Other identities: Politics of Sudanese discursive narratives

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Most Sudanese authors who have written about the nationality question in the Sudan have been personally involved in Sudanese politics, have held political offices, or have become advocates for the cause of one or another political liberation front. This unique position makes their contributions to the debate on ethnicity and nationalism not only tense, but also means that these writings contain influential political messages. This paper examines the works by major Sudanese authors who have contributed discursive narratives that express their individual political sentiments and simultaneously those of the ethnic groups to which they belong. It then assesses the impact of this committed agency on the construction and deconstruction of Sudan history and the subsequent use of the meaning of history in the struggle for defining the essential elements of a Sudanese national identity.

Key Words: Narratives, Identity, Ethnicity, Nationalism, Politics of meaning

INTRODUCTION

I define narratives as referring specifically to modern or traditional discursive forms employed by authors to explain, justify, or subvert a system of authority or dominance. Thompson (1984: 207) asserts that narratives “describe a sequence of actions and experiences, presenting them in typical human situations which they are engaged in changing or reacting to.” In this paper the term “narratives” will be applied to both literary works and types of discourse including written texts and accounts of events that are generally understood.
as partial representations of tradition. Narratives, therefore, will be seen as texts or written political histories that assume a predetermined and shared understanding of the history and myth of origin of an ethnic group and link the group's social make-up to its basic identity structure(s). When used to inform an ethnic interest, narratives reveal elements of ethnic discourse that go beyond formal or explanatory political meaning to become a potential instrument for political ideology. This is particularly relevant in the study of ethnicity, nationalism, and other political identity-related issues where narratives (as a manifestation of power relations and struggles, a form of ideology or fetishism) can be instrumental in subverting or maintaining power relations.

In the real world, authors who belong to dominant or marginalized ethnic groups use narratives to convey meanings that could be translated into action and consciously use discourse to maintain the status-quo or to break away from the prevailing relations of dominance. The dominant discourse magnifies the political role of the dominant ethnic or nationality group or groups and their relationship to the state. Such a discourse may contribute to the marginalization of ethnic groups, which are presented as "different" and non-conforming, and hence posing a threat to the "moral majority" and the nation-building project. In some East African countries, majority ethnic groups also claim a "moral majority" (for example, Dinka and Beja in the Sudan; Oromo and Amhara in Ethiopia; Buganda in Uganda; Luo in Kenya), making claims to power that at times portray a bellicose attitude toward minority groups. Narratives presented by authors to stake specific ethnic or nationalist claims abound. At the same time, counter-discourse is intended to solidify the internal front vis-à-vis the "other." In the social sciences, the analysis of the ways in which narratives can serve as a means of negation have generally been informed by Hegel's contention that "In discourse (the unity of process and system) negativity is always the underside and accomplice of positivity" (quoted in Thompson 1984).

However, whatever the intent of the author, once a text is perceived by the national or ethnic power brokers as a meaningful discourse, narratives and their interpretation become subject to what Ricoeur (1976) called distancization, i.e. the author is alienated from the meanings and interpretations generated by the text. Ethnic groups and states often assign their own interpretations of texts and hence use or abuse them to consolidate their power.
positions. In this latter sense, narratives must be seen as a form of discourse in which knowledge is expressed, but also as a medium through which the meaning of the history of events is produced and reproduced (Thompson 1984). Narratives count and recount the course of events and react back to them (Bove 1992). The interpretation of narrative would then go beyond its meaning to the narrator and beyond the narrator to defining and redefining the elements of a dominant discourse or its negation. Hence, the affirmation or contestation of ethnic histories is not just an affirmation or contestation of events and stories, but the economic, political, and cultural claims that the narrative justifies or negates, both from the author’s viewpoint and from the interpretations given by power brokers, ethnic groups, and their proponents or opponents.

In ethnic and nationality studies, discourse analysis is a synthetic deconstruction or reconstruction of a possible meaning; because authors are part of the objects of interpretation (i.e. an ethnic group, a nation or a state) any interpretative methodology that deals with the narrative and ignores the narrator falls short of comprehending the true meaning of the discourse or the possible meaning that the author attempts to explicate, construct, deconstruct, support, or negate. Essentially, discourse is informed by subjective knowledge presented by the state and its social corollaries as an objective justification for the continuity of socially structured power relations (Bove 1992; van Dijk 1993). Laclau (1994) tells us that books are discourses that inform institutions and social relations. As such they also reveal the author’s commitment to an ethnic cause or his or her unconscious projection of inherent subjectivity; the relationship between discourse and relations of domination affect the author’s analysis. To that extent, the separation of narrative and narrator seems impossible; because of the political role assigned to authors and intellectuals, their presentation and interpretation of narratives is not without a political message.

Caught between ethnic and national identity crises, Sudanese authors who publicly expressed ethnic sentiments were denounced for fear that they might frustrate the nation-building project, which had embarked violently on creating one nation state, one religion (Islam), and one language (Arabic) despite the ethnic and cultural diversity of the Sudan. The result was the development of an increasingly agonized intellectual milieu, one with split identities that are often privately ethnic and publicly nationalist. I therefore attempt to explain how authors from South and North Sudan have
used written narratives about Sudanese history and current political
development as a discursive form to construct, deconstruct, or recon-
struct meaning and to sustain or subvert dominant power relations.

In this case, the narratives are texts written by educated authors
who themselves belong to one or the other of the ethnic groups or
nationalities. These texts often transcend the author’s personal view
in affirming or providing a self-reflexive critique of the claims of his
or her ethnic group. In the Sudan, authors mostly advocate either a
Northern or a Southern point of view, depending on their own
origins. The question is why, despite the pervasive consequences of
modernity, some authors have retained diverse ethno-national or
ethno-social identities, regardless of the prevailing state-sponsored
nation-building project.

In this respect, my own publications on ethnicity and nationalism
in the Sudan (Mohamed Salih 1985, 1989a, b, 1991, 1993, 1994a, b,
1995 and 1996) fall within this wider tendency to maintain and
support local identities in the face of a homogenizing central state
synthesis. Born and raised in the Nuba Mountains, one of the most
underdeveloped and oppressed regions of the country, in political
proximity to Southern Sudan, the author of this paper has played
a committed role in support of the rights of the Nuba peoples to
regional autonomy and self-governing institutions. I can hardly
claim distance (or innocence for that matter) from the events I have
analyzed. My interpretation of this oppositional discursive narra-
tive is an attempt to expose and negate those of the politically and
economically dominant ethnic groups. It expresses not only the
political sentiments of the author’s individual identity, but also
the identity of the ethnic group to which he or she belongs and its
struggle to define its position as part of what constitutes a
Sudanese political identity. Hence, this discourse offers at least two
types of discursive formulation: (1) an identity crisis informed by
the mismatch between the author’s belonging to a nation-state with
a national mission aiming at national integration, and (2) depend-
ence on and compliance with its ethnic groups’ quest for autonomy
or the right of self-determination, which contradicts the nation-
building project. As I explain in the following section, the context
of Sudanese identity construction holds both positions to ransom.

THE CONTEXT

Since its independence from British colonial rule in 1956, Sudan
has been engaged in a protracted civil war that continues unabated
The civil war, and the social, economic, political, and inter-regional conflicts that have accompanied it, have been further complicated by geography and ethnicity. Sudan is the largest country in Africa, with an area of 2.5 million square kilometres, extending from the Sahara desert in the North to the tropical forests of the South, and from Chad and Central Africa to the West to the Red Sea, Ethiopia, and Eritrea to the East. Sudan's 30 million peoples are ethnically, culturally and religiously diverse; they consist of 56 ethnic groups divided into 597 subgroups who speak about 115 major languages. Islam and Christianity are the main religions, the North being predominantly Muslim and the South predominantly Christian, although some traditional religions are still practised by a large number of the population.

South/North differences are the result of a long history of mutual hostility characterized by Northern domination over the South. The slave trade was practised by Arabs and Europeans from the beginning of the 19th century and reached its height during Turco-Egyptian colonial rule (1821–1885). Although Anglo-Egyptian colonial rule (1898–1956) put an end to slave raiding, it treated the South as a separate entity, with different administrative and educational policies.

After 17 years of civil war between the North and the South, the Addis Ababa agreement was signed in 1972, between the Sudan Government and the main Southern rebel group, known as the Anya Nya Movement (the poisonous snake). This movement was also known as Southern Sudan Liberation Movement (SSLM). The Addis Ababa Agreement granted the South regional autonomy within a united Sudan. However, in 1983, full-scale civil war erupted again as a reaction to the introduction of Islamic (sharia) laws by the Northern-dominated government, and the division of the South into three regions (which undermined the Addis Ababa Agreement) in a typical 'divide and rule' policy. The other factors that contributed to the resumption of the second civil war include the absence of any serious attempt by the Northern-dominated Sudan Government to implement socio-economic development programs for the South, an explicit intention to export crude oil from Southern Sudan without consulting Southern politicians, and the growing mistrust between Southern and Northern Sudanese politicians.

The political wing of the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA), the Sudan Peoples Liberation Movement (SPLM), is perceived by its leaders as an all-Sudanese national movement. Although the SPLA originally claimed that it was not fighting to divide the
Sudan, by 1991 some of its leaders (such as Riak Mashar and Lam Akol) had opted for separation, which also signalled a division within the movement. The SPLA joined the National Democratic Alliance, a coalition of Sudanese opposition groups, in the fight against the current National Islamic Front, which came to power in a military coup d'état in 1989. However, the perceived identity of the struggle remains a sticking point: Northern Sudanese opposition forces struggle to replace the current National Islamic Front; Southern Sudanese struggle to establish a new Sudan based on new power relations and cultural values, as will be explained later.

The South–North ethnic and political differences have been further complicated by an economic divide reminiscent of the colonial legacy. Owing to its proximity to the Red Sea, the Turco-Egyptian colonial rule had concentrated all major development efforts in the North, including the Gezira scheme, which is the largest irrigation scheme in the world. The colonial Government also established large scale mechanized agricultural schemes to feed the Allied troops during the Second World War. These schemes were later institutionalized and became part of the production of export crops such as cotton and sesame (Mohamed Salih 1989a). The national Governments, which are Northern dominated, have continued the same pattern of development and established most of Sudan's industrial, transport, and communication infrastructure in the North. The few development projects (notably the Zande Scheme), health, education, and administrative facilities that were left by the Anglo-Egyptian colonial rule have been destroyed by the war. By and large, the North, with 60 percent of the population of the Sudan, controls more than 90 percent of the modern social development and economic sectors. Even the development projects that the Sudan Government promised to implement during the lull of the war between 1972 and 1985 were not taken seriously, a fact that later aggravated the South–North relations (Mohamed Salih 1994a). As a result of this uneven development, the South continued to be a source of cheap labor, raw materials (livestock, timber), and primary products (coffee, tea, and tobacco), all of which are largely controlled by Northern Sudanese traders. Today, Southern Sudan, including the capital towns, is predominantly rural, with 95 percent of the population subsisting on livestock raising (cattle), subsistence agriculture (millet, maize, cassava, yams), and hunting and gathering. Those who were displaced by the war (about 2 million people) live on relief food provided by Operation Life Sudan,
which was established by the United Nations in 1989 and is supported by international Private Voluntary Organizations (PVOs).

Therefore, although the national question in the Sudan revolves around a larger synthesis of South versus North, minority ethnic groups (for instance Nuer and Nuba) often prefer to act independently than to be seen as part of the national struggle in the terms identified by the larger Northern (Jalyyin, Beja) or Southern Sudanese ethnic groups (Dinka, Zande). As with other forms of political organization, even when they do unite, these alliances are fluid and display more external flexibility than position-shifts within the internal structural dynamics. In essence, marginalized ethnic groups negate the nation-building project, not merely for fear of the loss or dilution of identity and with it their oppositional advantage, but also because of the possibility of manipulating their power resources to achieve certain political goals, such as better representation in the state apparatus, or to increase their access to the factors of development (such as health, education, transport, clean water and sanitation, and so on).

In Sudan's highly charged political and social milieu, the meaning of history has become an indispensable ideological instrument in laying claims to the ethno-national nature of the state. Furthermore, meaning construction is informed by Sudan's diverse cultures, ethnic groups, and languages as well as the economic and political circumstances that have produced one of the longest civil wars in Africa. Hence the search for identity in such conflict-ridden state narratives is very important in the making of political boundaries that serve to reproduce or negate cultural subjugation or dominance. In such a turbulent political reality, identity construction is not a simple matter of asserting difference; it also involves the creation of narratives that give meaning to the ideology of dominance or its negation.

NARRATIVES AND THE IDENTITY OF THE NARRATOR

Narratives (as I have defined them earlier) are explained in relation to the socio-historical context within which political identities have been conceived, produced, and reproduced. The interplay between narratives and identity formation raises the question of how discourse can be used not only to deconstruct or reconstruct identities, but also to facilitate self-discovery, which is not necessarily conducive to nation-building.
I am not concerned in this paper with the use of oral history or novels to construct imagined or real collective representations of communities, political identities, and nationalities (Anderson 1983, Tolkin 1992, Ringrose and Lerner 1993) nor a search for nationalist and communal identities in the teacher's idea of Sinhala culture (Spencer 1990). This paper comes closer to Bhabha's (1990) idea that nations take history as their word therefore giving significance to its meaning through the interpretation of the events through which they have gone. In other words, the political elite who control the state use Northern Sudanese authors' interpretations of the historical events which Sudan has gone through to justify their claim over power. In this sense it explores how politically committed Sudanese authors (most of whom have held political offices or have been active members of the Sudanese liberation front) use narratives to express ethno-national claims, whereby narratives play a significant political role in justifying or condemning the dominant system of authority and its accompanying political order. However, the narratives authored by known individuals differ from folk narratives and folk-tales (about myths of origin and various other forms of oral tradition), since the former cannot be traced to a collective historical memory, but to an author who uses historical memories for ideological reasons. Since the majority of the Sudan's population (about 85 percent) is illiterate, the older generations still relay the common foundations of pre-understanding and collective memories through folk-tales, folklore, proverbs, and other forms of oral tradition such as poetry and myths of origin. However, as a result of modern education, urbanization, and industrialization, collective history narratives and tradition have given way to written discursive narratives. Concomitant to this is the use of foreign languages (Arabic and English as linguae francesae) as media and mediators of discourse. In spite of these changes, the power of tradition is still used as a reference point to a common history and set of experiences that distinguish "us" from "them." On the other hand, modernity has also produced modern narratives and narrators, books and authors. Not only has the concept of the narrative changed, but its content and form have changed as well. First, the content of narratives has changed due to changes in the political meaning assigned to history which has in turn influenced societal response to national events. Second, discursive form differences in local histories (rural/urban, oral/written) have been narrowed down by education and migration.
and their pervasive influence on the interpretation of national/regional political events. The metaphor and imaginary of ethnic differences and tensions have therefore been modernized to serve within the confines of "modernizing" political institutions (parties, national assemblies, constitutional committees, liberation movements, and opposition groups). Paradoxically, the so-called "traditional" ethnic values, cultures that are shunned by the nation-building project as backward and undirected to the creation of the nation-state, are used by modern and traditional elite alike in the struggle over power and resources.

Despite (and probably because of) the fact that most of the people of the Sudan are illiterate, written narratives command a formidable authority in shaping the views both of those who operate the state (professionals and intellectuals) and those who do not know how to read and write. After all, it is the acquisition of power through education that enables some educated elite to become the state operators, which in turn gives them access to political office. In Ricoeur's (1976) sense of the concept, written narratives expand beyond literary works to the sphere of social action by virtue of certain features that are shared by action and text.

One possible methodology (in addition to self-chosen reflections) in the search for "other identities" is to use a comprehensive interpretative method that treats narratives as historical moments that inform the author's ethnic identity (Sayer 1992). Other recent works (Thompson 1984; Bove 1992; Breuilly 1993; van Dijk 1993; Laclau 1994) have described elements of an interpretative methodology that could be divided into three principal analytical phases: (1) social analysis, which situates the political identity of the author within a given social-historical context. This is mainly because ethnic and/or nationalist identities are inseparable from the socio-historical analysis of the forms of domination or servitude that meaning (discourse) serves to maintain or subvert; (2) discourse analysis, which deals with the forms of discourse that express identity, not only as socially and historically situated practice, but also as a means toward meaning construction; i.e. forms of discourse are situated practices and meanings; (3) interpretative explication, which goes beyond formal discourse analysis, justifying action by transforming meaning (discourse) into political, social, or economic ideologies.

Therefore the interpretation of discursive narratives contributes to: (1) the understanding of the political basis for any conscious
contestation of narratives and their role in power mediation; and (2) the revelation of the author's political position as an advocate of a tormented and crisis-ridden identity that oscillates between tradition and modernity. The author's identity is, on the one hand, devoid of the burden of proof in every-day discourse and, on the other, responsible to a national constituency as well as the corridors of power. The importance of the second point is that authors whose narratives serve their political and ethnic identity without revealing it often become invisible accomplices to ethnic projects consciously or unconsciously designed to subvert the very nation-building project that they pretend to serve.

In treating Northern and Southern Sudanese authors' narratives, I deal with authors who (1) held political office, (2) those whose writings have influenced national or regional politics and access to the state apparatus (as official or behind the scene advisors), and/or (3) members of Sudanese oppressed minorities, liberation movements, or opposition groups whose writings represent a manifest or latent ethnic political viewpoint. The political context within which the narratives have been written is characterized by a protracted civil war between the South and the North (1955–1972 and 1985 until today), where war itself has become an instrument in shaping (and to some extent hardening) peoples' identity. In this context, the militarization of society has become a power aspect in the formation of confrontational identities that use violence to make up for lost political and economic opportunities. Victory and defeat are not less identity informing than cultural symbols and values.

A brief synopsis of some of the Southern Sudanese authors whose writings I have attempted to reinterpret is as follows:

Francis M. Deng is the son of Chief Deng Majock of the Ngok Dinka, a Southern Ethnic group that inhabits the contested Abyie District of Kordofan State on the border between South and North Sudan. Abyie District is contested by the Baggara Arabic-speaking groups and the Ngok Dinka of Southern Sudan, which inflames local conflicts and exhibits them as representations of South and the North. He served as Sudan's Minister for Foreign Affairs, and as Ambassador to Canada, the United States, and Scandinavia. Currently he is a senior fellow at the Foreign Policy Studies Program at the Brookings Institution, Washington DC.

Bona Malwal is a Dinka from Southern Sudan. He was a founder and member of the Executive Committee of the Southern Front (SF) during the first civil war between the South and the North.
(1955–1972). Previously, he served as Sudan Minister for Culture and Information and member of the High Regional Executive Council of Southern Sudan. He was the editor of The Vigilant, which contributed to consciousness raising during the first civil war, and established the Sudan Times Daily, which was closed down by the National Islamic Front in 1989. Currently he is the editor and owner of the Sudan Democratic Gazette, a monthly journal published in London, UK.

Abel Alier is also a Dinka from Southern Sudan. He was District Judge in Khartoum Province, Northern Sudan. He was one of the main negotiators on behalf of Southern Sudan with the Sudan Government in what was latter known as the Addis Ababa Agreement (1972). He became the Vice President of the Sudan and the first President of Southern Sudan Regional Executive Council following the Addis Ababa Agreement, when the South had established an autonomous self-government (1972–1983). Currently he is under house arrest in the Sudan as a result of his latest support of Southern Sudan’s right to self-determination.

The late Deng A. Ruay was a Dinka. He died in the war-zone in 1994, a month before his book Politics of Two Sudans was published by the Scandinavian Institute of African Studies in Uppsala, Sweden. In 1985, he fled from Northern Sudan and joined the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army (SPLA), where he stayed until his death in 1994. Ruay also supported the Southern Sudanese through his work in the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC).

Abdel Ghaffar M. Ahmed is Northern Sudanese. He was member of the Democratic Front, an alliance of “the progressive forces,” including the Communist Party. He left the Democratic Front over ideological differences. He was the Executive Secretary of the Organization for Social Science Research in Eastern and Southern Africa (OSSREA), Addis Ababa, Ethiopia.

Mudathir Abdel Rahim is from the Jaliyyin ethnic group, Northern Sudan. He served as Sudan Education Attaché in Scandinavia. He was a member of the Umma (National) Party, but served under various governments, including holding an advisory position in the National Islamic Front government of the day.

Abdel Wahab El Affendi is from the Shygiya ethnic group, Northern Sudan. He was the head of the Information Department, Sudan Embassy in the UK and a devout Islamicist with a number of books on the development of the Islamic movement in the Sudan. El Affendi is among the few Sudanese specialized in the Islamic and
political thought of Hassan El Turabi, the leader and current speaker of the Islamic National Front-dominated Sudan Parliament.

Sharif Harir is a Zaghawa from northwestern Sudan. He was a long-term member of the Muslim Brothers (MBs) organization, which later became the National Islamic Front (NIF). Being an African Muslim, and therefore in an inferior position in the Northern dominated National Islamic Front (NIF) narrative which treats Islam as the ideology of the Arab nation, he left the Muslim Brothers and the NIF and created Sudan Federal Alliance, an autonomous organization within the National Democratic Alliance. Western Sudan liberation forces operate from bases in Dar Fur State in the west and the Republic of Eritrea on the eastern border of the Sudan.

M. A. Mohamed Salih, the author of this paper, is a Hawazma from the Nuba Mountains. He was a member of the Executive Committee of the Nuba Mountains Political Union (NMPU), which struggles for greater political autonomy for the Nuba peoples of the Nuba Mountains of the Sudan. He supports the right of Southern Sudan to self-determination, including independence from internal colonialism.

The late M. Omar Beshir was from the Shygiya ethnic group, Northern Sudan. He was a professor of political history, University of Khartoum, pro-Arab socialism (particularly, Egypt during the late President Nasser administration). He was a member of the Northern Sudanese delegation that negotiated the Addis Ababa Agreement (1972) with Southern Sudan political and military movements. He served as political advisor on Southern Sudan affairs and Sudan Foreign Policy during Numeri’s regime (1969–1985).

Mansour Khalid, a Northern Sudanese, served in various ministerial positions, including Minister of Foreign Affairs during Numeri’s regime (1969–1983). He joined the SPLA/SPLM and became one of the most outspoken Northern Sudanese against the injustices committed by the North in Southern Sudan.

It is evident that most Southern and Northern Sudanese who have written about Sudan’s political history and issues of identification have been involved in Sudanese politics, either as holding political positions, as freedom fighters, or as prominent members of Sudanese political parties. These Sudanese authors have much in common with urban communities which have developed multiple sources of identity identifiable by the type of modern and traditional education they have been through and the narrative
forms available to them. The relationship between people and
their history must have been changed by written narratives over
which a large sector of the population has no control. In other
words, narratives are no longer the monopoly of those traditionally
defined social roles assigned to story-tellers, elders, poets, and
chiefs, etc. This signifies a gradual power shift from the traditional
to modern institutions of identity formation. Hence, the sources
of the South-North identity schism can be historically related to the
development, since the 1930s, of a distinct Southern Educational
Policy whereby Southerners were educated under the East African
school curriculum and Northerners under the Middle Eastern
Arabic-Islamic curriculum (Beshir 1969). After independence, and
in an attempt to create a nation-state dominated by the dominant
language (Arabic), religion (Islam), and related values of the North,
subsequent Sudan Governments have adopted heavy-handed
national integration policies, including the forcible Islamization and
Arabization of the South (Mohamed Salih 1994b, 1995). It is evident
that most of the Sudanese authors cited in this paper have, in one
way or another, been products of these education policies, which
reinforced rather than reduced their ethnic sentiments. Paradoxically
this occurred despite the fact that the Sudan education
establishment claim that non-reference to ethnicity and tribalism in
school textbooks would encourage national integration.

In sum, elements of the colonial dual education system have
persisted despite the Sudan Government’s attempt to create a
uniform national education policy. The elitist nature of post-colonial
education has offered privilege, senior appointments, and political
office, particularly to the authors who used discursive narratives to
advance an ethnic or national cause. The narrators with whom this
paper deals are not just authors, but also active participants in
ethnic and national politics. Their narratives not only advocate
their own political convictions, but those of the ethnic groups or
nationalities to which they belong. Moreover their discursive nar-
ratives also exposed their ethnic groups to the histories of other
ethnic groups with whom they have to negotiate their own posi-
tions vis-à-vis other elites’ political interests.

NARRATIVES AND IDENTITY DECONSTRUCTION

Ethnic group here refers to people who believe that they share a
common destiny, united by cultural, political, and economic bonds.
In the Sudan, an ethnic group may have a common name, culture and language, common origin or descent (Dinka, Zande, Zaghawa, Shilluk, Nuer, Fur, and Beja). They may also have different sub-cultures, and different but mutually intelligible languages and sub-ethnic groups. For instance, the Nuba of the Nuba Mountains speak about 39 different languages, have different forms of descent, e.g. the Moro are patrilineal, while Shatt are matrilineal (Mohamed Salih 1983). During the colonial period the term Nuba referred to the mountain people of Kordofan. Although they do not form a cohesive ethnic group, they were federated under one administrative structure and given the name Nuba by the colonialists. During the colonial period and the period that immediately followed independence, the large ethnic groups were used as basis for the Native Administration (1898–1921) and the Indirect Rule (1922–1956). The local administration system had granted the ethnic groups limited local sovereignty over their people. Asad (1973) has suggested that some of these ethnic groups were the creation of the colonial administration, which found them convenient structures of local government. It was also part of the “divide and rule” policy which kept political rivalry and competition for political favors alive.

The local histories that inform ethnic identity in the Sudan are not necessarily consistent with the South–North divide, since there is no collective North or South identity. There are different ethnic groups with diverse ethnic identities within the South and the North. As a matter of fact, the North is as ethnically and culturally divided as the South and cannot claim that it is united through Islam or the Arabic language, since over 40 percent of the population of the North have Arabic as a lingua franca and not as a mother tongue. Of great relevance to ethnic diversity in the Sudan is the process described by Brass (1991:15): “The cultural forms, values, and practices of ethnic groups become political resources, for elites in competition for political power and economic advantage. They become symbols and referents of members of the group, which are called up in order to create a political identity more easily.” However, when translated into the North–South divide, what becomes clear is what Deng (1995) describes as a “War of Visions,” in which both the Northern and Southern political elite are fighting over an imaginary that dictates belief in a united South and a united North, while neither exists as a uniform entity.

Kellas (1991) provides helpful definitions that can be used to distinguish between different types of nationalism. These are: (1) ethnic nationalism, the nationalism of ethnic groups, which defines
Politics of Discursive Narratives

their nation in exclusive terms, mainly on the basis of common
descent (Dinka, Nuer, Jaliyyin, Shynggiya, Juhyina, etc.); (2) social
nationalism, which is defined by social ties and culture rather than
by common descent (Arab, African or Afro-Arab Sudanese, Nuba,
Beja)—this definition stresses the shared sense of national identity,
community and culture; (3) official nationalism, or the nationalism
of the state (an oscillation between Arabism and Afro-Arabism,
with less emphasis on Africanism), encompassing all those legally
entitled to be citizens, irrespective of their ethnicity, national iden-
tity or culture. Reference here could be made to the nation-state.
Official nationalism often encompasses different forms of ethnic
nationalism. It is worth noting that all three types of nationalism
can be enhanced or curtailed by the political, economic, and cul-
tural arrangements of a given state. Domination by Northern
Sudanese ethnic groups or nationalities has contributed to the
Sudanese civil war, which has resulted in the destruction of the
fabric of whole societies.

The author's identity is of particular relevance to the study of
ethnicity and the state in the Sudan (and elsewhere), since social
scientists have played an important—although not necessarily
positive—role in fostering or opposing state-sponsored nation-
building projects. In the particular case of the Sudan, most authors
of political texts have been active in national politics, including
holding political offices in various governments. Therefore, their
discursive narratives play an important role in the contestation of
identities and can be used in subverting or constructing the values
of the dominant polity. The development of narrative-based discurs-
ive formation can also be used to interpret the dominant values
of given power relations. Since the Sudanese state is Northern-
dominated, most narratives of Northern Sudanese authors support
the dominant power relations. The narratives of Southern Sudanese,
the deprived and marginalized ethnic groups, are oppositional and
therefore inform both the state and public of a different reality
about the identity of the Sudanese State.

In a paper subtitled "Some Methodological Problems in the Study
of Nationalism and Nation-building in the Sudan" (Mohamed Salih
1985), I highlighted the political views of Sudanese authors on
nation-building from a regional perspective, with special reference
to the wider division between South and North. That paper still
expresses some of my present concern about how authors who
made significant contributions to the study of nationalism and
nation-building in the Sudan often present their ethnic claims as a
national project. However, since some of the themes in that paper were not fully explored, I will now attempt to elaborate, up-date, and revise some of the ideas in that paper.

Most, if not all, of the studies of South–North relations in the Sudan have been historically oriented. History has been used intensively by authors from both sides of the South–North divide to justify or condemn the events that contributed to the protracted civil war, which raged from 1955 to 1972 and from 1983 to date. Northern Sudanese authors also express diverse views about history and its uses and abuses to justify a common claim of a distinct but overtly dominant identity. For instance, Hasan (1967: 181) wrote that: “It is true to say that the supremacy of Islam in the Sudan dates from the rise of an Islamized dynasty. The stage was set for the further progress of Arabization and Islamization which would ultimately achieve two results: the creation of a feeling of cohesion among the heterogeneous inhabitants of the country and its gradual absorption into the Arab world.” In an attempt to respond to this discourse without challenging the discourse of Arab supremacy, Abdel Rahim (1971: 237) asserts that: “Just as Arabism is a cultural and non-racial bond, Africanism is also a geographical, political and cultural but non-racial link which binds together the various peoples of Africa irrespective of differences of race, colour or language. Arabism and Africanism have become diffused in Northern Sudan.” In response to this, I wrote that “Many Northern Sudanese feign an Arab identity and often neglect that they themselves are Afro-Arabs” (Mohamed Salih 1989a). My main argument here is that Abdel Rahim’s view that the North is Afro-Arab while the South is African is tantamount to arguing that the North possesses all the ingredients of a Sudanese nation whilst the South has only a fluid sense of Africanism, in other words, a partial ingredient of the Sudanese nation.

Other Northern Sudanese authors are bluntly Arabist. For instance, Beshir (1974) argues that “the steps taken to create a presidential system governed by an Islamic constitution would have made it impossible to solve the Southern Problem, and it would also have alienated the Sudan from its strong Northern neighbour, Egypt. Traditional and conservative elements would have become stronger and would have used this strength to further their interests and weaken the progressive new forces in the society. The modernization which these new forces hoped to attain would have been frustrated” (p. ix). The point here is that there are
Northern Sudanese narratives that assent to Islam as a non-racial faith and therefore do not agree to Islamic-Arabism as a racial ideology incompatible with the ethos of Afro-Arabism. Since authors such as Abdel Rahim (1971) would argue, as does Beshir, that Arabism in the Sudan is not a racial but a cultural category, the implicit assumption here is that Arabic culture is the dominant culture in the Sudan. With respect to this particular point, Malwal (1981) contends that the South rejects the old notion held by Northern Sudanese that Africa has no culture and that the Arabs brought their culture to it.

In the construction of a distinct Southern Sudanese nationalism vis-à-vis the North, I argued (Mohamed Salih 1985: 39) that this was shaped by a common experience and past memories of the struggles for survival and against Northern domination. Slavery, the colonial policies of administrative and educational separation, the partial Christianization of the South vis-à-vis the predominantly Muslim North, and the suppression of pan-Southern, pan-African aspirations by a strong and Northern-dominated state, all played a part in the construction of Southern Sudanese identity vis-à-vis the North. Southern authors often portray their past and present suffering as a live issue. In other words, the decisive moments from experiences of slavery and domination by the North are extended into the present as a powerful discursive form expressed by Southern Sudanese narratives.

For the period between 1972 and the onset of the 1983 civil war, a common theme in Southern Sudanese narratives was the strong tendency toward identity construction in Southern Sudan. Oduho and William Deng (1963: 57), while leading the separation movement in the South, wrote: “Here is a clear case of Africans being oppressed for no reason than because their skin pigment differs slightly in some cases and because they belong to a different race from that of the people who are at present wielding power.” Francis Deng (1978: 228) claims that, “deeply wounded by memory of the past, many Dinka cannot believe that the Northerner has truly changed or that he will continue to make the necessary adjustments in his attitude toward the Southerners to consolidate an ever-lasting peace and unity.” Yangu (1966: 1), a Southern Sudanese activist during the first civil war (1955–1972), dedicates his work to “all the Africans sold by Arabs everywhere, to the Africans murdered by the Arab before, during and since the 1955 revolt.” Malwal (1981: 45) lamented that: “If a Northern politician or administrator
took a decision which affected the South, Southerners accused the North of seeking to dominate the South. The identities of the South and the North are constructed around mutual confrontation, and these identities differ from each other in their perceptions of Sudan history and political pursuit. The Southerners are suspicious of Northern designs, which are portrayed as rarely beneficial to the South. At the level of ethnic groups, Deng's work (1973, 1978) was the best representation of Dinka narratives, which he collected from elders and presented in theses ranging from cosmology to war and peace.

Two of these narratives stand out as discursive formations that use history in order to subvert Northern dominance. In his book *Africans of Two Worlds; The Dinka in Afro-Arab Sudan*, Deng (1978: 132) quotes Giirdit, one of the Dinka chiefs interviewed in the book, as describing the slave raiders thus: "They came from our side attacking and also from the South of us, then went to Malwal Dinka country and turned to our Dinka side again. They went on destroying tribes." Chief Bilkuei, who is also interviewed by Deng (1978: 133), states that, "Destruction came with the Mahdi [Northern Sudanese religious leader who led the 1881–1885 revolt against the Turco-Egyptian colonial rule]. This destruction went to Jok and it went to Nuer and it went to Beir. The place called Kwel and the place called Paweny and all these areas, it was he who destroyed them." The narratives presented here draw attention to the inherent linkages between the South's struggle for survival against the brutality of slavery, which has never been condemned by Islam as long as the enslaved are not Muslim, which applies to most Southern Sudanese (who are Christian).

Even at the narrative level, Deng's "War of Visions" (1995) between South and North is a war of interests that are served by reference to the dominant core values and political interests of ethno-nationalists such as Abdel Rahim (1971). It is, therefore, clear that discursive forms and concerns interact and feed into the author's subjectivity, which in turn contributes to the constitution of "other identities." Despite the dynamism of history, both Northern and Southern Sudanese authors have used history as a reference point in explaining South–North conflict or advancing North or South cases.

The picture established so far portrays an image of a rigid ethnic make-up, with little or no response to decades of hostility or cooperation between diverse Sudanese ethnic groups, or to other emphases on unity in ethnic and cultural diversity, or to the current
regime's stress on nation-building: these narratives are pointers to the ethnic identity of the authors (Northern authors representing the interests of Northern Sudan, and Southern authors those of Southern Sudan). It is a clear case of commitment to an ethnic or national cause in which narratives are used to justify the authors' respective identities.

The narratives presented so far reveal that a committed discourse is a representation of a political response to the construction or deconstruction of power relations whereby the identity of the author is overtly expressed by the narrative. Pre-1983 Northern Sudanese authors publically adopted official nationalism but privately expressed various forms of ethno-nationalism. It would be simplistic to portray all Sudanese authors as ethnicists, although the majority are ethnicists (in the core of their ideology). However, a real but modest change away from the North-South dichotomy to a Sudanese national identity did occur in Sudanese narratives when the Sudan Peoples Liberation Army and its political wing (SPLM) proclaimed in 1983 that their struggle was for the creation of a New Sudan. This was the first time in Sudanese history that a Southern-based liberation movement had developed an ideological orientation that called for the liberation of the whole of Sudan and not just the South. Some Northern Sudanese expressed sympathy with the political programme of the SPLA/SPLM and distanced themselves from the dominant discourse (Khalid 1988; Mohamed Salih 1985, 1989a). Other authors such as El Affendi (1991) remained unmoved and kept working within the dominant Arabist discourse with its strong ethno-nationalist critique of any attempt to create a Sudanese secular state (El Affendi 1991).

A number of narrative forms and treatments of the national question in the Sudan can be identified as representative of different discourses in this period. The Islamist narrative is represented by El Affendi, whose work should be read against the backdrop of the National Islamic Front (NIF) policies, which have committed the Sudan, with its diverse ethnic groups, to a holy war against the South. According to El Affendi (1990: 182), the dominant discourse here is that the "NIF managed to establish itself as the carrier of the banner of 'northern nationalism,' thus assuming a comparable role to that played by the SPLA/SPLM in the South." El Affendi argues that "the role of the NIF is to defend Islam and Arab culture and frustrate Western attempts to use the South as a Christian bridge between Muslim North Africa and Eastern and Central
The failure to date of peace negotiations between NIF representatives and rebel fighters is due to the prevailing view that in religion, the unity between text and action are representations of a divine narrative and an unquestionable discourse.

The definitions given to Islamic discursive narratives (El Affendi 1991) are ideologically constructed to serve NIF political ends. This could explain why the role of Islam in Northern Sudan has been presented by Islamist authors as a divine, unquestionable narrative. The dominant Islamic narrative presupposes an association between divinity and the Islamic narrative; the Islamists' claim over political power is justified by its portrayal as a God-given, non-negotiable truth. Even in this religious sense, narratives can no longer be simply classified as traditional or modern, but become multi-dimensional in form, content, and manifestations of social reality.

The defining element in the South-North war of will is a dominant Muslim discourse versus other cultures and values. O'Brien (1993: 71) comments on this trend, arguing that "An inclusive Sudanese identity has now been under sustained assault for some time. The state to which it was formerly supposed to correspond has been destroyed and then reconstituted on a narrower base as the fraction of the single-national ruling class that has dominated Sudan since independence has responded to loss of legitimacy in terms of multinational harmony and developmentalism pressing its claims to legitimacy on the basis of claims of Arabism and Islamism." Furthermore, it is clear that the Islamic narrative has also transformed its religious meaning into a political message that feigns a picture of an Arab-Muslim identity structure informed by a message different from that presented by the sectarian political parties (the Umma or Nation Party and the Democratic Unionist Party). In fact, the NIF is critical of, and opposed to, the sectarian parties, which it describes as a form of traditionalism incompatible with Islamic teachings. As O'Brien (1993) has correctly concluded, this discourse offers little hope for the future of Sudan as a unitary nation-state.

The second discursive form is represented by Khalid (1988), the most prominent Northern Sudanese committed to the cause of New Sudan. Khalid’s book entitled Garang Speaks is a narrative written by a Northern author and wholly devoted to a Southern leader-politician, his speeches and political program. To my mind, this is a major break-through in dealing with the issues pertaining
Politics of Discursive Narratives

Khalid (1988) is for ridding Sudan of this duality and that Southern and Northern Sudanese should strive to develop a Sudanese identity that ideally combines both Africanism and Arabism.

Third is the unitary discursive form adopted by Northern and Southern ethno-nationalist authors, such as Alier's (1990) *Southern Sudan: Too Many Agreements Dishonoured*, Deng's (1995) *War of Visions: Conflict of Identities in the Sudan* and Ahmed's (1994) *El Sudan baina Arabiatuhu wa Afriyatiatuhi* (literally translated, Sudan between its Arabism and Africanism). This is an idealist trend that calls for unity in diversity and at times expresses utopian views far removed from South-North realities. However, it generally supports the possibility of South-North co-existence without defining the parameters upon which this co-existence could be based. The difference between Southern and Northern Sudanese who advocate this position is that the former are often confronted with official nationalism, which is more Arabist and less Afro-Arabist. The latter still operate largely within the dominant core values of the Sudanese state, although they give more attention to the possibility of curtailing the difference while enhancing the need for national consensus.

Separatism as a counter-Northern discourse is represented by Ruay's (1994: 181) *The Politics of Two Sudans*, in which he reviews more than 50 texts dealing with colonial and post-colonial state policies and attitudes towards the South from the North. Ruay concludes that, "The Southern People are one people in culture, way of life and in everything except the diverse languages that they speak. They are Black African people and they occupy a territory endowed with rich and varied resources... every community is to have the right to manage its local affairs in accordance with its distinctive values, tradition and outlook. In the like manner, a sovereign power in Southern Sudan would govern its people in a way that would enhance everything that unites the people and exclude everything that divides them. The tribalists... would have no voice in this system of the union of hearts in the future independent Southern Sudan." Again the case for separation is not based on the reality of Southern Sudan, which is as ethnically and culturally divided as Northern Sudan. The reconstruction of a Southern Sudanese national identity is as much at odds with its
own reality as it is with the reality of the whole of Sudan. This shows the relationship between the dominant discursive forms and the identity of the author, where narratives are presented in support or negation of ethnic group or nationality claims. However, as I have attempted to show, even counter-narratives are important in informing the other and must therefore be included in the issue of identity reconstruction.

The narratives presented above reveal that as elements of identity formation, narratives constitute an attempt to reinforce or subvert political dominance in a given society. Thus, in an in-depth interpretation, an author's theoretico-political categories are ideologically motivated representations of discourse. Either way, questioning the identity of an author is invaluable for in-depth hermeneutics, which combines both the interpretation and explanation of history. By and large, discourse analysis and narrative interpretation are well placed to create a bond between meaning and domination, an assumption which relates to one of the main questions that has troubled social scientists over time: where to draw the line between subjectivity and objectivity, particularly when dealing with issues of significance to the author's ethnic, social, and national identification. This raises the question as to whether social scientists should be entrusted to analyze (ethnic and national) conflicts that involve their own ethnic groups.

IN SEARCH OF OTHER IDENTITIES

Other identities here refers to the identities of the authors that they often refrain from disclosing. It is a search that urges social scientists to embark on a conscious dialogue and self-questioning of the manner in which they treat issues of ethnicity, nationality, and their relationship to the state. The objectivization of the self is an act far removed from humanity, and if social scientists are part of that humanity, it would then seem impossible for them to assume that discourse analyses are meant just to document or to assist societies to construct alternative identities for the sake of alternatives. Sudanese narratives are highly politicized, and thus penetrate far beyond merely defending theoretical or ideological positions.

To my mind, Sudanese discourse analysis has failed to explore fully the negativity of discourse as a self-understanding form. In fact, discourse in this particular case is either the dominant one, which is statist in form and content, or oppositional, with meagre
differences between different positions as regards their approach to their own ethnic group's questions. This paper attempts to combine interpretation and explication by locating some Sudanese authors (or narrators) within the socio-historical context that gave rise to the question at hand.

In my view, social discourse without interpretation will fall short of explaining how forms of discourse could be articulated to serve a particular interest or interests, or to further the cause of an ethnic group or nationality. I have argued elsewhere (Mohamed Salih 1993) that, because knowledge is a mediator of power, the relationship between knowledge and human interests is common to social sciences. Certainly, social science is a social construct and as such the triumph, decline, acceptance, or rejection of its findings is socially constructed. The relationship between knowledge and human interest (Habermas 1972) is urgently relevant when the social scientist is part of the subject of analysis and a member of an ethnic group or nationality. Discursive formulations are apt embodiments of theories of action or justifications of counter-actions.

In both cases, without subjectivity, knowledge and epistemology seem impossible because narratives are forms of discursive representation of peoples and interests. Thus narratives alone cannot capture the full range of identity formation beyond crisis manifestations: a negation of reality or the reinforcement of the negativity of the other. In a similar situation, Laclau (1994) poses the question in a different way: Why have ethnic and nationalist sentiments risen during late modernity? Laclau argues that once the deconstruction of certain known political identities (such as ethnicity) is complete, this reveals the power games that govern their actual structuration, so that new and more complex hegemonic political movements become possible within them.

In common with Brass (1991), Laclau also points out that theoretico-political categories do not exist only in books, but are also part of the discourses actually informing institutions and social relations: these deconstructive roles of discourse are an integral part of the making of political life. Rather than glorifying the postcolonial experience during which the very existence of ethnic politics was denied, authors should live up to the challenge of ethnic groups (real or imagined) playing an important role in the political making of Africa. Revealing the discursive formation of their own identities, and how they use or abuse them to subvert or sustain state formation, would result in political levelling in which political
development would be based on real structures of real society. The need for ethnic identification will not disappear simply because the African states deny it or because authors attempt to avoid it publicly while practicing it privately.

CONCLUSION

The material presented earlier informs both the dominant discourse and its negation. In the state realm, while the dominant discourse is used to justify the system of authority, the dominated ethnic groups present an emancipatory discourse aiming at the negation of domination. In the case of the Sudan, two disturbing tendencies persist. The first is the co-existence of at least two identities, one private and the other public: these two identities inform (or rather misinform) both the state and their ethnic groups, a fact that is also reflected in the behavior of Sudanese politicians and the way they act and interact in the national and the ethnic domains. These actions in turn inform the author's ethnic identities and hence become a tool in subverting the nation-building project that the state publicly advocates. The second is the failure of the authors (often part of the political elite) to transcend or reveal their ethnic identities: on the one hand, they enhance ethno-nationalism, and, on the other, publicly adopt the nation-building project, thus becoming both defenders and prosecutors of official nationalism. This not only hampers dialogue by denying their ethnic groups the opportunity to articulate a constructive ethno-national identity, within a united Sudan, but fuels through them the genesis of discordant identities. The contradictions in the political position of these authors are often expressed in social tensions justified by discursive forms and narratives.

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