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Rethinking Sudan Studies: A Post-2011 Manifesto

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Abstract

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This essay appraises "Sudan Studies" following the 2011 secession of South Sudan. It asks two questions. First, what has Sudan Studies been as a colonial and postcolonial field of academic inquiry and how should or must it change? Second, should we continue to write about a single arena of Sudan Studies now that Sudan has split apart? The authors advance a "manifesto" for Sudan Studies by urging scholars to map out more intellectual terrain by attending to non-elite actors and women; grass-roots and local history; the environment and the arts; oral sources; and interdisciplinary studies of culture, politics, and society. They propose that scholars can transcend the changing boundaries of the nation-state, and recognize connections forged through past and present migrations and contacts, by studying the Sudan as a zone rather than a fixed country. Finally, in their introduction to this bilingual special issue, they highlight the increasing relevance of French scholarship to the endeavor of rethinking Sudan Studies.

Résumé

Cet essai évalue la situation des « études soudanaises » après la sécession du Soudan du Sud. Il pose deux questions. La première : En quoi ont consisté les études soudanaises en tant que domaine colonial et postcolonial de recherche universitaire et dans quelle mesure doivent-elles changer, si tant est qu'elles doivent changer ? La seconde : Devrions-nous continuer à baser nos écrits sur un domaine unique d'études soudanaises maintenant que le Soudan est divisé ? Les auteurs proposent un « manifeste » pour les études soudanaises en exhortant les experts à cartographier un terrain intellectuel élargi en s'intéressant aux acteurs ne faisant pas partie des élites et des femmes ; à l'histoire de la base populaire et locale ; à l'environnement et à l'art ; aux sources orales ; et aux études interdisciplinaires portant sur la culture, la politique et la société. Ils avancent que les chercheurs peuvent aller au-delà des frontières en mutation de l'État-nation et reconnaitre les connexions établies grâce aux migrations et aux contacts passés et présents en étudiant le Soudan comme zone plutôt que comme un pays fixe. Enfin, dans leur introduction à ce numéro bilingue spécial, ils mettent en relief la pertinence croissance des travaux universitaires français dans le cadre de l'initiative visant à repenser les études soudanaises.

Keywords

Sudan, South Sudan, Sudan studies, historiography, secession

Disciplines

African History | Near Eastern Languages and Societies

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Introduction: New Paths, New Directions

In 2007, a team of three scholars asked colleagues specializing in different areas, periods, and genres of history to reflect on "what they now most desired for history in general and for that history closest to their own interests". The result was a volume called *Manifestos for History*. Approaching history writing "as an act of both fidelity and rebellion" in a postmodern period characterized by doubt and uncertainty, when "chosen ways of reading things lack solid, universal foundations", the contributors to this volume tried to set out agendas for future scholarship (Jenkins, Morgan and Munslow 2007: 1, 3, 5).

At this time of shifting foundations for the country that was called until 2011 Sudan - or sometimes, with the definite article, "the Sudan"[1] - which became two separate Sudan republics with the 2011 secession of the south, the contributors to this special issue are setting out upon a similar process of rethinking. Two questions stand behind our undertaking. First, what has Sudan Studies been, and how must it or should it change? Second, should we continue to speak and write about a single arena of "Sudan Studies" now that a split has occurred? Both questions inform this special issue of the *Canadian Journal of African Studies*, which addresses various disciplinary and topical approaches to "Sudan", the dual "Sudans", or the possible, more plural "Sudans" (Sharkey 2013).

To the extent that Sudan Studies qualifies as an academic field, one of its weaknesses has arguably been a tendency for its practitioners to describe the Sudan and Sudanese states as having been unique and incomparable relative to other places and polities (Willis 2001). This tendency goes back to Britain's official insistence, during the half century after 1898, that its Sudanese state was a "condominium" and not a colony: a one-of-a-kind, Anglo-Egyptian contraption. Originally functioning as a rhetorical tactic to forestall first a French and later an Egyptian colonial takeover, this terminology stuck.

British officials went on to stress Sudan's uniqueness in ways that had direct consequences for scholarship when they established a journal, *Sudan Notes and Records*, in 1918. As the academic *Ursprung* of Sudan Studies, this journal enlisted British officials – most of whom were trained as historians – and their associates (including people like E.E. Evans-Pritchard, who

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[1] One of the only scholars to discuss the politics of the indefinite and definite article in the country's name ("Sudan" versus "the Sudan") was Deng Akol Ruay, who suggested that the move towards dropping the definite article began in 1975 (Ruay 1994: 174).

went on to become a towering figure in British anthropology) to write articles about the customs and quirks, the folklore and fauna, found within the regime's sphere of domination (Sanderson 1964; Spaulding and Kapteijns 1991: 140; Kirk-Greene 1982). During its years of publication, from 1918 to 1968, *Sudan Notes and Records* established itself as the most authoritative scholarly journal on Sudan. Looking back, the journal offers confirmation of what many scholars have since noted: namely, that anthropology and history owe heavy debts to the colonial regimes that sponsored so much ethnographic and historical research during the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century (Asad 1973; Pels 1997; L'Estoile 2005; Tilley and Gordon 2007; Dulucq 2009). Again, *Sudan Notes and Records* reinforced a sense of Sudanese exceptionalism that translated into a consciousness – perhaps even an anxiety – among scholars of the region who came to see the Sudan as a stand-alone region, neither fully "African" nor fully "Arab".

In a 1968 conference paper delivered at Khartoum University, the historian Ali A. Mazrui diagnosed and gave a name to this condition when he argued that the Sudan was a site of "multiple marginality" along an Arab-African frontier (Mazrui 1969). Mazrui's terminology of "multiple marginality" offered a catchy, alliterative phrase that many have since repeated (see Woodward 2003), and suggested that the Sudan was, once again, *special* relative to Africa and the Middle East. Outsiders to the subject seemed to feel the same way. At least in North American and British universities, and with regard to the discipline of history, neither African nor Middle Eastern history textbooks covered the Sudan. Sudan therefore tended to be wholly absent from university curricula, while historians who specialized in this seemingly esoteric country had a hard time finding jobs (according to the professional lore that senior "Sudanists" passed, and still pass, to their junior colleagues). In practical terms, the dearth of Sudan-specializing historians also meant that there were few research institutions where graduate students were able to secure fellowships and pursue doctoral degrees with established mentors.

In short, Sudan not only fell on the margins, but between the cracks. These factors help to explain why members of the club of Sudanese scholarship came to feel that "Sudan Studies" was necessary, even desirable, in a way that, say, Nigerian Studies, Cameroonian Studies, and Angolan Studies – or for that matter, Jordanian Studies, Tunisian Studies, and Saudi Studies – might not have been.

The field of Sudan Studies has been organized and institutionalized by the creation of a number of academic communities that have included scholars, activists, and other concerned intellectuals, including members of the burgeoning Sudanese diaspora. The Sudan Studies Association (SSA) of North America, which was incorporated in Rhode Island in 1981, played a key role in this regard; so did the Sudan Studies Society of the United Kingdom (SSSUK), based in London. Over the years, the annual conferences of both organizations (along with their periodic, jointly sponsored international conferences) served as intellectual refuge zones where interested parties were able to engage in discussions without having to go through the tiring ritual of explaining and re-explaining the ostensibly intractable idiosyncrasies of Sudanese history and culture. However, these associations have also contributed to maintain the myth of the exceptionalism of Sudan Studies, so that their impact is ambiguous.

The frame around Sudan Studies began to widen in the 1990s, when scholars at the University of Bergen in Norway offered the infrastructural backing for a journal called *Sudanic Africa*. The journal's name recalled the idea of *Bilād al-Sūdān*, the "lands of the blacks" in the words of medieval Arab-Islamic geographers, and referred to the immediate sub-Saharan belt of Africa that stretched from the Atlantic Ocean to the Red Sea. But as a small and understaffed undertaking, *Sudanic Africa* lapsed in 2009 (with its last issue back-dated to 2005), moved its office (and host country), and changed its name – and perhaps we could add, lost its specific "Sudanicity" – by becoming the even more broadly framed journal, *Islamic Africa*, with offices at Northwestern University in Illinois. As its former editor explained, this shift from "sudanic" to "Islamic" in the title seemed more appropriate for a journal that was starting to field articles about other parts of the world where African Muslims were living, such as South Africa and even Newark, New Jersey, because of the absence of venues for research on such topics (Vikør 2012). In any case, during its heyday in the 1990s, the journal *Sudanic Africa* attested to the relevance of a "sudanic" zone which was far bigger than its eastern "Sudanese" component, and which covered an area that gave names both to "our" Sudan(s) in the east (that is, the current republics of the Sudan and South Sudan), and to France's former colony of Soudan (now Mali) in the west.

This wider geographical framing has also coincided with an opening of Sudan Studies to a variety of disciplines. From the 1990s, different types of interdisciplinary perspectives have been tested: the combination of economic and agricultural history with economics and political science (Mills 2004; Serels 2012) or of history, economy and anthropology (Bernal 1991); language politics and historical sociolinguistics (Sharkey 2008); history and educational research (Al-Ḥājj 2005; Al-Amīn 2007; Seri-Hersch 2011, 2014); politics, history and anthropology (Idris 2005; Leonardi 2013); and law, politics, and history (Ibrahim 2008; Massoud 2013). Historians have sometimes engaged with the toolbox of anthropologists, and vice-versa, as in Sondra Hale's historical and anthropological study of the left-wing women's movement (Hale 1996). As research in social sciences and the humanities has been swept by various types of 'post' studies, as in post-colonial or post-modern studies; of 'de' studies, as in deconstruction and de-Orientalization studies; and of 'neo' studies, as in neo-Marxist studies; Sudan Studies has also become increasingly critical of colonial paradigms (Spaulding and Kapteijns 1998; Vezzadini 2012). And yet much remains to be done.

Three Historians and an Intellectual Roadmap

This special issue is edited by three historians of modern Sudan who have devoted an important part of their work to the study of the colonial era (1899-1956). Any roadmap about what is left to explore necessarily reflects our particular standpoint and experience. This is evident not so much in our disciplinary choices, as this special issue includes contributions from linguistics, sociology, anthropology, and history. Rather, as historians, we share an impatience towards a form of presentism that is increasingly pervading Sudan Studies, and, more broadly, African Studies. In a country like the former, pre-2011 Sudan, which was fractured by decades of civil

and ethnic strife and ruled from 1983 by Islamist regimes, research on conflict, Internally Displaced Persons (IDP's), and political Islam is obviously extremely relevant. The important contribution of such research needs be recognized. However, this should not entail the transformation of all types of research into "crisis research" – a development witnessed by the emergence of fields such as urgent anthropology (Abusharaf 2009: 5, Zhelyazkova 2003).[2] In addition, the academic community has been subject to growing pressure to provide reports for national and international organizations, a pressure that is becoming increasingly sharp as research funding dwindles in most universities.

Historians are often uncomfortable with crisis research, which they regard as having a teleological and utilitarian relation to the past. Crisis research, in turn, seems to look disparagingly at history as at best a time-consuming enterprise and at worst a far-too-detailed reconstruction of the past, that risks to erase the "big picture". On the other hand, historians are worried that a selective choice of past events to make sense of the present may drive to misleading projections. One danger is to consider specific historical configurations as essential and timeless recurrences. The Sudanese civil wars are a case in point: observers tended to see conflict between a North and a South as part of the "genetic code" of Sudan.

In practical terms for this project, avoiding teleology and presentism also means specifying what we mean when we say "Sudan" with reference to different periods of history. Thus our agenda of "rethinking Sudan Studies" starts from the premise that we cannot be content with considering history as a mere reservoir from which one can select events to explain the present. Present configurations are the result of complex processes, and we cannot do without the awareness that they are situated and changeable.

Starting from these assumptions, we believe that there are several ways in which scholars who write about Sudan or one or both of the two Sudans – that is, scholars who are heirs to Sudan Studies – should seek to expand old paths and chart new ones. In this spirit, we set out here what we imagine as a "wish-list" for future academic research.

We hope, for a start, that scholars can make a greater effort to feature the agency and specificity of non-elite actors. This approach would entail examining societies at the grassroots and recognizing people as diverse groups or individuals – not as faceless massive collectives stuck in events that other forces are making (or rigging) around them. In simple terms, such a commitment requires efforts to focus on ordinary people and everyday lives, and not merely on social elites. With reference to political science in Africa, Jean-François Bayart and his colleagues argued in the 1990s that political scientists had hardly ever put non-elite actors at the center stage of their analysis, and that most scholarship had instead obliterated the diverse

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[2] Urgent anthropology, devoted to the 'rescuing' of the traditions and ways of life of engendered ethnic groups, has existed since at least 1958, when the International Committee on Urgent Anthropological and Ethnological Research, based in Vienna, began to publish a regular bulletin. Several institutions now award annual research grants for carrying out urgent anthropology, such as 'The Anthropologists' Fund for Urgent Anthropological Research' by the American Anthropological Association or the 'Fellowship in the field of Urgent Anthropology' at the Royal Anthropological Institute, UK.

motives and deeds of social actors (Bayart, Mbembé and Toulabor 1992). In their view, the core of the discipline should be preoccupied with the analysis of the "popular modes of political action" and on "politics from below". Of course, an earlier generation of Marxist Africanist historians, writing in the 1960s and 1970s, had endeavored to include the study of popular protest and collective action in the shaping of regional histories on a grand scale (for example: Iliffe 1967; Ranger 1968; Rotberg and Mazrui 1970). Yet, Sudan specialists have been slow to engage in this kind of approach. Works of political history and political science have tended instead to narrate the story of the major political parties and above all of their leaders (for example, Warburg 1978; Woodward 1990; Lesch 1998) – a choice that has made it difficult to see the complex history of people's political choices. In a parallel development, scholars who study the history of religion as it relates to Sudanese Islamic and Christian traditions have tended to focus, too, on leaders and institutions and less on rank-and-file believers. Studies of Islam have concentrated on Sufi thinkers and Sufi structures (Voll 1969; Grandin 1989; O'Fahey 1990; Al-Qaddāl 1992; Karrār 1992; Hofheinz 2003; Sedgwick 2005), while studies of Christianity have focused heavily on foreign Catholic and Protestant missions (for example, Gray 1990; Werner, Anderson, and Wheeler 1990). Notable exceptions include works that have brought anthropological insights to the study of the history of religion (for example, Yamba 1995; Hutchinson 2001; Poggo 2002).

Perhaps not surprisingly, the scholarship on trade unions in Sudan has been exemplary in its focus on rank-and-file, grass-roots politics. Most of this scholarship on trade unions and unionism has come from leftist Sudanese historians-cum-activists who have written in Arabic and who have at times evinced a nostalgia for what they describe as the movement's heyday during the 1950-to-1970 period (al-Qaddāl 1999, Qasim al-Sayyid 2004; Mūsā 2007; Zaylaʿī 2012). Note that with their many thousands of members, Sudanese trade unions were among the largest and most powerful in the African continent and had strong links to international Communist parties, including those in the Soviet Union and other Eastern European countries, which ended up bringing many leftist Sudanese students to Europe on scholarships for advanced educations in fields like medicine (see Sharkey 2004: 129).

Relative to political history, this focus on elites has attenuated somewhat during the last decade, as new studies have engaged with the popular motives underlying political choice and the various ways in which governance and authority have been constructed at the local level (Vaughan 2010; Willis 2011; Leonardi 2013). Meanwhile, others have been venturing more deeply into the field of local history by blending the study of oral, folkloric, and material culture studies with attention to textual sources (Ḍirār 2012; Salih 2012) – continuing a historiographical trail that scholars like Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Abū Salīm (historian and first Sudanese director of the National Records Office in Khartoum) blazed beginning in the late 1960s (see, for example, Abū Salīm 1971) and that others, like the Italian Comboni Catholic missionary, Stefano Santandrea, pursued in southern regions as well (for example, Santandrea 1977). If the field of local history expands, then it may be able to build upon the academic tradition of Sudanese folklore studies, which flourished in the 1960s, '70s, and early '80s (see Bābikr 1981; and al-Ṣādiq 2006).

A bottom-up approach in Sudan Studies has occurred in some other spheres of inquiry. Some scholars have attended to subaltern groups, that is, groups that have been subject to forms of marginalization and damaging representation within hierarchies of power (Guha & Spivak 1988). For example, there is an abundant literature on refugees and on the coping strategies of people affected by war (see for instance Bulcha 1988; Abusharaf 2002, 2009; Fábos 2008); there are also numerous studies on slavery and people of slave descent (Hargey 1981; Sikainga 1996; Makris 1996; Kenyon 2012). Indeed, slavery has been a central preoccupation of the field, as attested by the works of Warburg 1981; Johnson 1988; Spaulding 1988; Ewald 1990; Moore-Harell 1998; Collins 1999; Nuqud 2003; Kurita 2003; Vezzadini 2010; Lamothe 2011; and others. Slavery and its legacy is perhaps one of the most studied topics of Sudanese history, because scholars and South Sudanese intellectuals have looked upon the nineteenth century slave trade as a major, enduring source of discord between the northern and southern regions in the midst of the country's twentieth-century civil conflicts. However, many other socially fragile groups – including the sick, the old, and those deemed vagrants or criminals –have received little attention by contrast. A few studies have attempted to fill these voids, such as Spaulding and Beswick in their outline of a history of prostitution in modern Sudan (1995); and William Berridge (2011, 2012a, 2012b) in his studies of the connection between the colonial prison, policing and violence in northern Sudan. However, anthropological and historical approaches to concepts such as disability, deviance and sickness, beyond the recounting of institutional histories, are still wanting.

In charting new paths, we can also take a cue from postcolonial studies. In our case, however, instead of "breaking out of master-narratives that put Europe at the center" (Prakash 1992: 8), we can break out of the master-narratives that put the bounded, one-of-a-kind Sudan (in both its Anglo-Egyptian and postcolonial [1956-2011] manifestations) at the center. Finally, we can recognize that Sudanese history and "Sudan Studies" scholarship more generally has been "strewn with absences" (Vezzadini and Guidi 2013), and try to fill some of the gaps by addressing subjects that have drawn little attention from scholars.

Until recently, the absence of women in historical accounts has been especially flagrant. Researchers in Sudan Studies have only slowly become attentive to roles of women in society and history, thereby helping to mitigate the androcentrism of past scholarship. Until the 1990s, women – as both authors, subjects, and sources of history – were almost absent from scholarly production on Sudan, with the exception of scattered contributions on girls' education in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan (Sanderson 1968, 1975; Beasley 1992), economy and the peasantry (Benson and Duffield 1979; O'Brien 1980; Ibrahim 1982), women's movements (Badri 1986), and women vis-à-vis the law (Fluehr-Lobban 1987). Anthropologists have certainly been the most sensitive to women's experiences and ways of life, and from the 1990s appeared the first works - interestingly by women - with a specific gender focus (for example, Kenyon 1991; Hale 2003; Willemse 2007). On the other hand, historians have been slower to integrate gender as a category of analysis. To be sure, they have addressed gender, though mostly in relation to other questions such as body and health issues (Bell 1999), and slavery and social status in the Mahdist and Anglo-Egyptian periods (see respectively Decker 1998 and Sikainga 1995). Yet, few historical works capture the diverse trajectories and the transformations of women's

experiences in modern Sudanese history, their changing social roles, or their political and professional contributions. Exceptions include studies dealing with discourses on women's "progress" in colonial Sudan (Sharkey 2003), the role of women in the Mahdiyya (Decker 1998, Kurita 2004, Kramer 2010), the study of fashion in the Anglo-Egyptian period (Brown 2014), and the history of women's journalism (Amīn 2012). Finally, during the last ten years, works by Sudanese female historians and feminists have shed new light in particular on the main characters of the Sudanese women movement, including fascinating autobiographies ('Alī 2001, Bābikr Maḥmūd 2002 & 2008).

Another area that is sorely wanting in Sudan Studies, leaving aside studies of female genital cutting (Gruenbaum 2001; Abusharaf 2006; Boddy 2007), is that related to queer studies and body politics (again with few exceptions, such as Willemse 2005). Sudan scholars should consider addressing not only women's histories, worldviews and memories, but also gender and sexuality, while at the same time making it possible for voices of non-elite people to be heard.

Sudan Studies has also been extremely anthropocentric as demonstrated by the void of research on all non-human subjects, with the exception, arguably, of natural resources like water and petroleum (for example, Collins 2002). In fact, wildlife and botanical resources have profoundly shaped Sudanese history. One can think, for example, about the mutually connected and reinforcing histories of ivory and slave-trading in the nineteenth century; or of the trade of wild animals, whether in parts (as in rhinoceros horns) or as wholes, dead or alive (as in the animals bought for or given to zoos in Europe or preserved as skeletons in museums). Consider, too, hunting, which was a dense colonial ritual and a staging ground for colonial masculinity. Likewise, there has been the history of agricultural commodities such as gum arabic (Stiansen 1998). Once more, anthropology has been a step ahead of other disciplines, as the relation between the environment and human beings has been one of its early and continuing concerns (for example, Evans-Pritchard 1940; Asad 1970; James 1979). But a social history of hunting, of ecology and ecological changes, and general a cultural history of the environment are fields that need to be built from the ground up.

Other types of absences include, for example, the study of Sudanese visual, performing, and material arts such as music, theater, cinema, painting, and architecture. Rare exceptions to these absences in the arts include a study that traced the development of Christianity among the Dinka people by means of devotional songs (Nikkel 2001); a recent Arabic study on Sudanese film during the 1960s (Zakariyā 2013); and an article on the (unfinished) All Saints' Cathedral of Khartoum, which drew inspiration not from buildings in England but rather from a sixth-century Byzantine church in what is now Thessaloniki in Greece (Cormack 2013). The fact that the building featured in this last study is no longer a cathedral, but rather functions now as the Museum of Sudanese History after having been shut in the early 1970s in the wake of an attempted coup d'état (Cormack 2013: 76-77), seems worth mentioning in the context of this study and reminds us of the imbrication between architecture and politics. There are still other subjects that that have received only sporadic coverage in the past, such as the history of technology (Hill 1965, on railways and other modes of transport; Zulfo 1980, on the Mahdist military; and Abū Salīm 1980, on the history of irrigation via the waterwheel), and the history of

literature and poetry, in both written and oral forms (consider ʿĀbidīn 1967 and O'Fahey 1994). In short, part of the agenda of rethinking Sudan Studies must simply be to map out more intellectual terrain.

There is also the issue of coverage in time (as opposed to coverage in subject, place, or methodology). During the past half century, and with certain notable exceptions (e.g., Hasan 1967; Vantini 1976; Spaulding 1985/2007; Holt 1999; Khūlī 2011), most of the scholarship in Sudan Studies has focused on the period from the mid-to-late nineteenth century onward, when textual and especially printed sources in Arabic and European languages start to become abundant. Scholars have paid relatively little attention to what scholars of Sudanese history have commonly called the Turco-Egyptian era, referring to the period that stretched in the Sudan from the Egyptian conquest of 1820 to the fall of this post-conquest regime in the 1880s, in the wake of the Mahdist revolution (exceptions including Hill 1959 and Bjørkelo 1989). A major barrier to close study of the Turco-Egyptian Sudan has been language, since few scholars of the region are skilled in reading Ottoman Turkish manuscripts. Yet, as the field of late Ottoman studies builds momentum (especially in the Ottoman successor state of Turkey), and as archaeologists turn their attention to more recent periods of Sudanese history, new assessments of the Turco-Egyptian era, as part of an Ottoman era, are beginning to emerge. These studies may prompt scholars to reconsider what it meant for the Sudan (including what is now South Sudan) to have moved along the edges of the Ottoman orbit, as a result of its connections to both Egypt and the Red Sea corridor (Elzein 2009; Mallinson et al 2009; Lane and Johnson 2009; Ünal and Karacakaya 2013; ʿAbduh 2014). The field of archaeology and ancient history, in general, appears to be enjoying a resurgence vis-à-vis Republic of the Sudan (see, for example, Rilly 2012), although the extent to which archaeologists who focus on the pre-Islamic past will engage with historians of more "modern" periods remains to be seen.

Finally, one should say a few words about the relationship between the field of Sudan Studies and its methodology in reconstructing the past. While anthropologists are accustomed to representing the past from oral accounts – approaching these accounts as interpretive narratives illuminating the present, rather than as "objective" or "truthful" accounts of what happened – most other disciplines have heavily relied on written texts. To be sure, some scholars have used alternative, non-written sources, for example oral recordings (Miller 2004) or photography (Daly and Hogan 2005), or have tapped deeply into oral history accounts (Beswick 2004). Furthermore, an impressive collection of tapes recording rituals, songs, and languages of hundreds of different groups are kept in the Afro-Asian Institute of the University of Khartoum.[3] Still, compared to other contexts in Africa, writing about the past has been extremely dependent on textuality (Ibrahim 1985). More than that, oral sources seem to have remained epistemologically subordinate to written ones, so that if written sources can do without oral ones, scholars often seem to assume that the contrary is hardly the case. A richer use of oral sources would be desirable, although admittedly there are mounting hurdles (based on legal and ethical concerns) to conducting oral research (Ritchie 2011). One last void mapped by this

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[3] Most of the recordings, however, were made on tapes which are becoming increasingly unusable, as this technology is getting old and the machines needed to listen to them are breaking down.

unsystematic wish list for Sudan Studies is that of a more critical approach to textuality, and a greater openness to non-textual sources, including visual, musical, and material sources.

Sudan Studies after the Break-Up of the Republic of Sudan

Again, we are now at a turning-point: the 2011 break-up of the Republic of the Sudan has made a reassessment of Sudan Studies imperative, because this event has knocked down the perimeter that formed the colonial-territory-turned-knowledge-chamber. Many new studies are beginning to grapple with the significance of this rupture or to re-evaluate the historical circumstances that led up to it (for example, Idris 2013; Salomon 2014; Wassara 2015; Calkins, Ille, and Rottenburg, 2015). But the field of Sudan Studies, such as it is, would warrant reassessment even without these political developments, for research has moved with the times.

Given that all research ultimately entails issues of feasibility (which is another way of saying that scholars write what they are able to write), current scholarship also reflects shifting paths to research. Some routes have narrowed or closed off in recent years – for example, as records have been lost or destroyed in the midst of civil war (Daly 2004: 156-58). Others have opened up, for example, as archives have obtained, catalogued, or made available new materials and as the internet has made it easier to search for information, quickly, across borders. All the research now appearing reflects some combination of these changing opportunities and approaches, along with decisions about what is interesting or worthy of study.

Current research also reflects the fact that scholarly writing is not a monologue but an ongoing conversation. That is, even if subjects, sources, and approaches change, scholars remain in dialogue with – and in debt to – the texts of their predecessors, who were laboring under different conditions in earlier times. Works appearing now on the pre-2011 Sudan or on one of the post-2011 Sudans will therefore bear the marks, and carry some of the baggage, of earlier productions. Without a doubt, research has reflected the interests and predilections of individual scholars, yet it has also borne the marks of changing *Zeitgeists* and political vicissitudes – especially, in the Sudanese case, in the context of (plural) civil wars (Johnson 2011). These generational and circumstantial differences are on display when one compares the works of senior scholars who established careers during the early postcolonial period (i.e., the late 1950s or 1960s), when traveling to Sudan was uncomplicated by burdensome visa applications and when the access to archives was relatively painless, with the works of some of their students, who had to conduct research in times of duress (for example, Collins 1962 versus Poggo 2009). These generational differences are also evident even when one compares advisors with their students in different periods (for example, Holt 1958 versus Daly 1986 and Daly 2010).

Bearing these points about the context of scholarship in mind, what should we do and where should we go now? To put it differently, what can we do with, or about, Sudan (as it was before 2011) and the two Sudans (the Republic of the Sudan and the new Republic of South Sudan) in light of this goal of "rethinking Sudan Studies"? This is the pressing question that keeps

returning. The question is so tricky, in part, because scholars frequently arrange their research around nation-state constructions. And they do so not only because nation-states are standard organizing principles in global politics, shaping how we see the world, but also for the very mundane reason that nation-states, as power-bearing entities, grant visas and research permits, and frequently organize archives (and select the materials that go in them!) to boot. The question is also complicated by the very recentness of Sudan's division into two states. Sudan specialists endeavor to evaluate the impact of the split upon either their own research or the broader field of Sudan Studies, yet at the same time they are aware of lacking the distance necessary to produce a critically informed analysis.

Another related question is this one: given the discursive and practical power of nation-states, should we project the new, post-2011 Sudanese boundaries onto the past, and start specifying in our writings that we are narrating studies of just the Sudan (North) or just the Sudan (South), even when we are discussing historical events that occurred, say, in 1885 or 1924, when there was still just "one Sudan"? The answer should probably be no, but will end up being yes (Sharkey 2013). In any case, we seem to lack an academic protocol for dealing with this situation. Perhaps scholars of the two Sudans need to take a closer look at other countries that have split apart in the postcolonial period – with Ethiopia and Eritrea after 1991 undoubtedly offering the most obvious, and pertinent, example. Meanwhile, what is certain is that we are entering a period when the governments of the new South Sudan and the vestigial Republic of the Sudan will be engaging vigorously not only in state-building (Martin-Kessler and Poiret 2013) but also in the making and unmaking of heritage. "Heritage-making" is a particular kind of cultural construction work that French-speaking academics (who seem to be acutely aware of France's intense, ongoing history of political wrangling over representations of the past and its relics) call *patrimonialisation* and *dépatrimonialisation* (Seri-Hersch 2009). Of course, history writing always is, or at least should be, a battle over interpreting the past – as Sudan before 2011 amply illustrated (Warburg 1992). When done well, historical analysis registers the contestation and uncertainty – and not just the warm glow of nostalgia or "untroubled truths" – when looking back at what happened (Gorn 2000). But now that there are two Sudanese states, official and popular "heritage-making" enterprises in both countries will certainly bear upon the field of Sudan Studies, even if it is not quite clear as to how scholarship will be affected.

Here, then, is a possible roadmap: let us assume, for the moment, that we stick with the postcolonial (and now in some sense also post-national) category of a unitary Sudan that the phrase "Sudan Studies" implies – perhaps on the grounds that the two Sudans still share common borders, experiences, natural resources (especially Nile water and oil), and even people (including refugees and migrants, and their descendants). One option before us may simply be to decenter this notion of place by treating "Sudan" as a zone (which the term *Bilād al-Sūdān* had historically implied) rather than as a fixed and sharply-bordered place. We can then study movement into, out of, and within this zone – that is, the "migration" of people, ideas, and even things (see Appadurai 1996 and Spitta 2009). We can also consider situating Sudan against larger regional and global contexts – the "Middle East" and "Africa", the Nile Valley, northeast Africa, the Red Sea world, the trans-Saharan world, and the bigger world beyond,

notably vis-à-vis Europe and North America as recent sites of emigration (Abusharaf 2002; Sharkey 2004).

"History is a verb and not a noun", argued the editors of the volume, *Manifestos for History*, because the writing of history entails "intentional processes of shaping and meaning-making" (Jenkins, Morgan and Munslow 2007: 7). We could say the same about anthropology, political science, and other fields of scholarly endeavor. With this in mind, we have striven to make our own conscious engagements in the ongoing collaboration of Sudan Studies at this moment of flux in regional politics, history, and scholarship.

Sudan Studies: Views from Paris and Afar

In the last thirty years Sudan Studies has become a distinct, increasingly institutionalized field of research in Britain and North America. However, the Anglophone world can claim no monopoly on Sudan Studies. Indeed, since the last quarter of the 20th century, French institutions have hosted a lively cadre of scholars who have produced scholarship on the region in such fields as history (Grandin 1982; Prunier 2005), anthropology (Delmet 1979; Tubiana 1985; Casciarri 2002), political science (Marchal 2004; Delmet 2007), law (Bleuchot 1994), geography (Denis 2005; Lavergne 2005), sociology (Ireton 2005) and sociolinguistics (Miller and Abu-Manga 1992; Miller 2004).

The year 1989 was a turning-point both in Sudanese history and in the development of Sudan Studies in France. In the aftermath of the military coup that brought Sudan's current president Omar al-Bashir to power, French scholars for the first time published a multidisciplinary volume on modern Sudan (Lavergne 1989). Around the same time, Sudanese, French and British scholars met in Oxford to engage in an interdisciplinary dialogue on Sudan (Bleuchot, Delmet and Hopwood 1991). In the 1990s, a research program on Eastern Sudan was launched by the French Centre d'études et de documentation économiques, juridiques et sociales (CEDEJ) in Khartoum and the Development Studies and Research Center (DSRC) at the University of Khartoum. The program brought together French and Sudanese political scientists, sociologists, anthropologists, and linguists (Miller 2005). These various projects set the foundations for a kind of "Sudan Studies" in France, which now appears to be entering a period of vitality (Seri-Hersch 2013).

This interest in Sudanese affairs on the part of the French academic establishment was on prominent display at a symposium held in Paris on November 12, 2012. Elena Vezzadini and Pierre Liguori organized this symposium, which was entitled, "Au-delà des dichotomies: le Soudan, de la formation du pays à l'indépendance du Sud, 1869-2011" (Beyond Dichotomies: Sudan from the Formation of the Country to the South's Independence, 1869-2011), hosted by the Centre for African Studies and the Institute for the Study of Islam and Muslim Societies, both connected to the EHESS (http://soudan.hypotheses.org/).

This special issue on "Rethinking Sudan Studies" represents the continuation and expansion of the conversations that started at the Paris meeting. It stems from the encounter between

Anglophone and Francophone scholars reflecting together on Sudan, but from different historical standpoints, training and historical traditions.

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