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Colonial Education and the Shaping of Islamism in Sudan, 1946-1956

Abstract:

This article assesses the role of British colonial education in Condominium Sudan in shaping the mindsets of Sudan's first generation of Islamists between 1946 and 1956. Drawing on post-colonial theorists such as Nandy and Bhabha, it contends that the experiences of the pioneers of Sudan's Islamic movement at institutions such as Gordon Memorial College and Hantoub Secondary school moulded their understandings of both 'modernity' and 'tradition'. As a result of their colonial education, Islamists deployed discourses concerning both 'progress' and 'cultural authenticity' that bore remarkable parallels with colonial essentialism, even as they announced a decisive break with the colonial past. Much like the conventional nationalists, they used the space created by the colonial educational institutions to create an ideological community that transcended the narrow ethnic and regional divides previously fostered by the British. At the same time, Islamists and colonialists alike shared a contempt for Marxists and 'deculturated' effendis, and Muslim Brothers' aspirations to escape the 'English *jahiliyya*', however counter-intuitive this may seem, bore similarities with the worldviews of colonial officials concerned with preventing what they saw to be the excessive impact of urbanization and modern education on Sudan.

The Sudanese Islamists propagandized their ‘Civilizational Project’ of the 1990s as a cathartic break with the colonial past, which would rescue the country from economic and cultural subjection to the West. Yet it was also defined by limitations similar to those of the colonial ‘civilising mission’, being the brainchild of a narrow elite with a hubristic perception of its purpose as a modernizing vanguard that was not shared by the population at large. This article will attempt to trace the origins of the Islamist *weltanschauung* the first generation of Sudanese Islamists’ educational upbringing within the schools that acted as the bastions of the British ‘civilizing mission’ in the country, including Gordon Memorial College and Hantoub Secondary School. With the founding of the Islamic Liberation Movement at Gordon Memorial College in 1948, the Islamist pioneers passed through schools and university campuses during the last decade of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, during which colonial developmentalism reached its peak before the eventual independence of the country in 1956. Following Abdullahi Gallab’s call for a greater understanding of the role of colonial public education in shaping the outlook of the early Islamic Movement in Sudan,¹ this article will contend in particular that Islamists inherited the colonizers’ ambivalent attitude towards their own ‘civilising mission’, and in particular the fractured colonial mindset that veered alternately between championing an understanding of ‘modernity’ that sought to use colonial institutions such as schools and law courts to ‘enable new forms of life’² and an understanding of ‘tradition’ that represented Sudanese society as unchangeably ‘other’. Here I am drawing on Homi Bhabha’s argument that ‘colonial presence is always ambivalent, split between its appearance as original and authoritative and its articulation as repetition and difference’.³

Heather Sharkey’s seminal text *Living with Colonialism* explored in depth the role of institutions such as Gordon Memorial College, founded by the British in 1902, soon after the Anglo-Egyptian Reconquest, in cultivating in spite of themselves a generation of nationalists who saw themselves as the vanguard agents of a transition to a modern Sudanese nation.⁴ Yet, even though the first and most influential generation of Sudanese Islamists received their educations at the twilight of the colonial era, we are yet to see as thorough an analysis of the role of colonial education in forging the Islamist mentality. In the Sudanese case, this can partly be explained by the fragmented character of the writing on twentieth century history, which is rooted in an implicit exaggeration of the significance of formal independence in 1956. Specialists on twentieth century Sudan tend to be either imperial, colonial or area studies historians focusing on the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium and colonial-nationalist tensions, or political scientists, sociologists and anthropologists with an interest in the dynamics of Islamism and conflict in post-colonial Sudan. As such, while Gallab suggests the origins of the Islamists in the colonial public school system,⁵ there is a need for further exploration of the role of British colonialism in fashioning the future Islamist elite. In highlighting the long term significance of the Islamists’ secular education at Gordon Memorial College, this article seeks to heed calls for an end to the false dichotomy between Islamism and secularism that obtains in so much analysis of the post-colonial Middle East and North Africa region.⁶ As will be seen here, Islamist praxis was influential precisely because it synthesized religious ideals with the more secular forms of knowledge acquired through colonial education.

¹ Abdullahi A. Gallab, *Their Second Republic: Islamism in the Sudan from Disintegration to Oblivion* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2014), p. 37.

² David Scott, “Colonial Governmentality”, *Social Text* (43), (1995), 191-220 at p. 193.

³ Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (2nd edn: Hoboken: Taylor and Francis, 2012), p. 153.

⁴ Heather J. Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism: Nationalism and Culture in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan* (London: University of California Press, 2003)

⁵ Gallab, *Their Second Republic*, pp. 37-41.

⁶ See, eg., Omnia El Shakry, “‘History without Documents’: The Vexed Archives of Decolonization in the Middle East’ *The American Historical Review* 120 (2015), pp. 920-934 at 924-926. Noah Salomon, *For Love of the Prophet: An Ethnography of Sudan’s Islamic State* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016)

The irony is that though the Islamists would condemn the nationalist *effendiyya* elite that championed colonial ideals of civility, modernity and progress as purveyors of neo-colonialism,⁷ the Islamists themselves articulated a different and more ambivalent form of colonial worldview. In the fashion of Homi Bhabha's anti-colonial mimics, the first generation of Islamists who attended Gordon Memorial College – rather than being 'assimilated' outright into the culture of the colonizer – formed political and cultural ideals that were 'hybrid', syncretizing Western and Islamic ideals so as to undermine the ideology of difference upon which colonial authority relied.⁸ It is true that colonialism education was never so comprehensive as to sweep aside Sudan's existing cultural memory – poetry provided Sudanese musicians and writers with a means of remembering past resistance to colonialism, for instance.⁹ The leading Sudanese Islamist Hasan al-Turabi, whose experience of both a home education in Islamic jurisprudence and a formal colonial education at Gordon Memorial College enabled him to synthesize Western and Muslim knowledge, was probably the foremost example of an intellectual who used 'hybridity' to subvert colonialism.¹⁰ Yet it was one of the paradoxes of Sudanese Islamism that in spite – or perhaps because of - its hybrid character, many of its leading protagonists inherited the colonial fear of hybridity. Like those of the British colonizers, Islamists' mentalities were defined by a dialectal tension between 'modernity' and 'tradition', or to use Bhabha's language, between a 'mimesis' that emphasized creating subjects who they would assimilate to their own hegemonic, modern, culture and a 'displacement' that fixated on the alterity of Sudanese and at times Islamic culture.¹¹ They inherited – albeit in a modified form – the civilizational ethos of the colonizers, but also the same fears of the supposedly destabilizing consequences the 'civilizing mission' would have were it to promote excessive Westernization.

This article thus seeks to develop Nandy's argument that colonized intellectuals who sought to articulate anti-colonial discourses were constrained by the 'psychological limits' set by colonialism, and in particular its dichotomization of tradition and modernity.¹² The 'non-West' of these intellectuals was also, in many regards, derived from the colonial imaginary.¹³ The essentialized Islam of the Islamists was similar to the essentialized Islam that colonial Orientalists had expounded to keep the Muslim World 'other'.¹⁴ At the same time, it was for these reasons that the Islamists were not merely the passive victims of mental colonization – rather, as this article will demonstrate, they instrumentalized the tradition-modernity dichotomy as a means of political empowerment.

There are implications here for the broader literature on the emergence of Islamism. Though texts on Islamism argue the role of the modern school or university campus was to introduce students to contemporary Western ideologies such as nationalism and Marxism-Leninism,¹⁵ there is comparatively less focus on the manner in which Islamists ideologues inherited the fractured colonial

⁷ Hasan al-Turabi, 'Islam as a Pan-national Movement and Nation-states: an Islamic Doctrine of human association', *Royal Society of Arts Journal* (August/September 1992), p. 612. See also Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, *Manichaean Delirium: Decolonizing the Judiciary and Islamic Renewal in the Sudan, 1898-1985* (Boston: Brill, 2008), pp. 349-350.

⁸ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, Chapter 4 'Of Mimicry and Man'.

⁹ Abdullahi A. Gallab, *A Civil Society Deferred: The Tertiary Grip of Violence in Sudan* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2011), pp. 150-151.

¹⁰ W. J. Berridge, *Hasan al-Turabi: Islamist Politics and Democracy in Sudan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017), Chapter 1.

¹¹ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, p. 153.

¹² Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy: Loss and Recovery of Self under Colonialism* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 1988), p. 3.

¹³ Nandy, *Intimate Enemy*, p. xii.

¹⁴ Said, Edward, *Orientalism* (London: Penguin, 1995), 351. See also Berridge, *al-Turabi*, 124.

¹⁵ Olivier Roy, *The Failure of Political Islam* (transl. Carol Volk, Cambridge, MA.: Harvard University Press, 1994), p. 3.

worldview of their teachers.¹⁶ While it is true that Islamist student organizations such as the Islamic Liberation Movement perceived themselves as anti-colonial movements, they were even more anti-Marxist and while they tactically co-opted elements of Marxist Leninist discourse in an intellectual effort to outbid their communist rivals, their claim that the Sudanese communists were an overly Westernized group hostile to Islam and to Sudanese tradition chimed remarkably with that of the British.

The Origins of Islamism in Sudan

The first Islamist organizations of note in Sudan were affiliates of Egypt's Muslim Brotherhood (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimin*), which had been established in 1928 by Hasan al-Banna. These began to emerge following a tour to Sudan conducted by Jamal al-Din Sanhuri, a Sudanese national who had joined the Ikhwan during his studies in Cairo.¹⁷ Further visits and spontaneous preaching by Ikhwanis stationed with the Egyptian army in Sudan bolstered the growth of this local movement, and a Sudanese branch of the organization began to coalesce under the leadership of Ali Talaballah, who was appointed as the 'general supervisor' of the local Brotherhood soon after his arrest in 1947 for the possession of an unlicensed firearm.¹⁸ The other principal Islamist organization to manifest itself in Sudan in the 1940s was the Islamic Liberation Movement (ILM), which began to emerge amongst a group school students at Hantoub Secondary School in 1947 before being established in earnest by Babikir Karrar at Gordon Memorial College in Khartoum in 1948.¹⁹ Although the emergence of the ILM resembled the birth of the Sudanese Ikhwan, in that it was formed by religiously orientated individuals who sought to reconcile their Islamic faith with their experience of modern education, it did not initially identify itself as a branch of the Brotherhood.²⁰ Nevertheless, its members read extensively from prominent Ikhwanis such as al-Banna and al-Ghazali,²¹ and maintained contacts with the branches of the Sudanese Brotherhood outside of the campus.²² Meanwhile, a separate Muslim Brother organization emerged at Hantoub under Rashid al-Tahir, Muhammad Khair Abd al-Qadir and Jafa'ar Shaikh Idris.²³ In spite of ideological differences, these organizations remained close to each other, and began to merge de facto in 1951.²⁴ At the Eid Conference of 1954 this merger was formalized, and the movement consequently took up the name 'Muslim Brotherhood'.²⁵ Karrar's section of the ILM split off in protest, forming a separate 'Islamic Group' (*al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya*).²⁶

One of the most notable distinctions between the Egyptian and the Sudanese Islamist organizations was the comparatively more covert character of the movement in Sudan. When Hasan al-Banna established the Brotherhood in 1928, Egypt was a semi-independent country with a pluralistic

¹⁶ Salomon, for instance, has looked at the role of the British Condominium officials in pre-empting later Islamist agendas both through their civilizational rhetoric and their encouragement of Sudanese *alims* and *qadis* to follow a reformist logic similar to that of Muhammad Abduh in Egypt; however, there is less focus in his text on the role of institutions such as Gordon Memorial College and Hantoub. See Salomon, *Love of the Prophet*, Chapters 1 and 2.

¹⁷ El-Affendi, Abdelwahab, *Turabi's Revolution: Islam and Power in the Sudan* (London: Grey Seal, 1991), p. 46.

¹⁸ Abdelwahab el-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*, p. 51.

¹⁹ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*, p. 48.

²⁰ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*, p. 48.

²¹ See, eg., Abdullah Zakariyya Idris, Interview with *al-Saiha* 15 February 2015, <http://www.assayha.net/play.php?catsmktba=2850>.

²² Abdelwahab el-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*, p. 51.

²³ Al-Tayyib Ali Abd al-Rahman, *Hantub Jamila: al-Tajriba al-Tarbawiyya al-Farida 1946m-1994* (Khartoum: Sinan al-'Alamiyya li'l-Tiba'a, 2009), p. 242.

²⁴ Abdelwahab el-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*, p. 51.

²⁵ Abdelwahab el-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*, pp. 52-53.

²⁶ Abdelwahab el-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*, p. 53.

parliamentary system and a relative degree of political freedom. His organization was able to operate openly for twenty years, until it was banned by the Egyptian government in 1948 after its paramilitary arm was held to be responsible for the assassination of a government judge.²⁷ When the Brotherhood first appeared in Sudan in 1945, the country was still under a colonial regime and although political freedoms were beginning to appear the government exercised a far greater deal of control over rights of political association. The colonial regime was able to prevent the Sudanese branches of the Muslim Brotherhood acquiring any legal status,²⁸ although they struggled to prohibit the movement altogether. In 1946, the Civil Secretary informed his governors that the society should be allowed to function insofar as its objectives remained purely religious, as opposed to political, although they should not be allowed to use the name of the Egyptian parent organization.²⁹ This led the Sudanese branch of the Brotherhood to attempt to mask its political character, and British intelligence reports expressed frustration that local branches had mastered the technique of cloaking 'seditious' language through use of religious rhetoric in mosque sermons.³⁰ When Ali Talaballah appealed to the Civil Secretary for formal recognition in 1947, he maintained that the Sudanese Brotherhood was an 'Islamic' and not a 'political' organization, but was still refused.³¹

The covert character of early Sudanese Islamism had a particularly noticeable impact on the Islamist organizations in the secondary schools, and in Gordon Memorial College. The regulations of Gordon College forbade students from actively joining political organizations and engaging in politics because, in the words of J.D. Tothill, politics represented 'a novel situation that is not yet understood by our students'.³² Likewise, the headmaster Lewis Brown maintained a careful oversight of political organizations, including the Muslim Brotherhood, at Hantoub.³³ Mirghani al-Nasri, who founded the movement in earnest at Hantoub in 1948, recalls that his recruitment method was to approach a potential member privately in their dormitory, usher out any room-mates who might be present, and then to explain the society's principles to them before encouraging them to swear a membership oath on the Quran.³⁴ When members of the Muslim Brotherhood visited their colleagues at Hantoub in 1952, they met privately in the house of an Egyptian embassy official to avoid discovery.³⁵

The covert character of the early Islamist organizations is likely to have had significant consequences for their post-colonial successors. Although the Islamists no longer found it necessary to deny their political intentions, founding organizations such as the Islamic Charter Front (1964-1969) and National Islamic Front (1985-1989), Hasan al-Turabi as the leading light of the Islamic Movement after 1964 became renowned for his tendency towards ideological dissimulation and covert political action, the most notable example of which was his decision to conceal the National Islamic Front's role in Umar al-Bashir's coup of 1989. Al-Turabi has frequently attempted to justify these methods as a defensive measure,³⁶ and it is quite possible that his experience as a member of an undercover organization at Gordon College helped shaped his attitude and the attitude of other such Islamists towards the merits of covert action. Another consequence of the secrecy of the early movement was that its clandestine nature mitigated against the emergence of particularly hierarchical leadership structures and a rigid sense of ideological direction. For instance, Makki observes that the ILM lacked

²⁷ Richard P. Mitchell, *The Society of the Muslim Brothers* (Oxford University Press, 1993), 294-300, 62.

²⁸ Abdelwahab el-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*,

²⁹ Circular Letter by JW Robertson, 20 February 1946, cited in S. R. Ashton and D.H. Johnson(eds), *British Documents on the End of Empire. Series B, Vol 5, Sudan* (London: Stationery Office, 1998), p. 127.

³⁰ Sudan Political Intelligence Summaries (November 1946), FO 371/53328, TNA.

³¹ Sudan Political Intelligence Summary (Feb-Mar 1947), FO 371/63047, TNA.

³² J.D. Tothill to Hill 21 December 1946 (Circular Letter no 2), 970/2/12, Sudan Archives Durham (hereafter SAD), (Hill Papers).

³³ Hasan Makki Muhammad Ahmad, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya fi al-Sudan, 1969-1985m* (al-Khartoum: Dar al-Sudaniyya li'l-Kutub, 1999), p. 7.

³⁴ Abd al-Rahman, *Hantub Jamila*, p. 240.

³⁵ Ahmad, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*, p. 7.

³⁶ Berridge, *Hasan al-Turabi*, 82.

‘fixed intellectual characteristics’ because of its covert character.³⁷ The fact that the nucleus of the later movement emerged within a university campus and secondary school environment in itself marks a significant contrast with the experience of the Egyptian Brotherhood, the founders of which had already graduated and begun working within more hierarchical professional environments by the time they established the organization. Hasan al-Turabi would later claim that the movement developed a collective approach towards leadership due to its origins in an ‘egalitarian student milieu’.³⁸ While al-Turabi himself would go on to become a domineering figure in the movement between 1964 and 1999, he was never able to impose a fixed ideology upon it and it was perhaps the open and critical outlook that came with the movement’s origins in an academic environment that enabled its members to move against him in 1998 through a memorandum that criticized his leadership, and presaged his downfall the next year.³⁹

The covert character of the Sudanese Islamists’ student activism was accompanied by an attitude towards political violence that stood in marked contrast with that of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt, where members of the Ikhwan were, like other nationalists, willing to openly confront British troops stationed in Egypt.⁴⁰ In Sudan, where a negotiated transition to independence averted the radicalization of anti-colonial politics, the opposite was the case. Although we should be wary of assuming, as the colonizers often did,⁴¹ that anti-colonialism was external to Sudan, it was usually Egyptian Islamists, as well as Sudanese Islamists educated in Egypt, that made the most serious efforts to militarize the existing Sudanese movement. In 1949, Haselden, the Sudan Agent in Cairo, corresponded with Robertson, the Civil Secretary, and discussed the discovery of Arabic documents indicating the risk of an attempt on the life of the Governor-General by ‘members of the Ikhwan’. Nevertheless, the eventual translation of this document confirmed Robertson’s view that ‘the Ikhwan in Sudan need not be taken very seriously’, and Haselden continued to observe that the main threat would be likely to come from ‘terrorists in Egypt’.⁴² Makki perhaps sheds light on this potential assassination plot when he suggests that the Egyptian Muslim Brothers planned to kill the Governor-General, but that their plan to have Talaballah take the final shot fell apart when he was arrested for possession of an unlicensed pistol.⁴³

The impetus towards militant activism usually came from Ikhwanis based in Egypt. One such individual was Sadiq Abdullah Abd al-Majid, a member of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood who often wrote columns in the Egypt-based newspaper *al-Sudan al-Hadith*. In 1953, soon after the Islamists had seized the student union at Gordon Memorial College, Abd al-Majid encouraged the new student leadership to demand that they be provided with military as well as academic training so that they could make a contribution to the nationalist movement similar to that of their Egyptian counterparts.⁴⁴ Nevertheless, even by the account of the British themselves,⁴⁵ the student Islamists continue to pursue a non-violent mode of politics, anticipating the largely civil character of student activism during not just the independence struggle but also the October Revolution of 1964. It was not until the 1970s that

³⁷ Ahmad, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*, p. 7.

³⁸ Hasan al-Turabi, (trans. Abdelwahab El-Affendi), *The Islamic Movement in Sudan* (Beirut: Arab Scientific Publishers, 2009), p. 97.

³⁹ Berridge, *Hasan al-Turabi*, pp. 108-112.

⁴⁰ Mitchell, *Society*, pp. 60-62, 75, 89.

⁴¹ See, for instance, W. J. Berridge, ‘Sudan’s security agencies: fragmentation, visibility, mimicry, 1908-1989’, *Intelligence and National Security* 28 (2013), pp. 845-867; also Martin Thomas, *Empires of Intelligence: Security Services and Colonial Disorder after 1914* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007)

⁴² Kit Haselden to Robertson from Sudan Agency in Cairo, 8 February 1949, 524/2/40 SAD, (Robertson Papers).

⁴³ Hasan Makki Muhammad Ahmad, *Al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*, 7.

⁴⁴ Sadiq Abdullah Abd al-Majid, ‘Jama’at al-Khartoum taqud al-Ma’araka’, *al-Sudan al-Hadith* 16 August 1953.

⁴⁵ See later in this article

campus Islamism developed a militant outlook, in the context of violent conflicts with both the student communists and the military regime.⁴⁶

The divergence between Egyptian and Sudanese attitudes towards militarization serves as a reminder of the contextual character of Islamist political violence. In the short term, the ideological fluidity that came with the movement's non-confrontational covert character also facilitated its synthetic relationship with colonial discourse, as we will see. Of course, one reason that the Islamists in Egypt developed an increasingly Manichaean outlook was that the Muslim Brotherhood has clashed so violently with secular nationalists, whether the government of al-Nuqrashi in between 1948-1949 or that of Nasser in 1954.⁴⁷ In Sudan, the Islamists maintained close relations with both the major factions within the nationalist movement, the neo-Mahdist Umma party and the 'unionist' Ashiqqa (NUP after 1953).⁴⁸ In their self-perception, as well as their perception of Sudanese identity and history, they were not entirely distinct from this generation of nationalists.

Colonial education, nationalism and regional divides

Sudanese Islamists have often expressed resentment of the role that colonial education played in isolating them from their own culture and history. For instance, Abd al-Qadir maintains that the usage of an English language work by the Lebanese-American scholar Phillip Hitti as the principal textbook for teaching Islamic history at Gordon Memorial College was evidence that students were being cut off from their roots.⁴⁹ Indeed, colonial teaching on Islamic history was somewhat limited – in particular, the school system was let down by its reliance on European employees who had far greater knowledge of Western than Ottoman or Middle Eastern history.⁵⁰ Seri-Hersch observes that the colonial schools were significantly better at teaching early Islamic history than subsequent periods⁵¹ – one wonders to what extent this accounts for the Islamists' tendency to seek ideological succour in the distant, as opposed to the more recent Islamic past.

Islamists also sought to contest the teaching of Sudanese history, particularly the history of the Mahdiyya – the revivalist movement that had kept both the British and the Egyptians out of Sudan for around a decade and a half at the end of the nineteenth century. Abdullah Muhammad Ahmad (an ILM member who would later join the neo-Mahdist Umma Party) claims that both he and Babikir Karrar strove hard to reinterpret the prevailing, and false image of the Mahdiyya as a specifically Western Sudanese phenomenon, an interpretation that he maintains was encouraged by the colonial schools. Babikir Karrar, himself from a Mahdist Ansari family, enabled both Western and riverain Sudanese at Hantoub to view the Mahdiyya as a shared religious and political endeavour between the peoples of Western Sudan and those of the Blue and White Niles, thus reshaping its memory so that it would act as a tool of nationalist politics. In a sense, this interpretation was not altogether revolutionary – ironically, colonial elementary schools were beginning to put forward a similar 'nationalist' reading of the Mahdiyya in their textbooks due to the British desire to bolster Sudanese separatism in the face of

⁴⁶ See W.J. Berridge, *Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan: The 'Khartoum Springs' of 1964 and 1985* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), 97, 100.

⁴⁷ See, eg., John Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb and the Origins of Radical Islamism* (Oxford University Press, 2013), Chapter 6.

⁴⁸ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*, pp. 50, 54-56.

⁴⁹ Abd al-Qadir, Muhammad Khayr, *Nashat al-Haraka al-Islamiyya al-Haditha fi al-Sudan, 1946m-1956m* (Khartoum: Dar al-Sudaniyya li'l-Kutub, 1999), p. 65.

⁵⁰ Iris Seri-Hersch, 'Sudan and the British Empire in the Era of Colonial Dismantlement (1946-1956): History Teaching in Comparative Perspective', in Ali, Souad T et al (eds), *The Road to Two Sudans* (Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing), pp. 177-219 at p. 187.

⁵¹ Seri-Hersch, 'Sudan and the British Empire'.

the Egyptian campaign for the union of the Nile Valley.⁵² Indeed, one of the dormitories at Hantoub was named after a famous Mahdist general, Hamdan Abu Anja.⁵³

Ahmad's recollections speak to the capacity of colonial schools to act as a 'melting pot' dissolving ethnic differences. Before their alliance with the neo-Mahdist and anti-Egyptian Umma party, the British had striven hard to maintain the separate regional identities of Western and central riverain Sudan so as to prevent a recrudescence of revolutionary Mahdism.⁵⁴ The British headmaster of Hantoub, Lewis Brown, went against the grain of such 'divide and rule' policies by organizing dormitories and classes so as to transcend regional divides.⁵⁵ This is likely to have been the reason that Karrar and Ahmad co-habited in a single dormitory.⁵⁶ Meanwhile, Ahmad insists that Karrar's efforts challenged the tendency of Westerners such as himself who entered the modern educational institutions to isolate themselves from other Sudanese.⁵⁷ A number of Kordofanians were drawn into the ILM at Hantoub when it was first established, after students from the newly founded Khor Togat school near al-Ubayyid were required to transfer there while the building work at their new institution was being completed.⁵⁸

The one member of the ILM who played the greatest role in bridging the cultural and regional gulf between the central riverain areas and Sudan's westernmost province of Darfur was a native of al-Fashir, Abdullah Zakariyya. While the majority of students at Hantoub had come there from the provinces of Kassala, Kordofan and Blue Nile,⁵⁹ Zakariyya had undertaken his elementary education in al-Fashir and went to middle school at Dueim on the White Nile.⁶⁰ He joined the Islamic Liberation Movement at Hantoub when Karrar introduced him to the works of al-Banna, Qutb and Ghazali.⁶¹ From that point Zakariyya, who regularly returned to Darfur on study breaks, is credited with playing a major role in recruiting and overseeing ILM members in Sudan's Westernmost province.⁶² He maintains that he helped to orchestrate the February 1951 protests in al-Fashir, during which he was threatened with nine years of imprisonment by the British police commissioner for burning the British flag.⁶³ It may be that Zakariyya exaggerated his role in these protests – official Condominium sources attribute them to al-Azhar trained West African 'fellata' students who had recently returned from Egypt,⁶⁴ although it quite possible that these students were Muslim Brothers themselves,⁶⁵ and they may well have co-ordinated with Zakariyya. After Zakariyya, a number of other ILM members from Hantoub began to spread the organization in Darfur as they obtained employment in the region as teachers. Ali al-Haj,

⁵² Seri-Hersch, 'Sudan and the British Empire'.

⁵³ Abd al-Rahman, *Hantub Jamila*, p. 252.

⁵⁴ Noah Bassil, *The Post-Colonial State and Civil War in Sudan* (London: IB Tauris 2015), p. 75.

⁵⁵ Abd al-Rahman, *Hantub Jamila*, p. 113.

⁵⁶ Abd al-Rahman, *Hantub Jamila*, p. 234.

⁵⁷ See comments in Ahmad Abd al-Rahman Muhammad (ed), *Takhlid Dhikra al-Mufakkir al-Arabi al-Islami Babikir Karrar* (Khartoum: Dar al-Sudaniyya li'l-Kutub, 2008), p. 17

⁵⁸ Abd al-Rahman, *Hantub Jamila*, p. 235.

⁵⁹ *Report by the Governor General on the Finances, Administration and Conditions of Sudan in 1948* (RRG), p. 142.

⁶⁰ Abdullah Zakariyya Idris interview with Uthman

⁶¹ Abdullah Zakariyya Idris interview with Uthman

⁶² Azraq, Isa Makki Uthman, *Min Tarikh al-Ikhwān al-Muslimun fī al-Sudan* ([Khartoum?]: Sharika Dar al-Balad li'l-Sihafa wa'l-Tiba'a wa'l-Nushr wa'l-Tawzia, 1998), p. 9.

⁶³ Abdullah Zakariyya Idris, Interview with *al-Saiha* 15 February 2015, <http://www.assayha.net/play.php?catsmktba=2850>.

⁶⁴ *Report on the Administration of Sudan in 1951-1952*, (Khartoum: McCorquodale & Co., 1955), p 138.

Available via Sudan Archives, Durham,

<http://reed.dur.ac.uk/metsnav/sadsir/navigate.do?oid=http://endure.dur.ac.uk:8080/fedora/get/UkDhU:ddac4138-efe5-4a59-a530-8e46c3aa3b1a/METS&pn=142&size=screen>.

⁶⁵ Ali al-Haj informed Kamal El-Din that the first Muslim Brother group in Darfur in the 1950s was formed by Darfuris who had studied at al-Azhar. El-Din, Kamal Ahmed, 'Islam and Islamism in Darfur', in Alex de Waal, ed., *War in Darfur and the Search for Peace* (London: Justice Africa, 2007), pp. 90-112 at p. 99.

who would later become the most prominent Darfuri Islamist of Umar al-Bashir's Salvation Regime, recalls that he was recruited to the ILM in 1953 at Nyala Intermediate School by his teacher, who had himself joined the movement at Hantoub.⁶⁶

Like their relatively more secular nationalist colleagues in the Umma party, the Sudanese Islamists thus tied their project to revive Islamic society in Sudan to an image of a Sudanese body politic based on a nationalist rememorialization of the Mahdist past. British educational institutions helped to facilitate this nationalization of Islamism in Sudan, by promoting Sudanese identity against the rhetoric of Nile Valley Unity, by bringing together students from across regional and ethnic divides, and by developing an educational ethos that encouraged students to think of themselves of nationalist pioneers.

Colonial ambivalence and the emergence of Islamism

As Homi Bhabha and others have shown us, there was a fundamental ambivalence at the heart of the colonial project, as the impulse to transform the colonial subject competed with the fear that assimilation to a European ideal would undermine the logic of difference upon which colonialism was based.⁶⁷ This ambivalence was particularly evident in educational settings, where the colonizers feared that too much exposure to the European world would lead students to identify with anti-colonial ideologies such as nationalism.⁶⁸ Nowhere was this tension more evident than at Gordon Memorial College, named as it was after the ideological crusader Charles Gordon, who following his death at the hands of Sudanese Mahdist forces in 1885 had become an emblem of the colonial civilising project. Taking British public schools as a model, the educationalists of Gordon Memorial College placed an even greater emphasis than these institutions on activities intended to develop 'character', including various sporting, literary and social endeavours, maintaining that this was necessary to inculcate better moral values in the Sudanese elite.⁶⁹ Students were set texts such as Shakespeare and Kipling, and encouraged to practise 'free thinking' at the College's Literary and Debating Society.⁷⁰ The College also taught the students, the majority of whom entered into government service, 'how to think, how to keep records, and how to organize information according to a British order of things'.⁷¹ Yet the colonizers feared that too much Anglicization would lead to a demand for the same political rights as the British, and in the aftermath of the nationalist White Flag Revolt of 1924, the colonial government forbade the donning of Western clothes by students at the College.⁷² In the heyday of the colonial fetishization of 'tradition' in the 1930s, student uniform at the college was constituted of the *jalabiyya* (a long white flowing garment) and *imma* (turban).⁷³ Yet once students graduated, they would often return to wearing suits as a means of challenging colonial policy and expressing their modern leanings.⁷⁴ The elite character of the colonial education encouraged students to think of themselves as a generation of pioneers, uniquely equipped to bestow modern civilization upon the rest of the country.⁷⁵ The graduates of colonial schools were often referred to by the Ottoman-Egyptian term '*Effendiyya*' (sing. Effendi) – a term that quickly acquired a pejorative connotation when used by colonial officials.⁷⁶

Certain Islamists of the founding generation had familial connections to the earlier Gordon College graduates who had formed the first wave of educated nationalists in Sudan. For instance, Abd

⁶⁶ Ali al-Haj interview with *al-Intibaha*, reproduced at *al-Rakoba* 3 October 2014, <http://www.alrakoba.net/news.php?action=show&id=139925>.

⁶⁷ Homi Bhabha, *Location of Culture*, 153-163; Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism* Chapter 3.

⁶⁸ Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism*, p. 100.

⁶⁹ Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism*, 44.

⁷⁰ Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism*, 51-53.

⁷¹ Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism*, 65.

⁷² Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism*, 48.

⁷³ Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism*, 49.

⁷⁴ Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism*, 49-50.

⁷⁵ Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism*, 66.

⁷⁶ Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism*, 69, 99-100.

al-Rahim Hamdi, the future finance minister of the post-1989 Islamist regime, recalls that his uncle was one of the leaders of the famous 1931 strike at the college, whereas both his father and grandfather published in *al-Fajr*, the nationalist literary journal driven by Gordon College graduates. Hamdi's father regarded his family as having moved beyond 'tradition', and supported the unveiling (*sufur*) of women in his writings in *al-Fajr*, considering himself a member of a 'new generation'. Yet upon marriage he reconsidered his break with 'traditional' values to an extent, making his wife wear the headscarf (*tarha*) although not the full thob.⁷⁷

The ambivalences of the colonial and nationalist worldview were mirrored in the Islamist discourse of students who studied in premier colonial educational institutions such as Gordon Memorial College, or Hantoub Secondary School. In many regards, the ethos of the student Islamists was not altogether dissimilar from that of the more secular '*effendis*' who viewed themselves as purveyors of modernity. They emphasized the character-building capacity of education, sport and literacy. For instance, Abdullah Muhammad Ahmad celebrated Babikir Karrar as a man who had headed his dormitory, excelled at swimming and football, and mastered 'public comportment' (*al-seluk al-aam*).⁷⁸ Hasan al-Turabi has also attempted to highlight the values his footballing endeavours taught him at Hantoub, although many of his former classmates have refused to acknowledge any sporting prowess on his part.⁷⁹ Meanwhile, the oath that ILM members swore dedicated them to combatting not just colonialism but also 'backwardness' and 'poverty'.⁸⁰ Following a broader belief in the civilizational capacity of the written word, shared by effendis and post-war colonial developmentalists,⁸¹ the Muslim Brothers used the Omdurman Cultural Club as a centre for their campaign against illiteracy, which particularly targeted southerners.⁸² Not unlike the British colonizers and the secular nationalists, the Islamists perceived the post-war generation of Gordon Memorial College students as intellectual pioneers who could guide the rest of the nation. In 1953, Sadiq Abdullah wrote that the student union (recently seized by the Islamists) was 'the spark through which students in the various schools and institutes of Sudan will be enlightened', its members being possessed of 'the greatest share of education and knowledge in Sudan'.⁸³ Like the British colonizers, the Islamists anchored their sense of their own agency in a strictly linear reading of history.⁸⁴

On the other hand, Islamists of the founding generation have – at times explicitly – expressed identification with the views of colonial administrators more wary of the impact of modern education on the colonial subject. For instance, Muhammad Khair Abd al-Qadir, in his later history of the 1946-1956 period, quotes a memorandum from Bence-Pembroke, a colonial administrator in Darfur. Bence-Pembroke was writing in the hey-day of 'indirect rule' in the inter-war period, when a combination of economic retrenchment brought about by the Great Depression and fear of the nascent Sudanese nationalist movement led the colonial administration to limit the provision of state education and employ 'traditional' elites in the place of the *effendis*. He lamented that the 'younger generation' had become obsessed with the 'modes and fashions of the European, some of which are not only contrary to all native tradition and custom [sic], but which are also often opposed to the precepts of the Moslem

⁷⁷ Abd al-Rahim Hamdi interview with *al-Nilein*, 28 May 2009, <http://www.alnilin.com/117391.htm>. For *al-Fajr*, see Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism*.

⁷⁸ Muhammad (ed.), *Takhlid Dhikra*, p. 18.

⁷⁹ Berridge, *Hasan al-Turabi*, p. 32.

⁸⁰ Muhammad (ed.), *Takhlid Dhikra*, p. 18.

⁸¹ Iris Seri-Hersch, 'Towards Social Progress and Post-Imperial Modernity? Colonial Politics of Literacy in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1946-1956', *History of Education* 40 (2003), 333-356.

⁸² Abd al-Qadir, *Nasha'a*, p. 133.

⁸³ Sadiq Abdullah Abd al-Majid, 'Jama'at al-Khartoum taqud al-Ma'araka', *Sudan al-Hadith* 16 August 1953.

⁸⁴ For a similar argument about India Hindu reformers, see Nandy, *Intimate Enemy*, 26.

religion'.⁸⁵ Abd al-Qadir uses Bence-Pembroke's argument to support his own claims about the deleterious impact of colonial education upon Muslim religiosity, and in a further echo of the conservative colonialist outlook maintains that this alien form of education was responsible for spreading Marxist political ideals amongst the Sudanese *effendiyya*.⁸⁶ Both Bence-Pembroke and Abd al-Qadir mobilized the language of tradition and religious authenticity against their political opponents—the nationalists and the communists respectively.

In spite of the concerns he expressed regarding the impact of Western schooling, in the 1950s Abd al-Qadir passed through colonial educational institutions within which the 'civilizing mission' had come anew, as the British sought to form a generation of Anglophone nationalists who would maintain their links with the colonial metropole following independence. Writing in *al-Sudan al-Hadith* in 1953, he lamented that the British education system had spread 'poisonous ideas' that were 'more destructive' than colonialism's military manifestations.⁸⁷ It was in this context that the editor of *al-Sudan al-Hadith* Sadiq Abd al-Majid wrote in 1954 that unless the Anglicized elites returned to Islam, true Sudanization would not occur and the country would suffer from them 'lapsing back into the English *jahiliyya* (ignorance) once more'.⁸⁸ Here Abd al-Majid was evoking the Islamist concept most famously popularized by the Egyptian radical Sayyid Qutb, who had written in *Sudan al-Hadith* during 1953.⁸⁹ In a *jahiliyya* order the existing social system was completely divorced from Islam, in a manner resembling the original 'age of ignorance' of the 7th century.⁹⁰ Abd al-Qadir's own articulation of the *jahiliyya* concept illustrates Fanon's observation that the Arab intelligentsia turned to an idealized reading of Islamic history as a means of escaping the intellectual onslaught of colonialism.⁹¹ Nevertheless, he held out hope that educated Sudanese (*muthaqqafin*) could escape this *jahiliyya*, observing that a 'new group' (*fi'a karima*) had emerged that 'did not recognize English educational models', observed 'correct Islamic culture', and was thus capable of relating to 'modern, free culture' on their own terms.⁹² Given the year in which his article was published, Abd al-Qadir was presumably inspired by the political rise of the Islamists in Gordon Memorial College. Yet, as seen above, this generation of Islamists possessed an elitist worldview that was not all that different from that of previous *muthaqqafin* groups or indeed the British colonizers themselves.

Although Islamists decried the secular character of the colonial education system, what is noticeable is that *effendis* from either Sudan or the wider region often featured more explicitly as targets of Islamist censure than did their British teachers. Sa'id recalls that Sa'im Muhammad Ibrahim valued 'authenticity' (*asala*) and loathed the *effendis*.⁹³ It is worth observing here that the rationalist and at times atheistic worldviews that the Islamists disliked were by no means the exclusive preserve of Western civilization – as Euben has shown us, both Islamic and European cultures have experienced ambivalences over the respective merits of faith and reason throughout their histories.⁹⁴ Certainly,

⁸⁵ Abd al-Qadir, *Nasha'a*, pp. 120-121. I have taken the English language translation of the memorandum (Bence-Pembroke to Civil Secretary, 15 November 1926, S.G.A/CS/SCR/I-A-6, NRO) directly from p. 125 of the thesis of MA Bakheit, as referenced by Abd al-Qadir.

⁸⁶ Abd al-Qadir, *Nasha'a*, p. 121.

⁸⁷ Muhammad Khair Abd al-Qadir, 'Hawla Khitab Robertson...al-Tarbiyya al-isti'mariyya', *Al-Sudan al-Hadith* 30 August 1953.

⁸⁸ Sadiq Abdullah Abd al-Majid, 'Hatamuu hadhihi al-Tamathil', *Al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 20 Dec 1953.

⁸⁹ See, eg. Sayyid Qutb 'Al-Isti'amar al-Salibi', *Sudan al-Hadith* 30 August 1953.

⁹⁰ For a discussion of Qutb's *jahiliyya* concept, see Calvert, *Qutb*, pp. 160-162.

⁹¹ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*, p. 171. For a similar argument see Berridge, *al-Turabi*, p. 123.

⁹² Abd al-Qadir, 'Hawla Khitab Robertson'.

⁹³ Yusuf Hasan Sa'id interview, cited via *Ikhwanwiki*,

http://www.ikhwanwiki.com/index.php?title=%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1_%D9%85%D8%B9_%D8%AF_%D9%8A%D9%88%D8%B3%D9%81_%D8%AD%D8%B3%D9%86_%D8%B3%D8%B9%D9%8A%D8%AF.

⁹⁴ Euben, Roxanne, 'A Counternarrative of Shared Ambivalence: some Muslim and Western Perspectives on Science and Reason', *Common Knowledge*, 9 (2003), pp. 50-77.

Ikhwani students at Gordon Memorial College reacted critically to Durkheimian sociologists' rationalist views on religion, and the anthropologist James Frazer's claims that human societies in their 'primitive' form were bereft of religious belief.⁹⁵ Nevertheless, Islamist worldviews also developed in reaction to forms of rationalist philosophy that were specific to Islamic civilization. For instance, Malik Badri recalls that one of the experiences that motivated his entry into the Muslim Brotherhood was his resentment at being forced to study the medieval Islamic philosophers Ibn Sina and al-Kindi at the American University of Beirut, where he spent a year abroad in 1953 as part of his Gordon Memorial College degree.⁹⁶ In particular, Badri was outraged by al-Kindi and Ibn Sina's proposal that prophethood could be seen as another means of communicating philosophical beliefs.

One *effendi* at Gordon Memorial College who was a particular subject of Islamist opprobrium was Abd al-Aziz Ishaq, a lecturer in modern Arabic literature with a degree from Cairo,⁹⁷ where the secularism of authors such as Taha Husayn would have been in vogue.⁹⁸ Ishaq taught in an Arabic Department which, according to the College's official report, had 'found a section of its students more stiffly opposed than heretofore to the modernist approach to Islamic studies'.⁹⁹ Abdullah Muhammad Ahmad, an ILM member who was taking Ishaq's classes at the time, recounts that he and the other more pious students in the class resented their lecturer's 'mockery of Islam and the companions [*sahaba*]', and in particular his use of texts written by 'hypocrites and unbelievers' to question the validity of the Islam's religious message. During one lecture, Ishaq further enflamed these students when, while discussing a literary text that had advocated the merits of alcoholic drink as a defense against cold weather, he suggested that the Prophet himself had drunk alcohol throughout cold winters in Medina. In Ahmad's narrative, he and another student immediately bombarded their teacher with books, forcing him to flee to his office and lock himself in.¹⁰⁰

Following the incident, Ahmad summoned Babikir Karrar, who immediately phoned his contacts in the three towns. He was able to mobilize Ali Talaballah of the Muslim Brotherhood, the Ansar al-Sunna leader Shaikh Muhammad Hashim Hidayat, the Imam of the Omdurman mosque Awad Umar al-Imam, Mahmud Muhammad Taha of the Republican Brothers, and the leading Ansari Abdullah Nugdallah. They were accompanied by a furious crowd, who threatened that if Ishaq were not expelled from Sudan they would burn the college. The college principal, Lewis Wilcher, arrived with a number of prominent officials and attempted to appease the protestors before convening an emergency meeting of the college's administrative council, which resolved to dismiss Ishaq and repatriate him via the next flight out of Khartoum.¹⁰¹ We are rather dependent on Ahmad's account of the incident – the college's official gazette merely listed Ishaq as having resigned in 1954.¹⁰² If we accept his account, it might enable us to draw a number of conclusions regarding the dynamics underpinning Islamist activism within early colonial educational environments. First of all, it would appear that far from being isolated from society at large, the student members of the Islamic Liberation Movement were able to co-ordinate with some of the most prominent religious and political groups within the country. Second, even in the late colonial era students were able to shape the future of the

⁹⁵ Abd al-Qadir, *Nasha'a*, p. 152.

⁹⁶ Malik Badri interview with Hasan Abd al-Hamid (not dated), cited via *Ikhwanwiki*.
http://www.ikhwanwiki.com/index.php?title=%D8%AD%D9%88%D8%A7%D8%B1_%D9%85%D8%B9_%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%A8%D8%B1%D9%88%D9%81%D9%8A%D8%B3%D8%B1_%D9%85%D8%A7%D9%84%D9%83_%D8%A8%D8%AF%D8%B1%D9%8A.

⁹⁷ *University College of Khartoum Gazette* Vol I., No. 3 September 1954 (available via SAD). Muhammad (ed.), *Takhliid Dhikra*, 19.

⁹⁸ For Taha Husayn's controversial writings on Islamic poetry, see Paul Starkey, "Modern Egyptian Culture in the Arab World", in M.W. Daly (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Egypt Volume 2: Modern Egypt from 1517 to the End of the Twentieth Century* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 401-402.

⁹⁹ *The University College of Khartoum Annual Report 1952*, p. 11 (available via SAD).

¹⁰⁰ Speech by Abdullah Muhammad Ahmad, cited in Muhammad, *Takhliid Dhikra*, pp. 19-20.

¹⁰¹ Speech by Abdullah Muhammad Ahmad, cited in Muhammad, *Takhliid Dhikra*, pp. 20-21.

¹⁰² See *University College of Khartoum Gazette* Vol I., No. 3 September 1954.

state's most prominent educational institution – Ishaq was replaced by Abdullah al-Tayyib, who went to become one of the country's most prominent literary intellectuals. Third, it seems that the British colonialists, who had strictly forbidden Christian missionary proselytization in northern Sudan for fear of galvanising a religious revolt against their rule,¹⁰³ were just as wary of supporting atheist proselytization. According to Ahmad, the District Commissioner of Khartoum stood aside and allowed the protests against Ishaq to continue.¹⁰⁴ It is unclear whether the decision of Wilcher and the administrative council to dismiss Ishaq was motivated by a hostility towards effendi irreligion akin to that of Bence-Pembroke or simple fear of the violence that might ensue if they did not remove him, but either way it would appear that they were not willing to challenge the Islamists.

If Islamist worldviews were forged in the fire of their conflicted interaction with colonial discourse, they were also shaped by their ambivalent relationship with their Marxist student colleagues. If the effendis and students as a whole were, in Sharkey's words, 'colonialism's intimate enemies',¹⁰⁵ then the Islamist students were also the 'intimate enemies' of the communists. A number of the initial founders of the ILM, including Babikir Karrar, Yusuf Hasan Sa'id and Abdullah Zakariyya, had all been affiliated with the campus based communist organizations before 1948. Yet the demands they made upon these students to abandon their religious beliefs and religio-political affiliations proved too much. Yusuf Hasan Sa'id left the communists after hearing the head of his cell criticizing the Quran,¹⁰⁶ whereas Babikir Karrar, whose family had strong links to the Umma party, resented being commanded to campaign against it in Wad Madani.¹⁰⁷

What is noticeable about Islamist critiques of Sudan's leftists is that they tended to focus on the moral, religious and cultural weaknesses of individual communists, rather than the actual content of Marxist social and economic theory. The behaviour of the communists was reprehensible because they drank and smoke openly without fear of being challenged and they encouraged religious orientated students to abandon prayer.¹⁰⁸ Again, these criticisms paralleled those made by colonial officials contemptuous of Westernized 'effendis'. Indeed, Abd al-Qadir took as a sign of his generation's irreligiosity the fact that his generation of student donned European (ifranji) clothes, including suits and ties.¹⁰⁹ El-Affendi insists that the campus communists were 'ardent missionaries of Western forms of art and Western norms of behaviour'.¹¹⁰ However, for some members of the ILM, the problem of their former colleagues was not so much that they had embraced Marxist ideology, but that they had abandoned Islam in doing so. According to Abdullah Zakariyya, Karrar continued to propose that Marx's *Das Capital* should be the foundational text of the ILM.¹¹¹

What is remarkable about Islamist narratives concerning the founding the ILM is that – while one of the avowed aims of the movement was to combat colonialism – they usually tend to focus on the emergence of the movement as a reaction to the communist domination of the school and college environment, rather than as a response to British imperialism in the wider political arena. This should not imply any particular sympathy with British colonialism – more that the soon to be departing British administration represented less of a threat to the Islamists' long-term goals than did the communists. It probably also reflects the fact that as the last decade of the Condominium unfolded, it became

¹⁰³ See Heather Sharkey, "Christians Among Muslims: The Church Missionary Society in the Northern Sudan", *Journal of African History* 2002 (43), pp.51-75 at pp. 51, 56.

¹⁰⁴ Speech by Abdullah Muhammad Ahmad, cited in Muhammad, *Takhliḍ Dhikra*, pp. 20-21.

¹⁰⁵ Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism*, p. 1. Sharkey herself takes the term 'intimate enemy' from Ashis Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*.

¹⁰⁶ Yusuf Hasan Sa'id interview, cited via *Ikhwanwiki*,

¹⁰⁷ Abdullah Zakariyya Interview with *al-Sayha*, 15 February 2015.

¹⁰⁸ See Abd al-Qadir, *Nasha'a*, p. 64, 121; Muhammad Yusuf Muhammad in Muhammad, *Takhliḍ Dhikra*; El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*, p. 49.

¹⁰⁹ Abd al-Qadir, *Nasha'a*, p. 64

¹¹⁰ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*, p. 49.

¹¹¹ Abdullah Zakariyya Idris, Interview with Uthman.

increasingly clear that a negotiated independence would materialize, the future elites thus becoming more concerned with who would dominate the post-colonial political arena. Participating in strikes and demonstrations was therefore just as much a means to compete with the communists for prestige as it was to drive the British out. Zakariyya recalls that the ILM resolved that every action the Communists took they had to outdo – for instance, if the communists staged a strike, they had to perform a sit-in.¹¹² The Islamists established parallel organizations that mirrored the communists' own front tactics. When the Communists at Gordon College organized a Students' Congress (Mu'atamar al-Tulba) in 1949 (which evolved into the Democratic Front), the ILM backed the founding of a General Union for Sudanese Students.¹¹³ Even the name of the Islamic Liberation Movement was a product of the Islamist tendency to cannibalize the Marxist lexicon.¹¹⁴

It is evident that the British did not consider the student Islamists to represent as weighty a political movement as did their Communist rivals, even as they came to play a more substantial role on both the campus and national scene having seized control of the student union at Gordon Memorial College in 1953. Wilcher described this year, at the beginning of which the Muslim Brotherhood (now merging with the ILM) under Rashid al-Tahir had seized 9 out of 10 seats on the student union executive committee and thus ended a long period of communist domination, as 'the first year since 1946 in which the students, although as keenly interested in politics as ever, consistently confined new political activities to what might be termed constitutional channels'.¹¹⁵ Although Wilcher did not mention the Brotherhood by name, it is evident that he considered them less of a threat than the Communists. It is quite possible that the Islamists went through a phase of consolidation after their initial seizure of the union, which they lost control of to a group of political independents towards the end of 1953. Nevertheless, the student Islamists and other members of the Brotherhood grew in prominence after 1954 when they helped to support members of the Egyptian Ikhwan who had fled Nasser's crackdown against them.¹¹⁶ Locations such as the Omdurman Cultural Club acted as arenas in which they could further the political activity of the movement with the co-operation of prominent Egyptian Ikhwanis such as Hasan al-Banna's son in law, Sa'id Ramadan.¹¹⁷

The Islamists under Dafa'allah al-Haj Yusuf regained the union (in coalition with the independents) in late 1955, and were able to use it both to fight the British administration of the university and to influence the national political arena. On 8 December, with full independence approaching, 600 students marched on parliament to demand that the senior executive positions in the College, including that of the newly appointed Vice Chancellor, Michael Grant, be transferred to Sudanese nationals.¹¹⁸ These events are noteworthy for a number of reasons. First of all, they highlighted the student Ikhwanis' ability to connect to the broader nationalist movement – the union co-ordinated with al-Azhari throughout these events.¹¹⁹ Second, they highlighted the student Islamists' willingness to co-operate with the more liberal Westerners on the teaching staff. Zakariyya specifically mentions the assistance of an American teacher in his campaign against Grant,¹²⁰ and senior British academics were furious that staff support for the moves against Grant was 'not confined to any nationality'.¹²¹ This indicates that the students' motives were nationalist more than xenophobic. The union even sent a letter to Grant informing him that while they rejected his appointment as Dean, they

¹¹² Abdullah Zakariyya Idris Interview with *al-Sayha*, 15 February 2015.

¹¹³ Abd al-Rahman, *Hantub Jamila*, 235.

¹¹⁴ For further discussion of Islamist usage of Marxist terminology, see Roy, *Failure of Political Islam*, 39-40.

¹¹⁵ Lewis Wilcher, 'University College of Khartoum Annual Report 1953'

¹¹⁶ Ahmad Abd al-Rahman, Interview with *al-Sahafa*, 2 March 2013. Azraq, *Min Tarikh*, p. 20.

¹¹⁷ Ahmad Abd al-Rahman, Interview with *al-Sahafa*, 2 March 2013.

¹¹⁸ *University College of Khartoum Gazette*, Vol 1. No. 7, December 1955, p. 8. For the figure of 600, see Wilcher to Sir Alexander Carr Saunders, SAD 670/5/16. (C.W.M. Cox Papers).

¹¹⁹ Abdullah Zakariyya Idris interview with Uthman.

¹²⁰ Abdullah Zakariyya Idris interview with Uthman.

¹²¹ Wood letter to 'my Darling Dai', 19 December 1955, SAD 82/10/86,.

were happy to welcome him as a regular member of the teaching staff.¹²² Thus the student Islamists' views of Westerners do not seem to have been driven by the same outright Manichaeism that was then emerging in Qutbist circles in Egypt in the context of Nasserist persecution.¹²³ Finally, it was remarkable that, even though Grant believed the student union to be the principal force behind the protests, both he and Wilcher wrote in official correspondence that the communists were the main backers of the move against the vice chancellor.¹²⁴ This further highlights British officials' tendency to underestimate the significance of the Ikhwan, and perhaps suggests that the Brotherhood's tendency reproduction of quasi-communist rhetoric may have misled British officials.

At least according to Ikhwan narratives, the tumultuous events in Egypt also provided them with an opportunity to influence the national political arena. Islamist sources claim that following Nasser's execution of a number of Muslim Brothers in December 1955, al-Azhari and other parliamentary representatives responded positively to a request from the student union under Dafa'allah al-Haj Yusuf that they should perform funeral prayers on behalf of the executed men.¹²⁵ Abd al-Rahman has even maintained that this public show of support for the Ikhwan was one of the factors that led to Sudan's independence from Egypt.¹²⁶

The First Islamist Generation after 1956

The contribution of the first Islamist generation, shaped by late colonial educational institutions, to later Sudanese politics was pivotal. In particular, members of the ILM – the one Islamist organization that owed the most to institutions such as Hantoub and Gordon Memorial College – played a dominant role. It is true that the Islamic socialism of the ILM became increasingly less fashionable after 1954, when prominent Islamic socialists outside Sudan backed the Nasserist regime in Egypt that was persecuting the Muslim Brotherhood. Having left the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood in 1954, Babikir Karrar later became a prominent supporter of Mu'ammarr Gaddafi's regime in Libya, which had also advocated Islamic socialist policies.¹²⁷ He died there in the 1970s. Nevertheless, other ILM members were prominent in the Islamist regime that seized power in Sudan in 1989. Although Abdullah Zakariyya had also left the mainstream Brotherhood and travelled with Karrar to Libya, after 1989 he would help to transfer the Libyan model of 'Revolutionary Committees' to Sudan.¹²⁸ Uthman Khalid Mudawi and Ahmad Abd al-Rahman, high ranking members of the NIF at the time of al-Bashir's takeover, were both former ILM members.¹²⁹ Two other prominent figures within the post-1989 regime, Ali al-Haj and Abd al-Rahim Hamdi, also joined in the secondary schools as the ILM was beginning to merge into the Muslim Brotherhood.¹³⁰ Hasan al-Turabi, the NIF secretary general and principal architect of the post-1989 regime, had been an ILM member at Gordon College, although he did attempt to escape the legacy of his British colonial education by pursuing his doctoral studies at the Sorbonne in Paris, against the wishes of his British academic superiors at Gordon Memorial College.¹³¹ Al-Turabi's relationship with

¹²² As cited by Grant in Michael Grant to the Chairman of the Inter-University Council for Higher Education Overseas 24 December 1955, SAD 670/5/9 (C.W.M. Cox Papers).

¹²³ For the impact of Nasserist persecution on Qutb's ideology, see Calvert, *Qutb*, Chapter 6.

¹²⁴ Michael Grant to the Chairman of the Inter-University Council for Higher Education Overseas 24 December 1955, SAD 670/5/8. Wilcher to Sir Alexander Carr Saunders, SAD 670/5/16 (C.W.M. Cox Papers).

¹²⁵ Azraq, *Min Tarikh*, p. 21. Ahmad Abd al-Rahman, Interview with *al-Sahafa*, 2 March 2013.

¹²⁶ Ahmad Abd al-Rahman, Interview with *al-Sahafa*, 2 March 2013.

¹²⁷ Muhammad, *Takhlid Dhikra*, 61.

¹²⁸ Abdullah Zakariyya Idris Interview with Muzammil Abd al-Ghaffar, *Al-Ahram al-Youm*, 2 May 2012, reproduced via *Sudaress*, <http://www.sudaress.com/alahram/30413>.

¹²⁹ See Abd al-Rahim Hamdi interview with *Nilein*, 28 May 2009, <http://www.alnilin.com/117391.htm>.

¹³⁰ Abd al-Rahim Hamdi interview with *Nilein*; Ali al-Haj interview with *al-Intibaha*, reproduced at *al-Rakoba* 3 October 2014, <http://www.alrakoba.net/news.php?action=show&id=139925>. Al-Haj refers to himself joining the 'Islamic Movement' in 1953, retrospectively applying a later term for the Muslim Brotherhood.

¹³¹ Berridge, *Hasan al-Turabi*.

France was significant for Sudan's Islamist experiment, as he modelled his system of local governance on the French canton system and maintained close relations with Paris after the 1989 coup.¹³² Yet he sent the majority of his Islamist proteges, who has passed through the anglophone education system of early post-colonial Sudan, to universities in Britain and America.¹³³

While the leading Islamic Socialist (Karrar) may have left the Islamic Movement, these men continued the same crypto-Leninist methods, including the use of 'front tactics' and the pursuit of a policy of revolutionary state capture. Though this generation of Islamists would criticize earlier, more 'secular' nationalists for governing the nation in accordance with the Western worldviews they acquired from their colonial education, they themselves had attended the same institutions established by the colonizers to create efficient functionaries of the colonial and post-colonial state. This was why, in spite of the Islamists' anti-effendi discourse, they were the ones who were able to capture and work within that same state. They were, in Gallab's words, 'heirs of the colonial community of the state'.¹³⁴ The Islamists' ambivalent attitude towards their colonial schooling was reflected in their own education policy – while leaders of the post-1989 regime ensured that curricula in state run institutions were 'Arabized' and 'Islamized', they sent their own children to undertake private, English language courses at home or abroad.¹³⁵ Ironically, this reproduced a colonial attitude- only a small elite should reap the benefits of Western education so as to be capable of running the state, whereas the rest of the population should be safeguarded from the deculturation that might occur from exposure to Western influences. In other words, the Islamists preserved the 'mimetic' aspect of Bhabha's fractured colonial self for their own elite, while the general public were expected to adhere to a logic of difference. In Magdi Gizouli's words, 'Power to the NCP [National Congress Party], Sharia to the Masses'.¹³⁶

We have seen above how some Islamists educated in the colonial schools came to reproduce the views of regional colonial officials hostile to the institutions of modern state. The Islamists who sought to resurrect corporeal forms of punishment and blood money in place of custodial sentences echoed the opinions of such officials,¹³⁷ as did those who began in the 1990s to resurrect the system of 'Native Administration' seen by the British as a means for reducing their reliance on the deculturated graduates of Gordon College.¹³⁸ Islamist anti-alcohol measures targeted at the populations of the peri-urban regions of Sudan also bore parallels with colonial strategies targeted at making 'good Muslims' out of the populations of ex-slaves on the margins of colonial towns, amongst whom alcohol brewing was important within the informal economy.¹³⁹

Not all those Islamists who benefited from colonial educations between 1946 and 1956 joined al-Turabi's 'political' school in the post-colonial era. Most of those who identified as Muslim Brothers as opposed to members of the ILM – including Rashid al-Tahir, Jafa'ar Shaikh Idris and Sadiq Abdullah Abd al-Majid – would be amongst al-Turabi's most prominent challengers in the latter half of the

¹³² Berridge, *Hasan al-Turabi*. Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil: Hasan al-Turabi and the Islamist State* (Princeton: Markus Wiener Publishers, 2010), Chapter 7.

¹³³ Berridge, *Hasan al-Turabi*.

¹³⁴ Gallab, *Their Second Republic*, p. 58.

¹³⁵ See, eg., Mansour Khalid, *War and Peace in Sudan: A Tale of Two Countries* (London: Kegan Paul, 2003), p. 206, which discusses al-Turabi's decision to send his one of his sons to study at the University of Wales even as the system in Sudan was being 'Arabized'.

¹³⁶ Magdi Gizouli, 'Sudan: Power to the NCP, Sharia to the Masses', Magdi el Gizouli, *Sudan Tribune* 3 March 2012.

¹³⁷ W.J. Berridge, 'The frailties of prisons in post-colonial Sudan: from rehabilitation to retribution, 1956-1989', *Middle Eastern Studies* 52 (2016), pp. 385-401.

¹³⁸ For the return of the Native Administration, see M.W. Daly, *Darfur's Sorrow: A History of Destruction and Genocide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), pp. 251, 261.

¹³⁹ Ahmad Alawad Sikainga, *Slaves into Workers: Emancipation and Labor in Colonial Sudan* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1996).

twentieth century.¹⁴⁰ Others, such as Mirghani al-Nasri and Jizouli Dafa'allah, became major players in the professional movement – these two men led the lawyers' and doctors' associations respectively during the 1985 Intifada, without being linked to al-Turabi.¹⁴¹ Meanwhile, others joined the same 'sectarian' parties of which the Islamists were so critical – Abdullah Muhammad Ahmad the Umma party,¹⁴² Hussein Abu Salih the DUP.¹⁴³ This in itself is evidence that the barrier between the 'ideological' and 'sectarian/traditional' parties, or between the early nationalists and the Islamists, was more porous than is often assumed. We should not assume that the appearance of these former ILM men within the professional associations and 'sectarian' political parties represented a grand masterplan on behalf of the ILM, although Islamist organizations did make strenuous efforts to penetrate the unions. As identified above, the ILM was ideologically acephalous and it is thus unsurprising that a number of its members took different paths in the post-colonial era. However, both Abu Salih and Abdullah Muhammad Ahmad would later join the Islamist regime after the 1989 coup.¹⁴⁴

Conclusion

Sudanese Islamism did not emerge out of a binary schism between Muslim religiosity and colonial secularism. As much as they evoked a Fanonian break with the colonial past, the praxis of the early generation of Islamists was rooted in a belief, derived from the curriculum at institutions such as Gordon Memorial College and Hantoub, that modern secular education could foster a literate, progressive elite that could shape the destiny of an entire nation. It was in this context that they began to integrate Marxist concepts of revolutionary progress, even as they condemned the supposedly atheistic orientations of the communist students. The ability of the colonial schools to act as an ethnic 'melting pot' helped young Islamists forge this nationalist imagining of the Islamic Project in spite of the divide and rule policies of the same colonial administration that established these schools. Yet at the same time, the early Islamists were gripped by fears of the disintegrative impact of this same education on Sudanese religious and customary identity - fears that mirrored those of the more conservative colonialists.

It was significant that the Sudanese Islamists' late colonial experience was not marked by as violent and direct a confrontation with the departing British colonizers as was that of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt. Even during their struggle to force the British dean of Khartoum University to step down, the Islamist students pursued civil means and allied with the more liberal Westerners on the teaching staff. Throughout the late 1940s and early 1950s, the British were far more concerned by the nascent Sudanese communist movement than they were by the student Islamists, even as the latter group seized a pivotal role in university politics. The Islamists defined themselves against those within Sudan and the wider Middle East and North Africa region whom they perceived to be less culturally and religiously authentic far more than they did against the British colonial administration – Marxists, rationalists and atheists among their fellow students and the teaching staff. They reacted to a long history of rationalism and irreligiosity within both classical and modern Islamic education, as much as an imposed colonial secularism. What the Islamists shared with the British colonizers who provided their education was an ambivalent attitude towards the merits of 'tradition' and 'modernity', and they instrumentalized this dichotomy politically in a manner not dissimilar to their former masters. Just as the British essentialized Islam for the purposes of anti-nationalist and anti-effendi rhetoric, so did the Islamists when condemning their Marxist opponents. Yet in simultaneously borrowing from the

¹⁴⁰ See Berridge, *Hasan al-Turabi*. 55-57.

¹⁴¹ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan*, pp. 111-112.

¹⁴² Abdullah Muhammad Ahmad Interview with *al-Intibaha* 15 March 2013, available at Sudaress <http://www.sudaress.com/alintibaha/32125>.

¹⁴³ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan*, p. 179; Ahmad Abu Shouk & Al-Fatih Abd al-Salam, *Al-Intikhabat al-Barlamaniyya fi al-Sudan (1953-1986)* (Khartoum: Markaz Abd al-Karim Mirghani li'l-Thaqafa, 2008), p.33.

¹⁴⁴ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*, p. 199.

modernizing rhetoric, the Islamists were able to position themselves as a civilizational vanguard far more capable of bringing change than the rest of the Sudanese population who, paradoxically, they insisted must follow a more 'traditional' road.