



Centre for Mediterranean,
Middle East & Islamic Studies
A GREEK REVIEW OF
MIDDLE EASTERN AFFAIRS

Middle East Bulletin

Islam in Africa

contents

Interview: Jeremy Keenan throws light on the dark Sahara	page 02
Africa: the Arab connection	page 06
A clash of two visions: Sudan's national identity	page 08
Hezbollah's ventures in West Africa	page 12
Islamist insurgency in Somalia	page 15
The eclipse of the state in northern Nigeria	page 19
Sufi Brotherhoods in Africa	page 21
Book review: The Darfur Sultanate	page 25

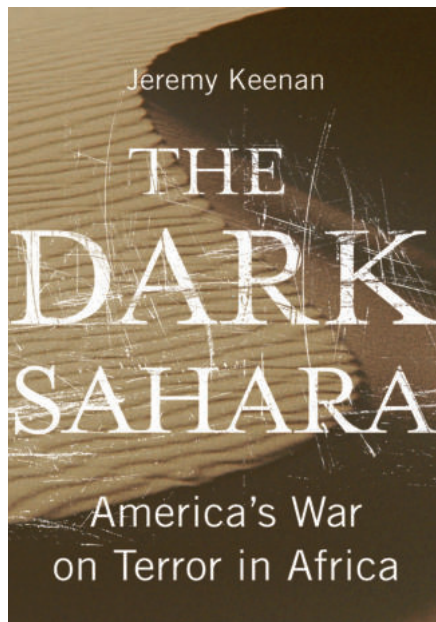
Photo: Nevia Liskounakou/Merislas Agalgiou

THROWING LIGHT ON THE DARK SAHARA

Alexia Liakounakou

Page 2

*The following interview with Jeremy Keenan, who is a Saharan expert and Research Associate in Anthropology and Sociology at the School of Oriental and African Studies, aims to highlight the real motives behind Washington's launch of the Sahelian counter-terrorist front. In other words, is the Sahara a terrorist haven, or is it a fabricated image of disinformation created to justify other interests and motives? This shadowy intrigue is analyzed here by J.K. (also in his latest book, *The Dark Sahara: America's War on Terror in Africa*, London, Pluto 2009).*



The vast space that is the Sahel (literally – ‘the shore’ - the southern margin of the Sahara), has been portrayed as a ‘terror zone’: a complex network of Islamist and other militant rebel groups which are allegedly linked to Al-Qaeda and which have been fighting the military forces of Algeria, Mauritania, Mali and Niger. This ‘threat’ first became ‘internationalised’ through the media after the abduction of European tourists in 2003 by the Algerian-based Groupe Salafiste pour la Predication et le Combat (GSPC). This gave justification to the US to launch a new front in the Global War on Terror (GWOT): the ‘Pan-Sahel Initiative’ (PSI), which provided Mauritania, Mali, Niger and Chad with US military aid and counter-terrorism training. While the PSI’s declared objective was to provide security to these regions by eliminating terrorist and smuggling networks, the subsequent upsurge in reported terrorist actions, and Tuareg rebellions have thrown the region into conflagration. Indeed, the branding of the region as a ‘terror zone’ has now become a self-fulfilled prophecy.



Alexia Liakounakou: The Sahel has been pictured as an Islamic 'terror zone'. What has created this, and how would you explain the rise of 'Islamic extremism'?

Jeremy Keenan: The region was labelled a 'Terror Zone' by the Pentagon in response to 32 European tourists being taken hostage in the Algerian Sahara in early 2003 by the GSPC, (now called Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb) under the leadership of Amari Saifa (best known as El Para) and the subsequent chase of his group across the desert and into Chad where most members were allegedly killed in a battle with Chadian forces. El Para, however, managed to escape, only to fall into the hands of Chad rebels who eventually handed him over to Libya and then to the Algerian authorities in 2004. Or so the story goes.

This prolonged incident was used by the US to justify the launch of a new Saharan-Sahelian front in the GWOT, which, in turn, was used to justify the creation of a new US military combat command for Africa (AFRICOM) and the militarization of much of the rest of the continent.

However, my research as an anthropologist, working more or less continuously in this part of the Sahara from 1999 to the present (and for many years before that) revealed that the taking of the 32 hostages was an act of state terrorism. It was fabricated and orchestrated by Algeria's military intelligence service, the *Département du Renseignement et de la Sécurité* (DRS), in collusion with US intelligence services. While the GSPC foot-soldiers were genuine members of the GSPC, their leader, El Para, was a DRS agent, as were a handful of his lieutenants.

The substantial evidence for this collusion is spelt out in *The Dark Sahara*, which has recently been corroborated by the US investigative journalist Seymour Hersh and key Pentagon documents that leaked on 16th August 2002. In October 2009 Nafeez Mosaddeq Ahmed, author of a number of key works on the GWOT, stated that a Pentagon adviser told Seymour Hersh that the Algerian operation was part of a new Pentagon covert operations programme, originally proposed in August 2002 by the Defense Science Board as the 'Proactive, Pre-emptive Operations Group'. The covert programme would aim to 'stimulate reactions' among Al-Qaeda terrorists by duping them into undertaking operations through US military penetration of terrorist groups and recruitment of locals to conduct 'combat operations or even terrorist activities'.

Questions about the rise of Islamic extremism in this part of the world therefore need to be treated advisedly. Its recent growth is rooted in the Algerian military's annulment of the January 1992 elections and the subsequent 'military coup' that led to civil war between Algerian forces and Islamic groups, the most notable of which was the GIA (out of which the GSPC emerged in 1998). However, there is now much evidence to show that the GIA was heavily infiltrated by the DRS and that many that died in the war were massacred by elements of the security forces masquerading as Islamists. The same modus operandi has characterised the GSPC and the 'rise of Islamic militancy' in the region since 2002.

Liakounakou: The Pan-Sahel Initiative (PSI) was introduced by the Bush administration in 2002, allegedly to 'counter terrorism', and 'promote economic development' by creating alliances with several African states. What happened next?

Keenan: US support for the governments in the region encouraged their authoritarian and repressive nature. All of them began designating legitimate opposition, especially from ethnic and other minorities, as 'terrorism'. All these governments (Algeria, Niger, Mali and Mauritania) provoked these 'opposition' groups to violence. Algeria's police provoked Tuareg youths into rioting and burning much of Tamanrasset town in July 2005; the Niger government provoked northern Tuareg to take up arms in 2004-5, and Algeria's DRS, backed by the covert use of US Special Forces, promoted a Tuareg rebellion in northern Mali in May 2006.

Liakounakou: What have been the consequences for the region and its peoples?

Keenan: These events have decimated tourism, the main cash-earning activity for many of the indigenous Tuareg population. Destruction of their livelihoods has forced many of them to work in the drugs, arms and people trafficking businesses and banditry. At the same time there has been a huge expansion of oil, gas and mineral exploration. The massive expansion of uranium mining in northern Niger has seen dozens of Western and Chinese companies taking up exploration licences, with little or no regard for the indigenous Tuareg peoples or their land rights. A consequence of the above was the rebellion of Mali's and Niger's Tuareg in 2007. The region



is not a 'Zone of Terror' but a zone of complete political instability and insecurity. Media reports of peace talks, especially those inspired by Libyan Leader Mouamar Qadhafi's meddling in the region, are little more than theatre and have been rejected by the real leadership of the main rebel movements.

Liakounakou: Are there in fact separate and recognizable 'groups' acting in the region, or are these creations of the media?



Keenan: There are definable groups but they are extremely complex in their composition and interactions. Very simply, we can identify a number of Tuareg groups. As for the al Qaeda terrorist cells, they are certainly exaggerated by both governments and the media. I would estimate their number in the region as less than 200, of increasingly diverse ethnic/national origin, but with Algerian leadership and well-infiltrated by the DRS. In addition, there are diverse Arab elements from Mali, numerous ethnic elements from Mauritania, and those involved in banditry; in short, an extremely complex and fast-moving situation.

Liakounakou: What is the role played by other North African states, such as Libya, in this context?

Keenan: While Algeria has been the primary driver in fabricating terrorism, the 'sub-hegemonic' rivalry between Algeria and Libya has seen both countries trying to play the questionable role of 'peace-broker'. In Libya's case, however, Qadhafi's incomprehension of the fundamental issues underpinning the Tuareg rebellions has placed his interventions in the realm of theatre rather than substance.

Page 5

Liakounakou: In which way are recent political changes in the 'West', such as the new Obama and Sarkozy administrations, affecting developments in the region? And how do you estimate that the situation will unfold?

Keenan: President Obama is, I believe, being ill-advised; possibly because his National Security Advisor, General Jim Jones, was the supreme military commander responsible for US military interests in Africa at the time of 'El Para terrorism'. Obama has indicated his backing of AFRICOM up to this point. France is in the process of 're-colonisation' with increased presence of large French companies, and I anticipate a strong French military presence in the Sahel in the future.

I believe that Western powers, along with their regional allies, will continue to play the Al-Qaeda card to further their control over the region's mineral resources. This 'accumulation by dispossession' will require increased militarization, and thus escalation of political unrest, insecurity and simmering rebellion amongst the Tuareg population. ■

The Arab world's delving into Africa

Ilias Tasopoulos

Lately, economic relations between Arab and African countries appear to have attained continuous growth, calling the attention of traditional foreign powers with special interests in the continent.

Page 6



The turmoil which undermined the entire Western banking system and the financial crisis that accompanied it could prove to be watershed events for African international relations. Sub-Saharan African countries, even if they are not fully integrated into the global financial system, could be indirectly affected by these developments. Decreases in official development assistance imports and investments could, amongst others, influence the region, as a major percentage of them emanates from the West.

African countries will soon have to establish new economic relationships that could compensate for these losses of foreign capital. While the growing interest of China in trade and investment in Africa is well known, the potential role that the Arab world could play in the African continent had not been addressed until recently. London-based analysts have argued that Middle Eastern countries, and notably the Arab countries, are well positioned to take advantage of the current unease that characterizes the economic climate in the Euro-American region as Western investment and foreign aid directed towards Africa is meant to be reduced.

The Middle Eastern countries' oil wealth and private investment funds could serve as a surrogate for Western volatility of economic activity. Allegedly, Western banks are planning to stop investing local profits in local subsidiaries in Africa or even require the closure of their subsidiaries due to a situation of financial distress. Thus, if Western banks decide to withdraw capital from their sub-Saharan African subsidiaries, the accumulated wealth of the major oil producers could provide the solution to financial difficulties that might arise in African countries.

The expansion of Dubai Ports World into Senegal, Djibouti and Mozambique is used as an example to show how the wealth of the Arab Gulf states has already been channeled towards Africa. Other countries, such as Morocco, have decided to cancel the debt of poorer African countries and grant them free access to the Moroccan market. Moreover, Moroccan companies have expanded their activities to establish operations in the region. Expansion efforts are also illustrated by the investments in road infrastructure and entertainment facilities in Senegal, which have not been only



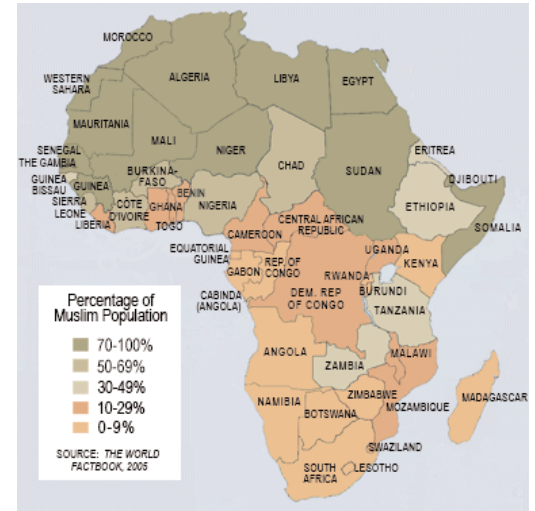
financed by the Arab Gulf states but also by Morocco and non-Arab Iran. In fact, Senegal is the most important destination of Moroccan investment in the region. However, Senegal cannot be considered as a typical example of an African country as it is relatively more developed compared to other African states and characterized by a high rate of urbanization and industrialization. In any case, the arrival of the Arab world as a major donor of foreign aid in Africa has been heralded as a breakthrough.

The agricultural sector is singled out as another area of future cooperation. An underlying trend towards convergence between Africa and the Arab world lies in the well founded argument that oil wealth cannot guarantee food security to Arab states and their populations, which are rapidly increasing. Therefore, the vast agricultural potential of Africa could indeed capture the attention of the Arab world in the same way as African energy resources have fascinated China and India. Due to their growing populations, access to food needs to become a priority of Arab countries as the inability to meet the nutritional needs of their populations could transform into a political threat for their regimes. In order to avoid such risks, Arab countries could invest in African agriculture, and use the crops to fulfill their specific needs. In turn, Arab investment in agro-industries would raise the level of production in Africa where agriculture remains largely rain-fed and subject to periodic drought. Irrigation is expensive for African countries and therefore extremely limited; investing in mining is more attractive for African regimes due to their almost instant revenue payments.

However, concern derives from Africa's poor infrastructure and the subsequent high trading costs. Transport costs in Africa are estimated to be 136% higher than in other regions and, making a bad situation worse, poor infrastructure only accounts for half of these costs. These costs are 50% higher in landlocked countries in Africa, where the percentage of countries without any access to sea or ocean is three-times larger than the global average of 11%.

Nevertheless now, incentives for African countries to advance their agricultural exports may be higher as prices have risen for many of Africa's export commodities, including agricultural products. Agricultural product exports are relatively low and constitute no more than 18%, when compared to energy resources exports, which are the main revenue of African states. This is somewhat unexpected as agriculture accounts for nearly 30% of the production of goods in Africa. However, the percentage of agricultural product exports could actually be higher, taking into account that, according to the World Bank, the average size of the informal economy in sub-Saharan Africa is over 40%.

While African countries seem to welcome the Arab world's delving into the region, Western countries are worried that these developments would restrict their ability to negotiate bilateral or multilateral agreements with African countries and ultimately lead to more authoritarian governments in the region. The main concern of Western powers is seemingly the absence of any conditionality related to human rights and democracy in Islamic and Arab investments in the region. European development aid and investment are directly connected with the principle of good governance, although such connection has often been accused as a means of severely undermining unfriendly regimes in Africa. In addition to their business-oriented mentality, Islamic and Arab countries do not seem to mobilize economic resources out of ideological proximity. Such Western concerns regarding Middle Eastern economic expansion in Africa might introduce new uncertainties into Euro-Arab relations. ■



Islam in Sudan: a clash of two visions of Sudan's national identity

Styliani Saliari

In Sudan, Islam and Arabism represent significant forceful variables in the construction of the country's national identity and have been occupied by the ruling elite in order to wield its power. Precisely, there is a lack of national consensus about Sudan's identity, something that is epitomized by Sudan's second civil war since this war had as one of its major causes radically opposing ideas of what it means to be a Sudanese. This is a controversial question which has remained unresolved.

Page 8

Reality is built on prejudices, misconceptions and ignorance as well as our subjective perception of knowledge. Moreover, it is quite often based on numbers: In Sudan an estimated two million people died and four million fled in two decades of civil war (1983-2005) between the Muslim north and the Christian and animist south. The United Nations have stated that some 300,000 people have died in the ongoing war in Darfur, with more than 2 million fleeing from their homes. While Washington has labelled these events as genocide Khartoum rejects that denomination and puts the death toll at 10,000. Furthermore, the country, which consists of 70% Muslims, 25% animists and 5% Christians, is the home of the world's largest number of internally displaced persons: 6 million at last count.

In 2005, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) which formally put an end to Sudan's (second) civil war between the government in Khartoum and

the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) was signed. It produced a coalition government between President al-Bashir's National Congress Party (NCP) and the SPLM, with the majority of parliamentary seats going to the northern party and proposed elections in 2010. Precisely, the south was granted a six-year transitional period of regional autonomy until a 2011 referendum on the future status of the south.

However since then, relations between both parties, which are still divided, have been disturbing while armies from both sides have clashed violently in contested border areas. Particularly, the SPLM has accused the NCP of impeding the stipulations of the peace deal, precisely its referendum, by deferring required legislation. In other words, a major point of disagreement is the implementation of a democratic process under which the results of the 2008 census are intended to form the basis for electoral con-



stituencies in the 2011 vote. The SPLM has accused the NCP of manipulating the figures and has stated that it will oppose any endeavor to use results to demarcate constituencies. Furthermore, the SPLM claims that 50% plus one vote should be enough in order to gain independence for the South while the NCP demands that the threshold should be 75%. Additionally, both parties disagree on who should have the right to vote in the referendum.

On September 28, 2009 the SPLM organized a three-day conference in Juba, the capital of the semi-autonomous south in order to reach a 'national consensus' on issues such as the 2011 referendum on the future of south Sudan. However, the conference was boycotted by several Sudanese parties, northern and southern, while the NCP had boycotted the conference right from the beginning. Nonetheless, around 25 party leaders participated, including northern opposition leaders such as Sudan's last democratically-elected Prime Minister Sadiq al-Mahdi, who is the head of the Umma party and the Islamist ideologue Hassan al-Turabi, head of the Popular Congress Party.

At the end of the conference all participating parties released a joint statement threatening the regime to boycott the forthcoming elections in case the latter does not proceed with the realization of promised reforms including, for instance, national security issues. Furthermore, the opposition parties demanded a South-African style truth and the establishment of a reconciliation body that would deal with the bitter memories resulting from Sudan's several conflicts

and the ongoing Darfur crisis. Besides that, it was also stated that parties should 'ensure that those who have committed war crimes are brought to book before independent judiciary'; possibly a provoking allusion to Omar al-Bashir's arrest warrant issued by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in March 2009. The NCP was enraged and reacted with several hostile articles published by the state media while the NCP's newspaper Al-Raed stated on September 30, 2009 that the Juba participants followed an 'unspecified hidden agenda'.

Additionally, an increase in clashes has been observed over the last few months. Precisely, on September 22, 2009 more than 100 people were killed in the Jongolei state in southern Sudan. Yien Matthew, a spokesman for the SPLM, stated that the NCP was behind those attacks which were aimed at undermining the CPA. Nonetheless, a mass boycott of the elections would also subvert the CPA and the promised referendum of the future status of the south while any recurrence to war would have devastating consequences for the already troubled country, its oil industry and the entire region.

Thus, it has become quite obvious that numbers play an important role in the case of Sudan as they are used in a war over the nature of reality. Inextricably linked to that observation is the existence of a controversy between the north and the south and the rights of Sudan's visible non-Muslim minority. Hence, one might divide Sudan into two cultural entities: the north and the south. However as Francis M. Deng, scholar at the Brookings Institution, correctly remarks



the root of Sudan's war is a 'war over visions' concerning the identity of the country. It is not merely a 'north versus south' divide but rather a war about 'what' it means to be a Sudanese.

Against this background, one can say that Islam and Arabism are significant forceful variables which have been occupied by Sudan's rulers in order to wield their power. Particularly, since Omar al-Bashir's coup in 1989 these levels of conflict have been

brought into the open and have become extremely politicized; Islamist nationalism took center stage during Sudan's civil war due to the state's aim to establish an exclusive Islamic Sudanese identity. According to Francis M. Deng, the basis of the ongoing hostilities 'is the attempt by the north not only to define the identity [of Sudan] as Arab and Islamic, but to structure and stratify the life and role of citizens along those lines'. For many northern Sudanese, reli-



gion represents the critical ingredient of Sudan's national identity. In this context, Prof. Abd al-Latif al-Buni, a pro-NIF (National Islamic Front) Sudanese political scientist states that to be Sudanese, is to be Muslim; to be Christian, an animist, a Jew or Hindu is not to be Sudanese.

Unsurprisingly, notions of Africanism and secularism have emerged as strong features of the 'south' while non-Muslims have objected to the idea of the creation of an Islamic state, and to the universal imposition of Islamic law. This evolution has made the conflict even more persistent with Southerners developing a desire for secession and the northern political elite getting more and more nervous about the referendum and the possibility of losing the south, which is the largest source of Sudan's oil reserves.

Islamic hegemony, i.e. the aspiration to enforce Muslim cultural hegemony to Sudan's non-Arab, non-Muslim population, has resulted in the country's polarisation between Islamist northern nationalism and an SPLM led south, exemplified by the second civil war and the current conflict in Darfur as the latest culmination of the protracted problem. The Darfur crisis began in February 2003 when the rebel movements: Sudanese Liberation Army/Movement (SLA/M) and Justice for Equality Movement (JEM) claimed equal development for the Darfur region. It eventually resulted into a prolonged armed conflict between the armed forces of Sudan and its allied proxy militia drawn from Arab ethnicity and the two mentioned rebel groups which consist of primarily non-Arab ethnic groups: the Fur, Masalit and

Zaghawa. However, as the Darfur crisis is a serious topic in itself which goes beyond the scope of the article it is not righteous to discuss it in one or two sentences. Nonetheless, not mentioning it at all would not be righteous either as it represents another piece of evidence of the argument at hand.

Consequently, one may want to identify solutions for Sudan's long-lasting conflict; a task which unsurprisingly is not an easy one. Nonetheless, one can agree with Harvey Glickman, professor emeritus of political science at Harvard College, who states that the Sudanese conflict 'is nourished by roots so deep in Sudan's history that they will likely prove very hard to rip out'. In other words, prospects for a compromise or the establishment of a confederation do not seem to be bright. Thus, it seems as if secession of the south appears as a feasible option in Sudan's war over its national identity as it will allow the north to create an Islamic theocracy. The 2011 referendum which represents part of the peace agreement could give southern Sudan an opportunity to secede and become independent. n

Hezbollah's ventures in West Africa

Marina Eleftheriadou

Over the years Hezbollah has evolved from a low-level grass roots insurgency group who took up arms to redress its grievances to a successful multifaceted organization with an annual budget surpassing those of many countries. Despite receiving financial support from some international players, Hezbollah has developed the capacity and know-how to generate its own financial resources through operating successful 'taxation' policies and an impressive investment portfolio both at home and abroad, particularly in South America and West Africa.

Page 12



In the summer of 2006, Hezbollah shocked the world with its military performance against the Israeli incursion into southern Lebanon. However, equally outstanding was the organization's rapid response to the post-conflict destruction in the Shia-inhabited areas. A stark comparison to the paralyzed Lebanese state, Hezbollah immediately released funds and arranged for the reconstruction of damaged properties, deployed mobile medical services for the injured and offered compensation for families of the fallen soldiers.

Since its creation in the 1980s, Hezbollah's *raison d'être* has been based on two pillars: resistance to Israel and boosting its presence in Lebanon through a sympathetic population. The latter is essential for Hezbollah in order to fill its ranks, to undermine Amal's influence and to

withstand the pressure from international actors, Israel and the Lebanese government. In this regard the social services sector never came second to the military or political one. An estimated 50% of an annual budget ranging between \$500 million and \$1 billion is allocated to the various projects of the social services sector.

In order to finance these costly enterprises Hezbollah has largely relied on Iranian funds. However, the organization's prudence in the post-Cold War era of scarce alternative 'bidders' has encouraged it to develop its independent sources of income; in a world where friendships are fluid and loyalty and interests are no longer mutually exclusive there is always the risk that Iran, and more so Syria, might sell Hezbollah out should a tempting 'bounty' present itself.



Hezbollah has allegedly been involved in numerous business ventures in Lebanon such as department stores, travel agencies and construction companies. Nevertheless, the bulk of its funds originate from abroad. Where external investments are concerned, Hezbollah does not have to be directly involved to generate funds as it benefits from a large business-orientated expatriate population (ethnic Lebanese living abroad are three times more than the population of Lebanon), a large percentage of whom are Shia, who either left the country in the late 19th century due to the social and economic discrimination against their sect, or during the civil war.

Until recently much of Hezbollah's funds were sourced from supporters in South America, especially the Tri-Border Area (where the borders of Brazil, Paraguay and Argentina meet) where an estimated 20,000 – 60,000 ethnic Arabs reside (many of them Lebanese). In the free-trade designated Tri-Border Area, beside the legal commercial enterprises, a lucrative black market of merchandise, weapons, drugs and false documents operates which generates billions of dollars annually. According to a US Naval War College study, Hezbollah has been known to make up to \$10 million dollars annually from these markets. However, in the era of 'the war on terror', global political efforts to quell channels for Islamist fund raising alongside local regimes' war against drug cartels, and with the arrest of several individuals operating in the illegal economy who were allegedly linked to Hezbollah (Ahmad Barakat, Chekry Harba, Sobhi Fayad) there has been a shift of focus to Africa.

Africa offers all the benefits of the Tri-Border Area (a Lebanese immigrant population and vast opportunities for profit) plus the fact that African states don't, in their majority, exert any serious influence inside or beyond their borders. A large Lebanese community dating back to several decades exists in the continent, predominately located in west African countries such as Sierra Leone, Liberia, Cote d'Ivoire and Senegal, but also in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Angola. Over the years many families have prospered and managed to control (occasionally holding the monopoly of) the trade of basic goods such as rice and petroleum. A wealthy community of this kind translates into large remittances, charities, donations and levied 'taxes' from which Hezbollah receives a share.

Moreover, in an environment of widespread corruption, as in Africa, successful involvement in trade has also produced a network of useful contacts that offer numerous opportunities to profit from the illegal economy in the large tracks of 'ungoverned land'. The smuggling of products (e.g. cigarettes and pirated software), people, weapons and drugs with Europe as a destination, proliferates in the region. West Africa has evolved into the primary transit stop for drug traffickers from Latin America where cocaine is cut and repackaged before it starts its journey northwards to Europe. In 2006 the Colombian authorities arrested Chekry Harb as the leader of a large cocaine-smuggling ring that used this route to channel drugs from Colombia and Brazil to Europe and the Middle East. According to Gladys Sanchez, the Colombian lead investigator in the case, Harb was funnelling the profits to Hezbollah.

But no business is like the diamond business. In Sierra Leone alone, according to Ambassador Daudi Mwakawago, former Special Representative of the UN in Sierra Leone, between \$170 million to \$370 millions worth of diamonds are smuggled each year. Official exports, even in their heyday in 2007, barely surpassed \$140 million. The Lebanese are highly represented in the diamond market and in Sierra Leone the case of Jamil Sahid Mohammed is indicative. His involvement in the country's natural resources has been longstanding and since the 1970s he has co-opted every political force which at times has handled the country's natural wealth (Siaka Stevens, Joseph Momoh and finally the RUF) up until the civil war and the persecution of the UN Special Court on Sierra Leone which forced him out of busi-

ness and back to Lebanon. His old associate Samih Osaily continued the business until 2003 when he was convicted in Belgium together with Azziz Nassour (highly involved in DR Congo's diamond trade) and six other people for dealing conflict diamonds. More recently, in May 2009, the US Treasury Department froze the assets of Kassim Tajideen and Menhem Qubaysi due to their links with 'terrorist organizations'. The former had been arrested in 2003 in Belgium for money laundering and diamond smuggling through his legitimate export company Soafrimex.

Hezbollah does not have to get directly involved in any of these profitable businesses. During the 1980s and 1990s Hezbollah's share was transferred to accounts the organization held in banks in Switzerland, Dubai or Iran. However, as international awareness regarding the use of international banks and the cloaking mechanisms employed to channel money for terror-related means grew, alternative methods had to be found. Such alternative methods for money laundering came in the form of the traditional and informal system of Hawala or through international money transfer companies such as Western Union. In some cases the organization's representatives travel to the region to collect in person. Such was the case of three Hezbollah members who were killed in a 2003 plane crash leaving Benin to Lebanon, carrying \$2 million.

From time to time reports uncover alleged efforts by Hezbollah to establish bases in the region to train African recruits, perpetrate attacks on Israeli and American targets present in the continent and find alternative routes to provide Gaza with arms. A report by the UN Monitoring Group in Somalia that leaked to the press maintained that several hundred Somalis were trained and dispatched to Lebanon to fight during the 2006 war (no such presence among Hezbollah's ranks was reported at any time during the war even from Israeli sources). Moreover, after the murder of Imad Mughnieh (the head of Hezbollah's security section) the Israeli press became focused on reporting imminent or thwarted attacks on Israeli businessmen in Africa based on vague intelligence estimations. More recently, in January 2009, a mysterious air strike (probably Israeli-executed) on a truck column in Sudan was linked to Iran and Hezbollah's effort to send Fajr rockets to Hamas.

Although there appears to be growing fear of Hezbollah's extending reach, Hezbollah has little need to set up bases outside of its 'theatre of war'. Unlike the Palestinians under Arafat who, after being expelled from Lebanon approached Sierra Leone's president Momoh with the request to establish a PLO base in the country, Hezbollah has the space and freedom to train its troops within Lebanon—or Iran in case Lebanon is not suitable anymore. On the other hand, Hezbollah does not need any less-motivated and easily noticeable African fighters as it has plenty of highly-capable Lebanese ones already. However, more importantly, Hezbollah has no apparent exigency to attack Israel outside the Middle East more so in West Africa where it would jeopardize a respectable income. Such attacks are not common to Hezbollah (only two external attacks have ever been orchestrated by Hezbollah in Argentina in 1992 and 1994). Since then the conflict with Israel has been no higher priority than establishing a position in Lebanese politics and empowering its base support through social provisions. Besides, on several occasions there are business links between Lebanese and Israelis who are equally involved in the West African diamond trade. When large sums of money are in question, the line between higher cause and profit gets thinner. It is just business. ■



Somalia's multiple spoilers of war: What role for political Islam?

Chrysoula Toufexi

Since the 1990s, the Islamic Courts Union in Somalia has raised expectations for a religion-based opposition that could function as an alternative form of governance and a balancing force to the warlords' corrupted rule. The optimism, though, that political Islam would put an end to years of hostilities among the various clans for the control of land, scarce resources and power was not realized.

Page 15

The Somali population is, by and large, religiously coherent and adheres to Sunni Islam, the practice of which is characterized by a dominant tradition of Sufism blended with indigenous tribal customs. The dominant Sufi Brotherhoods in Somalia are the Qadiriya, Ahmadiya and Salihya Orders (tariqa). Sayyid Mohhamed Abdille Hassan is considered to be one of the most significant figures of the Salihya Order in Somalia. He is the man who led the resistance movement (the Dervish Movement) against the British and Egyptian colonial powers from 1899 until 1920. Particularly, the Dervish Movement emerged during the colonial period as a response to western Christian influences which were regarded as a threat to the Somali identity.

However, different schools of Islamic thought have existed and have been preached in Somalia; a common phenomenon for Islamic African societies. With the end of the colonial mandate and the accomplishment of independence, the Sufi spiritual leaders lost their magnitude. Precisely, Sufism was hard-hit under the dictatorship of General Mohammed Siad Barre, initially a Soviet Union protege, whose system-

atic reform of Islam on the basis of secularization attempted to remove Islamic Sufism from its prevalent position.

Nevertheless, since the end of the tribal war, lawlessness in Somalia has been the norm. Both succeeding interim governments (2000-2003 and 2004-until now) have not been able to ensure political stability in the country and the clashes among the various warlords and their factions have contributed to the growth of militant Islamist groups that violently collide for political influence. Consequently, prominent moderate Islamists who adhere to Sufi mysticism have been under attack once again as Wahhabi Islam is gaining prominence in Somalia.

The establishment of informal local institutions, the so-called Islamic courts, during the 1990s in Mogadishu and later in the rest of southern Somalia offered relative stability to regions that were suffering from hostilities among local clans who fought over control of local districts. Situated in southern Somalia within the Shabelle River Valley (an area valued for its transportation infrastructure and lucrative commercial activities) the port towns of Merka and Kismayo were ravaged by conflicts involving various factions. Subsequently,

the establishment of clan-based Sharia courts, which later merged into the coalition of the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) led to the marginalization of the warlords. The courts' militia fought successfully against the warlords while crime was reportedly reduced to unprecedented levels. In Mogadishu, for example, the presence of Islamic Courts managed to check the power of the warlords and relieved the city of the hostilities among its various sub-clans. Thus, in times of anarchy and unpunished criminal behavior which was a daily occurrence, the local population welcomed the imposition of Sharia law in their neighborhoods. In addition, Islamic charities such as Harakat al-Islah provided relief and were engaged in a number of activities for the promotion of social welfare, education and healthcare. The Islamic courts raised hopes that political Islam could function as a unifying force for Somalis. However, hopes have been gradually fading due to the strengthening of extremist Islamist ideology within the Islamic courts and the consequent marginalization of its moderate Islamist leaders.

Although the ICU, which later became the Supreme Council of Islamic Courts (SCIC) represented a variety of Islamic ideologies, a certain branch was associated with the Salafi jihadist movement. While the executive leadership of the SCIC was represented by Sheikh Sharif Sheikh Ahmed, adherent to the traditional Sufi school of thought and now President of Somalia, Hassan Dahir Aweys acted as the head of the legislative councils. Aweys was the leader of the military wing of al-Itihaad al-Islami, a militant Islamist organization that had emerged after the collapse of the Siad Barre regime in the 1990s. The group advocated an Islamic state and the unification of Somalia by regaining the region of Ogaden, which is inhabited mainly by Somalis but has been controlled by Ethiopia since the 1950s. Al-Itihaad is believed to be responsible for the hotel bombings in Dire Dawa and Addis Ababa in 1996, while its members are suspected of having strong links

with al-Qaeda. It is said that they have received training, financial and logistical support by al-Qaeda. Moreover, although al-Itihaad has been largely inactive since 1997 due to an Ethiopian decisive counter-attack, some of its members have joined the ranks of the SCIC.

The growing influence of the Islamic Courts and the alleged involvement of some of its members in terrorist activities with possible connections to al-Qaeda alarmed both Washington and Addis Ababa. Combating transnational terrorism has been the primal objective of American foreign policy since 2001 and hence the possibility that lawless Somalia could operate as a safe haven for al-Qaeda members has been crucial to its counterterrorism cause. In order to fight the Islamic movement, the superpower suddenly started supporting the same cause with the warlords that had run the military assaults against the US peace-enforcement troops back in 1993. Its decision to assist the Alliance for the Restoration of Peace and Counterterrorism, founded in 2006 by warlords and members of the interim government against the Islamists, was a response to the perceived level of the terrorist threat in a state which lacked a central authority for more than a decade.

In addition, the Ethiopian presence in Somalia since 2006, America's sole strategic partner in the region, has been viewed positively by the US. For Ethiopia, the Islamists have been perceived not only as a threat to its territorial integrity but also as a threat to the pro-Ethiopian Somali interim government that was formed in 2004, but struggled to consolidate its power inside Somalia under Ethiopian protection. The Islamist takeover of Mogadishu in June 2006 triggered Ethiopia's decision - with the support of the US air force - to invade Somalia in order to drive the ICU out of power.



However, the Ethiopian troops were not welcomed by the Somali population who had perceived the six-month Islamist rule of Mogadishu as something very positive as it seemed to have put an end to the state of anarchy. Instead, the Ethiopian presence in Somalia popularized the Islamists' battle against the foreign aggressors while heightening sentiments of the liberation of Ogaden.

In addition, Somalia has developed into a battleground of competing regional forces. Ethiopia has strived for influence in Somalia mainly for two reasons. It seeks commercial access to and expansion of the trade routes of the Gulf of Aden while it wishes to contain Islamic and Arab influences (mainly Egyptian and Saudi) from spreading through Somalia into the rest of Eastern Africa. Ethiopia is a Christian state, while half of its population identifies itself as Muslim. Among them are the inhabitants of Ogaden, which has been the centre of dispute between the two African states since the territory came under Ethiopian rule in 1954. As a result, the Ogaden war (1977–1978) was inspired by the dream of “Greater Somalia” aiming for the liberation of all ethnic Somalis outside the borders of the state. Since 1977, the rebel militants under the Ogaden National Liberation Front (ONLF) have been fighting for secession of the region from Ethiopia.

Ethiopia's involvement in the internal affairs of the Somali state is even more complicated, as the country has been the ground of a long-term proxy war between Ethiopia and Eritrea. Territorial disputes at the borders of the two countries had escalated into a two-year war that started in 1998. Since the peace agreements have not been enforced, Eritrea supports rebellion groups which are active in Ogaden. Since the beginning of the Islamist insurgency in 2006, Eritrea has been supplying the Islamist militants with arms in order to assist their campaign to overthrow the pro-Ethiopian government of Somalia. After the Ethiopian attack, both Aweys and

Sheikh Ahmed along with other SCIC fighters found shelter in Eritrea where they founded the Alliance for the Re-liberation of Somalia (ARS) in order to fight against Ethiopian troops in Somalia.

However, new alliances have started to formulate themselves from what has been observed to be a split between the moderates and radicals of the Islamist insurgency in Somalia (which continues to this day, despite the withdrawal of Ethiopian troops). The ARS split in June 2008 when Sheikh Ahmed showed his desire to participate in the UN-sponsored peace process in Djibouti between the transitional federal government (TFG) and the moderates within ARS for the creation of a unity government. In January 2009 he managed to succeed the pro-Ethiopian and widely unpopular Abdullahi Yusuf Ahmed in the Presidency and moderate Islamists took their share in the government, while Ethiopian troops withdrew from the country.

However, radical Islamists under the special guidance of the al-Shabab militia continue the insurgency against the TFG refusing to participate in a reconciliation process. The militant origins of the al-Shabab go back to the Islamic courts. They fought along the SCIC in 2006 to gain control of Somalia. Since 2006 al-Shabab's militia have been strengthened due to their commitment to fight foreign Ethiopian troops which granted them a vast recruitment base. However, as the withdrawal of Ethiopia seems to have undermined their popular support they are now fighting against the interim government of Somalia. So far, they have managed to extend their control to southern Somalia in the regions of Baidoa, Lower Shabelle and Kismayo. In addition to its economic value, Kismayo is considered to be a strategic location from which al-Shabab can exert its control over Mogadishu and ultimately threaten to overthrow the government.

Since October 2008 hostilities have erupted in Kismayo, and al-Shabab is currently fighting to keep its power there after breaking a deal of shared control with Hizbul-Islam, a loose coalition of local sub-clans with an Islamist guise. The latest eruption of violence in Kismayo port reinforces the argument that Somalia has never really escaped factional divisions. By manipulating clan competition, al-Shabab has managed to get a hold of power over most of southern Somalia. Its strength depends significantly upon the local clans' aid whose main motives - under the pretence of Islam - are driven primarily by the need to prevent their competing clans from assuming political control.

The protracted clan conflict, the infiltration of radicals within the Islamist movement, Ethiopian interfer-

secular and religious aspects of the current conflict in the southern part of Somalia.

To define Somalia's many spots of conflict in terms of religious extremism without taking into consideration clan loyalties, which are deeply embedded in the Somali social order, can be quite misleading. It is therefore necessary to understand this war along clan cleavages that run throughout the country and compete in order to ensure participation in the power-sharing process. For example, the conflict between the ICU and the interim government of Somalia can be viewed under the prism of an inter- and intra-clan war. The sub clans represented in the government belong mostly to the Darood tribe, while the ICU draws its strength from the sub clans of the dominant tribe of Mogadishu, the Hawiye, currently underrepresented in the government. However, even the Hawiye tribe is not united in its objectives, and warfare between its sub clans seems to be the norm.

The realization that moderate elements within the Islamist movement could play a positive role in the reconciliation process has been a major advancement towards a more equal political representation. The first step of the new Somali President Sheikh Ahmed was to invite hard-line Islamists to give up their arms and join the peace process. Moreover, with the Ethiopian troops out of the country, the Islamist insurgency has lost its cause. The future of the insurgency in Somalia will be a catalyst for understanding the true nature of the conflict, which can be perceived as an indigenous 'Islamic versus foreign' western interests conflict, but which hasn't managed to escape clan cleavages. ■

ence into Somalia's internal affairs, Eritrea's proxy war and US fears that Somalia might turn out to be a second Afghanistan (i.e. a harboring centre for terrorist cells) are all factors that have contributed to the perpetuation of war. Moreover, all of these factors are also reflective of local, regional, global and more recently



The absence of the state in northern Nigeria: The case of Boko Haram

Ioannis Mantzikos

The religious/sectarian insurgency in the northern part of Nigeria, though it has often been blamed on Islamic 'fundamentalism', may have been in fact fuelled by successive governments' apathy to the welfare of the citizens. According to Karl Marx, religion is the opium of the masses. This philosophy is gaining currency in Nigeria, especially in light of recent events in some northern states of the country where a militant Islamist group, Boko Haram, led attacks against the government and its agencies.

Page 19

Boko Haram, active in the northern populous region of Hausa, does not in any way support that 'western education is a sin' as the media continue to portray in mentions of the sect. Boko Haram actually means 'western civilisation is forbidden'. While the former version gives the impression that the sect is opposed to formal education coming from the West (which is usually perceived as 'Europe') and which is far from the actual situation, the latter affirms their belief in the supremacy of 'Islamic culture' (not only education, for culture is broader) over 'western culture'. The Boko Haram sect believes that for a government to be Islamic, Allah has to be the legislator through the Quran and the Sunna of the Prophet. The Boko Haram propagate that their movement has a political and social programme as well as a remedy to the contemporary economic and sociopolitical plights of northern Nigeria.

The July 2009 uprising in Bauchi State began when members of the sect Al Sunna wal Jamma (Boko Haram) started an insurgency, by setting fire at police stations. Using knives, machetes, bows, arrows and petrol bombs they targeted anything that seemed to represent the government, and a week-long armed conflict ensued between Nigerian security forces and the group, which culminated in the capture and murder of the sect's leader, Mohammed Yusuf on July 31, 2009. Yusuf was a self-styled Islamic scholar and an indigene of Ngueme in modern Yobe State.

At the first level, the riots in Bauchi revealed that security lapses and lawlessness prevails in many northern Nigerian states. In addition, the death of Yusuf in police custody suggests, among others, the extent of human rights violations within the Nigerian security apparatus. Minority Leader of the House of Representatives, Mohammed Ndume, claimed that the Federal Government has continuously violated in the past ten years the constitution which stipulates that the main function of the Federal government is to promote peace and security for the Nigerian people.



Nevertheless, the real reason behind the rioting is the dissatisfaction of many Nigerians with political leaders and the Federal Government. The breakdown of reforms in Nigeria reflects a familiar pattern in Nigerian society and economy. A legacy of a weak central government, fractious ethnic competition and centralized revenues has sharply raised the stakes of economic management. The interests of the country's political elites have been long entwined with pervasive distributive pressures on the state. Successive military and civilian governments have mismanaged the country's vast oil resources and have failed to promote development in the north. Moreover some of the few local industries, such as the textile mills in Kano and Kaduna, have failed to compete with cheaper Asian imports. Mainly, from 1985 when Ibrahim Babanginda seized power promising a decisive course of economic and political change, Nigerian politics have been labeled by what the prominent Professor Richard Joseph has described as prebendalism: a system in which patron-client links are more diffuse and where individual authority is comparatively limited.

Ex-President Olusegun Obasanjo paid little attention to such problems of the north, until a campaign for full Sharia, including Huddud punishments (amputations and stoning) started up in several northern states, more prominently among them being the Zamfara State. His successor, Amaru Yar'Adua, a Muslim from the south, inspires no confidence among co-religionists. His fellow northerners seem unconvinced by his plans for agricultural and industrial development. Environmental degradation and rapid population increase have in the past decades driven many rural Nigerians to the cities. The government seems to have neither a short-term response to face the demand for jobs, nor a credible long-term policy to tackle land desertification and the destruction of crops.

The Boko Haram sect attracts members from a mixed background. Many are unemployed, or living in very poor conditions, some are illiterate, and some are singles with many dependants. Others are more fanatical Muslims from middle class families who believe that western-style education and certificates will not improve their lives and, furthermore, degrade 'local' or 'Islamic' culture and education. Others have been recruited from the sect's Ibn Taimiyah network of schools which were allowed to flourish and offer free education to the children of poor northerners. Therefore, the issues leading to revolt are multifaceted and longstanding, drawing dissatisfied individuals from many social strata and different ethnicities. Additionally, many of the recruits come from neighboring Niger. However, how does a group whose members may not even be Nigerian suddenly take laws into their hands to attack citizens and police forces for promoting western education and civilisation over Arabic education? The group has also recruited members from Cameroon and Chad and Yusuf reportedly told an army Colonel that he brought the largest bulk of weapons from these countries. Nevertheless, Jama'atu Nasril Islam (JNI), a traditional Islamic body, condemned the attacks while its acting secretary, Abdulkarim Palladan, said that the JNI cannot and will not fold its arms and watch the carnage and madness continue in the country in the name of Islam. Nevertheless, if one is to prosecute 'Islamist violence' executed by the Boko Haram and accuse the group of bringing instability to the region, the Nigerian government and security forces (for unloading 'excessive violence' against both militants and civilians as human rights groups reported) should also be condemned.

Despite a member of the sect's statement in international media that he had received military training in Afghanistan, the movement seems to be largely home-grown. There is no clear evidence up to now that international Islamic groups (and mainly al-Qaeda in the Maghreb which operates as far south as northern Mali) have teamed up with the Boko Haram, and attempts by the international Islamist groups to destabilize Nigeria through sponsorship of extremist sects are hard to discern. However, the al-Qaeda figurehead Osama Bin Laden has identified the country as rich ripe for Islamic insurrection. How this situation will unfold in the future is not easy to estimate, but the current state of affairs shows that the Nigerian state is continuously and gradually failing the demands of its people, leaving open ends and space for uprising, rebellion, and underdevelopment to multiply. ■



Sufi Brotherhoods in Africa: from decline to revival

Elisavet-Paraskeva Gkizi

Respect for other cultures, traditions and religions, tolerance, the belief in peaceful coexistence and devotion to humanity and non-violence are some of the main elements of Sufi philosophy as they are expressed via different Sufi brotherhoods. Today these religious orders play an anti-dominant role as they wage their resistance not only against western colonial powers - as they did in the 20th century - but against totalitarian regimes which are rapidly increasing inside Muslim African states.

Page 21

During the colonial period in Africa the degree of influence of Sufi brotherhoods was very high across Muslim countries, mainly due to their active opposition against western imperialism and Catholic missionary efforts. All these developments were regarded as a threat to the identity of the indigenous Muslim people. The end of the colonial era brought about different nationalist movements which tried to diminish the impact of Sufi Orders by labeling them as anachronistic and insinuating that they were unable to match the demands of the 'modern world'. However, Sufi orders have remained an active component of religious life in Africa and have continued to carry long-standing messages of Islamic unity throughout the colonization and de-colonization period, until this day.

Affiliation to a particular brotherhood is based on an association between each member with every other, and ultimately signifies the attachment to a particular Sufi master's teachings. In Senegal many devoted members emphasize the strong tie which

binds a Mouride (Mouridism is Senegal's richest and most powerful Islamic brotherhood) to one's spiritual guide and teacher, the Marabout or Sheikh. It is a lifetime relationship which is not only characterized by a spiritual connection but by more practical affairs as well. Creation of networks which provide professional help to their members such as business advice and support, or the attachment of Sufi brothers to brotherhoods abroad are notable examples of such practical aspects in a Sufi brotherhood. The exponential growth of Mouridiya has created a powerful worldwide network with sizeable representation in some large cities in Europe and the US, such as Paris and New York. All in all, it can be said that Sufi brotherhoods offer several benefits simultaneously: spiritual nourishment, business networking opportunities and a social life for 'brothers' in and outside Africa.

Today, the large expansion of Mouridism in Senegal's society has induced a vigorous persistence to tradition which has been externalized to every social, political and cultural aspect of life. After the end of



French colonization, 'tradition' became increasingly associated with national identity and, to this day, many Senegalese continue to find in Mouridism an anti-colonial way of life. However, contemporary 'anti-colonial sentiment' is mostly aimed at countering the impact of growing postcolonial 'invading' forces, such as modernity, urbanism, and technology, rather than against the colonial state itself.

Interestingly, Mouride brotherhoods have created a particular societal system based on religious principles and on the constancy of the importance of work as an expedient method to the rapid development of society. A remarkable example of this model

of Mouride society is Touba, the second largest city of Senegal, and holy city of Mouridism, which is characterized by tremendous rhythms of geographical, economical and population growth. It is estimated that one million pilgrims visit Touba for religious reasons every year. This important economic benefit for the town's commerce in combination with Mouridism's immense commercial activity all over the world has turned this small town into the capital of a global business network.

Moreover, there are a few powerful Sufi brotherhoods outside Senegal, such as Qadiriya (Qadiri) (the most powerful Sufi brotherhood globally) located in



East and West Africa, and Tijaniya in West Africa. The Tijaniya has exerted influence in postcolonial Mali, which presents a particular case, because Sufism in Mali holds a more individualistic character and is practiced through personal communication with “saints”. This means that particular “saints” act like individuals and not as part of an established Sufi order. The opening of the religious market in Mali due to the country’s economic, political and social liberalization programmes has enabled the creation of new religious practices which are expressed by new religious Sufi figures who have played a key role in Mali’s society without, however, intervening in politics.

In 19th century Algeria the Sheikh of Qadiriya (Amir Abd al-Qadir al-Jaza’iri), took up arms against the French forces. His anti-colonial action lasted for fifteen years and motivated other spiritual leaders (namely, Naqshbandiya, the Shadhiliya, and the Tijaniya) to do the same. During this particular period the aforementioned Sufi brotherhoods were at the zenith of their power. Nonetheless, after the long period of French colonialism in Algeria most of the Sufi leaders accepted French authority and even collaborated with the colonial power, thus losing their prestige within Algerian society. After the country’s secularization programs under the colonial regime, new values were promoted. The increasing emphasis on the significance of education and national identity led to a further diminishment of the importance of Sufi brotherhoods for the Algerian people, as Sufism became associated in their collective memory with the Algerian colonial past.

Today there is an effort to strengthen the position of Sufi brotherhoods within Algerian society and several initiatives such as international colloquiums have taken place in the country. One of them was the

three-day international colloquium on the Tijani Sufi in November 2006 at the Algerian University of Laghouat. About a hundred intellectuals and other prominent figures from twenty-nine countries took part in the colloquium. Participants discussed contributions which have been made by the brotherhoods and possibilities of how to restore Islam’s reputation as a ‘humane’ faith, as the Syrian writer Ihssan Baadarani expressed. The aim of this meeting was to invigorate the bonds between Tijani networks all over the continent (Senegal, Mali, Sudan and particularly Nigeria) and to promote its spiritual and human aspects for a harmonic coexistence and its potential to act as a medium to reduce violence of militant Islamic groups.

In Sudan, Qadiri and Tijani Sufi were dominant orders from the 16th century onwards. In the 18th and 19th centuries new reformist orders came to surface, others with a resisting role against conquerors (Rashdiya and Majdhubiya) and others with a more mediating role (Khatmiya) as they occasionally supported the government. After the country’s independence from the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, Khatmiya remained attached to the government, while political movements that started to grow were in favor of secularizing Sudanese society. Hence, the creation of radical political groups was inevitable, such as the emergence of the Muslim Brothers in Sudan, which started to exert a small but augmentable influence in Sudanese political organization, denouncing at the same time Sufi philosophy and its intention to participate in politics. Today the country’s regime remains hostile towards Sufi brotherhoods and extreme incidents have taken place such as the attacks against the Sufi population of Darfur which were carried out by the Sudanese government.

Another similar example, which links national action to Sufi orders in order to fight colonialism, is Somalia. Ahmadiya and Salihiya orders which have an impact on the south of the country (the Qadiriya brotherhood is more popular in the north), played a leading role in the most important rebellions in Somalia's history. However, besides their rebellious actions these two orders emphasized the establishment and development of farming communities (jamaat). This resulted in the establishment of cooperative cultivation and harvesting and other effective agricultural methods. Today, these communities function as a religious model of a "camp" as they grant asylum to pursued members of other communities. Furthermore, their tolerant and moderate practice of Islamic faith does not correspond to the strict Saudi Arabian-inspired Wahhabi interpretation of Islam.

Sufis aspire to the formation of an Islamic state with an open-minded conception of the world, but with less strict law enforcement in comparison to the desire of more radical Somali formations. This moderate conception of Islam decreed by Sufi brotherhoods became a point of conflict for Somalia's various sects last year. Radical Islamist groups commenced a program of destroying mosques and the graves of revered Sufi Islamic religious leaders, forbidding prayer near graveyards, which in stricter Islamic ideology indicates 'idolatrous' worship. These sacred Sufi spaces, which acted as pilgrimage shrines were attacked as an indication of non-approval of Sufi practice. In reply to this assault, Somalia's Sufis condemned the actions of what they saw as the 'ideology of modern Wahhabism' due to the desecration of graves, and thereby joined forces with the embattled government of President Sheikh Sharif Ahmed (a moderate Islamist) against al-

Shabab (a hard-shell Islamic group which allegedly has links with al-Qaeda).

The above examples are indicative of certain Sufi experiences in African countries, expressed in a nutshell. The essential feature propagated within all Sufi orders is a tolerant religious envisagement and, consequently, denouncement of Islamic extremism and violence. Sufi commitment to non-violence, tolerance and peace can be of key importance in countering militant Islamic violence. Various extremist organizations, such as al-Qaeda and its affiliates, support a doctrine that is hostile to practices that are not directly cited in the Quran and the Sunna and which may contradict strict Islamic legal interpretations. As a result, they oppose various Sufi orders. Hostile responses against Sufis in Somalia, for instance, may indicate that Sufism has been losing its dynamic in certain regions. Nevertheless, many African and non-African countries are reviving Sufi traditions in their spiritual and mystical dimensions and are becoming drastic agents against violence and extremism. Outside Africa, Britain was among the first countries to realize this potential of Sufism. The British Government facilitated the establishment of groups such as the British Muslim Forum and the Sufi Muslim Council, making them interlocutors and intermediaries in the state's dialogue with Muslim communities on a national and international level. ■



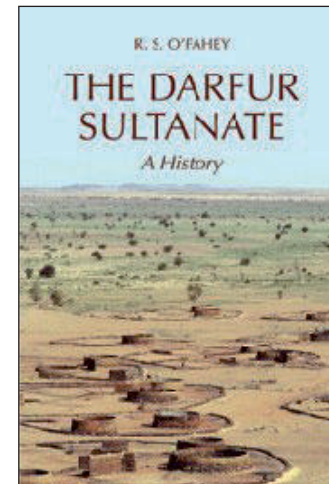


The Darfur Sultanate: a history

R.S. O'Fahey, London, Hurst & Company Publishers Ltd, 2008

Maria Abdel-Rahim

The current Darfur crisis in Sudan erupted in 2003. The south-western region of Darfur has become infamous for the civil strife that has been ensuing for the past six years, mainly centered around conflicts between rebel groups, government forces and paramilitary organizations, some of which (including "Jonahed") led genocides against thousands of people. Violent conflicts have resulted in the uprooting of much of the civilian population and forced expulsions from their homes. However, it seems that the roots of today's declining political situation can be found in the specific historical past O'Fahey aims to reproduce.



Page 25

The book is dedicated to the less known history of the province of Darfur (or else the land of the Fur) and refers to the time when it was called the Darfur Sultanate. The Sultanate in fact consisted of the geographical boundaries of today's Sudan and lasted from 1650 until 1916, when it collapsed under the pressure of British colonial rule.

R. S. O'Fahey, professor in the Department of Middle Eastern and African History at the University of Bergen in Norway, wants to reproduce a so called "collective historical memory" with the intention of recording the history and development of Sudanese culture in the region. His narrative is based, inter alia, on Arabic documents studied during a comprehensive survey of the history of Sudan, but also through oral traditions and personal testimonies by the local people. The book is divided into three parts and presents to its readers a complete historical picture of the socio-political structures of the Sultanate, while incorporating all the complexity and diversity that has always characterized the Darfur region.

Initially, O'Fahey introduces the basic components of the features which specify 'Darfur' as a place. Sudan's Darfur is a vast geographical area, which is about the size of France, and is characterized by a difficult, hot and dry climate. The ethnic makeup of the region is complicatedly interwoven, a fact which has been fur-

ther exacerbated through various movements of peoples throughout the centuries. These descriptions create a sense of vastness and diversity that render the Sudan a complex and difficult region to this day, and the author makes sure that his readers understand this aspect of cultural and environmental plurality. The African Sultanate named Keira (what the author describes as the Darfur Sultanate) is the kingdom which emerged in these dry lands and seems to hold many answers as to why Darfur has become a land of constant war to this day.

From the picture the author presents, it seems that contradictions which burden Sudan today may have their origins in this initial phase of the Keira Sultanate in terms of its tribe formation and associations. Indicative of this is a series of crises and two wars in the early years of its existence. The heterogeneity that characterized the people of Darfur, who lived and operated within the geographical limits of that Sultanate, is, as the author states, the source of the problem that has not been able to solve itself until now. Roughly, the dominant tribes which emerged in the region in that period were the Daju, Tunjur and Fur, who essentially determined, through their various conflicts, the development of the Sultanate until its complete collapse in 1916.

The second part of the book presents a description of the Sultanate's structures and institutions, which gives us the opportunity to understand how the ruling relations were shaped among the various power-holders. The author explains that the position of the Sultan, who, surrounded by his royal circle, was placed at the top of the hierarchy. Title meant absolute power; in other words, they were part of a single prerogative. Moreover, the hierarchical presence of an elite class played a key role in the administration and maintenance of the unity of the Sultanate. It seems that a class of merchants, who dominated the elite circles, gradually caused problems in the central administration of the Sultanate. Traveling merchants and slave-traders gradually gained great power from their economic activities (mostly based on trade with Egypt) and became self-proclaimed chiefs of certain areas which were loosely controlled by the Sultan. Particularly, the fall of the Sultanate is attributed to the emergence of a powerful trader, al-Zubayr - in the area of Baqqara. Al-Zubayr was mainly a slave-trader who controlled both the economic hinterland and the access to and from the Sultanate.

As the Sultan perceived al-Zubayr as a threat, he refused to negotiate with him or accept any kind of diplomatic solution that could solve their differences. This led to battle, in which the Sultan was defeated, and al-Zubayr prevailed militarily. Thus, the conquest of the Keira Sultanate in 1874 by al-Zubayr marked the future of the Sultanate and determined the beginning of the independence of the Darfur region. From 1874 until the outbreak of the Mahdist Revolution in Darfur, even in theory, the region was part of the Turkish-Egyptian Sudan. Efforts to restore the Sultanate by Ali-Dinar (in the period 1898-1916) failed, because the administrative structure had become fully disorganized. The chaotic remnants of the Sultanate were thereafter eliminated as the region of Darfur was appointed to the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan from 1916 onwards.

Ultimately, this book allows the reader to detect the factors that played a key role in bringing about the creation of the Sultanate and which later led to its disintegration. The narrative explains in detail why conflicts among the various ethnic groups have influenced the current formation of the region. It additionally illuminates



the shaky foundations on which interactions of the ruling elites took place, indicating that their struggle for power eventually led to internal instability and collapse. Even though this account is not an effort to propose possible solutions to Darfur's contemporary problems, it gives great insight as to how these problems occurred in the first place and how they have made an impact to the region's configuration to this day. ■



Centre for Mediterranean,
Middle East & Islamic Studies

Department of Political
Science and International Relations

U n i v e r s i t y o f P e l o p o n n e s e



Consulting Editor

Sotiris Roussos

Senior Editors

Marina Eleftheriadou

Ilias Tasopoulos

Coordinator

Alexia Liakounakou

Contributors

Maria Abdel-Rahim

Marina Eleftheriadou

Alexia Liakounakou

Ioannis Mantzikos

Elisavet Paraskeva-Gkizi

Styliani Saliari

Ilias Tasopoulos

Chrysoula Toufexi

English Language Editing

Styliani Saliari

Designing

azúcar K