Confronting the "Arab North": Interpretations of Slavery and Religion in Southern Sudanese Separatist Resistance

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For centuries, the greater Horn of Africa has been exposed to actors and influences crossing the Red Sea and sailing the Indian Ocean. The extension of these forces has had a profound effect in shaping contemporary societies and states in the sub-region over time. Contemporary Sudan is a fascinating example on how the extension of Islam and the elites-led emphasis on Arab identity has resulted in a society embracing Arab and Muslim culture. These characteristics in the territories that became the heartland of the contemporary Sudanese state translated into the formation of a nationalist governing elite promoting a particular form of Arab culture and interpretation of Islam as the main pillars of national identity for Sudan as a whole. However, the vast territories of contemporary Sudan are culturally highly heterogeneous. This contrasts starkly with the northern political elite's nation- and state-building project since decolonization, seeking to homogenize society through forced cultural assimilation. Since Sudan's independence, the state elite imposing Arab culture and Islam has led to varying degrees of direct confrontation with groups that oppose such forced cultural and religious transformation. This chapter reflects on the role of interpretations of slavery and religion in armed opposition and its aftermath in Southern Sudan. It points to the use of particular views of slavery and religion in the two main insurgencies in 1955-1972 and 1983-2005, and reflects on their representations in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (2005). The chapter argues that these interpretations are related to the Orientalist image of Sudan that connects with the aspirations of southern Sudan's self-determination, independence, and drift towards East African socio-cultural and Indian Ocean economic space.

keywords: Southern Sudan, slavery, Islamization, civil war, secession

Over the centuries, influences crossing the Red Sea and connected to the prevailing Indian Ocean dynamics have been important in shaping the societies of the greater Horn of Africa. This has been the case for the social organization that laid the foundation for contemporary Sudan. Historically, various actors sought to establish hegemonic power over the territories that extend over contemporary Sudan. Here, as in many other places in the world, cultural influences from faraway lands, spread through peaceful interaction or conquest, over a long period of time, were significant. In the case of today's Sudan, historical narratives tend to lend support to the importance to Islamic and Arabic cultural influences from the Arabian Peninsula, across the Red Sea and through Egypt, as those sculpting contemporary social organization and identities.

However, the territories of what constitutes contemporary Sudan were highly culturally heterogeneous before the arrival of Islam and the later overwhelming emphasis on Arab culture. While the extension of Islam was largely pacific, it also involved conquest and violence. One generation after the death of Prophet Muhammad, Muslim armies invaded Africa. Over the centuries, the kingdoms in the territories that later came to be known as northern Sudan were slowly annexed to Islam's sphere of influence as a result of migration, peaceful assimilation and conflict. In pre-Islamic times, Arab migrations to Sudan appear to have originated from Egypt and across the Red Sea, which set the pattern for later migrations (Hasan, 2003, p.11). From the 9th century onwards, economic motivations related to trade, and notably slaves that initially came from the western and central *Bilad al-Sudan*, among other commercial items, and mining of gold and emeralds, drove many Arabs to migrate to the heartlands of what constitutes contemporary Sudan (Hasan, 2003, p. 11, 17-18). By the 16th century this movement eventually overwhelmed the kingdoms of Nubia and Alwa, while Arab migrants settled in Butana and Gezira along the Nile as well as in the lowland areas of Kordofan and Darfur. Moving in these areas, they interacted and frequently intermarried with locals, which gradually produced mixed, at times culturally Arabized, frontier communities (Iyob and Khadiagala, 2006, p.22).

Over time, sectors of the Arabized part of the population gained influence in the local communities. This was due largely to their increasing societal prominence, often as traders, which tended to promote the Islamic religious culture that was gradually transmitted to other sections of the population, "… many of whom adopted Islam, some Arab customs and Arabic (though many Nubians,

Beja and others kept their ancient tongues)" (Hasan, 2003, p.25).[1] The patriarchal system dictated by Islam contrasted with the Nubian matriarchal structure and according to some authors fostered the prominence of the Arabized peoples ('Abd al-Rahim, 1970, p.135-6; Iyob and Khadiagala, 2006, p.22). The gradual expansion of Islam then led to most societies in central, eastern, and western Sudan gradually adopting the new religion. Although mixed with local traditions and belief systems it became mostly celebrated in its local *Sufi* form.[2] After the demise of the Nubian kingdoms in the early 14th century, notably the indigenous Sennar and Darfur sultanates became influential in territories of today's central and western Sudan, respectively. Their spheres of influence extended from the borderlands of contemporary southern Sudan to the northern territories bordering today's Egypt until first Sennar and then Darfur had to give way to the Ottoman invasion in the course of the 19th century.

The conquest by the Ottoman Egyptian viceroy Muhammad Ali is often considered the prelude to the making of a centralized polity in Sudan. Among Ali's prime motivations in occupying the lands south of Egypt was to obtain slaves to strengthen his army. At its height, the Ottoman dominion bordered Abyssinia (Ethiopia) and had its frontier lands extend to Darfur, southern Sudan, and the Red Sea coast. Yet, in 1885 the Ottoman rule collapsed before the Mahdist revolution that drew heavily from the support of the *Ansar* (the Mahdi's followers) from various parts of Sudan, but notably including cattle-herding *Baggara* from Kordofan. One of the major grievances behind the rebellion was the suppression of the slave trade which undermined the livelihoods of many Arab *jallaba* traders who by now had largely moved from *Bilad al-Sudan* to southern Sudan. The state during the Mahdist period (1885-1899) engaged in continuous warfare, and slave raids in southern Sudan continued. The administration incorporated elites that had been influential during the Ottoman period, giving the centralized state a degree of continuity. Still, the Mahdist experiment was short-lived and by 1899 the Anglo-Egyptian army had taken control of most of northern and central Sudan. Anglo-Egyptian rule, under *de facto* British administration, further consolidated the centralized administration initially put in place by the Ottoman rulers under the British and Egyptian colonial elite. The slave trade was largely suppressed but slavery continued to exist in northern Sudan, while southern Sudan was cut-off for more than a decade and subjected to a different colonial

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[1] Some prominent authors have theorized that the spread of Islam and Arabic culture in Sudan was facilitated by the increasing wealth of part of the Arabized sections that converted them into a desired source of husbands for Nubian and other local women, while at the same time culturally Arabized Muslim women were unable to marry non-Muslims (Mazrui, 1973, p.72-3; Deng, 1995, p.80).

[2] For more on Sufism in Sudan, see e.g. Warburg (2003), Karrar (1992), and Daly (1985).

policy seeking to preserve the "native" way of life while promoting Christianity and Western education.

The process of decolonization, initiated in the 1940s, brought remarkably little change to the state and governance. The post-colonial state largely inherited the dominant elites, organization and structure from the Anglo-Egyptian colonial state. The nationalist movement was dominated by the leaderships of the northern *Sufi* brotherhoods, the Mahdists and *Khatmiyya*, which had become dominant forces partly due to their collaboration with the colonial masters.[3] One of its main features, which marked both continuity and change, was the emphasis on national identity based on the most important self-defining features of the Sudanese political elite, Arab culture and Islam. Following the contours of the established political identity perceptions of the small well-educated elite, this project was highly exclusive and sought to maintain the concentration of political and economic power. An important part of this political project was the cultural homogenization of Sudan by using state policies to assimilate its diverse peoples through active promotion of Arabization and Islamization. Failing this, the resistant sectors of the population on the edges of the state were subjected to marginalization and exclusion. Essentially, they were deprived of effective political participation, economic development and social integration that would provide a degree of ownership towards the state, subjecting them to perpetual poverty and deprivation compared to the Arabized and Islamicized groups in central Sudan.

The political elite's hegemonic project appears to have faced most opposition in those communities that were least integrated with the state and whose cultural and ethno-political identities contrasted with the Arab-Muslim dominated socioeconomic and sociopolitical state order. From the 1940s onwards, among the most adamant against Arabization and Islamicization of their local societies were a selection of members of the contemporary southern Sudanese elite who saw forced cultural assimilation, in the historical context of slavery and perpetual racial inequality, as an outright assault on their own cultural dignity and values. This was due in part to the perception of not being treated equally by the Arab-Muslim governing elite, and the feeling of exclusion from political power at the centre of Sudanese polity, as well as a sentiment of resistance towards assimilation into the Arab-Muslim culture and the attempt to promote a regional identity in southern Sudan. Among the mission-educated southern elite there was likely an element of fear that being unable to prevent cultural assimilation would gradually result in the southern intelligentsia becoming obsolete. The southern elite would lose local constituencies to the national elite, and eventually a whole-

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[3] See e.g. Niblock (1989), Karrar (1992), and Warburg (2003).

sale cultural transformation would take place resulting in the eradication of local southern ways of life and conversion of southerners as a whole into a class perpetually servile to the "Arab north". The promotion of Arab culture and Islam provoked resistance among sections of the southern elite in parts of southern Sudan, and precipitated mobilization for anti-state activities to counter the perceived repressive policies.

This chapter explores interpretations of slavery and religion in the context of armed opposition in southern Sudan, and points to their connection with the aspiration for self-determination and an independent polity aligned with East Africa. The chapter does not aspire to give a comprehensive account on slavery, religion or the complex insurgencies themselves, but seeks to show that Orientalist views and images of Sudan became apparent in the political project aimed at separating the southern region from the rest of Sudan. Interpretations of slavery and religion were used to justify southern self-determination and independence, and have served to legitimize its drift towards the East African sociocultural and Indian Ocean economic space.

Slavery and Religion in the Making of "Sudan"

Over the centuries, the territories that form today's Sudan became Islamicized. The central areas of this region also became gradually culturally Arabized in terms of language, religion, and customs. In the presence of intense 19th slave trade and slave holding in north-central Sudan, and in connection with the attempt to preserve the lucrative slave trade by sectors of northern Sudanese elites, a discourse of a particular kind of social hierarchy emerged in which adherence to Arab culture and Islam justified higher social status, and were used to legitimize access to economic and political power.[4] This stratification included a social perception of race, in which the slave, considered the lowest status (Deng, 1995b, p.369-400, 484-5), constituted the starkest contrast to the most ideal forms of Arab and Muslim social and cultural purity.[5]

The slave trade in the northernmost territories of contemporary Sudan originated in the 7th century. This was the prelude for many Arabs engaging in commerce taking up lucrative slave trading in the region. Until the 19th century trade among the Sudanic kingdoms was relatively low in numbers in comparison to what followed during the period of Ottoman Egyptian domination. Particularly

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[4] See e.g. Deng (1995a, 1995b) and Jok (2001, 2007).

[5] Idris (2001, 2005) views Sudan as a "racialized state" in which social race, measured by excellence in Arab culture (language and customs) and Islam, defines societal status and the right to claim economic and political power.

the southern fringes of the Keira (Darfur) and Sennar (south-central Sudan) served as major sources of slaves forming part of the overall Trans-Saharan trade as well as that across the Red Sea. The captives taken from the southern frontiers, largely from today's southern Darfur, South Kordofan and Bahr al-Ghazal, came from societies that were outside the limits of the respective states. Their religious status appears to have been less of a factor in deciding their enslavable status.[6]

Most of north-central Sudan had become Muslim in the centuries following the Arab expansion. From the 16th century onwards *Sufi* orders originating in the Middle East and practising mystical form of Islam based on a personal relationship with God had become increasingly popular and gained influence in northern and central Sudan.[7] Sufism became a significant and resilient part of shaping social organization in which the brotherhoods played an important role. The societal importance of the major *Sufi* and religious orders allowed them to accumulate economic power and political importance, leading to the establishment of sectarian organizations as power centres in the context of the political order of the state. These formations hosted prominent sections of Sudan's political elite until their later marginalization during the military dictatorship of Jaafar Nimeiri (1969-1985).

The structures of centralized state inherited by contemporary Sudan originated in the colonial period. The "Sudanese" administration replacing the colonial state during decolonization inherited the governing apparatus derived largely from the need to control the extensive territories and extract resources. It was centralized in Khartoum which was a strategically opportune location in the centre where the Blue and White Nile met. In order to consolidate their rule, the Ottoman Egyptians had initially chosen to collaborate with sections of the central riverine *Shaigiyya* peoples and the sectarian *Khatmiyyah Sufi* order based in Kassala, both of which seized the opportunity to benefit from cooperation with the colonial state. Consequently, the Ottoman Egyptian rule in these areas became strongest. However, the colonial state faced a number of revolts and in the early 1880s the harsh rule had resulted in a violent anti-colonial movement by Muhammad Ahmad, who claimed to be and was accepted by many as the Mahdi. Originating in Kordofan, the movement drew particularly support among the Baggara many of whom became Mahdist followers, the *Ansar*. Similarly to a number of other Muslim groups in contemporary Sudan, the Baggara have manufactured genealogies for generations that trace their lineage

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[6] On slavery in pre-colonial Sudan, see e.g. O'Fahey (1973) and O'Fahey and Spaulding (1974).

[7] According to Woodward (2003, p. 96), "The politics of Islam from the eighteenth century onward was a reflection of the growth of the Sufi orders, or *turuq* (singular *tariqa*), who came into Sudan and steadily grew in size".

back to Muslim ancestors, and, despite being mixed peoples, they embrace Arab culture (Cunnison, 1971, p.186-96).

The rebellion grew quickly and extended in different regions due to the Egyptian rule that had made life increasingly hard due to high taxation, corruption and attempts to abolish the slave trade on which many merchants depended. Faced by the overwhelming popular revolt, the state collapsed and was replaced by the Mahdist Islamic administration. However, although the Mahdists showed animosity towards the former regime collaborators and drove the *Khatmiyyah* out, their government did depend on officials who had formed part of the former administration. As a result, the new regime continued to rely on sections of the north-central riverine peoples, namely *Shaigiyyah*, but also *Jaaliyyin* and *Danaqla*, to administer the state. This not only promoted sections of the central-riverine groups in the prevailing social order, but laid the foundation for their future prominence.

During this time in north-central Sudan, the idea of *awlad al-balad* (sons of the land) was adopted by the "fathers" (earlier generations) to claim a socially prominent position mainly among the *Shaiqiyyah* and *Jaaliyyin*. It came to be used as identification of belonging to the prominent state elite (Adam, Bartlett, and Nour, 2009, p.7), which as a whole wielded economic and political power. This "invention of tradition"[8] had wide reaching consequences largely because the educated northern elite promoted the discourse to advance the historical narratives of "Arab" conquests and superiority in Sudan, and thereby claimed ownership of the Sudanese polity. In the course of decolonization it therefore established a core of elite individuals claiming a socially defined exclusive right to power within the political structures of the state. Their self-proclaimed "pure" Arab and Muslim identity, justified by claims to generations of Arab and Muslim lineage, gave this exclusive group the right to power and generally disqualified other elites from exercising state power collectively. Although members of other, marginalized, elites have held positions of power, they have never been allowed to form collective blocs that could shift true economic and political state power from *awlad al-balad*.

British colonial rule had also contributed to the social prominence and symbolic capital of Arab identity and culture. Professing European superiority over the local societies, the British perceived Sudanese "Arabs" as largely "semi-civilized", and the people of the southern territories as "blacks" and "savages". They deemed sections of the riverine groups and the influential heads of the sectarian orders, whom they considered "Arabs", as the most useful collaborators of the

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[8] See e.g. Hobsbawm and Ranger (1992).

colonial state and relied on them to help to administer the polity. This way, the exclusive British ruling methods followed the practice of governance initiated during the *Turkiyyah*, and perpetuated political sectarianism, tribalism, and the use of culture for domination and racism (El Zain, 1996, p.525), the latter of which had originated in social subjugation related to the perceptions of "Arab" superiority.

In certain circumstances, collaboration with the colonial state was highly beneficial in terms of wealth and status. For instance, elite sectors of the riverine peoples who occupied administrative positions, as well as some privileged individuals connected to the leading *Sufi* and sectarian orders, were able to acquire higher education at Gordon College, Sudan's main institution of higher learning. Modern education, participation in the colonial administration and British views of the more sophisticated central riverine Sudanese, in comparison with the peripheral populations and borderlanders, gave fertile ground for growth of the attitude of superiority among these elites. Moreover, the heads of the leading *Sufi* movements and sectarian orders benefited significantly from their collaboration. Particularly Sayyid Abd Rahman al-Mahdi (the neo-Mahdists) and Sayyid Ali al-Mirghani (*Khatmiyyah*), used their large social constituencies and sectarian rivalry to extract resources and strengthen their social status. The British feared the mobilization capacity of each movement that could be used against the state, and sought to keep their leaderships content by proportioning economic wealth and allowing them to exert influence over large sections of the northern Sudanese population.

In the social order of the colonial state which to an extent privileged Arab-Muslim identification, it was southern Sudan that contrasted the most. The British perceived the territories roughly south of the 10th parallel north as "savage" and in need of civilization, which was deemed to come through Christianity and Western education. Missionary societies were endorsed in southern Sudan to provide such education. Realizing that southerners might be prey to Arabic and Islamic influences brought by officials and merchants from the north, the colonial masters became protectionist. Particularly following the nationalist current in the early 1920s which mainly shook northern Sudan, the protectionist attitude manifested itself in the promotion of native administration based on appointed "tribal" chiefs and separate rule according to the isolationist Southern Policy (Abdel Rahim, 1969, p.49-51, 75). The Policy, separating southern Sudan from the north, was progressively implemented from 1920-1930 (until it was abandoned in 1946), and Western historiographers often see it as a defining period for cementing differences between northern and southern Sudan. This view, which portrays the

British effort to isolate southern Sudan as an effort to protect the "noble savage" from Arab and Islamic domination and slavery, has been instrumental in shaping the Western approaches to Sudan. It also permitted the instrumentalization of the sense of difference between northern and southern Sudan by the southern Sudanese separatist leadership in the attempt to achieve its objectives of self-determination and/or an independent state.

Interpretations of Slavery and Religion during Decolonization and Early Armed Opposition

The changing political landscape after the Second World War, including increasing superpower pressure and local demands, pushed the British to decolonize Sudan. This process was conducted hastily in a ten-year period largely because of the fear of Egypt successfully annexing Sudan and it falling out of the sphere of British influence. Sections of the educated riverine Sudanese nationalists, projecting their Arab-Muslim self-identification as the basis for Sudanese national identity, were vocal advocators of the end of colonial rule. While the neo-Mahdists who formed the Umma party sought independence, *Khatmiyyah* and its political wing, the National Unionist Party (NUP), leaned towards Sudan's association with Egypt. The British viewed the northern intelligentsia composed of the sectarian elite, and associated educated class, as the fittest to govern Sudan and inherit control of the administration. The decolonization process, initiated in 1946, resulted in the "Sudanization" of public administration and security forces, which in practice meant that they became dominated by the northern riverine elites and their constituencies.

In the process of decolonization, the Southern Policy was abandoned and the southern provinces were re-annexed to northern Sudan. In 1947 the British convoked a conference in Juba to assess the attitudes of hand-picked members of the southern elite towards reunification with the north, which had already been decided on. Although the sentiments of fear and mistrust expressed by southerners at the conference are apparent in its documented proceedings (RJC, 1947), the British eventually re-annexed southern provinces to northern Sudan despite disagreements among themselves about the possible consequences.[9] The southern representatives were initially assured of safeguards when reincorporated into northern Sudan, and the northern political forces that had been actively present

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[9] A number of the British administrators in southern Sudan were against the reunification due to fears that southern Sudan could not stand up for itself and would be subjugated.

at the conference promised full consideration of a federal solution for Sudan following southern demands.

It was the exclusive Sudanization and reunification, which primarily triggered the southern fears of renewed northern domination. In the context of the electoral campaign for the first parliamentary election in 1953, the NUP (linked to *Khatmiyyah* and backed by Egypt), which emerged as victorious, promised southerners priority when administrative positions in the southern provinces would be Sudanized (Ruay, 1994, p.69). However, when this promise failed to materialize because southerners were considered mostly unequipped for the positions and disqualified,[10] the mistrust towards the northern "Arabs", combined with the memory of violent subjugation and slavery which the missionary education and oral histories in the southern communities had undoubtedly maintained, began to turn into contempt and hatred. The influx of northern administrators, teachers, and senior army and police officers into the southern provinces generated these adverse sentiments. They joined with that of impotence of gaining economic and political power (mainly jobs and effective representation able to secure southern rights), while the northern "Arabs" seemed to enjoy both of these and take advantage of their privileged position in southern Sudan.

A number of authors mention the collective sentiments of fear, anxiety, and mistrust towards the northerners as being important to the understanding of conflict formation in southern Sudan.[11] In such situations, the local leaders may play a significant role in encouraging and instrumentalizing such feelings, which serves to fuel the existing sense of insecurity towards the other (Arfi, 1998; Buzan, Wæver, and de Wilde, 1998; McSweeney, 1999). Indeed, the interpretation of slavery as a violent form of extreme subjugation and exploitation and the fear of its return in the context of northern "Arab" domination contributed to the radicalization of opposition and played a significant role in the rise of insurgency in southern Sudan in the 1950s.

These collective fears of the northern "Arab" were particularly acute in southern Sudan. It was likely due in part to the lack of contact with northerners because the British administrators cut most of southern Sudan off from interaction with the northern "Arab", and to the Western missionaries extending Christian and to an extent anti-northern and anti-Islamic values among the members of the embryonic mission-educated southern elite. The colonial administration had sought to build a buffer against Arabic and Muslim influences by socializing

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[10] In the final stage of the Sudanization process, southerners obtained 6 of 800 administrative positions (Taisier and Matthews, 1999: 203).

[11] See e.g. Eprile (1974), Holt and Daly (2000), Collins (2005), and Wassara (2007).

members of the southern elite along Western principles, using English instead of Arabic or local vernacular languages, and deliberately sought to consolidate Christianity. But at the same time the northern "Arab" became demonized as a term that was used and later instrumentalized in rallying for political opposition. From the Anglo-Egyptian colonial, a dominant narrative emerged in southern Sudan that the British were good to the southerners, while the "Arabs" sought to forcefully assimilate southern Sudan through Islamization and Arabization in order to perpetually dominate and subjugate it and its peoples.

Armed with this understanding, a selection of members of the southern Sudanese elite became antagonistic towards what was viewed as northern riverine "Arab" domination. Apart from perceivably marginalizing southerners during Sudanization, the new rulers discarded the earlier promises of political safeguards and possible federal solution for southern Sudan. By the mid-1950s the antagonism had turned into hatred, particularly in areas in the southernmost Equatoria Province following the farcical trial of a local member of parliament, Elia Kuze, and when southern workers in the Nzara agricultural scheme were laid off while more northern personnel was simultaneously hired. In 1955, a conspiracy to murder northern army officials in southern Sudan, to which some prominent southerners were linked, came to light and, soon after, disturbances targeted northern "Arabs" and a mutiny broke out among southern army troops in Torit, Equatoria. Eventually the mutiny was repressed with British help, but some soldiers escaped with their weapons and began a low-intensity insurgency that for a number of years amounted mainly to occasional banditry and isolated violent incidents. The government response to the disturbances in which a number of northerners died was characterized by revenge. A wave of terror followed which included arbitrary arrests, imprisonment, torture and killings in southern Sudan. This generated further fear and antagonism locally.

In 1958, a military coup resulted in the end of the brief democratic experiment in Sudan and the Ibrahim Abboud's military junta (1958-64) assuming power. In this situation, the state embarked on a mission of forced cultural assimilation to end resistance in southern Sudan, which according to the government was due to foreign agents, mainly the Christian missionaries.[12] The regime imposed a policy of active Islamization and pushed the Arabic language in southern Sudan. It was accompanied by large-scale violence in counterinsurgency operations, which mainly targeted the civilian population (Eprile, 1974). In this way, religion and language were politicized and used as tools for forced cultural assimilation, to

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[12] See e.g. Poggo (2002).

serve the attempt to cement the governing Arab-Muslim elite's domination in southern Sudan.

Yet, the Abboud regime's measures were unable to annihilate the armed opposition, which began to receive increasing external support in the early 1960s. Some of this assistance came from Christian organizations, with Equatorian priest Father Saturnino Lohure becoming an important figure in channelling resources (Gray, 2002, p.120). The regime's policy to expel Christian missionaries from southern Sudan (1962-1964) followed the perception that missionaries were agents of foreign powers. This led to foreign Christian players becoming active in supporting the southern opposition. The repression, but without sufficient strength to end the rebellion, and the external support, allowed the expansion of political opposition into a number of armed factions and non-armed resistance. The antagonism towards the northern "Arab" state was an mobilization important factor and fuelled the rebellion. Another crucial element was external support, which strengthened the armed opposition.

In the course of the conflict, various opposition factions controlled areas and their communities in southern Sudan. Still, it was Joseph Lagu, who had defected from the army and founded his Anya-Nya rebel command, that controlled much of the arms flows to the opposition, who unified the rebel groups under his leadership and the later Southern Sudan Liberation Front/Movement (SSLF/M). In May 1969, Colonel Jaafar Nimeiri had taken power in Sudan in an Arab socialist officers' army coup. He increasingly curbed external support for southern rebels by improving relations with the southern neighboring states, intensified the counterinsurgency effort and promised development in southern Sudan. Both through Lagu's unification of the rebel command and Nimeiri's successful counterinsurgency policy the way for a negotiated settlement became possible.[13]

Finally, in 1972, the government and the SSLF/M agreed on peace in Addis Ababa with Ethiopian mediation. This became a reality largely because of the SSLF/M's weakening position and Nimeiri's Arab socialist approach, which for the first time officially recognized the different southern way of life that was reflected in the policy on language and religion. The Addis Ababa peace agreement granted southern Sudan self-government and limited autonomy by uniting its three original provinces (Bahr al-Ghazal, Equatoria, and Upper Nile) into one region, and ensured that English became recognized as the "principle language" of the southern region (AAA, 1972, Chapter II, Article 6.). Although it did not directly address the issue of religion or social subjugation of southerners, it

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[13] There are a number of accounts on the insurgency and peace negotiations. See in e.g. Eprile (1974) and Alier (1990).

was implicit that southern self-government could buffer Islamic influences and protect southern rights. The 1973 permanent constitution, in turn, recognized Christianity and other "noble spiritual beliefs" (Part II, Chapter I, Article 16), and the constitutional validity of the Addis Ababa Agreement (Part I, Article 8) (PCS, 1973). The Addis Ababa peace agreement can be seen as a political settlement that sought to protect southern Sudan from the perceived northern "Arab" domination. But in the end the Southern Region remained subject to the arbitrary and unchecked political influence of the leadership of the dictatorial national government, which was a major factor leading to its eventual failure.

The Second Insurgency in Southern Sudan

The second rebellion in southern Sudan emerged in the context of abolition of the Southern Region and its institutions. President Nimeiri had personally influenced the southern leadership throughout the 1970s,[14] and dissolved the regional political institutions in 1980 and finally re-divided southern Sudan into its three original provinces in June 1983. These actions heightened the sentiment of renewed northern "Arab" control and were vigorously opposed in southern Sudan. They coincided with grievances over the partially failed integration of the former rebel military elements into the army after the Addis Ababa Agreement. A military conspiracy among officers, who claimed dissatisfaction over the political developments, triggered mutinies, which escalated into a rebellion.[15]

By the early 1970s Islamic resurgence was penetrating northeast Africa. In this regional context, soon after a failed 1971 allegedly communist coup attempt and the 1972 Addis Ababa Agreement, the government initiated a policy shift. By the mid-1970s, Nimeiri considered that the northern sectarian political elite, which for the first time had lost power in 1969 and had been driven into exile, needed to be accommodated. The sectarian leadership had found refuge in the Gulf States, and had staged aborted coups with external backing. Clearly, substituting the northern elite organizations with southern Sudan as an unprecedented regime constituency had been insufficient to consolidate the regime against political instability caused by the exiled northern political factions. While it had become apparent that in the regional context of Islamic resurgence embracing Islam would be beneficial, Nimeiri found support from the Sudanese Muslim brothers who had formed a minority party formation of Islamic Charter Front (ICF) in the

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[14] See e.g. Collins (2008, pp. 112, 115, 133, 134).

[15] See Madut-Arop (2006) on an extensive account on the military conspiracy.

1960s. This allowed Nimeiri to avoid sharing power with the still-powerful and potentially threatening sectarian parties. As a result, Nimeiri, a skilful political pragmatist, embarked on "national reconciliation" with the most influential and potentially threatening northern sectarian opposition factions, and invited them to return to Sudan but deliberately marginalized them to maintain control. The regime began favouring the Muslim brothers as its new constituency and secured backing from Saudi Arabia and the United States while it became increasingly inclined to abolish the Southern Region.

The Muslim brothers advocated Sudan's Arab and Muslim identity. The National Islamic Front (NIF), founded by Hassan al-Turabi in 1976, and increasingly politically influential, was among the most eager northern elite organizations to assimilate the peripheries through active Islamization. As such, it opposed any special recognition of southern Sudan, and perceived any concessions to the southerners as the state giving in to separatism and outright secessionism. However, this was not new since the sectarian parties had already been concerned about the possibility of southern secession since decolonization, and generally echoed the concerns of the Islamists. As a result, Nimeiri's national reconciliation became a process of rapprochement, involving sections of the northern Arab-Muslim elite and leading to marginalization of the southern elite and the undermining of southern political autonomy.

In this context, certain Islamist sections of the northern elite thrived. Receiving financing from the Arabian Peninsula and diaspora, and controlling much of the banking and economic sector in Sudan, Turabi's NIF grew in power and influence. Under increasing pressure, Nimeiri made concessions to Islamist elements, notably regarding the issue of southern Sudan. Having been involved in the politics of the Southern Region throughout the 1970s, and to an extent fuelling the ethnically unfolding rivalries in the region, Nimeiri became increasingly inclined to abolish southern self-government.

However, Nimeiri was also under pressure to salvage the Sudanese economy which was on a downward spiral. Oil had been discovered in southern Sudan near the northern Sudanese border in the 1970s and Nimeiri sought central government control of the oil fields. Seeking to capture the oil-rich territory, the government distorted the administrative boundaries and in 1980 Nimeiri created a new Unity State, but southern politicians discovered the attempt to manipulate the regions' borders and denounced it. A dispute over the oil issue flared up and eventually became an important factor in influencing Nimeiri's decision to abolish southern self-government.[16]

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[16] See e.g. Alier (1990) for an account on the dispute and its effects.

In May 1983, before the eventual break-up of the Southern Region, a number of orchestrated mutinies took place in the south and led to a second rebellion. Securing external support mainly from Ethiopia, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) led by John Garang emerged as the most powerful among the competing southern armed factions. The revolutionary SPLM/A manifesto detailed a number of grievances, which were mainly related to northern "Arab" political and economic domination. Following the outbreak of the rebellion, Nimeiri first abolished the southern autonomy that formed part of the 1973 Sudanese constitution in an unconstitutional move, and in September 1983 declared Islamic shari'a law in the whole country. These constituted symbolic steps subjugating southern Sudan and propelling state-led Islamization. The two measures fuelled the war as they caused re-emergence of fears of violent northern "Arab" domination of southern Sudan, and played into favourable conditions for mobilization of armed opposition. As one sign of a growing feeling of insecurity when faced with Islamization policies, many local people in southern Sudan turned to Christianity for solace and support (Johnson, 2003, p. 35).

In April 1985 a popular revolution in northern Sudan toppled Nimeiri, and the Arab-Muslim political elite-led multi-party system was restored. The government under the neo-Mahdist leader Sadiq al-Mahdi that followed sought to end the war in southern Sudan. However, in June 1989 the NIF took power in a military coup. The new regime, headed by Omar al-Bashir, with initially critical behind-the-scenes support from Turabi, further politicized religion as an effort to implement its "National Salvation Revolution" that entailed the building of an Islamic state through societal transformation (Voll, 2000, p.165-6). The NIF regime took radical measures to eradicate opposition, using religion in its counterinsurgency campaign while seeking to Islamize defiant populations, and declared jihad against the insurgents. It sought to forcefully assimilate local populations into Islam, including in some regions to systematically eradicate local cultures.[17] For instance, in southern Kordofan this effort consisted of eliminating those opposing the state, displacing the civil population ostensibly supporting them, and seeking to Islamize particularly the internally displaced who made their way to the government administered "peace camps" where they were subjected to harsh treatment.[18]

The SPLM/A sought to capitalize on this situation by repeatedly highlighting in its propaganda how government politicized religion was an extension of its at-

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[17] Probably the most radical attempt for forced cultural transformation was undertaken in the Nuba Mountains. See e.g. Ylönen (2009).

[18] Ibid.

tempt to dominate the rest of Sudan. It also portrayed religious and ethnic differences within its organization and in southern Sudan as non-issues, and it sought to maintain this image until and beyond the end of the war in order to feed the perceptions of southern Sudan as a united "Christian" and "African" front resisting "Muslim" and "Arab" government's violent repression. Highlighting the continuing group-based inequality and marginalization to which southern Sudan was subjected, it succeeded in presenting the fight against forced Arabization and Islamization as synonymous with the liberation of southern Sudan from northern domination. This was instrumental in influencing the interested and powerful Western states' approach to the conflict, and was consequently reflected in the peace terms.

Peacemaking and the Break-up of Sudan

The established outside perceptions on slavery and religion featured strongly in the peacemaking in Sudan. The external players most active in the peace process, mainly the US and a selection of European states (namely Norway, the UK, Italy and the Netherlands), had for long assumed the importance of historical narratives of slavery and religious subjugation as the main explanations of understanding political instability and armed conflict in the country. This was due to an extent to the Western historiography, with its orientalist overtones (Spaulding and Kapteijns, 1991), which has often depicted southern Sudan and its peoples as the victims of northern oppression. Both slavery and religion are inherent in the subjugation narrative, transmitting into the attitudes of external actors towards the main protagonists of the war in Sudan and influencing their relations with and approach towards the warring parties and the conflict.

Indeed, powerful narratives of slavery's legacy of unequal status between the Arab-Muslims and southerners continue to appear. For instance, Jok (2007) argues that due to continuing racist attitudes in northern Sudan, the black southerners have had no chance of becoming full members of the "Arab" in-group and exercising equal rights despite adopting the cultural prerequisites, including customs, language, and religion. Others have also pointed to this persisting social marginalization based on physical appearance, ethnic background and cultural attributes (Idris, 2001, 2005; Sharkey, 2003), which has generated grievances and fed antagonism. Moreover, relevant to grievances related to lower social status, Collins (1985) has noted that in the early stages of the insurgency in southern Sudan some southern young men being "...the lowest economic and social scale... became strongly militant as well as knowledgeable of the outside world. They

returned regularly to their homes in the South, bringing with them pent-up hostility and militancy that they developed while working as labourers on construction projects in the North" (p.138). Such attitudes have fuelled perceptions of "Arab-Muslim" imposed social inferiority of southerners.

The dominant Western discourses on religion and conflict in Sudan often emphasize the use of religion as a political weapon. In them, Islam has often been singled out as having played a prominent role in inciting violent conflict, particularly as a political tool of the Islamists. The National Congress Party (NCP, the former NIF) government's use of religion has been apparent as part of its counterinsurgency campaigns particularly in the early 1990s against the SPLM/A linked insurgents of South Kordofan and southern Blue Nile, as well as the armed opposition groups in Darfur. By imposing strict Islamic laws, the regime has been able to concentrate power in its core and its security apparatus on which its power largely rests.

In contrast, the protracted wars in southern Sudan, during which the government was using religious rhetoric for mobilization, enabled the local opposition movements to portray Christianity as a counterforce to forced Islamization. The perception in the West, and elsewhere, that the reductionist view given in the media about the war was largely responsible, emerged, in which southern Sudan and its peoples were victims of a violent form of radical Islamism propagated by the government in Khartoum. This generated sympathy for southern Sudan, and as the wars dragged on, played into the hands of those who promoted its secession from Sudan.

In the final stages of the peace negotiations leading to the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), the SPLM/A leadership found itself in a strong position. It was backed by the powerful Western states, especially the US, which largely positioned themselves against the Islamist regime in Khartoum, and could use the "Arab" domination narrative in order to try to influence these actors for favourable negotiation outcomes. Despite little evidence of slavery in contemporary Sudan, at least in the sense and magnitude that had occurred in the 19th century,[19] it became a topic that the SPLM/A could exploit and that eventually formed part of the final CPA. As a result, the SPLM/A, which portrayed itself as the voice of victims of "Arab" and Islamist domination and subjugation, was successful in including at least part of its anti-slavery, religious freedom, and anti-discrimination agenda as stipulations in the agreement. Even more importantly, however, highlighting the protracted violent domination and massive human

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[19] See e.g. Veldkamp (2014) for more evidence and first-hand accounts on abduction and slavery during the second civil war in southern Sudan.

rights violations present in the negotiations also captured sympathies, and contributed to the otherwise favourable terms for the SPLM/A in the CPA, including the clause for a self-determination referendum and the possibility of seceding from Sudan (CPA, 2005).

In contrast, the Sudanese governments have generally used "Arab" and "Muslim" labels to gain external support especially from Arab States. They have used the historical links and cultural affinities between northern Sudan and the Arabian Peninsula, and the current NCP government has been no stranger to exploiting these generally warm relations. Among the latest manifestations of this is Sudan's involvement in the Saudi-led coalition intervening in the civil war in Yemen, which has resulted in economic support to improve the ailing finances of the Sudanese regime. The NCP has benefited from crucial financial assistance and investments from the states in the Arabian Peninsula, as well as from political support from individual Arab states and the Arab League.

However, in the peace process facilitated largely by the Western states these relations could be viewed as an impediment. Having been accused of harbouring Islamist terrorism throughout the 1990s, in part due to having hosted Osama bin Laden and allegedly participated in the assassination attempt of Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in 1995, the US blacklisted and imposed sanctions on Sudan. This led to further deterioration of already problematic relations, culminating in a political confrontation in which the US and its Western allies appeared increasingly to be siding with the SPLM/A and other Sudanese opposition forces. In these circumstances of mounting international pressure, Khartoum attempted to improve its position by seemingly changing its posture. Particularly the US was keen on Sudan's volte-face, and welcomed Sudan's newly expressed willingness to assist in intelligence on Islamist terrorism after the 1998 embassy bombings in East Africa and the 9/11 attacks attributed to al-Qaeda. Khartoum's cooperation and the warring parties' seeming willingness to reach a negotiated end to the conflict facilitated the Inter-Governmental Agency on Development's mediation efforts over which especially the US exerted significant influence.[20]

The long and occasionally stagnated peace process, originating in the mid-1990s, and involving a series of agreements notably in 2002-2003, eventually culminated in the signing of the CPA in January 2005. A vast document, the 259-page CPA clearly reflected the main external actors' concern about political and economic subjugation of southern Sudan, the issue of slavery, and the politicization of Islam. For instance, the CPA stated "No one shall be held in slavery; slavery and the slave trade in all their forms shall be prohibited. No one shall be held

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[20] For more on the peace process, see Young (2012) and Ylönen (2014).

in servitude or be required to perform forced or compulsory labour... [and that] ... Everyone shall have the right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion..." (CPA, 2005, p.15). Chapter I of the CPA – also known as the Machakos Protocol, signed on 20 June 2002 – stipulated the requirement for religious freedom and that religion and customs should not determine access to public employment (CPA, 2005, p. 5). It also restricted Islamic shari'a law to the capital, Khartoum and exempted non-Muslims from its penalties, while recognizing Arabic as the national language and English as the language of government business (CPA, 2005, p.23, 25-6). These provisions can be seen as important because they posed an attempt to remedy the perceived marginalization, exclusion, and subjugation of southerners (and others) in Sudan as a whole. But in this regard the CPA also became an ultimatum to the northern governing elite to end marginalization and discrimination, because failing "to make the unity of the Sudan an attractive option especially to the people of South Sudan" (CPA, 2005, p. 2) would allow them to vote for secession in a self-determination referendum to take place after a six-year (2005-2011) interim period (CPA, 2005, p. 8).

The transition period was to assess the former warring parties' capacity to overcome their differences and to work together within the framework of one state in which the region of Southern Sudan would again exercise autonomy. This autonomy was guaranteed by the stipulated SPLM majority in Southern Sudan's newly created political institutions (while it became a minority partner at national level), and crucially the SPLA becoming the formal regional security apparatus in charge of protecting Southern Sudan. This formalized the SPLM/A's one-party domination of the region (mirroring the NCP domination in Northern Sudan), while giving it security safeguards which the earlier Addis Ababa agreement and Southern Self-Government Act had not. Both parties committed to "making unity attractive" for the Southern Sudanese, including celebrating civic liberties and religious tolerance, and promoting economic development, while the Southern Sudanese could opt for secession in the self-determination referendum in case unity was not made attractive during the six-year transition period. This way, the discourse of subjugation and religious domination continued play a part in the political dynamics during the interim period.

The CPA was heavily influenced by the southern and Western views of the conflict, the history of violence and massive human rights violations. Following the sudden death of SPLM/A's supreme leader John Garang in July 2005, secessionist elements within the movement close to the new leader Salva Kiir gained relative importance. Their objective of gaining independence contributed to the SPLM/A propagated and pre-established separatist views being used to justify

the secession and international recognition of Southern Sudan. During the interim period the SPLM/A governed Southern Sudan with an iron fist to ensure the desired outcome of the vote for self-determination. Expectedly, the referendum brought an overwhelming 98.33% vote for secession, with 97.58% voter turnout (SSR, 2011), and Southern Sudan became the independent Republic of South Sudan on 9 July 2011.

One important factor considered during Southern Sudan's referendum, secession, and international recognition was the economic viability of the new state. Politically, many believed rather naively that the SPLM/A-dominated order would be sufficient to end armed conflict and maintain stability, and that the SPLM/A elite would be equipped to successfully lead the country. Economically, South Sudan was seen as a viable state because approximately 75% of Sudan's oil reserves were located in its territory. Little consideration was given to the fact that its oil needed to be piped through Sudan and subjected to Khartoum's control and transit fees, and overlooking its overwhelming dependence on oil exports (98% of the official budget) and a potentially chronic case of "Dutch disease"[21] in the absence of any significant agricultural and industrial sectors.

However, alternative plans for exporting oil were made. These were accelerated by the crisis in which South Sudan accused Sudan of siphoning off its petroleum revenues and imposing excessive transit fees. This eventually led it to stop oil exports from its territory and the fighting of a brief but destructive border conflict (Ylönen, 2012). The plans to find alternative solutions for exporting oil also represented the South Sudanese government's attempt to break the bond of dependence on Khartoum, and symbolically move South Sudan from the sphere of "Arab" north and the Arabian Peninsula to ever closer alignment with East Africa with which southern parts of the country have historically intimate cultural and economic ties.

One idea which embodies this attempt was to ship oil on barges up the Nile to Uganda from where it could be transported to Kenya for export. Another version of this was that oil could be transported by road in trucks either to Uganda or directly to Kenya from where it could be shipped out. Yet, due to infeasibility and likely severe environmental problems, these ideas were abandoned when the plan to build an alternative pipeline became increasingly serious. Initially, it was proposed that perhaps a pipeline could be constructed to connect with the already functioning Cameroon-Chad pipeline, or another one built to the Kenyan coast. This was not only an economic but also a strategic geo-political question

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[21] "Dutch disease" is meant to describe the overwhelming dependence on oil exports relative to other sectors of the economy which simultaneously receive little or no sustained development effort.

of crucial national importance. Any such pipeline would constitute a permanent tie in terms of strategic infrastructure between South Sudan and its neighbours. With the background of Uganda and Kenya having supported the SPLM/A for a long time, and the longstanding cultural and commercial ties between South Sudan and the two neighbouring states, the relations between South Sudan and its East African partners have been close.

In this context, building a pipeline to the Port of Lamu in Kenya became an obvious choice, connecting South Sudan to the Indian Ocean's commercial sphere. For Kenya, the pipeline complements the Lamu Port Southern Sudan-Ethiopia Transport (LAPSSET) corridor in the making, which forms part of its ambitious "Vision 2030" development plan.[22] Meanwhile, relations between Juba and Addis Ababa are good in part due to Ethiopia's role in mediating in the South Sudan civil war. Ethiopia and Djibouti are also in the process of building a transport corridor which they hope to eventually to extend from the Red Sea to the Atlantic through South Sudan (Mail & Guardian Africa, 2015). This may offer landlocked South Sudan yet another route to the sea in the future.

However, the current crisis in South Sudan which initially unfolded in 2013 has pitted the country between the supporters of President Salva Kiir and the former Vice-President Riek Machar. The armed opposition under Machar has threatened to occupy the oil fields, while Khartoum has likely supported the rebels at least in the eastern part of South Sudan (SSNA, 2013) partly in response to the alleged support of South Sudanese elements for the SPLM/A-North armed opposition in Sudan based in South Kordofan and southern Blue Nile. Despite this situation, which has involved Ugandan armed forces intervention on the side of Salva Kiir, the construction of the pipeline connecting South Sudan, Kenya, and Uganda, which seeks to export oil in and from the vicinity of Lake Albert, is to begin in 2016 (Pipeline International, 2015). Simultaneously, any plans to improve transport connections between South Sudan and Ethiopia are complicated by the increased instability in the Greater Upper Nile in eastern South Sudan and in Gambella in western Ethiopia caused by the conflict in South Sudan. It is likely to take years before South Sudan can decidedly diminish the relative importance of economic and commercial ties with the "Arab" Sudan, the Red Sea, and the Arab countries, and fully endorse the economic potential of its relationship with Uganda, Kenya, and Ethiopia that would tie it ever more in the broader East African and Indian Ocean commercial space.

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[22] See e.g. Lamont (2013) for more on the LAPPSET and "Vision 2030".

Closing Remarks

Sudan has suffered from protracted war since its independence. The two longest rebellions in the country in which millions of people perished took place in southern Sudan. The role of the legacy of slavery and religion in these insurgencies has been debated, as they have been interpreted in different ways and used politically during the war and the peacemaking.

Historically, both slavery and religion have been forces used for societal organization in Sudan. The governing elites of the Sudanese state have used their self-proclaimed "Arab" and "Muslim" identity to justify their political and economic power and to gain support from Arab states. They have largely sought to maintain the social organization based on socio-culturally hierarchical and stratified perceptions formed along the past conceptions of race and social status. This has continued to perpetuate the relevance of hierarchical social order in contemporary Sudan. In this perception, the legacy of slavery and religion (particularly certain approaches to Islam) has been associated with and determined social status.

Moreover, the legacy of slavery and politicization of Islam has been linked to the armed conflict, especially in southern Sudan. First, the type of social subjugation marked by the legacy of slavery and politicization of Islam imposed as part of northern (state) domination has been mostly confronted in southern Sudan as external forces and resisted by large sections of the local population. Western historical narratives point to this resistance and the role of northern "Arab" domination, articulated through the legacy of slavery and forced Islamization, as a source of fear and grievance fuelling armed opposition. While this appears to have been the case in the formation of the first rebellion in southern Sudan during decolonization, the case of the second insurgency is less clear. Rather, it seems that the later southern Sudanese armed opposition, particularly the SPLM/A, was more successful than the earlier movements in using the belief among Western external players that the legacy of slavery and religious intolerance leading to discrimination and marginalization played an important role in the war. This helped to get the interested Western states involved.

Second, when considering the role of religion, it can be argued that Islam and Christianity played a role in both rebellions. Islam's prominent role in organizing society in northern Sudan, and the politicization and use of religion to define political and economic power and marginalize non-Arabs and non-Muslims has been a source of discord. The occasional use of jihad as a counterinsurgency mobilization tool and periods of forced Islamization appear to have further an-

tagonized many southerners. As a counterforce, Christian proselytization took place in southern Sudan during the colonial period and the insurgencies, while numerous Christian organizations of various types were involved. This indicates that although religious differences of individuals may not cause rebellion, the association of religion with power, marginalization, and domination in the society may lead to grievances and fear which, when exploited by the elites, favour the formation and sustenance of armed resistance.

Finally, the importance of the legacy of slavery and religion in the rebellions in southern Sudan has been determined largely by the behaviour of the actors involved. Promoting the belief in the importance of both has been essential, along with heavily Orientalist attempts to influence external actors and approaches to the conflict. Adopting such views, the CPA was a crucial manifestation of this by paving way for the eventual break-up of Sudan, and the ever increasing association of South Sudan with East Africa and the Indian Ocean economic space.

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