

The Intellectual Fosters of the Sudanese Nationalism

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ABSTRACT: This article deals with a socio-cultural, historical and political topic. It dwells on the schools of thought that had heralded the main intellectual trends which laid the foundation stone for the birth of advanced awareness about a ‘Sudanese nationalism’. Al-Fajr (i.e. the dawn) school of thought in 1930s, for instance, ushered in a new current of thought which encompassed different intellectual trends interacted with regional and international developments. These intellectual currents – through the ‘Graduate Clubs’ and the press – had exerted vital efforts to liberate the people from the domination of the traditional power, to lead religious revivalism and herald renaissance. One outcome of those efforts was the emergence of the first Sudanese Political parties in mid 1940s – notably the Umma Party and the National Unionist Party. These political parties had mobilized political participation, triggered intensive enlightenment and ignited the nationalist movement that culminated into independence in mid 1950s. Through historical and descriptive method this article explains the Egyptian impact as well as the British influence throughout the course of forming the Sudanese nationalism. If the Egyptian educational and cultural impact on the Arab countries is great, it is greater on Sudan through different tools and means. It tries to answer the question: what are the political and intellectual currents which inspired nationalism in the Sudan? It believes that the Egyptian impact on the formation of the Sudanese nationalism is so discernible.

KEYWORDS: Sudanese nationalism, colonialism, intellectuals, British influence, Egyptian impact, Graduates’ Clubs

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Introduction

■ **The Sudan is an outcome of a long process of interaction between indigenous Negroid and Hamitic elements of African origin and the Semitic elements. It was an interaction of Nubian and Mediterranean civilizations. This crossbreeding has produced the Afro-Arab synthesis of the present Sudan.**

So, Sudan is a blend of Arab culture, Islamic religion and African environment. It is a complex of diverse cultural trends that need to be harmonized to yield strength, otherwise would endanger its national cohesion. Sudanese nationalism has been a movement of cultural intercourse reflecting this dynamic synthesis. This national composition reached its climax in the *Mahdiyya* state when the strong coherence to Islamic feeling by the Sudanese people acted as a unifying factor.

The Roots and Characteristics of the Sudanese Nationalism

The European 19th century phase of nationalism had been expressed in varied forms of ideologies of democracy, communism and fascism, while modern global forms of nationalism were expressed in pan-Islamism, pan-Arabism, African personality and National Independence. These are progressive forms of nationalism of post-colonial Africa and the third world in general (Abu Saq, 2001, p. 1). One scholar argues that “Nationalism developed from closed conservative form dominated by the upper classes to liberal Parliamentary nationalism of the middle classes and ultimately to social revolutionary nationalism of the masses of the developing world” (Abu Saq, 2001).

In 20th century Asia, Africa and Latin America, a link was made between the ideals of modernisation and nationhood. The formation of the National Congress in India in 1885 and proclamation of the “National Pact” in Turkey in 1920, and the National Revolution in Mexico in 1929, were landmarks in the spread of national ideals to Asia, Africa and Latin America (Sills, 1972, p. 9). In spite of the fact that nationalism spread from Europe to the rest of the world, it took different shapes. Hence, two types of nationalism are distinguished: a closed conservative nationalism and an open progressive nationalism: “The open form of nationalism is a modern and forward looking intercourse

that builds bridges over separations of the past. It is based on emancipation, assimilation and mobility” (Abu Saq, 2001). It is best exemplified by the United States of America. The Sudan is like America an open society of different religions, races and cultural traditions.

The British tried to combat Arab Nationalism led by Mustafa Kamil upon his return from France in 1894. He established *Al-Hizb Al-Watani* (the patriotic party) in 1908. Arab national consciousness flourished and radiated from Egypt to other parts of the Arab world. Sudan was the most influenced one due historical factors which were, later on, fostered by the fact that Egypt was a co-coloniser of Sudan (1899–1956) – known as “the Condominium Rule”.

However, the roots of this impact dates back to pre-Condominium era. The nationalist movement in the Sudan was influenced by the Arab nationalism of Egypt and *Al-Sham* for the link through the Ottoman Empire. It was also influenced by Pan-Islamism of Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani (1839–1897) and Al-Sheikh Muhammad Abdu (1849–1905). Their student Muhammad Rashid Rida (1865–1935) believed that Arab Nationalism “could be reconciled with Islamic unity” (Horani, 1970, pp. 300–301). He proudly affirms the identity of Islam and Arabism. Using *Al-Manar* (published in Cairo in 1898) Rida spread his ideas, which drew on Sunni-Hanbalism with emphasis on the teachings of Ibn Taymiyya and Al-Ghazali. Like Abdu he was also critical of Sultan Abdul Hamid for his “personal despotism and propagation of a false kind of Islam” (Horani, 1970, p. 303).

Arab writers and thinkers between the two world wars and after namely Ahmad Amin, Abbas Mahmoud al-Aqqad, Tewfik al-Hakim, Abdulgadir al-Mazzini and Taha Hussein, were also fascinated by the European ideas and principles of humanism and democracy. Taha Hussein formed a bridge between the line of thought initiated by Abdu and the ideas of Lutfi al-Sayyid to latest generations who formulated the base for social thought and political action in the Arab countries for decades” (Horani, 1970, p. 325).

This current of thought transmitted to Sudan through the Egyptian press, Sudanese elite who studied in Egypt and Egyptian teachers who were employed in Sudanese schools since the beginning of the 20th century. The ties between Egypt and

the Sudan actually date back to ancient times. For centuries Egypt acted “both as a funnel through which foreign ideas filtered southwards and as a source of inspiration for a sizeable segment of Sudanese intellectuals in more modern times” (Abdin, 1985, p. 4).

The modern Sudan as a nation state dates back to the Turku-Egyptian period (1821–1881). During the Mahdist period, Sudan started to move in the direction of common identity. “The nucleus of a Sudanese nation state established by the Mhad-iyya did not incorporate all parts of the present Sudan” (Hurreiz, 1989, p. 88). However, Mahdist state (1885–1898) was dismantled by the British colonial administration. “Social mobility and inter-ethnic interaction, linguistic and religious as well as other factors which tend to foster common identity were obstructed by colonial policies” (Hurreiz, 1989, p. 88). It was in 1930s that the educated elite in Khartoum, Omdurman and other urban centres adopted counter ideologies geared to promote national unity and weaken ethnicity and sectionalism.

The multi-ethnic nature of the Sudanese society suggests a sociological interpretation of its nationhood. “Tribal and sectarian aristocracy of the Sudan asserted their leadership over early Sudanese nationalism. They boasted during the evolution of Sudan as a nation-state as sons of noble tribes and masters of the country (*awlad Qaba'il wa asyad balad*)” (Abu Saq, 2001, p. 2).

Muhammad Ahmed Mahjoub, a nationalist leader and twice a premier, argued that Sudanese Nationalism must be firmly based on Islam, Arabic culture and African soil and tradition; and that it should be open and free to interact with international currents of thought (Abu Saq, 2001, p. 2). Another scholar, Muddathir Abdul Rahim thinks that the Sudanese social synthesis is a product of the Islamisation which was carried out by missionary activities of a “wide spectrum of popular religious fraternity, or Sufi *tariqas* ... [which] have cut across tribal boundaries ... and achieved a remarkable degree of unity of purpose and outlook among their adherents” (Abdul Rahim, 1985, p. 232). However, this national unity which was fostered by Islamisation and Arabisation, did not extend to the South. Modern nationalism and the nationalist movement in the Sudan “originated and developed in the northern parts of the country among northern Sudanese” (Bashir, 1980, p. 5). This sectional formation of Sudanese nationalism, along with the British policy of ‘closed districts’, kept the South neglected and marginalised which had

a negative impact on South-North relation up to the present (the South seceded in July 2011).

The early rise of national consciousness and sentiment in the Sudan can be attributed to two interrelated factors: “firstly, the anomalous status of the country as an Anglo-Egyptian colony and, secondly, the rebirth of militant nationalism in Egypt after the World War I” (Abdin, 1985, p. i). The intellectual appeal of Egypt to the Sudanese intelligentsia stimulated the growth of nationalist ideas and associations at early stage of colonial period.

Some scholars see that two features characterise the emergence and growth of modern Sudanese nationalism: *first*, it came to being under a unique system of colonial rule – a partnership – known as Condominium. The dispute between the two colonial partners (Britain and Egypt) over the future of the Sudan awakened the nationalist thinking of the Sudanese educated class. *Second*, each partner had different approach and sometimes-conflicting policy towards the Sudan. The British tried to manipulate the traditional leaders and isolate the intelligentsia who leaned towards Egypt (Abdin, 1985, p. 4). The Sudan question was since its occupation in 1898 and as late as 1953 “... a thorny issue in the relationship between Britain and Egypt” (Abbas, 1952, p. 7). This period was dominated by Sudan Political Service, led by British officials; hence, the British Government adopted policies unilaterally, as Egypt was a nominal partner.

Since its outset one of the main targets and policy issues of the colonial administration was to uproot Mahdism by eradicating its intellectual influence in the Sudan. The colonial administration was generally worried about the spread of pan-Islamism, which was then prevalent in the Arab world. To that end the Sudan Government tried to separate Sudan from Egypt. Hence, the British administration had to “enhance its stronghold by religious justifications as far as it was dealing with a Muslim society” (Al-Buni, 1998, p. 22).

This policy was supported by government supporters such as those of *Jaridat al-Sudan* and its editor Mahmoud al-Gabbani; and *Hadarat al-Sudan* which was owned by the three sectarian leaders: Sayyid Ali al-Mirghani, Sayyid Abdurrahman al-Mahdi and Sayyid al-Sheriff al-Hindi. This group had supported that British (anti-Mahdist) policy. Those editors and their papers criticised Mahdism. They described al-Mahdi and his Khalifa Abdul-lahi as despots. They called upon the government not to employ the Ulama who had cooperated with the Mahdiyya. They also, particularly Qabbani, criticized the link to Egypt which was a mere

subordinate to the Ottoman viceroy. He hailed the Sudan government on its constitutional development towards self-rule (*Jaridat al-Sudan*, 28 June, 1903).

Hussein Sheriff also believed that the previous governments (prior to the British) failed to maintain law and order. About pan-Islamism he noted that it is an outdated idea and Muslims are disunited. Consequently, every *umma* (nation) turned to call for *wataniyya* (statehood) (*Hadarat al-Sudan*, 13 May 1919). *Al-Hadara* adopted patriotic line with a secular flavour. However, during the 1st World War the British Government needed the cooperation of Abdul-Rahman al-Mahdi to mobilise a mass Sudanese support to Great Britain in the war.

On the other hand, being aware of the British military superiority, Sayyid Abdul-Rahman adopted a policy of appeasement, maneuvering and manipulation with the government stimulated by her need of him to mobilise a popular support. He was pragmatic enough to establish good relations with the British governors in Sudan and secretaries (C.A. Willis: the director of intelligence 1914–1926, Geoffrey Archer: the Governor-General 1924–1926, and Symes 1934–1940). Hence, he was able to reorganise a neo-Mahdism based on constitutionalism dictated by political realities. Then he consolidated his position politically and economically. He toured Gezira, conducted a cautious campaign, mobilised adherents and organized Mahdist followers into a religious sect or '*tariqa*' (the *Sufist/s*). It constituted the other polar *vis-à-vis* the Khatmiyya in party politics that had dominated the political scene for decades. The *Ansar*, and their political organ, the Umma party, constituted one of the mainstreams for the nationalist movement and eventually independence.

The non-militant approach of Abdurrahman's neo-Mahdism left a vacuum in the field of national resistance. It was a new modern and educated class which was to step in to fill the vacuum.

However, the government's suppression of educational progress after the 1924 uprising left the intelligentsia weak and disillusioned. Even the graduates' clubs were closed in 1926. By 1927 Abdurrahman was ready to step in and assume the political leadership of the intelligentsia, with which he has already been in touch when he was the proprietor of *Al-Hadara* newspaper in the 1920s. Moreover, following the suppression of the 1924 revolt, some of once pro-Egyptian graduates became disillusioned with Egypt which let them down. Consequently, they were drawn to the Sayyid's politics of genuinely Sudanese nationalist movement,

which was in need of a leader. It was in this capacity that Al-Sayyid offered his services (Ibrahim, 1989, p. 187). He provided considerable assistance to the intellectuals' clubs and schools. *Da'irat Al-Mahdi* (his business enterprise) purchased a printing press to publish the *Ansar* publications as well as the literary and political works of the intellectuals. The other rival, Ali Al-Mirghani, did not challenge him in the field of the educated and politically minded young men.

The British policy was to secure the collaboration of religious groups or leaders who have influenced and could contribute to stability. Tribal and religious leaders were granted land and assisted in establishing agricultural schemes. Sayyid Abdurrahman al-Mahdi received allowances and business concessions from the Sudan Government in order to enhance his support. This policy resulted in cooperation between the Sudan Government and the religious leaders. Although Mahdism was declared illegal officially but actions were taken against it only where its activities in any area became 'subversive'.

The other group was anti-British and pro-Egypt eventually critical to traditional-sectarian leaders. This group was a product of education and modern sector. It formed its secret cell under the cover of '*Jameiyyat Al-Itihad Al-Sudani*' (the Society of the Sudanese Union). Its main goal was to resist the colonial government. It circulated leaflets accusing the government of tyranny and injustice. It also accused it of distorting indigenous religious values, and favouring the Christian missionaries (Abu Hassabu, 1985, p. 26). This trend was inspired by the revivalism and reformist ideas of Jamal Al-Din Al-Afghani and Muhammad Abdu who visited Sudan in 1905 and addressed the students of Gordon College (Al-Buni, 1998, p. 22).

Some educated Sudanese were influenced by the ideas of Mustafa Kamil which called for Islamic unity. The Sudanese also were interested in the political history of the Arab Islamic world. They read Abdulgadir Al-Jaza'iri, Muhammad Ibn Idris, and some of them defended the Ottoman Caliphate. Actually there was continuous process of political education to which many young Sudanese were exposed as a result of connections between Sudan and Egypt. Most of the students and graduates of the Gordon Memorial College "looked to Egyptian nationalists for inspiration and progressive ideas. The *Wafd* represented to them all that was 'liberal and modern'. They sympathised with its programme and adopted its tenets." (Kasha, 1985,

pp. 110–120). They looked forward to the day when they would follow its example.

Out of this political influence, the graduates of Gordon College nourished the nationalist movement. The most important contribution of the College to the growth of national sentiment is the fact that it “enabled many young Sudanese of different ethnic and social origins to think and act as a group. It was a melting pot which transcended traditional ties to new [nationalist] loyalties” (Abdin, 1985, p. 35). The formation of the Graduates’ Club of Omdurman in 1918 was one example of this group consciousness.

Members of the Graduates’ Club were held in high esteem and respect by society. A nationalist idea flourished and “power politics within the club in particular and the graduates’ rank in general, precipitated in the twenties and resulted in the formation of two major factions in the early thirties. One was the *Shawqiists* – headed by Muhammad Ali Shawqi and the other was the *Filists* – headed by Ahmed Al-Sayyid Al-Fil. The Faction led by Shawqi was supported by traditional tribal and religious leaders, specially Sayyid Abdurrahman and the Ulama besides the majority of older graduates (Abdin, 1985, p. 35). They represented the ‘moderate’ trend within the club and advocated cooperation with the government for peaceful change. The other faction, the *Filists*, a younger generation of graduates, was against cooperation with the Sudan Government as they believed in special relationship with Egypt. It was this faction which later developed the notion of the Unity of the Nile Valley. The *Filists* also declared “they were against cooperation with sectarianism as a reactionary force that hindered development and education”. They sided with Ali Al-Mirghani against the *Shawqiists* who received strong support from the Ansar” (Abu Hasabu, 1985, p. 38).

In that climate and within the graduates clubs flourished group discussions and literary associations formed as a reaction to harsh, anti-educational policies after the 1924 revolt. These groups provided the necessary ‘safe’ justification for the formation of circles and groupings and discussions of a literary and theoretical nature”. Their impact on the graduates later was important. Moreover, the educated class, through its knowledge of English and its contact with the outside world had “acquired certain abstract political ideas as well as habit of thinking politically about all concrete internal matters” (Abu Hasabu, 1985, p. 39).

This general awakening was influenced by the Egyptian national movement of 1919 and by

external factors during and after the 2nd World War; namely the impact of “the success of Communism in China, the emergence of the Eastern bloc of socialism, the birth of Israel, and the increased western interest of the oil in the Middle East” (Abu Hasabu, 1985, p. 41).

The end of the First World War “marked the emergence of Sudanese Nationalism which – to a greater extent – was influenced by Egyptian nationalism of Mustafa Kamil and Saad Zaghlul” (Atiyya, 1946, p. 163). Saad Zaghlul inspired nationalism of the Nile Valley when at negotiating with the British he stressed the future of the Sudan which was one of the four issues of reservation. When elected Prime Minister in 1923 he declared that he stood for the complete independence of Egypt and the Sudan. Consequently, the British Administration undertook a policy of ‘de-Egyptianisation’ in a bid to remove Egyptian influence from the Sudan. Subsequently, Sudanese replaced Egyptians in junior administrative posts as sub-mamurs. The British introduced the system of native administration through which local tribal leaders were brought in touch with the government institutions. This explains why traditional leaders became pro-British in the conflict over the Sudan question between Egypt and Britain.

Generally, under the Condominium rule (1899–1956) there were two phases of the Sudanese nationalism: prior to the 1924 revolt, which was a militant one, and post 1924 which was more pragmatic and reasonable. Hadn’t the nationalist movement been beset by factionalism, it could have been more effective and might have accelerated the drive toward independence.

There was tranquility in the nationalist movement between 1924 and 1936 – with exception of the strike of Gordon students of 1931 protesting the cut down in salaries due to the world recession of 1929–1931. The nationalist movement was revived by the 1936 Anglo-Egyptian Agreement when the Sudanese were neither represented nor consulted on the destiny of their country. Actually, in 1936 “there wasn’t any political organization that would maintain and defend the national interest” (Fabumi, 1973, p. 330). According to Muhammad Ahmed Mahjoub the Sudan throughout its modern history has always been directly influenced by popular movements in Egypt and the Middle East as Sudanese followed up these movements through the press. Hence, the first internal organisation, the Graduates’ Congress (*Muttamar Al-Khirrigin*) was named after that of India (Bashir, 1974, p. 63). The first call for the Sudanese Graduates Congress

was in June 1935 where the issue was raised by *Al-Sudan* newspaper; then followed by *Al-Fajr* magazine in May 1937, and was officially established in 1938. It was designed in the image of the Indian Congress or Egypt's Wafd Party to lead the nationalist movement in the Sudan.

The Role of the Intelligentsia

Since the establishment of the Condominium in 1899, the Sudanese have been "experiencing slowly, but steadily, economic and social progress together with political consciousness along western lines" (Mahjoub, 1989, p. 4). Soon after the 1st World War, signs of national consciousness began to show themselves in the Sudan, particularly among the Sudanese having western education (Ismail al-Azhari, the first Sudanese Prime Minister, is a product of the American University of Beirut). A number of societies and leagues came into being between 1921 and 1924 claiming either independence for the Sudan or a form of unity with Egypt. Among these was the White Flag League (WFL), which stood for freedom and unity of the Nile Valley and which was active in 1924. The WFL was mainly made up of young army officers, ex-students of Gordon College and government employees. It was headed by Ali Abdullatif (Mahjoub, 1989, p. 4). The revolt of the 1924, which was led by the WFL, was crushed. The Sudanese accused the Egyptian officers of failing the revolt. Others maintain that the failure of the league was due to the fact that the league neither sought nor indeed wished to ally itself with tribalism or religious sectarianism.

After the 1924 revolt the Sudan government adopted cautious policies towards the educated elite. Subsequently, the intelligentsia concentrated their activities on literary and social functions in the Graduates clubs of Omdurman and Wad Medani. These were reading and discussion groups, mostly of the graduates of the Gordon College, "with increased consumption of books and magazines ranging widely from literary criticism to politics. There was a great deal of interest in the Sudanese past and cultural life from the glorious of Meroe to folklore" (Fabumi, pp. 327–328). It was notable that the spirit of the Graduates' clubs was national consciousness transcending tribes and personalities.

So, following the harsh policies of the British Government after the 1924 revolt, the Sudanese nationalist movement adopted a new trend to build up resistance through enlightenment by literary

organs where metaphoric vocabulary was used in criticising the British Administration. More graduates' clubs came into being in Medani and Omdurman as well as in other parts of the country. The most prominent societies were two: Abu Rofians (those who belong to *Abu Rof* quarter of Omdurman which was led by Ahmed Khayr al-Muhami (the advocate), Khadir Hamad, Ismail al-Atabani, Abdullah Mirghani, Ibrahim Yusuf Sulaiman and Ma'awia Akkrat (Bashir, 1985, p: 123). This society participated in the Graduate's memorandum to the British Administration in 1942. The other society was the *Hashamab* which was led by Muhammad Ahmed al-Mahjoub, Abdulmuneim Muhammad, Yusuf Mustafa al-Tinay and Muhammad 'Ashri al-Sidiq. Then 'Ashri, established *Al-Fajr* magazine in 1934 in collaboration with 'Arafat Muhammad Abdullah.

The *Fajr* (the dawn) was the most intellectually oriented of the non-unionist groupings in the Sudan was founded by 'Arafat Muhammad 'Abdullah, Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahjoub (who became in 1960s prime minister), and his cousin 'Abdullah Muhammad, and 'Abdullah 'Ashri al-Sidiq. They used this name perhaps to denote looking forward to a new Sudan (Al-Jaali, 1998, p. 42). Because the main founder, 'Arafat, was a pro-Egyptian unionist, it was believed that Egypt was responsible for the emergence of the school. 'Arafat had before and during 1924 well known for his "die-hard unionism, as well as for being one of the leaders of the WFL, which was founded in May 1924 by both Sudanese and Egyptian nationalists in order to agitate against the British in the Sudan and to promote the cause of union between Egypt and the Sudan after the departure of the British from both countries" (Al-Amin, 1981, p. 1). During his stay in Egypt as the secretary of the WFL's branch in Cairo Arafat was accused of the assassination of Sir Lee Stack, the British Governor-General of the Sudan in November 1924, but – three months later – he was acquitted and released. He left Cairo for Hijaz, then to Sudan. "His impact on intellectual circles in the Sudan began with his contributions to *Al-Nahda* (renaissance)", (Al-Amin, 1981) a magazine which appeared on October 4, 1931 under the editorship of Muhammad Abbas Abul-Rish. *Al-Nahda* ceased publication with the death of Abul-Rish on December 11, 1932. 'Arafat founded his own magazine, *Al-Fajr*, on July 2, 1934 through which "he was able to articulate the anti-Egyptian and pro-independence aspirations in Sudan" (Al-Amin, 1981) 'Arafat was actually one of the educated unionists who turned against Egypt after

the 1924 revolt in which the Sudanese believed that the Egyptian officers let them down and this led to the failure of the revolt which also further strained relations between the British Government and the educated class. Edward Atiyya (a Lebanese who was a teacher at the Gordon College), who acted as a mediator between the two sides, came out with a conclusion bearing on psychological aspect – that the revolt of educated Sudanese against the British “was mainly emotional [...] aggravated by a burning inferiority-complex; that it was a revolt not against oppression, injustice or economic exploitation [...] but against spiritual arrogance, racial haughtiness, social aloofness and paternal authoritarianism [...]” (Attiyya, 1946, p. 163). However, later developments proved that the psychological factor was only a reflection of a wider resentment to foreign rule – a potent resistance that ended in attainment of full independence three decades later. According to Atiyya’s advice the British Government took a new socio-cultural approach in which he played a paramount role.

The activities of literary societies and discussion groups flourished. The Sudan Government adopted the literary approach to “influence the post-1924 leading figures, especially among the younger generations, and in order to avoid being considered by that generation as a stumbling-block in the path of their rising aspirations” (Ahmed Khair, 1970, p. 69). This is in addition to attract that generation to take side with British Government against Egypt in the dispute over the question of sovereignty over the Sudan. However, it resulted in the cleavage in the ranks of the educated as reflected by the split between the followers of the pro-Ansar (the Shawqist camp), and pro-Khatmiyya (the Filists) (Al-Amin, 1981, p. 5). This also provided the religious sects with chance to recruit the educated along with the Government’s interference which sided with the successors of Shawqi’s followers (i.e., the Fajr school) against the successors of those of al-Fil (i.e., the Abu Rof school and all other unionists). Thus the sectarian division of the country into Ansar and Khatmiyya and its political division into pro-independence and pro-union-with-Egypt group were now paralleled by a further division of the intelligentsia into those who were prepared to befriend members of the Sudan Government and indulge with them in their various cultural pursuits, and those who kept their distance from anything that has the slightest connection with the Government (Al-Amin, 1981, p. 4).

The split between the two groups of the intelligentsia was more a product of the Sudan Government

than an inherent one. Nonetheless, the two groups found enough common ground to set up joint cultural societies which did not last long because of the intervention of the government. They both shared the same intellectual interests, at least as far as literary matters were concerned, and they both longed for the day when tribalism and sectarianism would be eradicated or at least alleviated. Finally, “they both cherished the ideal of future Sudan that was secular, forward-looking, socially and politically democratic, and free from discord” (Al-Amin, 1981, p. 5).

The members of the Abu Rof School, together with ‘Arafat and M.A. Mahjoub, set up a society called the Society for Arts, Crafts and Debating, which did not last for long, “because of the participation of Atiya who was well known for his intelligence role, used to have link with Arafat and Mahjoub and, subsequently, the Fajr group as well” (Hamad, 1980, pp. 52–55). They had confidence in him and believed that he is a man of apparent patriotism. Consequently, the Fajr group has ever since been looked upon with suspicion particularly when it became clear that this group had been talking of a Sudanese identity as distinct from that of Egypt. They were able to defend themselves very well against all charges. Al-Fajr, who were a highly intelligent and extremely articulate group of educated young men who at a crucial juncture in Sudanese history – when in the wake of the 1924 defeat the country was suffering severely from the symptoms of shock, withdrawal and xenophobia – managed to open their minds and hearts in a genuine attempt to discover, understand and appreciate anything that could lead them (and the country) a sense of will, purpose and direction (Al-Amin, 1981, p. 6).

It was obvious that the Fajr group viewed themselves as the natural leaders of a younger generation who are better off than the elders with regard to general awareness and progressiveness of outlook. They claimed that they were potential and capable of ushering in a new and advanced era in Sudanese history. So they thought that they should be allowed to take the lead and be considered as the ‘vanguard’ of the younger generation of the Sudan. “We wish to see the enlightened generation taking an active part in the affairs of this country ... we should take part in molding our destinies...” (Al-Fajr, May 1, 1935). They believed that they were capable of setting up a new order.

Because of this radical stance on issues in relation to Sudan, the world and the universe, some scholars held that they paved the way for

the Sudanese communists and, hence, for the emergence of the Sudanese Movement for National Liberation (SMNL) in 1946. They were critical and believed in the “dialectical development of their society and in the necessity of using science and scientific method of research to effect that development” (Al-Fajr, June 1, 1935). They also encouraged trade unionism. They were revolutionary and so clashed with the dogmatic concept of Islam particularly with respect to the context of the Sudanese society at that time. They, for instance, called on women to abandon the veil and called for education of women to be in equal footing with men: “...women’s education, like that of men, is a sacred social duty which, above all else, is necessitated by reason” (Al-Amin, 1981, p. 11).

The members of the Fajr School were revolutionary in the sense that they called for radical change in the Sudanese society. They called, among other things, for scientific thinking and removing fetters by abolishing “stupid custom and paralyzing ‘bigotry’ which were only acting as a drag on the progress of the nation” (Al-Fajr, June 1, 1935). They charged those who had been calling for preservation of these outmoded customs “with doing so out of a nostalgic infatuation with the past” (Al-Amin, 1981, p. 8).

Through the writings of the Fajr School many scientific theories and philosophies found their way into Sudan. Hence, there was a popularisation of Darwin’s Theory of Evolution. They were engaged in westernizing their society at the social, cultural and intellectual levels. It is clear that they were influenced by some Egyptian writers such as Salama Musa, other Copts in Egypt and some Jews in Sudan such as Ibrahim Israeli (a member of the Fajr School) who wrote in *Al-Nahda* about Benjamin Kid, August Comte, and Herbert Spencer. The writers of the Fajr were not confined to one trend or western philosophy; they tried to combine oriental spiritualism with the rationalistic materialism of the west (Al-Amin, 1981, p. 14). But, the Abu Rofian faction of the Fajr school were Fabian rather than radical. The economic programme of the political wing, the Unionist party, called for social justice and other principles of socialism such as protecting the working classes against poverty, ignorance and diseases and raises their standard of living.

In spite of confronting a Muslim traditional society which was conservative and, hence, sensitive to foreign beliefs and thought, the *Fajr* School, nonetheless, channeled the Sudanese society into the stream of westernisation. With that effect the Fajr nourished the Graduates Congress.

Scholars noted that the intellectual contribution of the *Fajr* group marked the first political analysis pertaining to the Sudanese society which had been “injected with such systematically strong doses of socio-economic theory” (Al-Amin, 1981, p. 16). However, it seemed that the intellectual force had no political weight in practice commensurate with their theoretical activities. Had there been a potent and active intellectual tradition in the country, both the Abu Rof and Fajr schools would have survived, and even flourished as think-tanks for two major rival political movements: the unionists and the pro-independence respectively. Actually neither *Abu Rof* nor the Fajr group was “able to play the role of ideologue for its potential political movement. The *Abu Rofs* were stumbled by the pragmatic Ashiqqa and consoled themselves with the luxury of engaging within the limited and exclusive circle in highly academic and philosophical debates” (Al-Amin, 1981, p. 26). The *Fajr* group were shocked and paralyzed by the death of Arafat.

According to Ahmad Khayr, the Fajr group criticised sectarianism which handicapped the younger generation, supported the colonial rule and manipulated laymen in the name of religion” (Al-Fajr, July 16, 1934). Also Ahmed Yusuf Hashim criticised sectarianism describing it as wicked religious aristocracy indulged in making wealth and live in luxury (Al-Fajr, June 1, 1973). He commended the role of Sufism in spreading Islam in Sudan but he thinks that it needs to be reformed. Also Arafat criticised the method of the religious preachers and the rhetoric of the *Juma’h* (Friday’s) sermons whose content belong to the Medieval ages (Abdul-Rahim, 1971, p. 110).

Thus the writers of the *Fajr* School tried to liberate the people from the domination of the traditional power, to lead religious revivalism and herald renaissance. They envisaged sectarianism as a factor of disunity – though Islamisation and Arabisation of the Sudan brought a remarkable degree of cultural and social cohesion, they have not, however, been devoid of divisive particularism.

However, this modernising school failed to achieve its goal for objective reasons. It was fought by the traditionalists (sectarians) and was vigorously hindered by the colonial government. Nevertheless, the *Fajr* School managed to establish three different schools of thought and politics among that vanguard generation of Sudanese intellectuals (Al-Buni, 1985, pp. 26–27). The first school was a secular one whose writings on China, Russia, India, Arab unity, socialism, Greek philosophy and various thinkers all over the world, found their way

through Al-Fajr magazine. They also wrote about Ghandi, Darwin, human rights and the economic interests as the base for unity in modern Sudan (Mahjoub, 1946, pp. 134–135). They also adopted modern and scientific terms in their writings particularly with regard to the writings of M. A. Mahjoub and Ma'awiya Nur. They criticised the Funj kingdom and the Mahdiyya state where ignorance was prevalent. Muhammad 'Ashri Sidiq also wrote on Mahdism as a state of anarchy – where many innocent children, women and men lost their lives apart from the slave trade. It was a miserable life (Nur, Al-Fajr, November 16, 1934).

On the religious-motivated revolts which broke out at the advent of the colonial rule (Wad Haboba, 1908, and others) Ahmed Khayr wrote that they were ignorant, fanatic, disbursed money and caused loss of lives (Ahmed-Khair, 1970, p. 7). The writers of this trend criticised the religious sufists (shaykhs of *tariqas*) who reduced Islam to religious stagnation, idle life, rigidity and reactionary thinking. They called for a new vision and a new comprehensive outlook that incorporates all religions, arts, and philosophies (Al-Safi, 1989, p. 187).

The second school of the Fajr group was Islamist. It was led by those who adopted Islam as a political ideology that provides interpretation and justification for their political stances. They started to refute the allegations made by the Egyptian writer, Ali Abdulraziq on his book published in 1924 in which he denied the existence of any Islamic state. Some of members of the Fajr school studied in Al-Azhar and had contact with *Jameiyyat Misr al-Fata* (the Young Egypt Society) – a semi-military Islamic movement. They (the Fajr) led a trend that calls for combating the Christian missionary activities in the South and called for the establishment of Islamic state in the Sudan (Al-Khalifa, 1986: p. 9). They organized some symposia and seminars at the Graduates' Club in Omdurman and called for independence and affirmed that Islam is the only option. Towards the end of 1930s some young members adopted *Wahabism* but they did not manifest a clear Islamic political ideology (Abudul-Hameed, 1975, p. 162). They also criticised religious sufists and sectarians.

The third school of the Fajr group was a conciliatory one (*tawfiqi*) between secular and Islamic trends. This school calls for a co-existence between the Islamic and western cultures. The members of this school believe that both the European and Islamic cultures jointly produced the ideas of that generation where the European thought came into Sudan through Egypt. Thus there was a dichotomy

in the personality of the Sudanese intellectuals. Trimingham touched on this dualism: the clashes of currents of thought and the intellectual disintegration and adjustments caused by the impact of western intellectual, social and political ideas in Islam. The life of Muhammad by Haikal, the works of Taha Hussayn and other modernists are eagerly read [...] many are drifting away from their traditional moorings [...] drawn to a wider outlook which makes him [Sudanese intellectual] recognise his tradition as enchaining and leaves him subject to conflicting loyalties..." (Trimingham, 1965, p. 259). However, Mahjoub does not see the Sudanese intellectuals were caught up in that dichotomy. He believes that they incorporated both trends. He explained that the spirituality of the Orient is not enough nor is the materialism of the West. He advised the youth not indulge in the shell of the Western civilisation and to accommodate what is useful and what fits our culture, values, or that does not contradict with our religion.

Thus, Al-Fajr school of thought in 1930s heralded a new current of thought which encompassed different intellectual trends interacted with regional and international developments. Inside this current there overlapped three intellectual visions: "secular, Islamic and conciliatory" (Mahjoub, 1923, p. 22).

All these trends found their way into the Graduates' Congress. However, the intellectual experience was not ripe yet. Those different trends vacillated, lacked articulation and depth. Even the leading intellectual figures such as Al-Mahjoub "swung from secularism to Islamism and then to moderate conciliatory" (Mahjoub, 1932, p. 22).

Towards the 1940s the ideas of that generation were developed and were heading a state of integration. But that process was undermined by sectarianism and the emergence of political parties which were established along that line of division. This had decelerated the intellectual development and had negative impact on the political and intellectual fabric in the Sudan rendering it to a setback. This had overwhelmed the political movement in the Sudan till the present where factionalism has been a salient feature of political practice.

Nonetheless, in 1940s the intellectuals managed to hold themselves together where on April 3, 1942 the Graduates' Congress under the Presidency of Ibrahim Ahmed (later vice-President of Gordon College and Minister of Finance in the coalition government of 1965), submitted to the Governor-General a memorandum with twelve demands among which was the issue of granting the Sudan

the right of self-determination directly after the War. Sir Douglass Newbold (the Civil Secretary) and Sir Hurbert Huddleston (the Governor-General) returned the memo and refused to “entertain any political discussion with the Congress” (Sawt al-Sudan, October 13, 1945). Consequently, in 1944 the Congress broke into two independent factions – the Umma Party, made up initially of members willing to trust the Civil Secretary; and the *Ashiqqa* (blood brothers) Party, composed of those who regarded the British Government’s attitude, as conveyed in the answer to their memorandum, as unsympathetic. The *Ashiqqa* resolved to set up a Sudanese Democratic Government in Union with Egypt under the Egyptian Crown.

By mid-forties two opposing mentalities representing two generations of the intelligentsia were distinct: The elder, ‘moderate’ faction included more senior officials, *kadis* (judges), educated staff, and older and more sober merchants. Elder government officials felt that – in the post-1924 era – that they had to be ‘prudent’, ‘cooperative’ and ‘moderate’ in their demands and activities. Hence, they adopted the gradual-constitutional-change-under-British-guidance approach (Abu-Hassabu, 1985, p. 14). The second is younger generation of the intelligentsia, mainly younger government officials, a certain class of merchants, peddlers and artisans, was bitter about the post-1924 anti-educational policy and found in it evidence for Egyptian claims that both parts of the Nile Valley were victims of British colonialism and that the only salvation was in a united struggle (Abu-Hassabu, 1985, p. 14).

The educated Sudanese continued to criticise the concentration of the decision-making process in the hands of the British administrators. On November 23, 1946, Ismail Al-Azhari, the then President of the Congress, submitted a note to British Government asking for Sudanese participation in the government of their country. Accordingly, in 1947 the British Government introduced the Advisory Council to associate Sudanese with the government of their country. The intelligentsia, through their organ – the Graduates’ Congress, boycotted the Council on the ground that it as only advisory and unrepresentative and because it consisted largely of tribal and traditional elements and excluded the southern Sudanese from its membership (Bashir, 1989, p. 406).

Thus, from 1945 the Sudan Government’s policy underwent a major change in that it acknowledged the nationalist aspirations of at least a section of the educated Sudanese, those it called the ‘reasonable’ elements or the ‘moderates’. Policy

also shifted emphatically in favour of an alliance with Sayyid Abdulrahman so that Sayyid Ali had no alternative but to seek an alliance with the other co-dominis, Egypt; and the anti-government section of the educated. Those were the alliances which fought the first national elections for self-government in 1953: The pro-unity parties were united as the Nationalist Unionist Party, backed by Sayyid Ali and the Khatmiyya sect and Egypt, and the Umma Party backed by Sayyid Abdulrahman, the Ansar sect and the Sudan Government. On its part, the British Government established a parliament for the Sudan, the Legislative Assembly, for a three-year period (1953–1955). They were both boycotted by the Khatmiyya and the pro-Egyptian political parties and were dominated by the Umma Party. So, all parties took side with Egypt, except the Umma party which dominated the Assembly. (Bashir, 1989: p. 409) This, besides the US intervention, all forced for speedier transition.

When the Sudan became independent in 1956, the major features of its economic and political life were: A parliamentary system similar in form to that of Westminster, two sects struggle for power with the intelligentsia divided allegiance between them; a relatively small class of merchants whose growth was hampered by the privileged foreigners (Greeks and Syrians); a small civil service not exceeding 10000 of efficient *effendiyya*; a military establishment possessing the attributes of a national army; a backward economy of an annual per capita income as low as US\$70 and a sharp division between the North and the South (Bashir, 1989, p. 431).

So it is clear that in spite of the role played by the intellectuals in attaining independence smoothly, this educated class failed to parallel that effort with adequate pressure on the colonial rule for introducing modernisation into the country. And also they failed to address the masses directly. The intellectuals actually approached the masses through the traditional leaders a matter which strengthened the status (of those leaders) in the society and brought about a mass political parties based on sectarianism, authoritarianism, and highly personalised system built around those traditional charismas. They lacked proper political vision and revolutionary programme capable of replacing the foreign cadres, planning for development and of making a modern Sudan.

With such shortcomings the early political leaders “derived its legitimacy from the army, the ruling one-party organization, and from certain sections of the middle class” (Abu-Hassabu, 1985,

p. 155). Moreover, Sudanese politicians after independence “repeated the earlier British tactics of endeavouring to use the countryside to contain urban politics through sectarian and tribal leaders’ mobilization of their vast rural supporters” (Woodward, 1989, p. 125). This strengthened even more tribal, regional and sectarian consciousness as opposed to a national consciousness. Again, the domination of sectarianism in the political sphere of Sudanese life after independence was in fact created during the condominium period with the politicisation of sectarian leadership through the tactics employed by the Sudan (British) Government.

Nevertheless, the contribution of the Sudanese intellectuals in the nationalist movement and in pushing the vehicle on the road to independence was very obvious. The intellectual activities and nationalistic enlightenment of the 1930s led by the Fajr group and the press in general culminated in the Graduates’ Congress, manifested in the memo of 1942 and the emergence of political parties in mid 1940s, all had put more pressure – though peacefully – on the British Government and accelerated the process of decolonisation. As a result “the self-government period had arrived far more swiftly than the British had anticipated” (Woodward, p. 125). The British had scheduled the occasion for the year 2000.

Thus the intellectuals have contributed effectively to a peaceful attainment of independence. They did well in that smooth transfer of power where the “evolution from imperial autocracy to Westminster-style liberal democracy was regarded as fundamental of independent statehood” (Woodward, 1989, p. 125).

In post-independent era the role of the press was not less significant. It was by far more vital in the process of nation building which has been handicapped by many internal problems such as partisan disputes, sectarianism and ethnicity. However, the press suffered a lot not only under the colonial ruler but also under the military regimes in the post-independent era. The outcome was unstable political life at the dawn of independence. Hence, the interventions of the army in politics have further undermined smooth process of evolutionary political development.

Conclusion

Thus, it is notable that Both Britain and Egypt influenced the process of the formation of the Sudanese nationalism through their educational and cultural impacts. The British Colonial Administration,

for instance, imposed English language in Sudan. English language was officially used in running the state apparatus and bureaucracy. It was also used as a means of instruction in secondary schools as well as at university. Moreover, the British Government established the so-called ‘The British Councils’ as tools for consolidating the spread of the English language among the educated in the society. Those councils – which were situated in the capital Khartoum and some major towns – encouraged students to learn English language and provided them with facilities to that end. This included facilitating borrowing literature books, providing grants and scholarships or the like. Gradually, English language became the second language in the country – ranked second to Arabic (the mother tongue of the majority of the population). It was only by late 1960s that Arabic replaced English at the secondary schools and by early 1990s at the university level.

On the other hand, Egypt – which was the co-governor or colonial partner in the ‘Condominium Rule’ – also had had a considerable impact on the Sudanese socio-cultural life. Actually Egypt’s cultural impact was far reaching in all Arab states especially through cinema, literary production and publications. In Sudan, in particular, Egypt had had greater intellectual impact through the press (newspapers and magazines), books, cinema, soap opera as well as teachers who spread all over the country – at the elementary, intermediate and secondary levels.

Generally, the intellectuals played a vital role in the national liberation movement. Through the press and literary groups they enlightened the people and mobilised them towards the strife for independence. The outcome was a peaceful attainment of independence as well as paving the way for a national unity and national identification.

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