of the Mahdi family, Sayyid Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi, was not only deriving an income of over LE30,000 annually,[29] but he also began to establish wider contacts among educated Sudanese, hence translating his impressive economic weight into political leverage. The methods he used for this purpose are noteworthy in that they were to be repeatedly imitated by other aspiring political groups, including the Muslim Brethren:

> He [Sayyid Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi] entertained them [the educated] whenever occasion offered, subscribed generously to their studies and charities and put government hospitality in the shade with his splendid receptions at religious and national festivals. He held court like an Abbasid Khalif.[30]

For his part, Sayyid Ali Mirghani, the Khatmiyya leader and contemporary of Sayyid Abd al-Rahman, responded to these tactics by patronizing another segment of the Sudanese educated classes in a similar manner. Both families hoped to use these social mechanisms, made possible by their now impressive financial assets, as a way of shaping the post-independence political objectives of the "graduates." That is, not satisfied with the fact that they had come to form a central part of the Sudanese commercial establishment, they sought to acquire an equally strong impact on any future political power-broking in the country and in so doing safeguard and continue to promote their economic prestige.

Within the context of these class and quasi-political formations, instigated under British rule and lasting to the present day, it is not surprising that in the 1940s at the height of nationalist fervor in Egypt a number of Sudanese youth began to look for alternatives other than those offered by

the traditional leaders of the country who seemed unwilling to pursue nationalist rather than self-aggrandizing economic interests. Two such alternatives emerged at this time: the Communists and the Muslim Brethren. To answer why the Muslim Brethren movement has realized a surge of growth in recent years while the Communists' has declined in power and influence, it is not sufficient to point to the alienating features of Western-style secularism inherent in the Communists' program. Rather, it is more useful to highlight the political and economic reasons that have helped facilitate this development.

While Muslim Brethren groups have been active in Sudan since the mid-1940s at a time when a number of students influenced by the fundamentalist movement in Egypt were returning to the country, none offered a concrete blueprint for an indigenous fundamentalist movement. In fact, when in March 1949 these groups institutionalized their movement into a political party, this was done primarily as a reaction to the influence of the Communists in the nationalist student movement of the time. In that year a school teacher, Babikir Karrar, formed the Islamic Movement for Liberation (ILM) which espoused vague notions of Islamic socialism based on sharia law. The main concern of the organization at this time as in later years was the rejection of the ideas of the Communists, who were then the dominant political organization at University College in Khartoum.[31]

By 1954, a divergence erupted within the ILM over the primacy of political objectives, with Babikir Karrar and his supporters maintaining that the organization's emphasis should be on the spiritual awakening of the people prior to any attempts at political activism. It was this point of debate which led to the creation of two separate organizations: the Islamic Group, adhering to Babikir Karrar, and the Muslim Brethren, led initially by Rashid al-Tahir, and later in 1964 by the present leader, Hassan al-Turabi. The latter received his doctoral degree in law from the Sorbonne in Paris, and his father was a respected sheikh from a small town north of Khartoum. Gifted with a high level of political sophistication which often took precedence over his stated religious scruples, al-Turabi has been able to lead the Muslim Brethren movement into playing a crucial role in Sudanese politics.

By al-Turabi's own admission the social base of the movement in its first nine years was limited to students and recent graduates "in order to retain the intellectual quality of the movement."[32] It is clear that al-Turabi and other leaders of the movement have always known that they made up a new and unique phenomenon in Sudanese politics and for this reason they thought it "undesirable to dilute the intellectual content of the movement by a large scale absorption of the masses." They were quite aware that the dominance of Sufi religiosity in the country precluded their particular fundamentalist brand of Islam from developing into a mass movement. At best, particularly in the formative period of their movement, they hoped to "draw people away from the sects and to give them an alternative."[33]

Yet clearly they have also believed that in order for them to succeed they must at all costs do away with any other alternatives put before the people, which until the 1970s was the Communist Party of Sudan (CPS), and in the 1980s the aforementioned Modern Forces.

The growing influence of the Communists under the Abboud regime (1958-64), and particularly their dominant role in the ouster of that regime and in the subsequent transitional government after the October 1964 revolution, necessitated a change in the Muslim Brethren's tactics. Specifically, they decided to begin, for the first time, some kind of "mass organization in order to participate in the upcoming elections."[34] Consequently, in 1964 they formed the Islamic Charter Front (ICF)—the forerunner of the National Islamic Front (NIF)—with Hassan al-Turabi as its chairman. Al-Turabi's strategy was to form political alliances with other traditional forces, which more often than not was the Umma party, with a view toward achieving two objectives: first, to isolate politically and then to ban the Communist party in the Sudan; and second, by utilizing the Islamic sentiments of the people to campaign for an Islamic constitution based on sharia.[35] These objectives were obstructed by the imposition of a pro-Communist regime in May 1969, led by Ja'afar Nimairi. Predictably, the Brethren opposed the regime and along with their frequent ally, the Umma party, formed an opposition front in exile.

Nimairi's suppression of the Communist party following the 1970 Communist-backed coup attempt eventually resulted in greatly enhancing the fortunes of the Brethren, who by July 1977 had entered into a "marriage of convenience" with the Sudanese dictator. In that year, Nimairi embarked on a process of reconciliation in which he restored to the traditional parties as well as to the Muslim Brethren the right to participate in the political process, provided, of course, that they exercised this right within the existing one-party system. In return, the Umma party and the Muslim Brethren agreed to dissolve their opposition front.

The political benefits of the Brethren's and their leader's compromising approach were to become unmistakably evident as time passed. By the autumn of 1980, the movement was sufficiently well organized to enable it to gain a substantial number of seats in the elections for a new people's assembly, and al-Turabi himself was appointed the country's attorney general.[36] The motivation behind Nimairi's open co-optation of the Muslim Brethren at this time stemmed primarily from his perceived need to outflank the Sufi-led political movements which, as detailed above, have always held the allegiance of the majority of northern Sudanese. For their part, the Brethren naturally welcomed these developments as an opportunity to enhance their political and organizational strengths. However, it is no less true that during this time the membership of the movement had greatly increased not only in prestige but in sheer numbers, so much so that by the early 1980s

it was clear to most that it was no longer a fringe or marginal movement as it had been during the first twenty years following independence.

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SMALL TRADERS AND THE ISLAMIC BANKS

The question here then, aside from the political benefits garnered under Nimairi, is what other factors have contributed in making this particular fundamentalist movement so influential, particularly in the last ten to fifteen years? A discussion of the movement's economic support base in relation to the country's social structure provides the best basis for attempting to answer this question.

The Muslim Brethren's greatest strength lies in two sections of Sudanese society. The first source is one typical of fundamentalist movements in other countries and can be found among secondary school and university students, particularly in the capital and in the west of the country. During the 1970s, a large number of the Brethren's supporters became teachers in the western provinces and consequently there has been major support for the movement among Sudanese pupils there. In addition, when the latter went on to universities in Khartoum they came to dominate student politics to such an extent that until this year their candidates have swept to victory in all the student union elections.[37]

The second and perhaps more important power base is among the urban-based small traders and industrialists, who are essentially petit bourgeois entrepreneurs. They oppose the traditionally powerful merchant families primarily because the latter pose a threat to their own economic aspirations.

The most significant development in recent years that is closely related to this social group, and hence greatly contributing to the ascendancy of the Muslim Brethren, has been the growth of Islamic banking. Since the Faisal Islamic Bank (FIB) first established a presence in Sudan in May 1978, there has been a remarkable expansion of Islamic banking in the country. Beginning in the late 1970s and under the initiative of the Muslim Brethren, Islamic banks have entered the Sudanese financial system and attracted the small traders and industrial entrepreneurs who, as stated earlier, are the principal source of the movement's support.[38]

The spread of Islamic banks has garnered much controversy in Sudan, primarily because of their special status under the Nimairi regime which afforded them a special advantage over other commercial banks. The Republican decree which created the FIB was more lenient toward them than to the nationalized or conventional foreign banks. FIB has drawn a great deal of criticism from economists and politicians alike concerned with

the lack of state control and the high percentage of capital in low-risk trade.[39]

In September of 1983, Nimairi declared the application of sharia law. Two months later, on December 9th, a committee formed by the president declared that no banks may operate under the interest-based system. The entire banking system, including foreign banks, was converted and under the terms of the directive all assets and liabilities were either liquidated or transferred to an Islamic formula.[40] Until recently, no banks have used conventional systems until the relatively minor Equatoria Commercial Bank (ECB) was established in the southern capital of Juba in 1987.[41]

What is of paramount significance here is that the very timing of this policy shift occurred at a time when President Nimairi sought to outflank the traditional religious and political leaders by implementing an Islamization policy and cultivating the allegiance of the Muslim Brethren, at the time the only political group left in his support.[42]

Although they started from a small capital base, the Islamic banks, thanks to the influx of petro-dollars from the Gulf States following the oil price shocks of 1973-74 and again in 1978, have grown at a much faster rate than the other traditional banks. In the early 1980s, for example, they doubled their assets and profits annually, and their paid-up capital was greater than the fifteen national commercial banks.[43]

Leading this spectacular growth was the FIB, whose paid-up capital rose from 3.6 million Sudanese pounds (LS) in 1979 to as much as LS57.6 million in 1983. Over the same period FIB's net profits rose from LS1.1 million to LS24.7 million, while its assets, both at home and abroad, increased from LS31.1 million to LS441.3 million.[44]

The Faisal Islamic Bank of Sudan is of great import not only because it was the first bank of its kind established in the country, but also because it has served as a model for similar Islamic banks which, taken together, have come to play an extremely influential role in the country's financial sector. The FIB was founded in 1977 under the initiative of Prince Muhammad bin Faisal of Saudi Arabia who, along with other private Saudi sources, provides 40% of the bank's capital base. Sudanese citizens provide another 40%, while the remaining 20% is put up by other nationals, primarily from the oil-rich Gulf states.[45]

The FIB, like other Islamic banks in Sudan, has an office in Jeddah which accepts deposits from Saudi citizens and Sudanese expatriates that are immediately recycled to Khartoum where its activities are centered.[46] It is precisely because most of these banks' capital is garnered from Arab sources that the success of this banking sector has paralleled the oil revenue fortunes of the oil-exporting Arab nations, beginning in the mid-1970s. Moreover, since, according to Prince Faisal, "all the financial operations of these Islamic banks are designed to provide for the requirements of Muslims within the framework of the principles and precepts of the Sharia,"[47] the

Sudanese Muslim Brethren (whose political agenda is concerned primarily with the implementation of sharia law) found themselves well placed to introduce and dominate this system in Sudan.[48]

The self-avowed intention of the Islamic banks in general is to concentrate on direct investment activities and to participate in the project financing of small-scale industries.[49] At present over 90% of these banks' investments are allocated to import-export trade. In 1987, for example, the average investment allocation for the FIB alone was 45% to imports, 40% to local trade, 10% to exports, 1% to handicraft activities, and only 4% to what is potentially the nation's most productive sector, agriculture.[50]

This investment pattern, essentially designed to encourage the growth of small and medium-sized businesses, has effectively ensured that the bulk of the Muslim Brethren's support is derived from the middle and lower strata of urban entrepreneurs. In recent years, as we shall see below, this development has resulted in a conflict between this new trading class and the big, traditional export-import merchants (most of whom are linked to the Khatmiyya sect) who had previously dominated this economic sector and whose members are allowed little access to Islamic bank financing.

In addition, the fact that clients who borrow from an Islamic bank usually have to enter into a joint venture for a specific project implies that capital is offered with many economic as well as political strings attached. This usually takes the form of an equity-participation agreement (*musharaka*) in which both parties provide capital for a business venture over a temporary period. Parties agree on a profit-loss split based on the proportion of capital provided. If, for example, $10,000 worth of industrial spare parts are being bought and then sold by a trader, the bank (while not charging interest) will take 25% of the profits and the borrower the remaining 75%, assuming an equivalent proportion of capital input.[51]

This newly found financial success has been successfully utilized by the Muslim Brethren as the basis for social mechanisms designed to engender political mobilization among influential segments in Sudanese society. Thus, in many cases, in order for an aspiring businessman to qualify for a loan from one of the Islamic banks, he must usually provide a reliable reference from an already established businessman with a good record of support for the movement,[52] a development that has resulted in an almost comic attempt on the part of many in the urban marketplace to assume the physical as well religious and political guise of the fundamentalist Muslim Brethren. Moreover, in a strategy reminiscent of the mobilization efforts of the more traditional leaders of the country, the Muslim Brethren have provided numerous philanthropic and social services as a means of broadening their political base. In order to attract a strong following among the young student population, for example, the Brethren provide educational scholarships abroad to those who have assumed a particularly ardent political posture on their behalf. They are also very active in securing employment for recent

university graduates, a proposition which is especially attractive to the newly-urbanized Sudanese. A student from the University of Khartoum recently rationalized his support for the Brethren in this manner: "I am not really interested in politics. In fact, that is why I support the *Ikhwan* [Brethren] in the student elections. I am much more concerned with being able to live in a comfortable house, eat, and hopefully find a reasonable job after I graduate. The fact is that the Ikhwan are the only ones who will help me accomplish that."[53]

With the escalating national debt and lack of domestic savings in the country, Islamic banks have become one of the most important sources of finance in Sudan. Moreover, the Brethren's close links with Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states means that there is almost no shortage of cash even in a country as poor as Sudan. Within this context it is not difficult to see why the Muslim fundamentalist movement, spearheaded by the Muslim Brethren, grew dramatically from the late 1970s onward.

The success of the Muslim Brethren among the newly emerging small-scale trading and industrial bourgeoisie has brought them into economic conflict with the Khatmiyya (DUP) sect which, as noted earlier, had managed under colonial rule to consolidate its power among the urban petty traders. It is of great interest to note that this development has typically translated into political conflict as well. This animosity is reflected in the tendency on the part of the National Islamic Front to ally itself with the traditional Umma party both because their respective leaders are related by marriage and, more importantly, because they share a common hostility toward the Khatmiyya. The Umma party, deriving its economic fortunes primarily from agricultural schemes, poses much less of a threat to the Muslim Brethren and their supporters, who share competing interests with the Khatmiyya sect in the trading and industrial sectors in the urban areas. In response to the success of the Faisal Islamic Bank and a host of others dominated by Brethren members, a number of wealthy merchants belonging to the Khatmiyya established the Sudanese Islamic Bank in 1982 in a clear bid to regain their monopoly of the country's retail trade and financial system.[54] Nevertheless, members of the Khatmiyya, perhaps in recognition of the Brethren's advantage in this field, have in recent years chosen to oppose them on another front, the political. Thus, while in the 1970s the Khatmiyya's spiritual leader, Muhammad Osman al-Mirghani, was careful not to speak out against sharia, in recent years he has actually opposed its implementation on the grounds that it poses an obstacle to the peaceful resolution of the southern civil war.

This discussion as to the real socio-economic support base of the Muslim Brethren and its place within the Sudanese social structure is important not only because it sheds light on the reasons for the movement's increasing support among specific social groups, but also because it offers further evidence of the latter's role in the new regime. More specifically, it provides

insight as to why the new Muslim Brethren-backed regime has initiated a violent and often hysterical attack against those citizens whom they believe to be involved in the black market. Most of these black marketeers are from marginal ethnic groups and sects and consequently have little access to credit. They utilize the buying and selling of hard currency in the informal market as a means of obtaining financing for their small or medium-sized businesses primarily in the capital. It is not difficult to see why these types of operations would incur the wrath of a government supported by the Muslim Brethren, and it largely explains why Sudan is now the only country in the world which executes its citizens on these grounds. It may also explain the impetus behind the new regime's economic policy which permits the Islamic banks to freely participate in financial transactions involving foreign currency while closely monitoring and regulating similar operations in other Sudanese banks.[55]

CONCLUSION

It is difficult to predict how long the alliance between the Muslim Brethren and their supporters with the new military regime will last. What is evident, however, is that political developments in Sudan have since colonial times been greatly influenced by external forces. British patronage of particular religious sects helped the latter consolidate their economic base and set the stage for Sudan's political development in the post-independence era. Yet it would be no less true to say that the current ascendancy of the Muslim Brethren movement does not reflect a return to a fundamentalist or "authentic" identity resulting from a long-harbored resentment of the West. Indeed, not only has there never been such a singular "identity" in Sudan's history, but another form of dependency has resulted based on the reliance on Arab petro-dollars which, within the context of Sudan's bankrupt economy, has resulted in the promotion of the economic and political prestige of certain social groups under the umbrella of the Muslim Brethren movement. Thus, it would be more accurate to say that the latter represents an entirely new phenomenon supported by an entirely new social class.

Such a structural and historical analysis is useful in that it enables one to view the future political fortunes of the Sudanese Muslim Brethren within the context of specific social groups who in themselves are dependent upon financial linkages with the oil-rich Arab states. The fact that the traditional Sufi-linked leaders of Sudan lost much of their political influence following a commensurate decline in their economic fortunes may mean that a similar development may occur to the Brethren if for any reasons their financial sources from the Gulf dry up. The new military regime, however, is unlikely to outlast such a development if only because its reliance on the Brethren's support means that its legitimacy is derived from too narrow a social base

(i.e., segments of the middle and lower strata of urban entrepreneurs) in the country. This may also explain why the present regime has, since assuming power, responded to a wide range of opposition with a degree of repression and violence unparalleled in the history of post-independence Sudan.

This is not say that the very origins of the Muslim Brethren did not stem from the failure of the traditional leadership to fashion what Esposito has called a broad-based "political and social synthesis" in Sudan. Yet this type of analysis, so common in the literature on the subject, in the end serves a superficial utility in that it neglects to discuss the structural factors underlying this failure. In other words, while certain internal factors shared by both the Khatmiyya and the Mahdists facilitated their economic advancement, the pattern by which this development occurred would not have been possible without British patronage of these sects. The promotion of the Khatmiyya and the Mahdists in the financial and agricultural sectors, respectively, ensured their inability, or rather unwillingness, to advance the interests of all the factionalized segments of Sudanese society even though theoretically they were in a position to do so following independence in 1956.

In effect, then, colonial policy in Sudan not only exacerbated traditional sectarian and class cleavages, but it also played a significant role in the rise of alternative political movements such as the Muslim Brethren and the Communist party. That the Brethren in particular have achieved great influence in recent years, however, was, as has been illustrated, due to a combination of socio-economic and political factors rather than to an inherent or "nativist" attraction to their fundamentalist ideas.

Similarly, while the process of modernization in Sudan, as elsewhere, has engendered "frustration," particularly among the newly urbanized and educated classes, this in itself cannot explain the real reasons why the Muslim Brethren in particular have enjoyed such success. Factors such as urbanization, social mobilization, and uneven economic development, commonly associated with this process, have been in effect in Sudan at least since colonial times and yet, until fifteen years ago, the Muslim Brethren movement was largely weak and isolated. While it is quite probable that in recent years a large number of the Brethren's supporters have come to view the movement as a promising ideological alternative, this still does not illuminate for us why it has amassed more political clout than other movements and why this ascendancy took off in the mid-1970s.

Sectarian affiliations continue to provide the most significant ideological and spiritual refuge for the great majority of northern Sudanese, and yet the political ascendancy of such Sufi-linked movements as the Mahdists and the Khatmiyya throughout the country's modern history has itself depended on their respective economic advancement facilitated under colonial times. There is little reason to believe that the Brethren's fundamentalist ideas have somehow proved more politically relevant or more spiritually potent than those of the more traditional movements, and it is consequently much

more useful to discuss the former's political advancement within a social structure particular to the Sudanese case.

NOTES

1. John L. Esposito, ed., *Islam and Politics* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 152.

2. Fazlur Rahman, "Roots of Islamic Neo-Fundamentalism," in Phillip Stoddard et al (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 1981), 34.

3. Nafissa Ahman El-Amin, "Sudan: Education and Family," in Stoddard et al, 87.

4. Henry Munson, Jr., *Islam and Revolution in the Middle East* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1988), 111.

5. *Ibid.*, 112.

6. *Ibid.* See also Nafissa Ahman El-Amin for a good account of the disruptive cultural ramifications of urbanization in Sudan. It should also be noted that in this instance Munson is primarily concerned with revolutionary fundamentalism (as in the Iranian case) rather than with the more subtle variety advocated by the various Muslim Brethren movements.

7. *Ibid.*

8. *Bayyan Min Fari'al-Tadamun al Watani al-Dimokrati al-Sudani bi-Washington.* Distributed by the Sudanese Opposition Front's Washington branch. I was also a witness to these events while on several journalistic assignments in Sudan.

9. Tim Niblock, *Class and Power in Sudan* (NY: SUNY Press, 1987), 226.

10. *Bayaan Min Fari'al-Tadamun.* Eyewitness reports.

11. *Ibid.*

12. *Ibid.*

13. Interview with former Sudanese Minister of the Interior, Mubarak al-Fadl, in *Al-Hayah*, September 2-3, 1989.

14. *Bayaan min Fari'al-Tadamun.*

15. Interview with prominent Sudanese politician and scholar, April, 1990. Name withheld by request.

16. Niblock, 102.

17. J.S. Trimingham, *Islam in the Sudan* (London, 1949), 222.

18. Niblock, 104.

19. Trimingham, 236.

20. See P. M. Holt, *The Mahdist State in the Sudan* (Oxford University Press, 1958) for one of the best accounts of Sufi orders in Sudanese history. Pages 16-21 discuss the organizational structures of these turuq. Apparently not all orders place special emphasis on the principle of heredity and family leadership (p.18).

21. Trimingham, 227.

22. Holt, 21.

23. P. M. Holt, *Studies in the History of the Near East* (London: Frank Cass, 1973), 140.

24. Niblock, 100. See also Holt, *Studies in the History of the Near East* for a discussion of the predominance of Sufism over orthodox Islam in Sudan.

25. Fatima Babiker Mahmoud, *The Sudanese Bourgeoisie: Vanguard of Development?* (London: Zed Books, Ltd., 1984), 134.

26. Niblock, 104.

27. Carole Collins, "Colonialism and Power in the Sudan," *Merip* 46 (1976):6. See also Babiker Mahmoud, *Sudanese Bourgeoisie*, 135.

28. Niblock, 51.

29. *Ibid.*

30. Quoted in Niblock, 53.

31. "Islam: Blueprint for a New Century," *Sudanow*, November, 1979, 11.

32. Peter K. Bechtold, *Politics in the Sudan: Parliamentary and Military Rule in an Emerging African Nation* (New York: Praeger, 1976), 89. Quoting the leader of the Muslim Brethren in Sudan, Hassan al-Turabi.

33. *Ibid.*

34. *Ibid.*

35. Alexander S. Cudsi, "Islam and Politics in the Sudan," *AFRICA*, March 1978, 48.

36. "An Equal Place for All," Interview with Hassan al-Turabi, in *Sudanow*, February 1980, 12.

37. Charles Gurdon, *Sudan at the Crossroads* (London: Middle East and North African Studies Press, 1984), 68. Many of these elections, however, have been widely contested by various segments of the University of Khartoum's student body. Brethren members have often resorted to violence on campus as a form of political coercion.

38. *Ibid.*

39. Bahman Roshan, "Sudan and the Faisal Islamic Bank," in *Arabia: The Islamic World View*, November 1985, 6.

40. Arab Banking Cooperation. Occasional Paper Series-No. 1. Arab Banking Systems (United Kingdom), January 1985, 41.

41. Economist Intelligence Unit, *Country Report: Sudan* (London: Economist Publications, Ltd., No. 3, 1987), 19.

42. Bona Malwal, *The Sudan: A Second Challenge to Nationhood* (NY: Thorton Books, 1985), 37. For a detailed account of Nimairi's Islamization policies, see Mansour Khalid, *Nimairi and the Revolution of Dis-May* (London: KPI, 1985).

43. Roshan, 6.

44. *Faisal Islamic Bank Annual Reports,* quoted in an as yet untitled and unpublished thesis by Magdi Mutwakil Ahmad Amin. (Princeton University).

45. Rodney Wilson, *Banking and Finance in the Arab Middle East* (London: St. Martin's Press, 1983), 85. The Faisal Islamic Bank was immediately successful and by the end of its second year had two branches as well as its head office in Khartoum.

46. *Ibid.*

47. *Ibid.*, 82.

48. The Brethren's concern with dominating the Sudanese financial sector through the Islamic banking system may partially explain Hassan al-Turabi's seemingly contradictory stance on the practice of usury (the charging of interest). While he has always maintained

that the implementation of sharia would not discriminate against people of other monotheistic religions, he has quite adamantly spoken out against riba (interest), claiming that it is forbidden by all religions and hence its use cannot be tolerated even among the sizable Christian population of the country. See "An Equal Place for All," interview with Hassan al-Turabi in *Sudanow*, February 1980, p. 12. For the official Islamic view on riba see Sura II: 275 of the Qur'an.

49. Wilson, 85.

50. *Faisal Islamic Bank Sudan Annual Reports.*

51. Gurdon, 69.

52. Interview with prominent Sudanese journalist, June 17, 1990. Name withheld by request.

53. Interview with university student at the University of Khartoum, June 15, 1989. Name withheld by request.

54. *IFDA Dossier* 75:76, January/April 1990, 36.

55. "Hal Kanat al-Jabha al-Islamiyya Wara al-Inqilab Fi al-Sudan" (Was the Islamic National Front Behind the Coup D'état in Sudan?), *Al-Hayah*, September 3, 1989.