

Review

The religious motivation in raise and collapse of El-Mahdiyya government from 1880-1898, and its effect on the modern Sudan: Sudanese religious conflicts 4

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The objective of this article is to narrate and discuss the evolution of an Islamic movement established in 1880 by a religious leader named Mohamed Ahmed, who claimed spiritual inspiration. The theocratic government that emerged from this movement came to an end in 1898 due to the cooperation of Anglo-Egyptian troops. The article evaluates the key elements that motivated the religious leaders in their movement, enabling them to defeat the powerful Turko-Egyptian condominium government, which had occupied Sudan in 1821 and was technically supported by European nations. The discussion also covers the internal weaknesses of the movement that led to its collapse within 18 years. The initial collapse resulted in the death of most of the movement's leaders, who were killed by the foreign invaders of the Anglo-Egyptian condominium, which subsequently ruled the country for 58 years. Additionally, the article analyzes the impact of the El-Mahdiyya movement, both positive and negative, on modern Sudanese governments during the 65 years following independence in January 1956.

Key words: Anglo-Egyptian, El-Khalifa, El-Madi, government, Khartoum, religion, Sudan, war.

INTRODUCTION

The Islamic government that emerged in 1880 was led by El-Sheikh Mohammed Ahmed, known as El-Mahdi, who defeated the powerful Turko-Egyptian condominium government in January 1885. After the religious leaders took over power, they continued ruling Sudan until their government was overthrown in 1898 through the joint cooperation of Anglo-Egyptian troops. El-Mahdiyya, considered by many Sudanese as the first national government, evolved from distinct religious roots and continued to rule the country based on principles claimed to be derived from Islamic teachings. This article will

discuss the divination of El-Mahdi, the rise of El-Mahdiyya, how it came to power and overcame the powerful Turko-Egyptian condominium rule. The article will also examine how El-Mahdiyya eventually collapsed and its ideological impact on modern Sudanese governments.

Time and geographical scope

The time scope is from 1880 to 1898 focusing on, the

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religious movement that ruled Sudan through presumed spiritual principles. Geographically, El-Mahdiyya attempted to extend its control over most of what is now Sudan, bordering Egypt, the Red Sea, Ethiopia, and Libya, with very limited contact with the area that is now South Sudan.

THE ORIGIN OF EL-MAHDI, FAITH AND PRACTICES

El-Mahdi is a term from the Arabic language with Islamic religious connotations, meaning 'the one who is to come.' This person is believed to be the guide who will lead the world to repentance and faith in God (Allah). Some scholars believe that's the term El-Mahdi did not appear either in the holy Quran or in Hadith, though it does exist in some unrecognized Hadiths. Historically, the idea evolved after the significant division among Muslims following the assassination of Caliph Uthman ibn Affan during his conflicts with Caliph Ali ibn Abi Talib. This division led to the formation of the Sunni and Shia sects. Some Sunni scholars view the concept of El-Mahdi as not a fundamental doctrine but rather a Shia belief that gradually spread among Sunnis. In this context, however, El-Mahdi is believed to be a person who will appear in the last days and should be a descendant of Fatimah al-Zahra¹ in order to renew the religion, purify the earth after it has been corrupted by the unbelievers (Kufar/Kafirun), and fill it with justice. Although Sudan during this era was predominantly dominated by Sunni doctrine, it was influenced by the belief in the anticipated coming of El-Mahdi. As a result, the country was ruled by this faith in the fourth decade of the 19th century. Hence, the use of the term El-Mahdi here refers to the expected one to come (Werner et al., 2010; Shugeir, 1981).

Mohamed Ahmed, who claimed to have been endowed with divine power, managed to mobilize a large army with the intent to purify the world, starting with Sudan, after defeating the Kufar (unbelievers). Through this belief, Mohamed Ahmed officially adopted the name El-Mahdi for himself, and within four years, he succeeded in overcoming the Turco-Egyptian government, one of the strongest empires in the world. The theocratic government established by the so-called El-Mahdi became known as El-Mahdiyya. Practically, the spiritual, political, economic, and social influences of El-Mahdiyya still affect the lives of millions of Sudanese people today, continuing to fuel religious conflicts.

EL-MADIYYA IN SUDAN

El-Mahdiyya in Sudan was a religious and political movement established and led by El-Imam Mohamed Ahmed, who took on the title El-Mahdi in 1881 (Arop, 2012; Sugeir, 1981). According to historical records,

Mohamed Ahmed was born in Dongola, northern Sudan, in 1843, with claims that his family descended from the Prophet Mohamed. However, his father, Ahmed Abdullah, was a simple woodworker and carpenter who made water boards along the Nile River. Due to their economic situation, the family moved to Khartoum and settled in Karari, where his father later passed away. While in Karari, Mohamed joined a religious school for his basic education, following the El-Samaniyya Tariqa (order), and became one of its most devoted students (Pasha, 2016; Shugeir, 1981).

The family later moved to Aba Island, north of Kosti in central Sudan, where they continued their vocation, and Mohamed continued to follow the El-Samaniyya order under a new teacher, El-Sheikh Mohamed Sharif. Mohamed Ahmed deepened his spiritual devotion to the point that he built an isolated house, like a monk, on the riverbank. However, he would still visit his teacher, El-Sheikh Sharif, from time to time to show his respect and submission.

On one occasion, El-Sheikh Sharif allowed singing and dancing during a party organized for the circumcision of his children and other children of the El-Tariqa (Order). Mohamed Ahmed, who did not attend the event, criticized the singing and dancing, considering it religiously Haram (forbidden). The criticism quickly reached El-Sheikh Sharif, who then asked Mohamed Ahmed to defend his views. Naturally, a student could not win a heated debate with his teacher, leading to Mohamed Ahmed's dismissal from the order for disobedience. Despite Mohamed Ahmed's apologies and his humble attempts to reconcile with El-Sheikh Sharif and the other students, the teacher did not accept his apology and instead insulted him, calling him a 'Dongolawi' and a 'devil.'

The simple ideological disagreement took on another dimension, deeply connected to ethnic roots, between El-Sheikh Sharif (a pure Arab) and his student, Mohamed Ahmed, the Dongolawi (considered a 'slave'). Pasha (2016) explained that there was significant ethnic bullying and even enmity between the El-Jaliin, from whom El-Sheikh Sharif descended, and the people of Dongola. The Jaliin Arabs considered themselves pure-blooded, while the citizens of Dongola were regarded as slaves. Historically, Dongola was established by someone called El-Aab Dongol (Slave Dongol), who later became the leader of the Nubians. After the Arabs conquered the area, this notion persisted in their mindset, used as a tool for dominance and bullying against anyone from Dongola, especially during conflicts of interest or misunderstandings, regardless of the person's origin (Pasha, 2016:14). This derogatory view of the people of Dongola by other Arabs in Sudan was even directed against former President General Jafer Mohamed Nimeiry, who ruled from May 25, 1969, to April 6, 1985, with the insult that a 'Dongolawi' (a man from Dongola) could not rule over them.

After his dismissal, Mohamed Ahmed sought out another Sheikh named Gorashi from the same order but

¹Fatimah El-Zahra is a daughter of the prophet Mohamed.

in a different area, who accepted him without conditions. When El-Sheikh Sharif realized this, he asked Mohamed Ahmed to return as a forgiven student, but Mohamed Ahmed declined, stating that he was not interested because he was not guilty. The story quickly spread across Sudan, garnering widespread sympathy and elevating Mohamed Ahmed's stature as a great and heroic figure in the eyes of the people. Now, Mohamed Ahmed began to build his confidence, focusing on self-development, and eventually migrated to Kordofan, where he became the only scholar. From there, he started sending messages to his followers, urging them to do two things: (1) devote themselves to Allah for spiritual purification and (2) disobey the government, which he claimed was corrupt and led by Kufar (godless people).

A few years later, his teacher El-Gorashi passed away, which further solidified Mohamed Ahmed's position as the only remaining scholar. Around this time, Abdullah Mohamed, from the Arab El-Taeisha tribe, who would later become Mohamed Ahmed's deputy, claimed that he saw in him the qualities of El-Mahdi (Pasha, 2016:52). This claim further motivated Mohamed Ahmed, who was seeking such recognition and praise. The two religious men, Mohamed Ahmed and Abdullah Mohamed, became close friends, with Mohamed Ahmed confiding in Abdullah that the time for Allah had come. To legitimize his spiritual authority, Mohamed Ahmed claimed that Allah had led him to meet other prophets and had blessed him as the successor to the Prophet Mohamed. Abdullah El-Taeisha, who came from another region, immediately believed and supported him, with the hope of becoming his successor in case anything happened. El-Taeisha worked diligently to mobilize and recruit others, especially his people, to believe in Mohamed Ahmed as the El-Mahdi.

THE ROOT CAUSES OF EL-MAHDIYYA REVOLUTION

Since its conquest by the Turco-Egyptian condominium in 1821, Sudan has experienced significant progress politically, socially, economically, and religiously. Politically, the government collaborated with European countries and contracted experts from Great Britain, Austria, and other nations (Mading, 2012; Pasha, 2016). This progress was spearheaded by British explorer David Livingstone, who led expeditions to discover the sources of the White Nile River. Other notable officials included Samuel Baker, the first Governor of the Equatorial Province, based in Gondocoro (now Juba). He was succeeded by General Charles Gordon, who became the Governor-General of Sudan and was later assassinated by El-Mahdiyya in January 1885. Another key figure was Austrian officer General Salathin Pasha, who was appointed Governor of Darfur and fell into El-Mahdiyya captivity for 10 years (Pasha, 2016; Harrell, 2010; Deng, 2003; Jendia, 2002). Many other European officials employed by the government also faced criticism from

religious leaders for their involvement in suppressing slave raids.

Socially, the government, through these governors, made efforts to combat the raiding and enslaving of African tribes. They established military posts along the Nile River and other key routes to eliminate those involved in raiding activities (Mading, 2012; Yoh, 2002). However, having non-Muslims in top leadership positions in a Muslim country was considered Haram (illegal) by Mohamed Ahmed and Abdullah Mohamed El-Taeishi.

Economically, the government initiated agricultural projects and facilitated trade by exporting and importing goods through Egypt, the Red Sea, and other ports (Pasha, 2016; Harrell, 2010).

From a religious perspective, European countries were pressured by the church to influence the Turco-Egyptian condominium government to allow Christian missionaries to operate freely. Consequently, the Vatican, led by Verona Fathers, sent Maltese and Italian priests and nuns. Catholic missionaries established mission centers in various locations, including Khartoum, El-Obeid, Dilliny, and Holy Cross among the Aliab and Cic-Dinka, and in Gondocoro among the Bari. They introduced non-Islamic education for the first time (Werner et al., 2010).

Although the government facilitated the spread of Islam in remote areas, Muslim Sufis felt uncomfortable with this development. Fanatical Sufis, including Mohamed Ahmed and Abdullah El-Taeishi, were particularly aggrieved. They perceived existing differences between the middle and lower classes. According to their perspective, the middle class of government officials was corrupt, and the lower class of Derawish (Sufis) should rebel.

Mohamed Ahmed, a prominent Sufi, capitalized on this situation and his growing popularity. He identified four issues with the government that he believed needed to be addressed: (a) the collection and management of taxes were against the Islamic system; (b) government officials exhibited European cultural behaviors; (c) official Islamic scholars were aligned with the corrupt government; and (d) the system of administration was based on tribal and regional affiliations rather than Islamic principles.

Through these points and others, Mohamed Ahmed found a solid foundation that led him to be recognized as El-Mahdi, who would save the nation. Within a short period, he established his government's principles, emphasizing that they superseded all Tariqas (orders), congregationalism, tribalism, and regionalism, as his inspiration came directly from Allah as the successor of the Prophet Muhammad. El-Mahdi went further by declaring his theocratic rule, combining both political and religious authority (Shugeir, 1981; Bashir, 1987; Pasha, 2016). He openly proclaimed that anyone who rejected his Mahdism was a Kafer (godless) and deserved to face Jihad (holy war), while those who died in Jihad would immediately enter paradise. These principles quickly gained traction and motivated the Derawish, resulting in an overwhelming response from thousands of Mujahidin

who joined his army.

However, El-Sheikh Sharif, his former teacher, observed Mohamed Ahmed's rise with concern. He warned that Mohamed Ahmed was driven by a greed for power and that his increasing ambitions were problematic. According to El-Sheikh Sharif, Satan had influenced him through pride, leading him to believe he was the only rightful leader on earth and the expected Mahdi (Shugeir, 1981:323). El-Sheikh Sharif also warned Raouf Pasha, the Governor of Ameriyya, but the governor dismissed these warnings, viewing them as personal disagreements and jealousy over Ahmed's growing popularity.

EL-MAHDIYYA VICTORIES

In 1881, from Kordofan, El-Mahdi began to tour various areas, visiting leaders of other Sufi Orders. The issue of tax collection was a key factor that quickly enabled him to recruit Derawish to his side (Shugeir, 1981; Bashir, 1987). Pasha (2016:56) further explains that General Governor Gordon appointed a Sudanese businessman named Alias to the title of Pasha and tasked him with tax collection. El-Mahdi and his followers accused Alias of corruption, favoritism, and nepotism, claiming he appointed his relatives to high positions and enriched himself at the expense of others. These grievances, combined with the general discontent with the government's lack of effective leadership and clear objectives, motivated El-Mahdi to declare Jihad against the government.

On 29 June 1881, Mohamed Ahmed declared himself El-Mahdi and proclaimed a new creed: (a) There is no god but Allah, (b) Mohamed is the Prophet of Allah, and (c) Mohamed El-Mahdi is the successor of Allah's Prophet. He told his followers that purifying Islam required removing the oppressive Turks (Werner et al., 2010:149). Over the next three and a half years, from June 1881 to December 1884, El-Mahdi recruited a large army from the Derawish, allowing him to control major parts of Sudan from west to east. When the government in Khartoum recognized the threat, it sent two battalions to Aba to capture him. However, Mohamed Ahmed, through his network of spies, informers, and underground supporters, surprised the government forces and defeated them decisively. This victory was a crucial milestone that increased his followers' trust in him, as he assured them that paradise awaited those who died in Jihad as a reward from Allah.

On 8th September 1881, El-Mahdi relocated his forces and marched to El-Obeid, the capital of Kordofan. However, before he could occupy the city, his forces suffered a severe defeat, resulting in the loss of thousands of followers, including his own brother Mohamed, El-Khalifa Abdullah's brother Youssef, the senior judge, and other princes. Despite this, El-Mahdi's forces continued to surround the town for five months,

causing the deaths of hundreds due to hunger and disease (Pasha, 2016:79). Simultaneously, his forces attacked other areas in the region, such as Dilliny and Bara, which could not continue resisting. Consequently, the Turkish Governor Mohamed Saed Pasha, lacking support from Khartoum, surrendered El-Obeid to El-Mahdi.

In Dilliny, El-Mahdi's forces, led by Mekk Umdar, captured the Christian Mission's Centre, taking priests and nuns, including Father Ohrwalder and Father Bonomi, into captivity. The Nuba Christians who were captured were forcibly converted to Islam, violating the Quranic verse "La Ikraha Fi Din" (there is no compulsion in religion). Young boys were conscripted into El-Mahdi's army, while girls were made concubines for the officers; two of the most beautiful girls became El-Mahdi's concubines (Werner et al., 2010; Pasha, 2016).

El-Fashir, the capital of the Darfur region, remained outside El-Mahdiyya's control, having lost over 90% of its fighting forces. As a result, Salathiin Pasha, the Austrian Governor, was forced to surrender, convert to Islam, and was given the name Abdul-Ghader (Pasha, 2016; Werner et al., 2010).

In Eastern Sudan, El-Mahdi's forces, under the command of Osman Digna, captured several towns, including Sinkat and Sawakin. In 1884, from El-Obeid, El-Mahdi and his deputy El-Khalifa led a large army of Derawish towards Khartoum to confront the British General Charles Gordon, the Governor General of Sudan. After several battles, El-Mahdiyya captured Omdurman on the western bank of the Nile in December 1884. Finally, on 26th January 1885, after the fall of all garrisons surrounding Khartoum, General Gordon was killed in the corridor of his palace while wearing full military uniform and his head was severed. The fall of Khartoum marked the beginning of the El-Mahdiyya government under the leadership of El-Mahdi, fulfilling the movement's ambitions.

EL-MAHDIYYA RULE AND EL-MADI'S DEATH

El-Mahdi's ambitions extended beyond Sudanese borders. His goal was to conquer Mecca and establish a theocratic government for the entire world. To achieve this, his first step was to attack Egypt, which would enable him to reach Mecca (Hejaz), Sham, and Palestine. Consequently, he wrote letters to Hussein Pasha Khalifa at the border (Aswan), inviting him to join his cause, as well as to other Muslim leaders, including El-Haj Abdullah El-Kahal in Sham and various leaders in Morocco, appointing Mohamed El-Ghal as their prince.

Although El-Mahdiyya became a reality and many people began to visit him from the Middle East and India, he was also ignored by many others. El-Mahdi established religious principles that were primarily aimed at self-glory and power consolidation, especially under his successor El-Khalifa Abdullah El-Taeisha. The general

instructions were that each Muslim should avoid worldly attractions and strictly observe the five daily prayers. Other rules were imposed that every follower had to abide by. Consequently, people feared not out of love for religion or the government, but because any accused of backsliding, rebellion, or betrayal faced no mercy and was often executed (Pasha, 2016). In July 1885, El-Mahdi suddenly fell ill and died a few days later at the age of 43.

EL-KHALIFA RULE AS EL-MAHDI SUCCESSOR

The Islamic system established by El-Mahdi had to be followed. Therefore, after his burial, his deputy, now known as El-Khalifa Abdullah El-Taeisha, took over as the successor. Immediately, El-Khalifa requested their *Mubayya'a*².

Meaning, the followers had to swear an oath of absolute submission to his authority. According to Pasha (2016), unlike El-Mahdi, who was a scholar in religion, El-Khalifa had very little knowledge of Islam. He combined limited religious knowledge with dictatorship and a focus on personal power. Consequently, his government lacked freedom and he issued decrees with no legal basis. The role of his official judges was merely to confirm cases without analysis, creating opportunities for division and manipulation among followers. General Pasha, who spent ten years at the gate of El-Khalifa's house, observed that after the capture of Khartoum, religion was used to fulfill personal interests, and immorality became rampant. Many officials owned numerous concubines, with El-Khalifa having over 200 wives and concubines in addition to his four official wives and those he had divorced. Pasha (2016) and Mading (2006) noted that such practices were common in both Arab and African cultures. This immoral lifestyle became a part of the El-Mahdiyya government system and contributed to the spread of sexually transmitted diseases. In further religious decrees, El-Khalifa canceled the pilgrimage to Mecca and promoted the tomb of El-Mahdi in Omdurman as a holy site, claiming that it represented the Prophet Muhammad's presence. This was controversial because, in Islam, pilgrimage to Mecca is not only about visiting the Prophet Muhammad's tomb but also about the Kaaba (black stone).

The situation deteriorated to the point where if El-Khalifa became angry with anyone, including his closest friends, he would imprison them without legal charges and show no mercy. He often subjected them to humiliation and prevented their relatives from mourning them. For those he executed, such as his former friends Zeki Thombol and Judge Ahmed, he issued orders that they be buried with their backs toward Mecca,

symbolizing their exclusion from Islam and eternal damnation. The government became dominated by his tribesmen from the El-Taeisha and other nobles known as Ashraf, creating a class-based society divided along ethnic lines. The hierarchy included Ashraf at the top, followed by Mulazimeen (attaches), sometimes called Ansar (supporters), Atbaa (followers), and slaves.

Under El-Khalifa's rule, the El-Mahdi family felt marginalized and plotted a coup against him. However, in this oppressive environment, their plans were betrayed. Despite this, they prepared for battle, which resulted in casualties on both sides. To calm the situation, El-Khalifa agreed to reconciliation with promises to share power with the El-Mahdi family, but he soon reneged, turning the state management into a means of personal protection for himself and his family.

The revival of slavery, which had been suppressed during General Gordon's rule, became widespread under El-Khalifa, affecting black Africans in Darfur, Ethiopia, Northern Upper Nile, Southern Blue Nile, and the Nuba Mountains.

Ahmed (2009) noted that the population of the Nuba Mountains dropped from 50,000 in 1880 to 25,000 by 1898 due to these conditions. Tribes that attempted to surrender to El-Khalifa's rule for protection were not spared from raids.

Slaves under the government had no rights, including ownership of property, marriage, or the ability to testify in court, and faced numerous abuses, as Islam did not extend these privileges to them (Pasha, 2016).

Externally, the El-Mahdiyya government became a concern and a threat to the world. European citizens could not visit or pass through Sudan, and those who attempted to do so often fell into captivity, where they either remained imprisoned or died from killing, hunger, and disease. Abdul-Ghader, the former Governor of Darfur, found that his conversion to Islam and submission to El-Mahdiyya did not protect him from imprisonment for the next ten years. He faced numerous accusations and was subjected to house arrest and chains, spending his days at the gate of El-Khalifa's house and practicing the five daily prayers until his escape to Egypt in February 1895.

THE FALL OF EL-MAHDIYYA AND THE ROLE OF EUROPEAN COLONIAL

Great Britain considered itself the dominant power in the Nile Valley, extending its control from Alexandria to the Great Lakes in Eastern Africa. Following the assassination of General Gordon, there was a significant reaction and plans to end the extremist religious movement of El-Mahdiyya. This response was part of broader agreements among European countries, which divided Africa into colonial zones.

In 1895, France established colonial outposts such as Fashoda on the western bank of the White Nile and

² El-Mubayya'a is an Islamic term means commitment for absolute submission otherwise; who does not comply is an absolute enemy to be deal with through Jihad.

Wau in western Southern Sudan as part of its territorial expansion from Central Africa. Other French entries included Naser on the Sobat River in the east, extending from Djibouti (Shugeir, 1981; Johnson, 1993, 1995). Italy also began colonizing Eritrea and Somalia, while Germany had established a presence in Tanganyika (Tanzania), particularly in the Kilimanjaro region and Arusha. Belgium occupied significant portions of western South Sudan, including Juba (Gondocoro-Rajaf), and extended across the Jabel River (White Nile) to create the Lado Enclave, with Mangala as its capital. Belgian occupation continued until 1917 (Wheeler, 1982). The Abyssinian Empire, through an agreement with the British in 1902, also gained control over the Gambella region in Eastern Upper Nile (Johnson, 2010).

These global developments in the Nile Valley prompted Great Britain to take decisive action to end the extremist Islamic government. After political treaties were signed with the aforementioned countries, Britain planned a serious military campaign in cooperation with Egypt. This led to the majority of El-Mahdiyya leaders being killed in battle or committing suicide. Consequently, after the fall of El-Mahdiyya in 1898, the succeeding government was known as the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium rule, which lasted for 58 years until January 1956.

EL-MAHDIYYA CONTEXTUAL IMPACT ON THE SUDAN TODAY

To this day, Sudanese opinions are divided between two ideologies:

(a) Some still believe that El-Mahdiyya represented a genuine theocratic government that ruled Sudan and that its principles should be reapplied. Consequently, El-Mahdi's family is held in high esteem and reverence, not merely as national leaders but as divinely inspired individuals. According to this belief, people may seek blessings by kissing their hands, and followers even use the dust from El-Mahdi's family members' feet as a form of blessing.

(b) Others view El-Mahdi as a historical figure who, despite using a spiritual title, was essentially a national revolutionary leader. While Mohamed Ahmed used religious rhetoric and achieved liberation for his people from foreign rule, his use of religion was akin to that of any other fanatic Muslim leader, without any special divine inspiration."

THE USE OF RELIGION IN THE MODERN SUDAN

Since its independence in 1956, Sudan has been ruled by several governments, with religion often at the forefront of their agendas (Mohamed, 2013). For example, the two major religious parties, the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) and UMMA, are led by the El-

Khatomiyya and El-Mahdiyya religious families. In every free and fair election, these parties have typically competed for the parliamentary majority. Additionally, the three military regimes, starting with Ibrahim Abboud from 1958 to 1964, were characterized by Islamic rule. A similar scenario occurred under General Jaafar Nimeiry, who began his rule as a liberal on May 25, 1969. However, after surviving several coup attempts, Nimeiry signed a peace agreement with opposition religious parties, forming the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) in 1977. As a result, Nimeiry declared himself a devout Muslim in September 1983, proclaimed Sudan an Islamic State, and assumed the title of Imam (Jendia, 2002; Mading, 2019). When the National Islamic Front (NIF) realized that the elected democratic government was poised to sign a peace agreement with the Southern Sudan rebels of the Sudan People's Liberation Movement and Army (SPLM/A), it seized power through a military coup on July 30, 1989. Consequently, the military government under General Omar Hassan El-Bashir implemented an Islamic agenda."

Mading (2019) explored the similarities between the El-Mahdiyya and NIF governments. The NIF, like the El-Mahdiyya government, targeted tertiary education as a key site for recruiting youth into Jihad. Students were not only sent to military training and war zones but were also encouraged to write dedication letters to their most beloved family members. These letters typically contained reassurances that their sacrifice would be rewarded with paradise as martyrs for Allah (El-Sadiq and El-Musbah, 1999). After the deaths of hundreds of thousands of these students, the Mujahidin's letters were compiled and published in a series of books titled *Resail El-Suhada* ("Martyrs' Messages") to bolster the morale of families and encourage more students and youth to join Jihad.

Southern Sudan was thus divided into two categories: (1) Areas under government control were called Dar El-Islam (the Islamic Land), and (2) Areas under rebel control were termed Dar El-Harb (the Land of War) to be cleansed and purified from the rebels' influence.

Since 1953, two years before independence, up to 2012, Sudan has had 12 constitutions: 1953, 1958, 1964, 1973, 1985, 1989, 1998, 2005, and 2012. These constitutions were categorized as temporal, interim, or permanent. Observers and nationalists consider the constitutions of 1973, 1998, and 2005 to be the most favourable because they guaranteed the rights of minority groups³. At the same time, all the constitutions agreed that Islam is the official religion of the state, and Arabic is the official language, with English also in use (Mohamed, 2013). Table 1 compares the El-Mahdiyya government (1881-1898) with the National Islamic Front government (1989-2019), as described by El-Jack and Kamer (2005).

³The term minority has two meanings; (1) the minority ethnics who have no political say. (2) The Minority religions who are non-Muslims like Coptic from Egyptian background and the African traditional religious.

Table 1. Comparison of the El-Mahdiyya government (1881–1898) with the National Islamic Front government (1989–2019).

S/N	Mahdiyya Government 1881-1898	Ingaz/NIF Government 1989-2019
1	Jihad against Turko-Egyptian rule and non-Muslims	Jihad against rebels in Southern Sudan and non-Islamists
2	Defending the doctrine and the Islamic brotherhood.	Defending Islam the only religion and brotherhood.
3	Defending land of Islam and the Doctrine.	Defending the Doctrine and the land.
4	Scholars and teachers were the Jihad leaders.	Academicians joined training for Jihad and operations.
5	Being a Mujahid was the first condition for the study.	Students from 18 years have to join training before university.
6	Al-Mahdi was the Mujahidin teacher of principles.	All Islamic scholars were devoted in training al-Mujahidin.
7	Mujahidin trained for suicides operations for paradise.	Mujahidin were oriented that their death is the way to paradise.
8	Mujahidin evening hours for reading the Quran and prayers.	Mujahidin being grouped during the five times prayers.
9	There was special care for Jihad leaders and families.	Priority for the Shura leaders and Shuhada families.
10	Al-Mahdi opened school for Mujahidin students only.	Defaa Shaabi and Surta Shaabyya were trained for jihad only.
11	Night clubs were closed and undisciplined youth were punished.	Non-Islamic markets were closed and youth were taken to Jihad trainings and war zones without salary.
12	El-Mahdi ordered traders to use their money for feeding Mujahidin <i>Zad El-Mujahid</i> .	The government ordered traders to feed El-Mujahidin in program of <i>Zad El-Mujahid</i> .
13	Mysteries families were provided with monthly salary.	Al-Sahed organization was established to support mysteries families.
14	There were Mujahidin group in every area for protection (El-Jack:93-98)	Lijan El-Shaabya are the security agencies in every area (Kamer 2005:113)

THE EFFECT OF RELIGIOUS MOTIVATION ON THE SUDAN REGIONALLY AND GLOBALLY

Islamic extremism strained Sudan's relations with other Arab, African, and Western countries. For example, after the 1995 assassination attempt on Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa, Egyptian troops immediately occupied the Halaib Triangle in northeastern Sudan (Sater, 2010). This action compounded Egypt's accusations against Sudan for hosting Omer Abdurrahman, the Egyptian founder of the Islamic Jihad Organization. Saudi Arabia responded to Sudan's hosting of Osama Bin Laden by tightening visa restrictions for Sudanese nationals, who were then classified into two groups: opponents of the government and loyalists (Zein El-Abedeem, 2006).

Relations with Tunisia, Algeria, and Libya were similarly strained. Tunisia, for instance, withdrew its ambassador from Khartoum in protest. Additionally, Sudan had issued a diplomatic passport to Rashid El-Ghannouchi, the Tunisian Islamic opposition leader (Sudan Strategic Report, 1996). Algeria accused Sudan of supporting Islamic movements responsible for numerous atrocities and genocide, while Libya rebuked Sudan for hosting

Libyan Islamists under the Arabic-Islamic Congress.

With Uganda, both military governments attempted to undermine each other through support for rebel groups, leading to a diplomatic standoff in April 1995. Uganda accused the Sudanese Air Force (SAF) of operating in Ugandan territory against the SPLA, while Sudan openly supported the Ugandan rebels, the Lord's Resistance Army (LRA).

Relations with Eritrea were smooth until 1994, when Eritrea perceived Sudan's push to establish Islamic rule in Eritrea through the Eritrean Jihad Islamic Movement. According to Zein El-Abedeem (2006), Sudanese leaders aimed to install a loyalist of the Islamic movement as Eritrea's Head of State. In response, the Eritrean government granted its embassy buildings to the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) opposition and supported the SPLA in various ways.

The Sudanese religious extremism created concerns for the European Union's interests. According to Collins (2010), the EU Foreign Ministers issued a decree sanctioning the export of military logistics to Sudan based on three grounds: (a) Sudan had hosted Osama Bin Laden, the leader of the al-Qaeda Islamic movement, for several years; (b) Sudan had also hosted leaders of the

Palestinian Islamic movements Hamas and Islamic Jihad; and (c) The international terrorist Carlos the Jackal (*Ilich Ramírez Sánchez*) lived in Khartoum until he was arrested and handed over to the French government in a political deal⁴.

The Sudanese economy was negatively impacted by deteriorating relations with neighbouring countries and the international community. Despite this, the government maintained its Islamic program. The national currency was changed from the Pound to the Dinar to align it with other Arab currencies. Influenced by these countries, the Security Council issued several resolutions and sanctions against Sudan (Resolutions 1044, 1054, and 1070). In 1996, the USA imposed a ban on Sudanese military personnel entering the country. In 1998, the USA expelled Sudanese diplomats from Washington. Additionally, the international community discovered Sudan's involvement in supporting slavery activities against certain ethnic groups within the country.

CONCLUSION

Religious extremism, particularly in the form of Islam, has historically served as a tool for recruiting followers in Sudan. It has also been a divisive factor, elevating certain ethnic groups above others, as demonstrated by El-Mahdiyya in the 19th century and by the National Islamic Front (NIF) government until its fall in 2019. Consequently, this divisiveness led to the separation of South Sudan in 2011, splitting the largest country in Africa and the 10th largest in the world (Jendia, 2002). The use of religion intertwined with ethnic affiliation continues to pose a significant threat, with potential for further fragmentation, especially among those who feel politically and economically marginalized. The claim of Arab origin as superior to African origins is particularly evident in regions such as Darfur, South Kordofan, Southern Blue Nile, and the Eastern Beja regions. This article advises the people of Sudan to focus on common national interests. Their freedom of worship, choice of religion, beliefs, and intermarriage should foster a sense of unity and strengthen the nation's cohesion.

CONFLICT OF INTERESTS

The authors have not declared any conflict of interests.

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⁴Foreign affairs documentation archive, European humanitarians paper, 1996