

Religious Politics and State Power: Religion in Sudan during War and Peace

A Case Study Analysis: Investigating How the 1977 National Reconciliation During the Interwar Years (1972-1983) Between the First and Second Sudanese Civil Wars Further Alienated the Political Center and Brought Islam From a Peripheral to a Central Issue Into National Political Administration?

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Abstract

In 1977, Sudan's then President, Second Lieutenant Jaafar al-Nimeiri and his socialist-backed coup often regarded as the May 1969 regime, facing mistrust against the Communist wing of his regime that attempted to overthrow him in 1971, sought successive alliances with the Communist Party and prominent religious leaders such as Sadiq al-Mahdi (a religious figure, Prime Minister from 1966-67 and leader of the Umma Party - an extension of the Ansar Sufi Order). In fact, in 1975, the Communist wing of the armed forces, for the second time, unsuccessfully attempted overthrowing Nimeiri and in 1976, Sadiq al-Mahdi, backed by Muammar al-Gaddafi, led a force of one thousand Libyan-trained insurgents through the Libyan border and eventually into Sudan's capital, Khartoum, in order to overthrow Nimeiri's government for previously allying with the Communists. In order to promote stability within Northern Sudan, strengthen his relationship with southern leadership, uphold the 1972 Addis Ababa Peace Agreement preventing another civil war, and ultimately consolidate his power, he sought a "National Reconciliation". Nimeiri focused his efforts with Sadiq al-Mahdi, the rival Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) - an extension of the competing Khatmiyya Sufi Order, and Hassan al-Turabi - an Islamist leader affiliated with the transnational Muslim Brotherhood political movement premised on restoring Islamist politics in the Arab socialist republics and monarchies, culminating to his forced exile, to join the legislature under the umbrella of the Sudan Socialist Union (SSU).

This research aims to investigate how the National Reconciliation that took place in 1977 during the interwar years (1972-1983) between the First and Second Sudanese Civil Wars further alienated the political center and **the impact it had on bringing religion from a peripheral to a central issue into national politics**. Although the National Reconciliation and the weaponization

of religion in multi-religious and multi-ethnic states and societies has been extensively studied in International Relations, better conceptualizing the relationship between how domestic, regional and international influences affect religious politics during war and peace can refine how scholars and policymakers alike understand elite politics in post-colonial states from a state-society lens and its effects on politico-religious violence. The research reached many conclusions; the most important one being that the National Reconciliation itself was motivated by Nimeiri's intent on consolidating state control and internationally projecting Sudan as a regional ally with the US against Communist expansion in East Africa in order to finance state-building projects. By consolidating national control, his logic was to co-opt the traditional political parties. However, as Nimeiri's coalition increasingly suffered from inter-Islamist rivalry, he leaned towards al-Turabi's Islamic Charter Front (IFC) - with its expansive investment networks to finance his development plans; opening the door for a modified version of religious outbidding (defined in greater detail as *religious outbidding entrapment*). This religious outbidding entrapment further alienated Nimeiri from his own government as he vied to influence the political center against al-Turabi and Sadiq al-Mahdi's competing visions of Islamist politics; further marginalizing the southern leadership's role in national politics.

Overview of Sudan's Religio-Political Development: Competing Nationalisms, Religious Movements, and the Battle for State Control

For the British, engagement in Sudan began as an adjunct to strategic interest in Egypt. The overriding aim was to stop France controlling the Suez Canal and hence the sea route to India. However, Britain soon developed an important streak of philanthropic imperialism in the form of

the suppression of the slave trade. The pretext for dispatching British soldiers and administrators to Sudan was to ensure that the Egyptians carried out their promise in this respect. In the 1890s, the demand to avenge the death of General Charles Gordon also helped drive the charge to war against the Mahdist armies. However, it was strategic rivalry that prompted the 1896-98 invasion. After the French sent an expedition from the Congo that set up a base on the Upper Nile at Fashoda, keeping the French out of Sudan demanded a re-conquest, supposedly in the name of restoring Egyptian sovereignty. Thereafter, economic interests in the form of cotton came to play an important role. Meanwhile, each of the internal elite groups in Sudan learned to play on the interests of potential external sponsors.

Sudanese nationalism emerged as a conflicted movement with distinct and competing political, ideological and cultural strands.¹ Each strand was shaped by what it identified as its principal adversary and its strategic and tactical allies. The first manifestation of nationalism was the White Flag League of 1923-1924, led by a culturally assimilated southern Sudanese Dinka soldier named Ali Abdel Latif. He made common cause with the Egyptians against the British and staged a mutiny.² The subsequent leaders of Sudanese nationalism were drawn principally from the elite groups of the North and they too identified Britain as their prime adversary, enlisting Egyptian support to mobilize. The British meanwhile minimized the Egyptian role in Sudan and sought to undermine the urbanized and educated class, instead supporting the rural aristocracy and sectarian leadership, including (in a remarkable about face) the neo-Mahdists. In the 1880s, the Mahdi had fought against both Egypt and Britain but in the early twentieth century, his son Abdel Rahman built up a new Mahdist movement in alliance with the British: his nationalism was hostile

¹ Woodward, Peter, *Sudan 1898-1989: The Unstable State*, London, Lester Crook, 1990.

² Daly, Martin, *Empire on the Nile: The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1898-1934*, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

to Egypt and his productive base was cotton farming. What Sayyid Abdel Rahman al-Mahdi and his Northern political rivals shared was the assumption that on independence, the Northern elite would inherit the state. Meanwhile, the Southerners were opposed to both Egypt and the *jellaba* class and belatedly saw the British as a protector against both.

The failure of any one of the contending political factions to exercise decisive leadership over the Sudanese nationalist movement meant that the struggle for independence was a war of political maneuver in which diplomatic skill was critical to success. After 1945, Sudanese politicians also learned to play off the United States against Britain.³ Independence was achieved on January 1st, 1956 by Prime Minister Ismail al-Azhari who infamously made incompatible promises to different constituencies: unity with Egypt to the unionists and the Egyptians, sovereign independence to the neo-Mahdists and the British, and federation to the Southerners. al-Azhari's government lasted only a few months and the legacy of political instability in both civilian governments and military regimes has significantly contributed to both Sudan's unequal economic development (in Sudan's peripheries) and underdevelopment, as well as the lack of a unifying nationalist myth and a "father of the nation" figure. The Egyptians felt especially betrayed by Azhari, and generally speaking, see Sudan as a "lost province."⁴

In regional politics, Egyptian governments still tend to see non-allied countries' engagement in Sudanese politics as an infringement on their own sovereignty. However, from the outset in 1956, competing religious nationalisms, led by political extensions of pre-colonial and

³ Woodward, Peter, *Condominium and Sudanese Nationalism*, London, Collings, 1979.

⁴ Troutt-Powell, Eva, *A Different Shade of Colonialism: Egypt, Great Britain and the Mastery of the Sudan*, Berkeley, University of California Press, 2003.

colonial Sufi orders, were competing for state power, meeting little resistance from the southern Sudanese who had been strategically excluded from the pre-colonial politics by the British. Funding the newly independent Sudan was a growing concern.⁵ After decades of fiscal stringency in which the only significant investments were in the cotton-growing areas, imperial Sudan began its first attempts at national economic development in the decade after World War Two. In the first decade of independence, governments continued to invest in infrastructure: extending the railway line to Darfur and the South, expanding the irrigated schemes and developing advanced agricultural systems in more fertile regions of Kordofan and Darfur, as well as rural development.⁶ These investments chiefly benefited the existing dominant classes who continued to play an influential role in political and economic life. This classes included the multi-ethnic neo-Mahdist support base (Sadiq al-Mahdi's constituency) which had economically sustained itself on agricultural schemes, the overwhelmingly Arab merchant class tribally aligned with the Khatmiyya Sufi Order benefiting from increased investment in infrastructure and markets, as well as the administrative elite.⁷

Upon overthrowing al-Azhari's civilian government in May 1969, President Nimeiri in the early and mid-1970s, accelerated development efforts, with ambitious schemes for digging a canal to divert the Nile in the South, a vast sugar plant, roads and agricultural development projects. The political rationale was, however, radically different. He had driven the sectarian elites out of the country and sought to use a developmental state to transform the country, building up a new ruling

⁵ Daly, Martin, *Imperial Sudan: The Anglo-Egyptian Condominium 1934-56*, Cambridge University Press, 1991.

⁶ Deng, Francis, and Martin Daly, *Bonds of Silk: The Human Factor in the British Administration of the Sudan*, East Lansing, Michigan State University Press, 1989.

⁷ Daly, Martin, *Empire on the Nile: The Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, 1898-1934*, Cambridge University Press, 2003.

elite in the process.⁸ This began as a socialist-inspired project with technical assistance from the eastern bloc. After Nimeiri fell out with the Communists in 1971 after their failed coup attempt, he switched alliances to the US; reassuring the US' regional interests in balancing against Soviet backed Libya and Egypt in North Africa, as well as Ethiopia after falling to Communist rule in 1976. Development finance came from the US as it sought to strengthen its relationship with Nimeiri by helping him consolidate his power and Nimeiri himself was intent on leveraging US assistance to state-building efforts in order to maintain power. The technocratic elite he was trying to build had no established constituencies in Sudan—they tried as hard as they could but were unable to challenge traditional sectarian loyalties—and instead built their politics on a promise of future prosperity.

Nimeiri allowed his ministers to borrow recklessly in pursuit of these goals. Because Sudan was officially a socialist country, it sought loans from the eastern bloc but being increasingly aligned with the US they also borrowed from Western Europe, the US and the World Bank. However, after the oil boom, investment from Arab socialist republics and monarchies increased exponentially; with Arab companies going as far as borrowing from commercial banks for long term development in Sudanese agriculture. Unfortunately, by 1978, Sudan was \$6 billion in debt and kept defaulting on its interest payments.⁹ The following years witnessed a struggle to bring both borrowing and spending under control; ironically coinciding with the increased primacy of religion in national politics. Mansour Khalid, formerly a minister in Nimeiri's government, describes how in 1980 when the President, “finally succumbed to the disciplining hand of the Bank

⁸ Niblock, Tim, *Class and Power in Sudan: The Dynamics of Sudanese Politics, 1898-1985*, New York, State University of New York Press, 1987.

⁹ Hussein, Mohamed Nureldin, “The IMF and Sudanese Economic Policy,” in T. Barnett and A. Abdelkarim (eds.) *Sudan: State, Capital and Transformation*, London, Croom Helm, 1988.

of Sudan and the Ministry of Finance (though not for long enough), the government had to hire a special adviser, Morgan Grenfell, to identify the size of the total indebtedness of the country. There was no record in the Bank of Sudan of obligations undertaken by the palace. Morgan Grenfell sent out telexes to all Sudan creditors asking for details.”¹⁰

The 1972 Addis Ababa Peace Agreement (AAPA)

Jaafar Muhammad Ali, Minister of Local Government, prepared a draft agreement in 1971 holding the government’s perception of regional autonomy to be implemented in the Southern administrative district. Initially, this process began as a part of multi-step secret negotiations earlier in Addis Ababa in 1971 under the patronage of Emperor Haile Selassie. The government delegation arrived in Addis Ababa in November 1971 and was primarily led by the Minister of Southern Affairs Abel Alier and Minister of the Interior, Major General Muhammad Ahmad al-Baqir who was the primary liaison with the southern rebel leaders and even taught them in the Military Academy. The South Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM), the political wing of the Anya-nya, was headed by Ezboni Mandiri, John Garang, (who would ultimately become Sudan’s Vice President in 2005), and Garang’s superior within the Anya-nya, Joseph Lagu.¹¹The observing council included Ethiopian representatives, The World Council of Churches and the Organization of African Unity. Representatives from both sides suggested for further time to consult with their leaders with Nimeiri’s government aiming to meet a preliminary deadline by December 1971.¹²

¹⁰ Mansour, Khalid, *Mimeiri and the Revolution of Dis-May*, London, KPI Limited, 1985, p.135.

¹¹ Reda, Adel, *Nimeiri, The Man and the Challenge*, pg. 269 (translated).

¹² Government of Sudan Ministry of Foreign Affairs: *The Southern Issue - The Path Towards Peace*, Mansour Khalid, Khartoum, Sudan, 197, Print, (accessed April 5, 2020) (translated).

The Sudanese government sent its delegation comprising delegates representing all the government ministries, on February 2nd, 1972, to conduct official talks with the southern leadership. The dialogue lasted twelve days with the Southern leadership initiating dialogue on three of its core issues/grievances: secession, religion, the official language, and how to go about integrating the armed forces. The government refused to consider southern secession but agreed with the Southern leadership to grant religious freedom and make English the South's official language instead of the previously imposed Arabic under the former federal framework. However, both sides disagreed about the status of the armed forces with the southern leadership demanding that Sudan's military in the southern region be decentralized under their military command and to integrate the Anya-nya while the Sudanese government contended to further centralize the national army. Eventually, both sides agreed and Nimeiri's government ushered regional autonomy for the southern region within a unified Sudan, which would no longer be divided into the three provinces of Equatoria, Bahr al-Ghazal and Upper Nile. The southern region's economic and political affairs would be controlled by an executive body (the High Executive Council), a legislative authority (People's Regional Assembly), and the Anya-nya would be integrated into the Sudanese army and police.¹³

The AAPA brought Nimeiri prestige abroad and domestically while aggrandizing his regional influence in both the Arab World and East Africa. Religiously, the peace agreement also legally backed the south's religious freedom, stipulating that, "every person should enjoy freedom of religion...and the right to profess it publicly and privately."¹⁴In fact, it was the first time since

¹³ Ronen, Yehudit, "Religions at War, Religion at Peace: The Case of Sudan," *Nomos Verlagsgesellschaft*, 2005, pp.80-96.

¹⁴ Abel Alier, *Southern Sudan: Too Many Agreements Dishonored*, Exeter: Ithaca Press, 1990, pp. 41-104.

the inception of the dominantly-Islamic Sudanese state that Islam, Christianity and traditional religions were formally acknowledged as being of equal legitimacy. Thus, the AAPA became a critical pillar of Nimeiri's logic in consolidating his control by granting regional decentralization as a means to preventing conflict and advancing his development plans. While the AAPA could theoretically succeed in maintaining peace through regional decentralization as a means to power-sharing and economic development, in reality, Sudan's lack of a truly democratic infrastructure and sectarian politics which had played an increasingly central role in descending the country into its first civil war, would manifest into further attempts by both the Communists and the Islamist parties to overthrow Nimeiri; forcing him to focus his efforts on reconciling with the opposition in order to perpetuate his government's control of power and resources.

Religious Pluralism in a Federal System

Recognizing religious pluralism in Sudan had become a central issue prior to Sudan's first civil war and contributed to the southern rebels needing to be reassured that power-sharing through Sudan's government would entail religious freedom. In fact, the Southern Party, during the 1958 parliamentary election inviting all the various political parties in the country to formalize Sudan's government, discussed the issue of religion, language and the status of Southern Sudan in the future Sudan although it would come to no avail once the Umma party came to power in the general election.¹⁵ Reassurance was key since the Umma and PDP parties (to become the DUP) unanimously offered, largely to justify more administrative control over the South to the British and to entice the Egyptian-Sudanese nationalists, for a federal system that would respect the

¹⁵ Melani Cammett and Edmund Malesky, "Power Sharing in Postconflict Societies," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 56, no. 6 (2012).

cultural and religious freedom of the southern peoples.¹⁶ However, after both parties won a majority in the civilian government, the parties seized the opportunity to withdraw their initial agreement after independence; aiming at an Islamic constitution believing it would lead to a culturally united Sudan. Yet, even after the civilian government was dissolved by Abboud's military regime, his regime seeking to remain in power without resorting to force, continued to brutally impose Arabization and Islamization policies in local education due to pressure from the Islamist parties which maintained an influential role in the northern rural regions through the regime's local representative councils. On the other hand, Abboud effectively denied political representation to Khartoum's emerging urban coalition comprising Islamists, labor unionists and intellectuals (the United National Front), as they presented a more threatening cross-cleavage threat to his power than did the traditional Islamist parties he could more effectively control. The regime's vigorous program of Arabization and Islamization in the south provoked strikes in the schools and open revolt in the countryside and by 1963, escalated the rebellion to civil war in which the northern troops held the towns while the southern guerrillas roamed the countryside.

Although Abboud did not have as strong of a Pan-Arabist socialist political vision for Sudan as Nimeiri did, his acquiescence to the Islamist's influence in maintaining his rule would bring religion to the center of national politics, leading to the increased intensity in the conflict between 1963 and 1971. Nimeiri, upon seizing power in 1969, felt a stronger commitment towards the communist cause as he believed Turabi's argument that a, "peaceful solution to the problem in Southern Sudan lay in extending democracy to the whole country,"¹⁷ was a gateway for his ICF

¹⁶ Warburg, Gabriel (1978). *Islam, Nationalism in a Traditional Society: The Case of Sudan*, London: Frank Cass, p. 140.

¹⁷ Gallab, Abdullahi, *The First Islamist Republic: Development and Disintegration of Islamism in Sudan*, New York, 2008, p. 22.

and the traditional Islamist parties to gain power and re-assert their orientation towards an Islamic state. Thus, Nimeiri rejected assimilation and argued that Sudan's unity needed to be preserved on practical social objectives recognizing the cultural differences between the multi-ethnic Muslim North, (although politically dominated by Sudanese Arabs), the Christians and Animists in the South under the SSU. His motives contributed largely to the signing of the 1972 Addis Ababa Peace Agreement (AAPA).

The 1977 National Reconciliation: Nimeiri's Shift to Islamism

Up until 1971, the idea of a peace agreement was in the air and as Nimeiri's government began formal negotiations with Southern leaders to end the civil war, the Islamist opposition parties felt the agreement was a tactical move by Nimeiri to prevent them from ever having a stake in national politics.¹⁸ After the AAPA was ratified, both the Umma and DUP believed that Nimeiri's government granted too many concessions to the South, with the newly amended 1973 constitution serving as a critical barrier to creating an Islamic state and encouraging a future separatist movement.¹⁹ After Sadiq al-Mahdi's Libyan-backed coup attempt, President Nimeiri was rightfully persuaded that the South was definitely his, and that he should turn his attention to the danger represented by the traditional religious groups. He felt that in the complicated mosaic of ethnic identities and forces which made up the Sudan, he had gone too far towards appeasing the southerners and therefore alienated Sudan's traditional Islamist base.

¹⁸ Johnson, *The Root Causes of Sudan's Civil Wars: Peace or Truce*, The International African Institute, p. 55.

¹⁹ Ibid.

With the mid-1970s demonstrating increased faith placed on Nimeiri by the US and his Arab allies investing in agriculture, compounded by the rising influence of the Muslim Brotherhood in regional and domestic finance schemes following Sudan's 1976 economic decline, Nimeiri, in like fashion with Abboud's authoritarian inclination, would fall prey to his own political ambitions and unwittingly acquiesce to the Islamists following his National Reconciliation; ultimately repaving Sudan's return towards both religious and secular elites' reliance on instrumentalizing religion in obtaining state power during peace time. However, by 1978, Nimeiri relied on al-Turabi's political prowess in balancing against the Umma party and the DUP while offering to meet the Islamist opposition's first demand of the 1977 National Reconciliation by institutionalizing a committee to, "harmonize existing laws with the principles of the *Shari'a*."²⁰ With al-Turabi serving as the committee's head, he began implementing Islamic finance laws to aggrandize the North's political and financial control of agricultural schemes as well as an oil pipeline intended to divert oil in the south to the north, giving the southern regional governments no influence in the matters. These aforementioned actions resurfaced southern anxieties about their religious and economic freedom purportedly granted to them, paralleling the Umma and PDP party's pre-independence unmet promise of promising religious freedom in the federal system.

A Functional Perspective of Religion

From a sociological perspective, religion can be understood in both functional and non-functional perspectives. As a functional role, it is used by actors, for specific purposes and

²⁰ Mansour, Khalid, *Nimeiri and the Revolution of Dis-May*, London, KPI Limited, 1985.

therefore cannot work alone. It combines different complex, specific cultures of individuals or groups of people. Even societies that have the same cultural traditions but with different religions can have conflicting or different interpretations of their shared culture. In this case, religion creates a framework that acts as a basis to legitimate or justify individual or group behavior and actions. Its role in the conflict is manifested through its structural effects. The IFC, was increasingly determined and was pressuring the government to practice the interpretation of their faith in the appropriate way. Some of their actions and behavior during the conflict reflects the assertion that, “Muslim fundamentalists give primary importance to elements of Islamic unity in thought and in practice rather than accepting diversity in local custom. The primary unit of identification should be the community of Muslims rather than any ethnic, kin, or religious group.”²¹

From a political science perspective, the functional use of religion, and more specifically, leaders placing religion from a peripheral to a central issue in national politics or war, is explained in reductionist terms. Specifically, explaining religion in reductionist terms is based on the post-Westphalian West’s bias towards taking a ‘secular’ approach to governance in the separation between church and state. This has led to many of the social sciences bias towards a ‘secularization thesis’ - explaining that as humanity continues to progress, religion’s role in governance will slowly die out. However, some scholars have pointed to the instrumentalism of Islam more specifically as a means of attaining legitimacy due to the fact that in Muslim republics, dictatorships and monarchies, Islam functions as an inextricable link to state politics as it unites societies and communities along ethnic, economic and political lines. Furthermore, in many post-independence, multi-ethnic and multi-religious states with nebulous geographical boundaries for

²¹ Assefa, H, “Religion in the Sudan: Exacerbating Conflict or Facilitating Reconciliation?,” Bulletin of Peace Proposals, Vol. 21 (3): p. 257.

defining citizenship, particularly many Muslim states, western influenced styles of governance whether they be dictatorship, one-party systems, socialism or democracy; politicizing Islam becomes a way to justify legitimacy and even failure.

Platteau builds off of the aforementioned functional use of religion to address how rulers instrumentalize religion as a means of protecting their legitimacy and expanding their political base given religion's potential to mobilize support along ethnic, political and economic lines explaining that, "Under normal circumstances, Muslim rulers concede some measure of autonomy to religious scholars and institutions in order to gain Islamic legitimacy and consolidate their temporal power. (This strategy is actually reminiscent of the practice that many European rulers followed in the Christian world before the advent of modern democratic systems.) Politics dominates religion yet the latter serves the function of a safeguard against possible despotic excesses indulged by the ruler, and as a shock absorber whenever the regime's actions spark dangerous tensions in the society. Such a politico-religious equilibrium is inherently unstable, however. Indeed, using his double quality as both a political leader and the guardian of the faith, the ruler may be tempted to confer upon himself the legitimacy accorded by Islam with a view to getting rid of countervailing forces and concentrate the whole power in his hands."²²

Religious Outbidding Entrapment

²² Platteau, Jean-Philippe, "Political Instrumentalization of Islam and the Risk of Obscurantist Deadlock," World Development, 2011, Vol. 39, No. 2, pp.247.

To what extent does this framework explain how the 1977 National Reconciliation further divided the political arena and brought Islam from a peripheral to a central issue into national politics? Although it provides for a general framework for how political elites seek to maintain their rule when they are challenged by traditional Islamist groups, it falls short of explaining under what conditions it can turn into religious outbidding. Toft, specifies these conditions arguing that in, “religious outbidding, bids are not restricted to issues of nationalism or hyper nationalism, nor are they unique to democracies. Religious outbidding applies... in religious civil wars when four conditions hold: (1) the rule of a state leaders is threatened; (2) the society has preexisting religious cleavages; (3) the state monopolizes information and communications; and (4) key resources needed for continued rule-small arms, cash, skilled fighters, and logistical support-lie beyond the geographic boundaries of the conflict itself, thus making transnational appeals more necessary and more attractive.”²³ Indeed, Abboud’s Sudan certainly fits this theoretical space and as his continuance of Islamization and Arabization policies in the newly independent Sudan served as a means to garnering domestic support from the Islamists’ constituencies as well as international support from the US as it preferred any dictatorship that did not support communism. However, as the Islamists began to join the secular camp as his Islamization and Arabization policies intensified the war and reached a climax by 1963, he was pressured to mitigate his policies and make concessions in the form of open forums that; leading to his regime passing power to a multi-party civilian coalition government. Thus, Abboud had to restrain religious outbidding at a certain point because his domestic audience’s political stance became more moderate as labor unionists, socialists and communists diluted the Islamists’ influence upon their seizing of power.

²³ Toft, Monica, “Religion, Civil War, and International Order”, BCSIA Discussion Paper 2006-03, Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University, 2006. p19-20.

Although Nimeiri's Sudan observes all these conditions, these conditions did not exist in the context of a civil war, and certainly not a religious civil war. In fact, Nimeiri was confident that he had deterred any chances of an armed southern regional movement given that his regime's state-sanctioned support for the AAPA broadly increased southern' loyalty to him along all religious and ethnic lines, and nevertheless, prevented him from being toppled in 1973, 1975 and 1976. Thus, proposing a *religious outbidding entrapment* framework makes clearer sense for conceptualizing why Nimeiri was unable to reverse his religious outbidding against Sadiq al-Mahdi and al-Turabi, preventing further political alienation within the SSU, even though he knew it would bolster the Islamists' political interests in bringing religion from a peripheral to a central issue in national political administration leading and could ultimately lead into another civil war.

Religious Politics and State Power: Nimeiri's Religious Outbidding Entrapment (1977-1983)

This section lays out the domestic religio-political and international context for why Nimeiri was unable to simply reverse his religious outbidding against Sadiq al-Mahdi and al-Turabi and preventing further political alienation within the SSU, even though he knew it would bolster the Islamists' political interests in bringing religion from a peripheral to a central issue in national political administration.

Although Nimeiri's SSU, comprised of both non-sectarian and partisan technocrats as well as Pan-Arab, Socialist bureaucrats, was largely efficient in the social and economic development of Sudan up until the National Reconciliation, they were unable to support Nimeiri in consolidating

a cohesive political base. In fact, Mansour Khalid, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, notes that, “even the politically-minded among his group loathed Sudan’s so-called ideological schools, their antipathy stemmed not from a skepticism about ideology per se, rather because they detected that ideology, to many of its adherents, has become a surrogate religion, not a tool of analysis.”²⁴ Despite the technocrats’ progress in helping bolster education and development during Sudan’s economic boom, their apolitical orientation coupled with their frustration at the increasingly corrupt bureaucrats benefitting from Nimeiri’s office politics, was an aspect Nimeiri enjoyed about his administration as he prioritized loyalty at the increasingly top heavy bureaucracy and ‘apolitical efficiency’ at the bottom. Even after having a UN commission conduct a study to improve administrative performance in the civil service in 1972, ‘neither the reform, nor the network of civil service institutions created the desired ‘modern state’, for above the traditional familial and fraternal nepotism that existed, a new brand of corruption was added: political.”²⁵ Thus, Nimeiri himself prioritized loyalty over appointing the politically zealous and ethical bureaucrats needed to propel society towards his development agenda and away from the Islamists. Unfortunately, Nimeiri’s running of the government was becoming increasingly conducive to authoritarianism as he would justify his increased presidential powers following the 1975 and 1976 coup attempts; alienating his party and further perpetuating his calculus towards appealing to his opponents’ support bases towards his increasingly hallow political camp in a National Reconciliation.

²⁴ Khalid, Mansour, *The Government They Deserve: The Role of the Political Elite in Sudan’s Political Evolution*, London, KPI Limited, 1990, p. 305.

²⁵ Khalid, Mansour, *The Government They Deserve: The Role of the Political Elite in Sudan’s Political Evolution*, London, KPI Limited, 1990, p. 307.

The National Reconciliation gave both Sadiq al-Mahdi and al-Turabi the opportunity to revert towards more extreme Islamist politics now that the Nimeiri gave them the opportunity to influence Sudanese governance. In fact, for Sadiq al-Mahdi, “Faced with the rise of the Islamists, who were trespassing on his ideological space, and with the Islamist Front's capacity to find new militants, Sadiq al-Mahdi managed to modernize his grandfather's party during the 1970s. He did so by refurbishing the image of the Al Umma, linking the Sudanese tradition and the Mahdiyya's legacy with modernity. He portrayed his party as one of the rising modern Islamist movements, and not as a backward sect from the nineteenth century. In doing so he sought to compete for the same urban and educated electorate that the Islamists were seeking to monopolize. His action again can be described as an ideological bricolage, as Sadiq al-Mahdi was using the stock of tradition and his family's legacy and attaching it to the 'modernist' discourse used by the Islamists. This communication strategy was successful, as it enabled him to win over significant portions of the urban electorate in Khartoum.”²⁶

Likewise, al-Turabi in the 1970s adopted a moderate approach for supporting his ICF by advocating on principles that can arguably be described as grassroots Islamic egalitarianism. Noble-Frapin highlights this in identifying the ideological bricolage, or how leaders in crafting a political ideology, select their tools and reject others explaining, “al-Turabi needed to break the religious authority of the Sufi sheikhs to win over their followers. In order to do so he sought to modernize the notion of *Ijtihad* (i.e. the interpretation of religious sources). He viewed *Ijtihad* as being open to everyone, without social or scientific distinction. This meant that all policies based on Islam should ultimately be assessed by all Muslims, rather than by a closed circle of religious

²⁶ Noble-Frapin, Ben, “The Role of Islam in Sudanese Politics: a Socio-Historical Perspective,” *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol. 20 (2009), p.78.

leaders. By challenging the idea of who should be permitted to interpret the religious sources, Turabi sought to break the monopoly of the Sufi sheikhs in this domain. All of this discourse can be analyzed as a cognitive subversion of the social and political order. Drawing from the stock of the Islamic tradition, Turabi sought to make something new with old materials.”²⁷

Upon bringing in the Islamists, Nimeiri’s approach towards consolidating his support domestically and internationally would no longer take a balanced approach as he continued to play off the US for continued economic support insofar as Nimeiri banned the Communists from rejoining his party. Thus, as long as Nimeiri’s international constituency backed him, including the oil rich Arab monarchies who gladly accepted his shift as well as the US’ geopolitical interests in maintaining strong relations with any non-Communist country, he knew that the country’s worsening economy could be managed and improved by al-Turabi and his Islamist-technocratic elite who had domestic and regional influence to the oil monarchies. Nimeiri’s technocrats had failed him and with al-Turabi’s increasing promotion of ICF civil service, financiers and army, at least Nimeiri respected al-Turabi’s ability to promote a wider base of support to his coalition SSU. Yet Nimeiri’s logic towards increasing his base of support actually alienated the political center as his increased reliance on al-Turabi, and increasing personal politics as a result of his paranoia, would continue to rupture the religio-political fabric of his party; functioning as a positive feedback in which Nimeiri would begin to fall into religious outbidding entrapment. Upon creating the *shari’a* committee and thus increasingly increasing Turabi and his technocrats’ role, both Sadiq al-Mahdi, out of a desire to pull from Turabi’s base of support and to religiously outbid Nimeiri, Nimeiri sought to establish his religious piety even if it meant alienating his party and increasing

²⁷ Noble-Frapin, Ben, “The Role of Islam in Sudanese Politics: a Socio-Historical Perspective,” *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, Vol. 20 (2009), p.77.

the Islamist's legal-financial influence over the 1978 Jonglei Canal 1979 oil schemes at the expense of the southern regional government's agreement. Institutionalizing the shari'a committee thus became the institutional marker of the extent Nimeiri was willing to undergo in his religious outbidding; leading to his ultimate entrapment.

Mansour Khalid describes both Nimeiri's cabinet's dismay as well the Abel Alier, the Vice President and the President of the Southern Regional Government, as Nimeiri continually encircled himself with Turabi and his advisors, as well as Sadiq al-Mahdi, and refused to listen to his technocrats. He captures Nimeiri's moves in context to the external forces reinforcing his religious outbidding explaining, "Before all other questions, one must ask why Nimeiri suddenly exposed a new morality? Nimeiri himself liked to encourage the idea that the President had undergone some sort of 'religious conversion'. In 1981, he published a book *al Nahaj al-Islami Limaza?* or *Why the Islamic Way*, outlining the personal importance of his newfound religion. In spite of such posing and perhaps because of it, the imposition of *shari'a* smacks of political opportunism rather than religious conviction. Sudan's Islamic revolution came at a time when Nimeiri was seeking a new support group amongst the religious fundamentalists. He wanted to deprive the sectarian leaders of their own *raison d'etre*; Nimeiri could now say that he alone had achieved what both al-Mirghani (DUP leader) and al-Mahdi failed to achieve in generations - the establishment of God's kingdom on earth."²⁸

Therefore, Nimeiri needed Sadiq al-Mahdi and al-Mirghani to simply exist within his party; framing Sudan's Islamization to his new constituency as a result of his goodwill. If Nimeiri had

²⁸ Khalid, Mansour, *The Government They Deserve: The Role of the Political Elite in Sudan's Political Evolution*, London, KPI Limited, 1990, p.310.

been driven to bring peace to Sudan to ‘unite’ by ensuring religious freedom to the southerners in the AAPA, leveraging his status as a reconciler of Sudan’s sectarian tensions by establishing the *shari’a* committee was the next step towards fully consolidating his leadership. Moreover, Nimeiri began to firmly believe that Sudan’s unity was tied to him, and the National Reconciliation was simply the conduit towards his desire for glory. Perhaps what sealed the deal for Nimeiri’s religious outbidding entrapment was the religious legitimacy he felt when, “During the time of political crises in Sudan, Nimeiri began to regularly attend the Islamic religious rituals. The new move of Nimeiri can be interpreted as a way to remind Muslims that he was of their ‘status group’ and that he needed them. Some leading Muslim Brotherhood figures from the banned Islamic political party ICF took Nimeiri to visit the Chieftain of the Sufi order, namely Awad Al-Jiid Muhammad Ahmed. During their meeting at the rite, Awad Al-Jiid communicated to Nimeiri that he had ‘a telepathic communication’ with the Prophet Muhammed, and in that communication; the Prophet told him that President Nimeiri would apply Sharia in institutions of Sudan. The statement of Awad Al-Jiid to the President Nimeiri that mentioned Sharia is a conditional reference for accepting him to the Sufi religious order. It required him to reconsider his ideological belief in secular socialism. After this meeting, members of the ICF, including their Head, Hassan Abdullah Turabi were appointed to the cabinet. Some concerned supporters complained how the Islamists could join this government, which had destroyed their Islamic and Arab ideology in Sudan. Turabi answered that his political association had decided to collaborate with the President, in order to reform the institutions within.”²⁹

²⁹ Jok, Kuel, *Conflict of National Identity in Sudan*, Department of World Cultures, University of Helsinki, 2012, p.163.

Nimeiri's further alienation of the non-Islamists within his party would lead to his increasing authoritarianism as al-Turabi's ICF would continue to infiltrate Nimeiri's government from within. In the last seven years of Nimeiri's rule between 1978 and 1985, Sudan's economy would continue to contract and his increasing authoritarianism would manifest itself in ousting Abel Alier from the HEC in 1978; replacing him with Joseph Lagu, who, similar to Nimeiri, had become increasingly motivated to consolidate his power in the Southern Regional Government. Nimeiri's power hunger and religious fervor would lead him to demand an oath of unconditional allegiance from all members of the civil service and judiciary, thereby causing the departure of the remaining prominent secularists and the dominance of the civil service, the army and the financial sector by Islamists. Finally, Nimeiri's September 1983 proclamation of *shari'a* as the basis of the Sudanese legal system as well as the re-division of the Southern Region into the three old provinces of Equatoria, Bahr al-Ghazal and Upper Nile would mark the official abrogation of the 1972 AAPA, culminating into increased tensions leading to the Second Sudanese Civil War.

Conclusion

Overall, this research aimed to investigate how the National Reconciliation that took place in 1977 during the interwar years (1972-1983) between the First Sudanese Civil War and Second Sudanese Civil Wars further alienating the political center and the impact it had on bringing religion from a peripheral to a central issue into national politics. Although the National Reconciliation and the weaponization of religion in multi-religious and multi-ethnic states and societies has been extensively studied in International Relations and Conflict studies, better conceptualizing the relationship between how domestic, regional and international influences affect religious politics during war and peace can refine how scholars and policymakers alike

understand elite politics in post-colonial states from a state-society lens and its effects on religious violence and foreign policy. The research reached many conclusions; the most important one being that the National Reconciliation itself was motivated by Nimeiri's intent on consolidating state control and internationally projecting Sudan as a regional ally with the US against Communist expansion in East Africa in order to finance state-building projects. By consolidating national control, his logic was to co-opt the traditional political parties. However, as Nimeiri's coalition increasingly suffered from inter-Islamist rivalry, he leaned towards al-Turabi's Islamic Charter Front (IFC) - with its expansive investment networks to finance his development plans, opening the door for a modified version of religious outbidding - *religious outbidding entrapment* between al-Turabi and Sadiq al-Mahdi's competing visions of Islamist politics, further alienating Nimeiri from his own government and marginalizing the southern leadership's role in governance.

By applying a sociological and political science framework for understanding the relationship between how political actors play religious politics when engaging in religious outbidding, this research has attempted to understand the puzzle behind, under what conditions, religious outbidding entrapment occurs and the party politics, or lack thereof, that compel political actors to reverse their actions. The Sudan case study provides a compelling example of how competing international, domestic and religio-political factors during the inter-war years impeded the progress towards a unifying civil religion found in mature democracies, such as the US, that respects the various religions, cultures, and ethnicities of the country. Nimeiri's ineptitude would foster the conditions for the Turabi backed Islamist military coup that would continue to justify religion to commit mass atrocities against Muslims opposed to their "revolutionary vision" towards Salafist Islam as well as non-Muslims in south Sudan, Darfur and Blue Nile.

