

Articulation of Cultural Discourses and Political Dominance in Sudan

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“There is no better starting point for thought than laughter”

Walter Benjamin, “The Author as A producer”

Sudan, as a multi-cultural society, figures, among other African states as a sparkling example where one cultural strand was in a position to retain hegemony and dominance, politically and economically, through peaceful and other means. Configuration of geographical factors may, certainly, not be held, alone, and accountable for the present articulation of economic and political dominance of Arab Islamic culture.

Grasped in actual events, the basic political philosophy of the Arabic-Islamic political discourse towards the South and other underprivileged regions of the Sudan is to preserve the country united and integrated without jeopardizing the monopoly of political power of the northern triangle of Khartoum-Medani-Portsudan. In its extreme, the policy entails the exclusion, even damage, of Southern Sudanese and other backward regions of the country from sharing political and economic power. Politicians, and to some extent, scholars of Arab origin, merge to argue that “...the African past of the Sudanese was not regarded as an object of glorification or seen as a source of self-gratification by politically conscious Sudanese” 1.

The scholar vigorously followed suit of the political. During the euphoria of independence of Sudan, Ali Abdel Rahman, then Minister of Interior of the first independent government had this to say in the Parliament, “Sudan is an Arab country and whoever does not feel Arab should quit” 2.

One year before, the south was being ravaged by Equatorial military mutiny of 1955 which is the first military reaction to counteract the immanent process of cultural homogenization. Successive governments, both multi-party and military, dominated by Arab-Muslim sectarian political parties failed, for conceivable ideological reasons, to address themselves to the issues involved. Instead, “assimilation and cultural domination were assumed to be the only ways of achieving national unity” 3 .

The participation of southern politicians in the national political spectrum was underscored,



if not non-existing. Historically, but not to be taken as a justifying counter-argument for the subsequent politics of Arabic-Islamic cultural domination, nationalist movements in Sudan were of Northern character, i.e. , they originated and flourished in the northern part of the country and were dominated by Northern Islamic Arabic-speaking “elite”. The crux of that nationalist ideology was strongly advocating Islamic- Arabic orientation through the assimilation of the entire non-Arab nationalities into the Arab national group. Spread of Islam and Arabic education was envisaged as instrumental and instructive. In fact, since July 1939 the leading members of the Sudan Graduates Congress, the political parties’ leaders on the making, then, presented to the Government the proposal” that education should be oriented towards the Arab and Islamic, but not African, culture, because the Sudan had much in common with the Arabic countries of the Islamic Orient. They were in the opinion that the proselytizing missionaries were incapable of improving education in the South. Only “through the opening of government schools, similar to those in the North, and where the Arabic language would provide the Lingua Franca” 4, could real development of education take place in the South.

Independence of the country was merely a single episode in this process. The dominant Arabic-Islamic discourse in power since independence has activated and pursued these policies. The first military regime (1958-64) launched an unprecedented campaign of spreading Arabic language and Islamic religion. Missionaries’ activities were banned, mosques were built in the South, and Friday was repealed. It is understood that nascent discourse of cultural assimilation necessitates the economic and political power of the state, which was dominated by the Arab-Islamic political parties. Even when, in 1968 elections, William Deng had won the election as representative of Sudan African National Union (SANU), it was beyond his political capacity to assume whatsoever role in the ascending assimilation discourse. Instead, he was “assimilated” into the Coalition Government of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and the Imam wing of the Umma Party. It was common practice for Northern political leaders, in their efforts to display unanimity and national legitimacy, to recruit Southern politicians in their government, often as ministers without portfolio and representative capacities. Being no potential force for pressing Southern demands, is a prerequisite for their involvement.

Unravelling the controversy entangled in the intricate relation between the state and the Islamic religion would set the argument in the right track of de -clothing the intransigent efforts of the dominant Arabic-Islamic discourse in its thrust to assimilate, culturally, non-Arabic groups. Islamization process, albeit unsaid, is the spearhead of assimilative policies. This could be pushed further back to the heyday of Mahadyya movement in the 19th century.

Across history, the nationalist movement, in the 30s, led by the Graduates Congress, was, undoubtedly, a kaleidoscope of Mahadyiya ideological discourse. Equally indicative were the manoeuvres at Juba Conference in 1947. Though the subject of the Conference is to debate whether southerners should have representatives to the legislative body in Khartoum and to reinforce the unity of the Sudan, in “reality the issue at the Juba Conference was whether the unity between the South and the North, decided upon by



British administrators in the Sudan in 1946, should be confirmed by Southerners with or without safeguards for the people of southern Sudan” 5.

Safeguards visualized by Southerners were nothing other than the cultural identity of the Southern people and the necessity to preserve it through equal socio-economic development of the region, promotion of education, commitment to equality of citizens in the future united Sudan and the participation of Southerners in the administration of the country coupled with self-rule in the South.

It was not difficult for Northern Sudanese representatives to endorse these safeguards and never put them in practice. No efforts were spared to arrive at a successful fruition of the cultural assimilation targets. The same game was played in December 1955 when preparations for independence were being debated. The Southerners were firmly demanding, time and time again , a sort of reaffirmation regarding safeguards for their pledge to have federal system of government stipulated in the constitution and acceleration of socio-economic development and promotion of education in the South. Repeatedly, reaffirmation was given and the independence was attained in Jan 1956. Following independence, the political scene was pigmented with visions and policies that do not differ from the age-old aspiration for the Islamization of the country; rather they were overtly spoken. The commitment to federal pledge came by the southerners proved to be illusive and shadowy, no other than tactics to pass the declaration of independence in the parliament. Instead, federation pledge came to be equated with separation and was severely rejected and debilitated.

Having political supremacy securely attained, the dominant Arabic-Islamic political discourse was on solid grounds to furnish the political space with claims regarding the Islamic constitutionality of Sudanese society and culture. To its detriment, and because of its myopia, national unity was perceived as tantamount to Arabicization and Islamization. Culture backed by politics was in a full sway and any claims for cultural promotion and development was continuously contemplated and interrelated. Claims for Islamic constitution would have been realized but due to the squabble among the dominant political parties leaders coupled with the ravaging war in the south it was handicapped. It re-figured again during 1967-69 to be battled along the acute difference about whether it should be parliamentary or presidential. Complete disregard of socio-economic issues of development, with regard to the south and other underprivileged regions, was sacked by a dominant political centre engulfed in issues of Islamic legitimacy and accommodation.

Nor were the non-Arab groups in the north immune from the encroaching cultural assimilation policy.

Following the 1964 popular insurgency, regional movements started to appear on the scene, demanding recognized roles in political, economic and cultural affairs. The Beja Congress (BC) from Eastern Sudan, Nuba Mountain Union (NMU) in the western part of the country, and Dar Fur Development Front (DDF) asserted such claims. The DDF aim was to create a multi-racial movement to channel people’s political, ethnic, social



and religious aspirations into the right direction in the Sudan and Darfur Province in particular. 6

The difference between North-South and North-North counteraction to the encroaching cultural assimilation is one of a kind rather than degree. While the one is military confrontation, the other is a political one. This could be attributed to the fact that, in the first case, the degree of inequality and non-participation in national administrative institutions, coupled with cultural difference is greater, compared to the second case. Nevertheless, the fact in both cases remains; those regions suffer from the sterile policies of the dominant political parties and the ensuing inequalities since independence. The fact that some of these regions, particularly Darfur and Eastern Sudan, were the traditional electoral stands for Umma and the Democratic Unionist religious parties, respectively, is an onslaught on the two parties' discourse regarding their policies and orientations toward non-Arab groups.

Common appeals for non-discriminatory policies and assertiveness regarding equitable apportionment of economic and political resources were factors that stimulate regional movements to merge their efforts with Southerners to act, in post 1964 politics. More than two decades elapsed by when the Sudan People Liberation Movement (SPLA) was outstandingly conscious, thanks to cultural assimilation policies, to articulate the regional movement aspirations with national problems. The problem is not one of North-South strife but that of the whole country; the battle was brought to an altogether new and sophisticated stretches.

Destined to be ridden by seventeen years of war (1955-72), the country was for the first time and, a fact to be restated, during Nimeri's regime (1969-85), harboured the North-South conflict to peaceful grounds by the conclusion of Addis Ababa Accord in 1972. It was for the first time, in the political history of the country, that Sudan cultural diversity was politically recognized in the open. The fact that Sudan is a multi-cultural and multi religious society was taken, by the Accord, as not a factor for national disunity, but rather, when perceived broadly, a stimuli and enrichment to the national integrity of the country. It provided the political and institutional devices through which cultural diversity could be a springboard to unity.

In addition to the establishment of a regional government in the South, Addis Ababa Accord contained provisions addressing the cultural diversity issues. This comprises articles that recognized minority's local languages, customs, freedom of religious opinions, development of local cultures, equality of opportunities in education, employment, commerce etc., irrespective of race, tribal, origin, place of birth or sex. The fact that for the first time political power was to be shared with that large non-Arab minority, could not be realized without being protested, overtly or covertly, by some in a cultural milieu historically dominated by Arab-Islamic ideological prejudice. It was that the President" could not have had more than limited support for his new policy among either Islamists or the pan-Arabists; and even the Arab Sudanese in general were still opposed to sharing power with the " rest", while the civil service was known to be



strongly against regionalism” 7

However, the background scene for the Accord was such miserable and fuzzy, that: “ for it would be difficult to find elsewhere in black Africa a population of about five million, occupying over a quarter of a million square miles, who 15 years after independence could boast of only two secondary schools, and neither a permanent secretary nor a director of a department in the public service” 8

Factors pertinent to the south militate, among other factors, against the full- fledged realization of the political autonomy and cultural self-determination of the South. Central among them, is the all-embracing economic and political destitution of the South. This is not to argue that backward economic and political structures were eternally destined to be inherent as structural mechanisms of self-destruction and fragility. Rather, it is possible to argue, in the case of Sudan that: “the Southerners have not only ceased to have faith in promises any more, they do actually believe that these promises are stratagems with which to destroy the legitimate rights of the citizens in the South”9

Promises for safeguards in Juba Conference 1947, and Declaration of Independence Resolution, December 1955, were not yet washed out off the South memory. Another factor, pertaining to May regime, that of the strong emphasis and recognition of Pan-Arabism was too devastating and sweeping to allow for amicable conciliatory political and cultural atmosphere to grapple with. It was the new Prime Minister, Babiker Awaddalla, who, from the outset epitomized the new regime mission”. It is seen as a complete understanding of the bond of destiny uniting forces of Arab Revolution, and which will work for the creation of economic, military and cultural ties with sisterly Arab Nations. The sole goal envisaged was to strengthen the Arab Nation, at large, in its fight against new-colonialism and Zionism” 10. No seats were reserved in that drama for neither pan-Africanists nor Sudanese citizens of African origins. There were no convincing reasons to be bothered with such concerns. It was evident, at least for the new regime, that: “the Sudanese..... turned their backs on Africa and became passionately attached to the glorious past of Islam, which, together with the richness of classical Arabic culture and thought, provided the necessary psychological prod “for” instead of helping them to regain their lost self-confidence, Africa would have the effect of accentuating their (southerners) feeling of inferiority...” 11 . However, the road from March 1972 to June 1983 guaranteed no safety for whatever margins of free interplay. Host of structurally inherent factors in the unfolding processes of Sudan political history persuade, rather force, the very regime, i.e. which initiated and proclaimed the policy of “ Sudan for all Sudanese”, to the threshold of propagating the Agreement which retained a spacious room for the Regime’s credibility and devotion in the memory of both Southerners and Northerners.

The 1977-78 policy of “National Reconciliation” in which the regime reconciled his major political opponents, i.e. Muslim Brothers and Umma party, was dictated by an interplaying host of economic and political forces following the 1971 plan of “open door policy”. Thematically based on the thesis that the political processes in Sudan are



best grappled with through the articulation of Arabic-Islamic ideological discourse and political dominance, the paper assumes that economic forces, among others, were the backbench energizers of the unfolding political scene. Rather, a dialectical interplay between economic, politico-cultural, and social factors was considered theoretically instructive instead of the mechanical economic approaches. Accordingly, the National Reconciliation is examined within this perspective. Ultimately, it is an episode, distinctively important, whereby the politically dominant Arabic-Islamic discourse is sparing no effort towards the fruition of its cultural assimilation thrusts. The fact that “throughout the years of nationalist agitation and early independence there had been a persistent assumption that the Sudan was an Arab nation whose culture was exclusively Arab and its language predominantly Arabic” 12 , provides for no margin of cultural tolerance in a political and cultural space exclusively dominated by Arabic-Islamic ideological discourse.

In the strict sense of the word, the declaration of Sharia law (Islamic law) by the regime in September of 1983 pre-necessitated the repeal of Addis Ababa Accord of 1972. The former should be read upon the background of the later, and both of them should be tested against the general tendencies of Sudan politics since the thirties. Furthermore, neither military regimes nor multi-party governments of post-independent Sudan differ in their orientations regarding the dominance of Arabic-Islamic culture, equitable apportionment of economic and political resources, promotion of education, etc. Some parts of the North i.e. Eastern and Western regions were not an exception. To the latter, the charitable sectarian partisan cadres were sent for missions of mobilizing the destitute population for “national” election and patronage. To the Southerners military troops were sent to crush the “racialist conspirators”. The South conceived, as a “cultural vacuum” to be filled by Arabic culture under an Islamic revival is a contention for both the junta and the sectarian politicians. Succinctly, Arnold Toynbee puts it , “ the Northern Sudan Arabs seem to me to be flagrant colonialists trying to impose themselves, their religion, their language and culture on a non-Arab African people that want to be itself and does not want to be dominated” 13

By declaring Islamic Law in 1983, Colonel Nimeri is not a ridiculous black sheep of the cattle. Instead he is a celebrated forerunner, and as such should be deemed by the dominant Arabic-Islamic discourse, and a faithful successor to what his post-independence predecessors fought for: the imposition of Islamic law. The contention that :” the dominant feature of our nation is an Islamic one , its overpowering expression is Arab, and this nation will not have its entity identified and its prestige and pride preserved except under an Islamic revival” 14 was ,seventeen years later, realized by Nimeri’s declaration of Islamic Law, enchanted by his gut and clarity. It was not denounced by post- 1985 Prime Minister Sadig El-Mahdi, though “it does not equal the stuff by which it was written”. Thanks and due admiration to the distinctive consistency of the last Prime Minister; Nimeri did what he (El-Mahdi) aspired for. Differences of uniform guarantee no variations in political orientation and mentalities, be it military or multiparty system.

Strictly speaking, National Reconciliation is the most important instrumental juncture in



the process of Arabic-Islamic cultural dominance in recent Sudan history. The political squabbling among the dominant sectarian political parties, following independence, was an impediment to the application of Islamic Law in Sudan. Apart from rhetoric and political leaders' speeches and public statements, no departure was made in the direction of Islamic rule application. More that is the fact that the political instability, myopia of the dominant religious bigotry and the ravaging war in the South were not conducive of Islamic take-off and resources were squandered in a political game of playing one against another.

By the beginning of the early 70s, the Arab regions started to echo the ascending strides of Islamic fundamentalist movements. Mostly, the Islamic fundamentalist discourse was a ramification and reaction to the complete bankruptcy of liberation movements that prevailed in post-independent Arab countries. Dominated by "bourgeois" political parties nurtured by colonial administrative policies, post-independent regimes were completely incapable of satisfying the aspirations of their native people. Economic stagnation, political instability and clientism, ethnic strife, etc., to mention the least, slowly but effectively, erupted to erode post-independent social and political formations. Completely fragile and decayed, the post-independent states, desperate as they were, resorted to oppressive means and policies to safeguard national consensus and legitimacy. Decalo, in length, argued that: "...fundamentally unaccountable, purchasing a measure of stability...in the absence of systematic stability...via the social glue of patronage or external props, assuming ambitious statist economic policies that rest on myopic assessments of assuming their capability to sustain the requisite costs, both civilian and military regimes have bankrupted themselves, mortgaging their futures to the demands of the day"¹⁵. Under no conviction, we can argue that Sudan is an exception. Nor was it an exception from the fact that of the \$143 billion debt repayment loads in Africa is equal to the continent's entire annual GDP, 370 per cent of total export earnings, and individual payment ratios are in some instances stratospheric 1500 per cent for Sudan and Mozambique, 2000 per cent for Gambia"¹⁶. Upon this background of a desperate portrait engulfing, more or less, all African states, May regime and the religious political parties came to conclude a National Reconciliation that put an end to their political "rivalry". Upon the abrogation of Addis Ababa Accord, expectedly, if not inevitably, that the factions of the dominant Arabic-Islamic political discourse celebrate their nostalgic gathering. Put differently, the relative political stability and cultural tolerance brought about by the Agreement is a too much dose and unforgivable surrender to non-Arabic entities for which the dominant Arabic-Islamic political discourse reserve no room other than submission and absorption.

Declaration of Islamic Law in Sept. 1983 and the contravention of the Agreement in June 1983 were the gift of May regime to the patriots of 1978 National Reconciliation who, though "not" dominating the state, were never to lose sight and grip of the ascending Arabic-Islamic ideological discourse. Nimeri's "gifts" were nothing other than an apostate repenting his apostasy. It remains to say that, in practical reality, the Agreement of 1972 is a sparkling manifestation of the regime pragmatic policies. These policies were



able to forecast and arrive at conclusions, based upon the military policies of the previous political regimes regarding the “Southern question leading to the conclusion that: the continuity and political stability of Northern governments depends, exclusively, upon having relative political and cultural stability, if not self-rule in the South. Deductively, the politics of National Reconciliation are a blueprint that orchestrated the dramas of the post-1983 political scene.

It is noteworthy to argue that neither the 1985-86 interim government nor the 1986-89 multi-party system incurred notable departures from the age-old policies of the dominant Arabic-Islamic discourse, as was aforementioned. Nor do the unscholarly and under-read academic and theoretical writings crafted out by some writers would have lead the debate to differentiate between politics of the dominant Arabic-Islamic political discourse in a way symmetrical to the periodisation of post-independent state according to whether it is military or “democratic”.

In fact, one of the greatest failures of the 1985-89 “democratic” regime is its consolidation and endorsement of tribal militia in the country. Confronted by the army about the existence of tribal militia in 1989, the Prime Minister, Sadiq El-Mahdi, told the army that those paramilitary forces were only to defend democracy 17. Paraphrasing the Prime Minister’s statement would read that: those paramilitary forces were articulated in defence of the Arabic-Islamic political discourse in power. The celebrated “democracy” is nothing, at one manifestation, other than reinforcing the already existing military policies and means regarding the second civil war in Sudan since 1983. The notorious massacre of 1987, carried out by the armed Baggara militia who killed and burned to death hundreds of Dinka and rendered too many into captivity, is a case in point 18.

Clearly, what is novel in this policy is that the stage was set for articulating the dominance of Arabic-Islamic political discourse upon ethnic dimensions threatening the national integration of the country. Consequently, the present Islamic regime could not be, strictly speaking, blamed in its policy of elevating and giving legal status to that paramilitary militia by incorporating them into the Popular Defence Act of 1989. A mere step forward would have been adopted by Sadiq’s regime, had it still been in power. Furthermore, subjected, as they were, to military mobilization and emotional enchantment to fight the “pagan” Southern “mutineers”, those militia were, more or less, late realization and echoes of Sadiq El-Mahdi’s interventions in Sudan Constitution Assembly of October 1966, as was aforementioned. However, through different means and policies, both military and “democratic” regimes in Sudan were not, consistently enough; ready to forgo the realization of Arabic-Islamic cultural dominance.

The political vigour, on the part of politicians, regarding the dominance of Arabic-Islamic political discourse, is paralleled, if not reinforced, by theoretical and conceptual formulations of some writers and researchers dealing with politico- cultural issues in Sudan. Among the dominant Sudanese scholarly spectrum it is unanimously agreed that a distinction should be devised out, if it does not exist already as a matter-of-fact, between “popular” Islam and “orthodox Islam”. Popular Islam is taken to be the corollary



of sectarian political parties (Umma and DUP) that have dominated the political scene since independence, while, on the other hand “orthodox Islam” is, by the same token, taken to be the corollary of Muslim Brothers, later National Islamic Front (NIF) that has held political power since the 1989 military takeover. The former i.e. “popular Islam” and its political scaffolds (Umma and DUP) is perceived to be tolerant, while the later i.e. “orthodox Islam” and its political bearer (NIF) is perceived to be fanatic and intolerant. Further attributes were devised out; the political adherents of “popular Islam” were taken to be representatives, to greater extent, of national capitalism associated with national productive capital, while those adherents of “orthodox Islam”, on the other hand, were taken to be, exclusively, representative of parasitic capitalism associated with non-productive capital. Equally, as well, we have this dual schema: “popular Islam” is associated with “traditional sector” while “orthodox Islam” is associated with “modern sector”.

Entrapped in everyday notions, texts and theories would not be in a position to arrive at analytical fabrics and findings other than descriptive formulas echoing the surface bubbles of the subject dealt with. As well, it could be argued that, being mortgaged to such notions, such texts and theoretical formulations will be, eventually, set on a track that arrive, on a backward journey, to the very point of the outset or departure. In other words, theoretical conceptualizations were mere identification and reproduction of the subject put to scrutiny, for everyday” notions are so tenacious that all the techniques of objectification have to be applied in order to achieve a **break-up** that is more often proclaimed than performed” 19. Embodied, as they were, everyday notions were the day-to-day representations of the dominant ideological discourse. Deductively, texts and theories unable to disentangle themselves from ordinary utilization were, in event, reproducing the very dominant ideological discourse that they set out to negate, challenge, or refute. Rather than placing the discourse 20 .

This mode of thought, or Day-to Day Thought as was dubbed by Mahdi Amil, to greater or lesser extent, uncritically, confer upon “popular or folk culture” high esteem and, consequently, tend to endorse the prevailing ideological structures by helping to reproduce the beliefs allegiances necessary for their uncontested functioning. Without going into debates and geological assessments regarding definitions, structures and operationalities of the concept “popular culture”, it suffices to say that it is an area and space where the operation of power has been continuously disguised and naturalized by the dominant political discourse. Succinctly phrased by Brumnschrig, ordinary notions and language were a” a legacy of words, a legacy of ideas, passes unnoticed, because it is so ordinary, but it carries in its vocabulary and syntax a petrified philosophy of the social, always ready to spring out of the common words, or complex expressions made up of common words, that the sociologist inevitably uses”21 .

Descriptive and conceptually poor as it is this vulgar mode of thought get stuck regarding differences between the trees and the jungle. Rather than structurally approaching and analyzing Sudan, as a socio-economic structure historically determined and, consequently, non-static, it is caught by the politico-cultural and ideological ensembles of



the superficial manifestations of the structure, thus losing sight of both the trees and the jungle. “Modern” versus “traditional” thesis and its theoretical correlates and deductions emanated from this marred vision; the point of view says Saussure, creates object.

The “modern sector” is gauged by the level of advanced technology used in the production process. This, in turn, entails a parallel level of specific political and ideological setup. Therefore, the “modern sector” could not be perceived or “created” without the “traditional sector. The latter, as well, is gauged by the non- advanced technology used in the production process and which, in turn, entails a “popular or folk ideology” .In other words, the non-sophistication of he sector, due to the easiness of its addressability, is ,by no means, in need of sophisticated conceptual structures and “ideologies”. Symmetrical as it is, this conceptual apparatus conceived of the “orthodox Islam”, now known as the “political Islam”, to be the ideological counterpart of the “modern sector”, while, on the other hand, “popular Islam”, derivative of Sufi orders, to be the ideological counterpart of the “traditional sector”. Differently read, the “modern sector” is nothing but capitalist sector i.e. the capitalist mode of production, while the “traditional sector” represents the pre-capitalist mode of production. In other words, and by deductions, the Sudan, as socio-economic structures comprises and manifests a co-existence of both pre-capitalist and capitalist relations of productions.

The tolerance of “popular Islam” articulated with the pre-capitalist structures, according to this school of thought is, by necessity, relationally antagonistic to the intolerance of “political Islam” articulated with the capitalist structures. If adopted as an analytical conceptual tool, the above mentioned conceptual apparatus, would, concerning the theme of the paper, twist the argument to endorse an approach arguing that, according to the distinction made above, the age-old pursued policies regarding the dominance of Arabic-Islamic political discourse were, conceptually and practically, split between two Arabic-Islamic ideologies. To the contrary, of course, we argue. We will start by underlining the misleading theoretical underpinnings of that school of thought.

Among political economy scholars, it is now commonplace to argue that colonialism had led to drastic uprooting of the previously existing socio-economic structures in the colonized peripheries. Equally important, is the fact that in nowhere did colonization replaced the pre-capitalist structures with capitalist ones. In actual terms, it is a historical impossibility for the simple reason that colonized peripheries should be kept as secured sources for pumping natural and mineral resources to the industrialized capitalist metropolis. As such, the colonized peripheries should be kept in a state of arrested development, not to be viable competitors of the industrialized capitalist centres. It is a truism to argue that this was the basic mission of the colonial centres when confronted with the continuous rate of profit deterioration, a tendency structurally inherent in the capitalist economies. However, the peripheries were endowed with a mid-way mode of production, belonging neither to the encroaching capitalist relations of production nor to the formerly exiting relations of production.

Mahdi Amil 22 devised out the concept of “ colonial mode of production’ to coin the sauce-



economic structure of the colonized peripheries. According to his theoretical arguments, the colonial mode of production dominant in the peripheries is a form of a capitalist mode of production that, structurally, impeded to develop into a full-fledged capitalist mode of production. Structurally articulated with the capitalist mode of production, reproduction mechanisms of the colonial mode of production were externally oriented and articulated with those of the capitalist mode of production. Without going into debates regarding such area of theoretical controversy, the “modern” “traditional” sectors thesis, tested upon such theoretical backgrounds, rendered infertile.

Dichotomization based on the level of technology used in the production process as an indicator and distinction between pre-capitalist and capitalist structures provides no theoretical instruments regarding the internal dynamics and the reproduction theoretical instruments regarding the internal dynamics and the reproduction logic of the dominant socio-economic structure. Allotment of, advanced or not, technologies for the production processes is a technical option decreed by decision-makers and economic planners in pursuit of specific goals of the full capitalization, in a way identical to that of the capitalist centres, is, alas, neither of their targets nor pertaining to their capacities. Addressing and reproducing everyday notions, rather than going into structural grass-root analysis of the phenomena, that school of thought is crippled and fails to provide theoretical strategies that could hold together that fascinating series of parallels modern\traditional, political Islam\popular Islam.

Moreover, the theoretical and interminable jargons addressing the parasitic capitalism overpowering the economy of Sudan and, unanimously, associated with political Islam movement presently holding power in Sudan, are also unable to explain the country’s economic and political problems. What is interesting, though by no means taken by surprise, is the fact that, that school of thought in its theoretical endeavours tend to blur the significant\signifier distinction, that is to say, according to one’s identification with either political Islam or popular Islam discourse, the epithet “parasitic” or “productive” is, respectively, labelled. Ideological contentions, rather than the other way round, were clues to the existence of capitalist forces whether “parasitic” or “productive”.

This paper proposes the thesis that: the one difference that could be sketched out between the political ideologies of the sectarian political parties (Umma and DUP) associated with popular Islam; and that of the NIF associated with political Islam, as both of them feeding upon Islamic ideology, is procedural rather than a rule. Differences have to be sought in areas of variations and interpretative capabilities of the discourses of both versions of religious political parties. We have to focus upon following of a “discourse” which is a linguistic practice that puts into play sets of rules and procedures for the formation of objects, speakers, and thematics” 23 . We could assume that this “putting into play” is a viable factor in the difference between the two versions of the religious political parties.

According to NIF’s leader, Al-Turabi’s own contentions, the movement in its inaugural phases was limited to students and recent graduates “in order to retain the intellectual quality of the movement” 24. Figuring out with a unique political discourse within a



milieu pigmented by the political discourse of the dominant sectarian parties, both the stage and actors should be warily approached in a way that they perceived it “undesirable to dilute the intellectual content of the movement by large scale absorption the masses” 25.

To this social class of petty bourgeois, rather than the masses, the movement was faithful and appealing ever since. Their incontestable dominance over the Graduates Constituencies in the 1986 elections is a case in point. The fact that the NIF is a non-mass oriented movement put it in a position whereby the intellectual satisfaction of its members, among other things is a relentless prerequisite. Accordingly, it has developed into a more “modern” movement in the sense of institutional structuration. In other words the movement has developed a well-established organizational setup articulated with a centralized political and decision-making centre, stable financial resources, hierarchical political bureau, and, most important, stable institution of research and publication centres responsible for providing studies concerning different issues of the country’s socio-economic and political problems as well as political rivalries. Well-read and first hand information were always and instantly at hand, if not, ahead of others. The movement is, in a sense, “revolutionary” regarding its tactics and the way it problematises and makes use of the drastic tactical and political defects of both the preceding and contemporary sectarian parties and the communist movement. As such, it is vested with monumental capacities of political and emotional mobilization unprecedented and unmatched in the political history of the Sudan.

“Acquiring the confidence of the people by being thoroughly in touch with the better class of natives” 26 indicated a well known fact, though consciously or unconsciously oblivious, that the genesis of the sectarian political parties in Sudan were cultivated by British colonialism along traditional sectarian dimensions and under the banners of Umma and Khatmiyya sects. The Khatmiyya as “a better class of natives” were able, under the British patronage “to consolidate its economic powers in the urban areas of the northern and eastern regions, where the control of retail trade was the basis for the formation of local petty traders and a commercial bourgeoisie”. By the same token, the British colonialists went about “re-establishing the Mahadia (Umma) family’s status as the premier landlord, agricultural capitalist class by returning to them previously confiscated agricultural lands and by supplying them with the capital necessary to develop large-scale pump and mechanized agricultural schemes” 27.

With their economic and political interests, coined as they were, to the British colonizers, and, contrary to the political Islam movement, the sectarian political parties, taking advantage of the dominance of Sufi religiosity in the country, appeal, rather, to masses particularly in rural areas. As well, and contrary to political Islam movement, intellectual satisfaction of the masses is not a prerequisite or burden on the sectarian political parties. Illiteracy, dominance of Sufi religiosity, etc., were instrumental for the ideological articulation, on patrimonial basis, of the rural masses with the sectarian political parties. Unencumbered as such, by intellectual ideological clarity, the sectarian political parties remained so ever since. The masses were held as disciples and followers bound by blind



faith rather than enlightened political and ideological cadres. Suffice it that the political leaders remain at the same time, the theoretical and ideological thinkers, if ever existed. Unlike their contemporaneous “modern” “revolutionary” political Islam movement, the sectarian political parties were dwarf. The absence of clear organizational set up, coupled with family-dominated decision-making centre, provide no room for the inevitable necessity, as political parties, of having whatever informative institutions regarding socio-economic and political issues of Sudan. They lack the process of “mediation”; the country’s different historical realities were taken the way they present themselves and were, consequently, represented. Truisms, axioms, incidence, everyday notion, etc. were given ideological and theoretical advantage de-clothed of the slightest and theoretical abstraction necessary for its comprehension and representation. As such, the sectarian political parties count upon the abilities of “popular culture” and its assumed far-reaching capacities, though in the case of Sudan, and might be because of this, the dominant and highly elevated “popular culture” is that of Arabic-Islamic origins which contains an immense body of literature and predilection that is biased against other non-Arabic and non-Islamic cultures. Intellectuality and non-intellectuality of political discourse, though both spoon-fed by ISLAM, is what differentiate the sectarian political that perceive the issues of national integration and national unity as, merely, attainable through full Islamization and Arabisation. No difference, concerning this, could be perceived between the “Awakening Islam” of Sadiq El-Mhadi and “NECESSITY Jurisprudence” of Hassan Al-Turabi”.

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