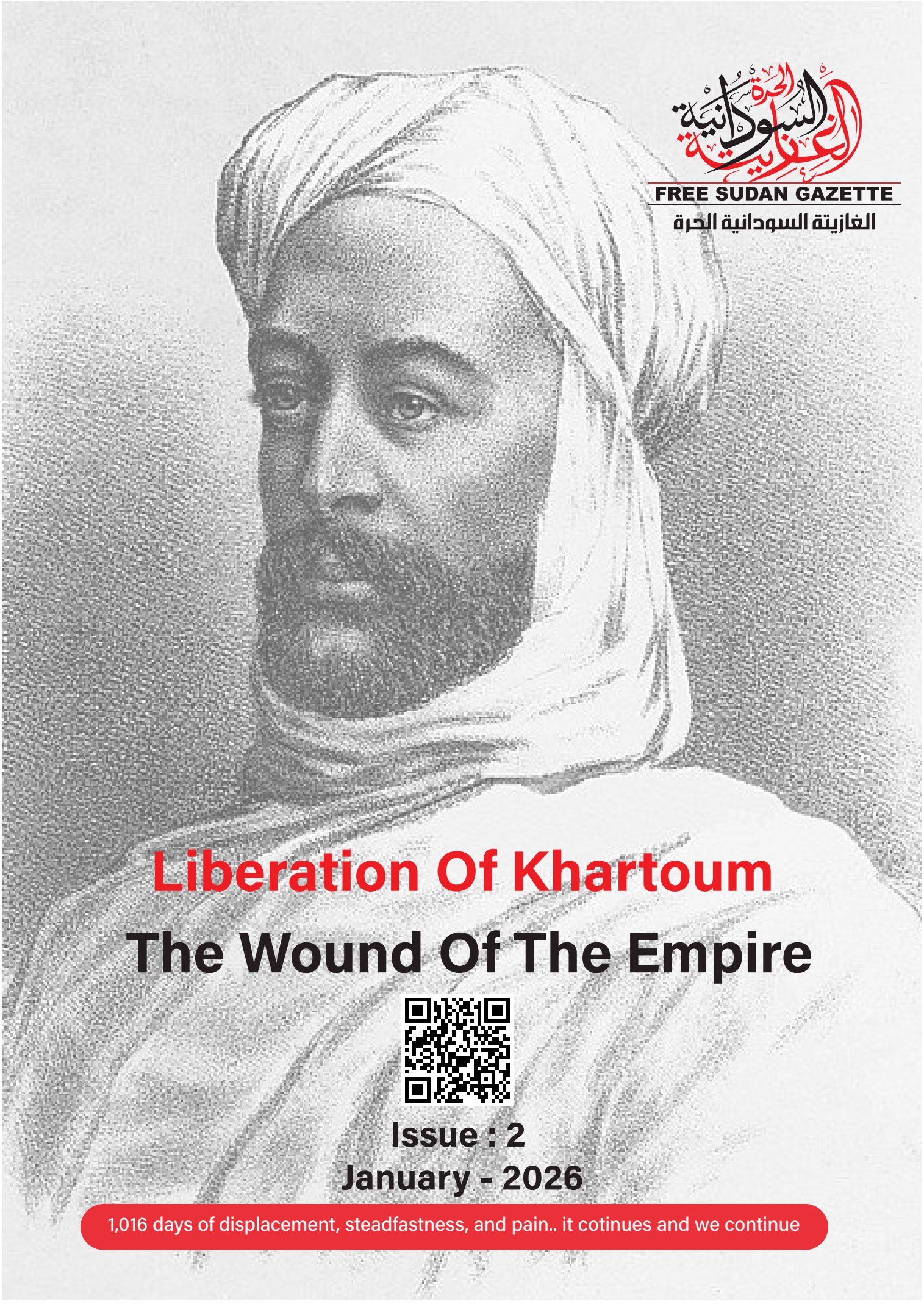


FREE SUDAN GAZETTE
الغازيتة السودانية الحرة

Liberation Of Khartoum

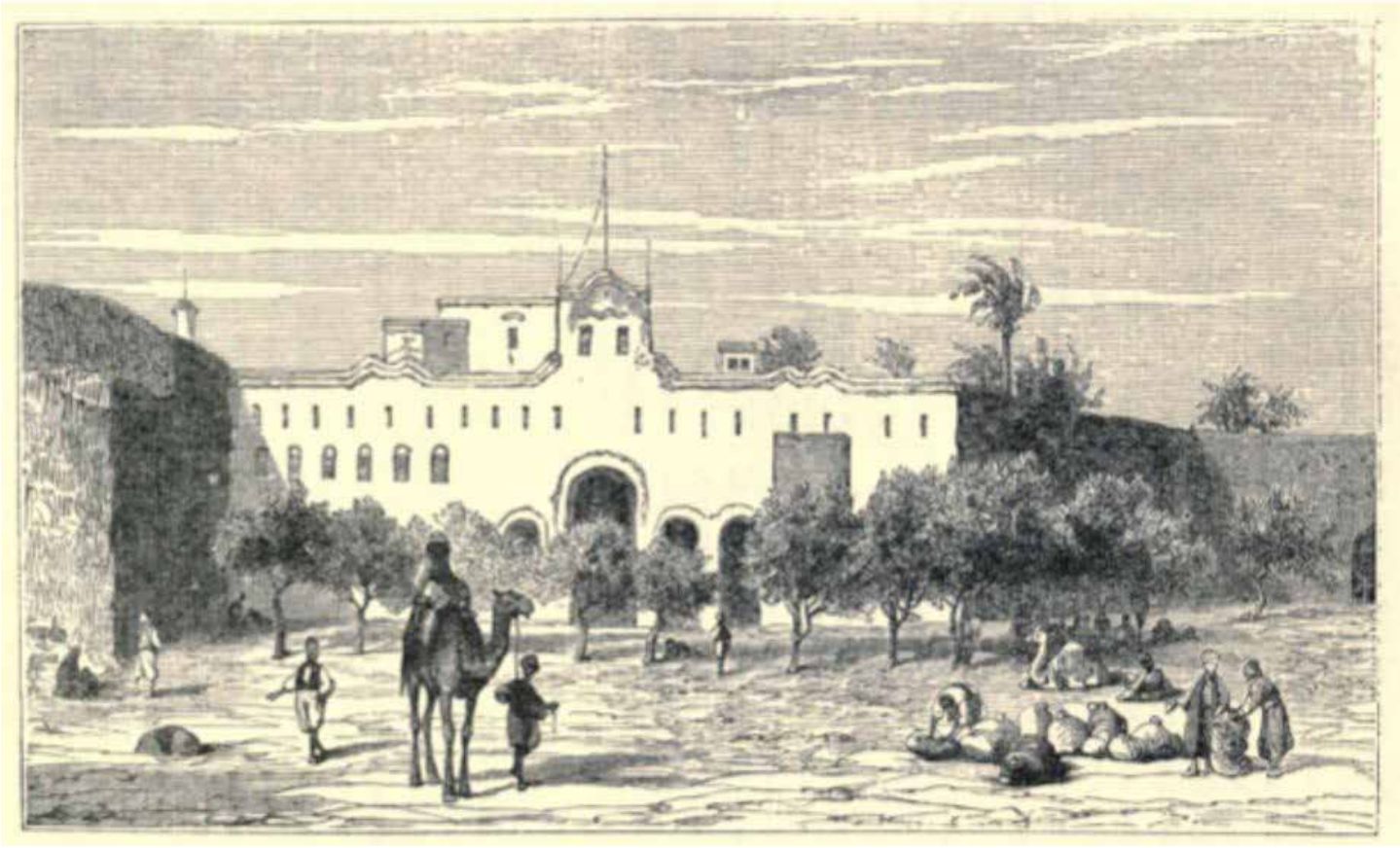
The Wound Of The Empire

Issue : 2
January - 2026

1,016 days of displacement, steadfastness, and pain.. it cotinues and we continue

Free Sudan Gazette is an independent, open-source digital media platform covering news, developments, and political and social analysis focused on Sudan. through critical research, investigation, and documentation of political, socil, and cultural events related to Sudanese people at home and abroad, we seek to elevate the voice and experiences of Sudanese people.

Khartoum, 26 January: An Empire Shattered



The Khartoum Palace where Gordon lived and was killed. Durham University Archive.

On 26 January 1885, Khartoum was more than a city reclaimed. It became the embodiment of a homeland recovering its will and dignity, and of a people openly declaring their refusal of every form of oppression and exploitation.

On that enduring day, the Mahdist Revolution, led by Imam al-Mahdi, triumphed, inscribing one of the most powerful chapters of resistance in modern Sudanese history, and affirming a timeless truth: when peoples unite around just causes, even the longest-entrenched colonial chains can be broken.

The revolution arose as a natural and inevitable response to years of punitive taxation, unjust levies, and deliberate policies of impoverishment and marginalisation imposed by the Egyptian colonial administration under British tutelage. It was a genuine eruption of social anger, an early articulation of national consciousness, and a profound collective yearning for freedom, justice, and independence. The Battle of Khartoum was therefore not merely a military encounter, but a struggle of will, awareness, and sovereignty—one that repositioned Sudan within the global imagination of the late nineteenth century.

In this special dossier, The Free Sudan Gazette reopens the archive of national memory, revisiting this decisive moment through multiple lenses; historical, intellectual, political, and global, while drawing its meanings into conversation with the present. The dossier traces a line between yesterday's resistance to foreign colonial rule and today's confrontations with modern forms of domination and authoritarian powers.

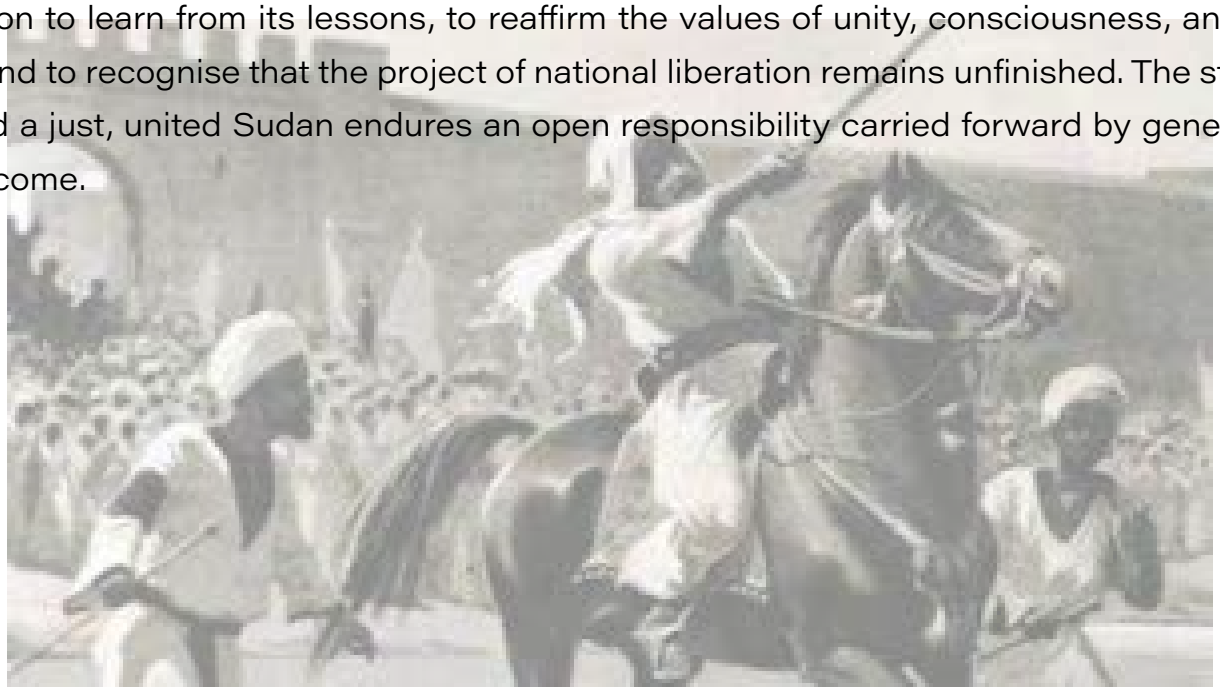
The collection brings together a range of scholarly and intellectual contributions. Among them is an article by Ustaz Walid Ali Abu Zaid, which explores the historical formation of Sudan culminating in the Mahdist Revolution as a foundational moment in the birth of the modern Sudanese nation. The article foregrounds Imam al-Mahdi's pivotal role in uniting Sudanese communities across their diverse social and cultural landscapes under the banner of national liberation, and in linking the Mahdist experience to contemporary visions of national state-building.

The dossier also examines the global reverberations of the liberation of Khartoum through a dedicated section drawn from the book by Dr Mohamed al-Mustafa Musa. This section documents the political and economic shock that rippled through Britain, the intense engagement of the European press, and the celebrations of nationalist movements in Ireland and France, which hailed the Mahdist victory as a striking blow to global imperialism.

Researcher Ahmed Adam contributes an article that situates the liberation of Khartoum within a broader imperial geography of global memory. His analysis reveals how the defeat of General Gordon triggered the Australian colonies' first overseas military intervention, sending troops to Sudan in 1885. The article traces the continuity of imperial military policies and alliances into the present, offering a critical reading that links nineteenth-century colonial entanglements to contemporary international alignments.

The dossier further includes an analytical study by Dr Mohamed al-Wathiq Abdelhamid, who examines Imam al-Mahdi's philosophy of managing change and diversity. The study highlights his leadership acumen, his capacity to unify Sudanese society and organise a revolutionary movement, and the strategic brilliance of selecting Omdurman as the capital of the Mahdist state; a decision that helped anchor an inclusive and cohesive national project.

Revisiting this moment in history is not an exercise in nostalgia or simple celebration. It is an invitation to learn from its lessons, to reaffirm the values of unity, consciousness, and freedom, and to recognise that the project of national liberation remains unfinished. The struggle to build a just, united Sudan endures an open responsibility carried forward by generations yet to come.



الحرة السودانية الغراء
FREE SUDAN GAZETTE

The Mahdist Revolution ... and The Awaited Sudan

By : Walied Ali Abuzaid

Rabindranath Tagore (1861–1941)

Sudan emerged onto the map of the ancient and modern world through a long process of formation. Throughout human history, Sudan bore several names. It was referred to in ancient Egyptian, Akkadian, Babylonian, Assyrian, Persian, as well as Greek and Roman texts and inscriptions by various names. Among the most famous are those found in ancient Egyptian writings, such as Ta-Seti (Land of the Bow) and Ta-Nehesy (Land of the Blacks). This latter designation was translated by the ancient Greeks into their language as Aithiopia, meaning "people of burnt faces."

The earliest reference to the name Sudan as Kush appears in ancient Egyptian pronunciation as Kash. The Assyrian texts mentioned it as Qus. As for the ancient Sudanese themselves, they called their state Kush, which is the same name and pronunciation adopted by the Old Testament (Torah) to describe the land of Sudan.
Kush was a great state that encompassed northern and eastern Sudan and a large part of Kordofan, extending southward to Jebel Moya in Sinnar State. This marks the southern limit of Kushite archaeological remains, with the last sites of Meroitic pottery discoveries dating from approximately 1500 BCE to the fourth century CE.
After the fall of this kingdom around 350 CE, Sudan entered a period of major political vacuum lasting about 200 years, known as the period of "Group X">

(The Heroic Age in Sinnar, by Jay Spaulding, 1984)

The period of "Group X" ended with the emergence of three kingdoms that divided the former lands of Kush in 550 CE. This era is known as the period of the Christian Nubian kingdoms, which included the Kingdom of Maris (Nobatia) with its capital at Faras, the Kingdom of Makuria with its capital at Dongola, and the Kingdom of Alodia with its capital at Soba. This period ended with the fall of the Kingdom of Alodia in 1505 CE.

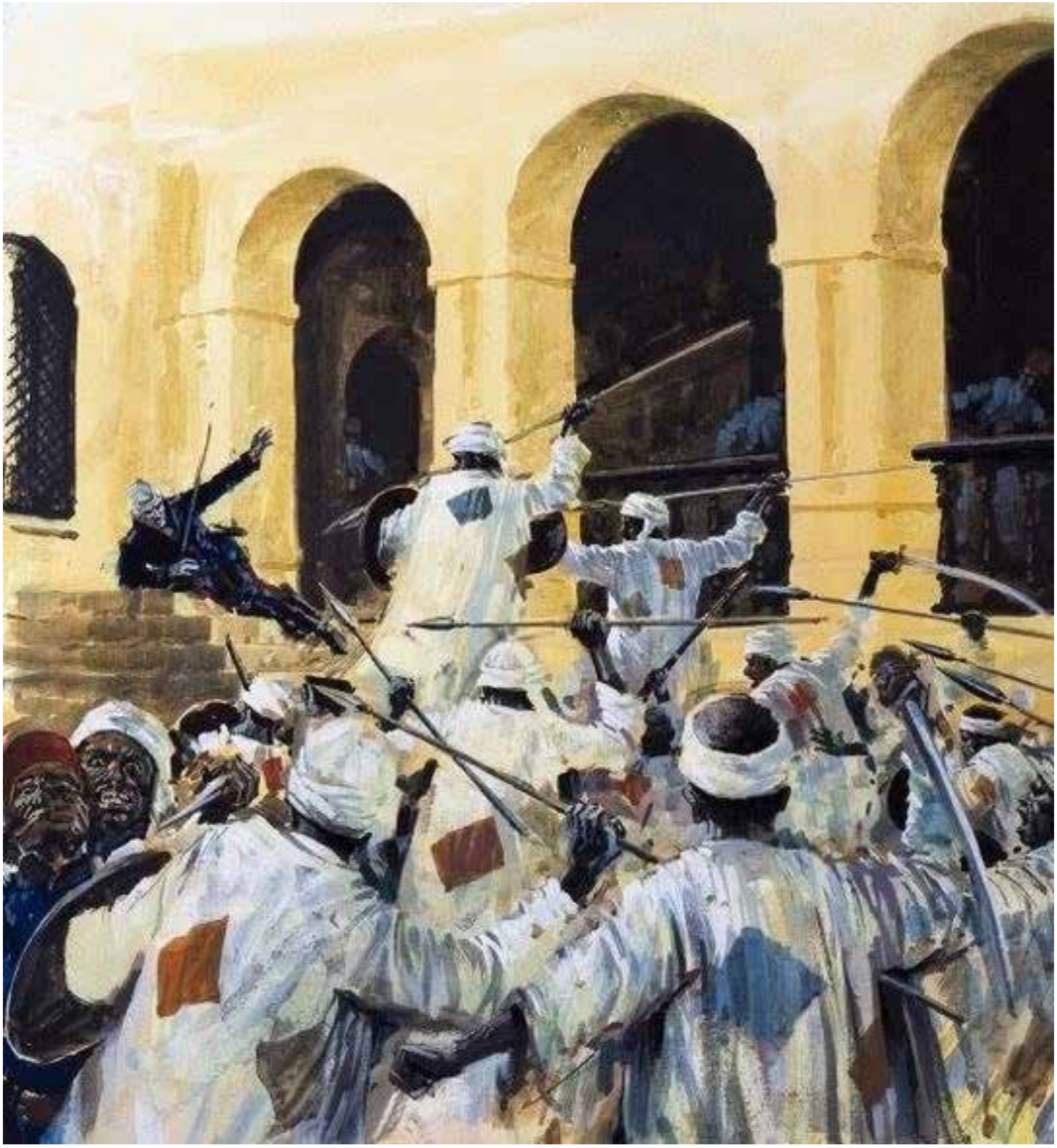
(The Christian Nubian Kingdoms, by Fr. Giovanni Vantini, 1978)

The Funj (Sinnar) era marked the beginning of a culturally different political system, as Islam ascended the throne of power for the first time, announcing Sudan's entry into Islamic history as an Islamic state or emirate. Sudan was not the first state south of the Sahara and in East Africa to experience Islamic rule, as it was preceded by the Kingdom of Kanem-Bornu (1380 CE) and the Islamic-style kingdoms in Abyssinia and Somalia, such as the Kingdom of Shewa and the Sultanate of Ifat.

In Darfur, an important Islamic kingdom emerged in 1586 CE: the Keira Kanjara Kingdom (the Darfur Sultanate, 1586–1874). This was followed by the Kingdom of Taqali in southern Kordofan, and several small kingdoms in northern Sudan such as Dafar, Argo, Al-Khandaq, and the Shaigiya, as well as Blue Nile kingdoms like Fazughli, Kili, and the Berta. All of these were considered small kingdoms with limited cultural, social, and political influence.

(Ancient Sudan as Documented by Ancient Texts, by Abdel Qader Mahmoud, 2017)

The period known as the "Qiman" era in the late Funj state closely resembled the political vacuum Sudan experienced during the Period of the "X-Group". This followed Sheikh Muhammad Abu Likaylik's coup against King Badi Abu Shulukh around 1762 CE. Although Badi installed his son, Mek Nasser, as king of Sinnar, the position was merely symbolic, with real power transferring to Sheikh Muhammad Abu Likaylik. This led to the state's deterioration, rebellion in its peripheries, and fragmentation of power centers, until it completely collapsed in 1821 CE following the entry of the Turco-Egyptian forces in what historians of the period referred to as the Turco-Egyptian conquest of Sudan.



Gouache Work By English artist's

Graham Coton

With the beginning of the Turco-Egyptian era, Sudan experienced a form of coercive unity, as Khedival Egypt annexed all these kingdoms through a series of military campaigns extending from 1821 to 1874. It annexed what was known as the lands of the Niam-Niam, which later named the Equatoria Province—today's South Sudan—and subjugated the Keira Kanjara state in 1874. In this way, the Turco-Egyptian Khedivate presented a new map to the world called Eastern Sudan or the Sudan of the Nile Valley.

Toward the Awaited Homeland

For the first time in their history, the Sudanese found themselves a people with a shared destiny. However, they were a captive, shackled people, subjected to an unprecedented level of harsh and brutal occupation. Throughout their history, Sudanese had lived with freedom and cultural and social independence, but the new colonial system held a different view. It did not treat Sudanese as citizens, but as economic resources to be exploited for military service and agriculture, and sometimes as commodities to be bought and sold.
The slave trade became active and flourished during the Turco-Egyptian era, making Sudan one of the worst places on earth for common people and non-Muslims. Their enslavement was justified by their oppressed class status and by their religion, which was not recognized by the colonizers. A person could lose their freedom if they failed to pay taxes or the "diqniya", a head tax imposed annually on every family member; failure to pay resulted in confiscation like any other commodity.

Thus, popular proverbs emerged among Sudanese at the time expressing resentment, such as: "The grave rather than the tax debt" meaning death is preferable to standing before a tax official; and "The Turk rather than the Turkified," meaning dealing with an official sent by the Khedivate was preferable to dealing with a Sudanese working under him, described as "mutawarrek" (one who imitates the Turks).
It is worth noting that the term "Turk" did not necessarily mean someone of Turkish origin, but anyone representing the Turco-Egyptian government, regardless of whether they were Egyptian, Circassian, Albanian, Syrian, or even European.

The Father of the Awaited Sudan

During this harsh period, Sayyid Muhammad Ahmad Abdullah was born by the Nile. He was destined to lead a movement of change that astonished the world and demonstrated the will of sub-Saharan African peoples to resurrect. Muhammad Ahmad, known as Imam al-Mahdi, revived the Sudanese people from obscurity to the forefront of global headlines, igniting a liberation movement that resonated across a world groaning under colonial imperialism and European and Ottoman arrogance.

Imam al-Mahdi led the Sudanese—united for the first time in their ancient history—under the flag of a single cause. Despite the religious nature of the Mahdist revolution, non-Muslim Sudanese responded to it. The Nuer prophet Ngundeng brought out his sacred drum, "Dang", and beat it with the holy staff (Di) granted to him by "Kwoth", the Great Spirit, to proclaim the Mahdi as a sacred spirit whose call must be followed. Nuer fighters thus marched to join the Mahdi at Qadir. The Dinka also rose and announced their participation in the fight against colonialism, and the Nuba Mountains tribes joined the revolution when Mek Adam Wad Umm Dabbalo descended majestically from his mountains in response to the Mahdi's call for freedom.

The Dome of Almam Al-Mahdi - Omdurman

For the first time in history, an army formed where Dongolawi, Furawi, Hadandawi, Dinka, and fighters from all tribes of the four corners of Sudan came under one flag.

This revolution represents the true birth of the Sudanese as a nation. Setting aside issues of governance and the administrative distortions that later affected this great popular political movement in African history, it remains a stunning and near-perfect model of a people uniting against colonial forces—and against time itself. The Mahdi's victories over three years were so remarkable that the global press struggled to keep pace. Major international newspapers sent correspondents to Egypt and Suakin to cover this astonishing liberation movement.

The Mahdi and the Sudanese people became a major source of inspiration for thinkers and writers seeking reform worldwide. The Mahdist Revolution inspired European socialist and liberation thinkers such as Engels, Ottoman reformists of the Committee of Union and Progress like Orhan Meric and revolutionary leaders such as the Somali rebel Muhammad Abdullah Hassan, leader of the Dervish resistance (1900–1920), whom the British considered influenced by the Mahdi. They dubbed him "the Mad Mullah" and bombed his forces with aircraft after he fought them, as well as the Italians and Ethiopians, with courage and honor for twenty years.

The Mahdi fulfilled his promise to the world and to the Sudanese of the birth of the awaited Sudan. Historian Fergus Nicoll interpreted this in his 2004 book The Sword of the Prophet: The Mahdi of Sudan and the Death of General Gordon, describing the Mahdi as the true father of the Sudanese people.

The Mahdi and his companions presented an eternal tableau expressing the will of peoples when they unite, and a sacred message that civilization and refinement are never more precious than freedom. Occupation, no matter how long it lasts, is merely a transient episode in the history of nations and will inevitably recede into the past, no matter how deeply it sinks its fangs into the present.

Mahdism rejected racism and dissolved ethnic divisions, replacing racial and social ties with faith in a common cause. This, to some extent, constitutes one of the foundations of the modern state, in which the nation becomes the sole focus of loyalty beyond race and religion. Although religious thought was the spirit and essence of the Mahdist Revolution, it provided a model for Sudanese unity in the pursuit of freedom, even for those who did not practice Islam, such as the people of South Sudan who fought alongside the Mahdi and his companions.

Today, amid the war we are living through as Sudanese—a war that has burdened us with wounds, division, and hatred among communities—we draw inspiration from the memory of the liberation of Khartoum and the Mahdi's victorious entry with his companions, presenting the awaited Sudan to the future and to history: one united Sudan. For the first time, all Sudanese lands in the north, south, east, and west were ruled by a single Sudanese leadership. He truly deserved the title "Father of Sudan."

Although the Mahdi lived only a few months after liberating Khartoum and establishing his capital in Omdurman, he left a legacy so immense that none of our great predecessors can rival it. Without any doubt, in that hall where our ancestors gather in the other world, the one seated at the center of the assembly is the great revolutionary fighter Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi, together with his companions who fought like noble warriors.

Walied Abuzaid is an academic and researcher in Sudanese culture and history.

FREE SUDAN GAZETTE

The Global Echoes of the Mahdist Revolution

Excerpts from a book with the same title by Dr. Muhammad Mustafa Musa

Introduction by: Professor Abdullah Ali Ibrahim

Published by Dar Al-Musawarat for Printing and Publishing - 2019

Chapter Six: The Global Echoes of the Liberation of Khartoum1885

As 1885 drew to a close, cold winter winds filled the flags of the Mahdi Revolution planted in the soil of the capital (Khartoum), liberated for the first time in sixty-five years of foreign occupation. Far from Sudan, whose soil was boiling like a cauldron under the feet of the British, the British Isles were weighed down by bitter news when, that same month, reports came in of Sudanese victories over their invading forces. The news of Gordon's death, coupled with the resounding defeat suffered by the armies of the empire on which the sun never sets, struck like a thunderbolt on safe and secure ground. The overwhelming grief rushed to invade the gates of Buckingham Palace, despite the fierce guards, shaking the throne of Queen Victoria, whose heart was set on the expected victories of her army sent to rescue Gordon. In the same context, there is nothing more expressive of the above than what Lord Ponsonby, the Queen's private secretary, wrote in documenting those moments when Her Majesty received news of the Mahdist victories. Let us leave it to British historian Robin Neillands to convey the entire scene in the words of the royal secretary:

"The queen was in such a bad state after the fall of Khartoum that she looked like a patient lying in bed. She was just getting ready to go out when we received a telegram with the news. When she came to my private residence, her face was pale. There I found my wife, who was horrified by the sight of Her Majesty in that state, and the queen was telling her, while trembling: 'It's too late!' ... Neillands then goes on to say: The Queen was not alone! When news of Gordon's death reached London ... mourning spread throughout Britain, flags were lowered, and that day was declared a national day of mourning. Soon, the general sadness turned into overwhelming anger directed at British Prime Minister Gladstone.

[1]..«Late Too»

1 رسم حزين حاكى كلمات ذات العبارة التي وردت على لسان الملكة فيكتوريا: Too Late. ورد الرسم بمجلة «ذا بنش» اللندنية بتاريخ ٥ فبراير ١٨٨٥. وعلقت عليه الصحيفة بخبر مقتضب قالت فيه: «بحسب التلغراف الذي جاءنا بصباح الخميس ٥ فبراير ١٨٨٥: انتزع منا المهدي مدينة الخرطوم بينما لا يزال مصير الجنرال غردون غير مؤكد».

A tragic, allegorical cartoon inspired by the phrase spoken by Queen Victoria: “Too late.”
The cartoon was published in the British satire magazine “Punch” on 5 February 1885.

Deep concern dominated the pages of important British newspapers such as The Morning Post in London. That renowned newspaper wrote in a tone steeped in lamentation about the need to respond to the Mahdist revolution's insults to Britain's dignity in Sudan with a new military strike. To emphasize the importance of this, the newspaper discussed how the victories of the Sudanese revolution could undermine British colonial control over various parts of the world,

noting at the same time that this devastating impact could destroy Gladstone's government itself. It said:

"The enormous disaster that has befallen us in Sudan will have far-reaching consequences that make us unable to believe that the current British government will remain in power for more than a week after the next parliamentary session. We cannot retreat before the Mahdi and his hordes without sacrificing our control over Egypt and without shaking the foundations of our empire in India. Since we have become involved in this conflict, we must see it through to the end. Since we have already gone to Sudan, we must not leave until we are victorious."

What the aforementioned London newspaper called for remained in the realm of wishful thinking, given the reality of the military situation in northern Sudan. The commander of the retreating British campaign, his forces heavy with wounds, soon received a letter full of confidence from al-Mahdi—after he had liberated Khartoum—to all the soldiers of the British campaign, demanding that they surrender, as he had done before with Gordon. The letter read:

"The soldiers of God have come to you, and you have no power to fight them, but out of compassion for you, we have ordered them not to fight you until after this letter reaches you and you proof your refusal to respond, and not to harm you or infringe upon any of your rights if you surrender, except confiscating your military uniform, weapons, and ammunition. If you surrender, you will have the protection of God and His Messenger and the protection of the servant of God." He then added:

“Otherwise, if you disobey, we will not accept any action from your side, and you will see what will happen to you.”

However, Lord Wolseley, who fought hard to put on a mask of false pride in the face of everything that had happened, was unable to hide his mounting anger and bitterness, at least among his close circle of friends. A few days after receiving the Mahdi's letter, he wrote to his wife, Louisa, acknowledging the trap the Sudanese revolution sets on them on all fronts, saying:

"The Mahdi has triumphed... and here we all are... looking like fools!"

Wolseley's initial assessments, which were certain of his inevitable victory over the Sudanese resistance on their own soil, were reversed when he asserted that any British military operation to advance against the Mahdist forces now with the aim of recapturing Khartoum from their control would be "the most dangerous military operation in Britain since the famous Battle of Waterloo against Napoleon's French forces." ." Wolseley requested significant military reinforcements from London, which the British Parliament estimated would cost approximately four and a half million pounds sterling. However, British Prime Minister Gladstone, stunned by the victories of the Mahdist revolution, sought to put an end to this losing confrontation when he addressed Parliament, saying: "Is there any moral justification for wasting the lives of such a large number of our troops in the current situation of our empire and the urgent need for those troops? We are fighting against a harsh environment in Sudan, and I cannot hide from you my fear of becoming involved in fighting a people who are striving for liberation. This has been clearly demonstrated by what has happened in this country."

The "Bury and Norwich Post" newspaper reported:

"There is not a single observer monitoring the movements of the lobbies influencing the decisions of the British Cabinet who would harbour the slightest doubt that last Monday's debates clearly showed that the determination to crush the Mahdi in Khartoum has ended in complete death, similar to the death that befell Julius Caesar. However urgent it may have been for us to destroy the Mahdi's forces in the previous month, the necessity is even greater today.

But the British government ministers have discovered that these operations against the Mahdi will be costly and protracted and, more importantly, not unanimously supported by their own supporters. Consequently, all their heroism has evaporated. These ministers, who had rashly decided to inflict a crushing defeat on the Mahdi in Khartoum, were now anxiously considering how they could flee before the Mahdi would crush them.

The “Pall Mall Gazette” reported:

“It is rare for the English Parliament to meet under skies darker than those of today.”

"The moment Khartoum fell, as had been predicted by the many warnings received by the British government since the previous summer, the situation there underwent a major transformation. As a result, the Mahdi went from being a mere rebel against our influence in Central Africa to a recognized leader of all the Arab tribes in the Nile Valley. We must remember what General Gordon wrote with his own hand when he said: "The moment the Mahdi extends his influence over Khartoum, the task of crushing him will become extremely difficult. Nevertheless, the security of Egypt may compel you to carry out this task). Here, the Mahdi confirms all of General Gordon's fears. Instead of sitting contentedly in Khartoum after the city gates were opened to him because of collusion, he is taking the initiative and advancing toward us. At this very moment, it is said that he is advancing toward our meager army with 60,000 of his victorious troops, consisting of Sudanese Bedouins, whom he himself has taken command of. The whole situation has taken on a completely revolutionary character."

"In all the cities of Egypt, there will be a wave of public sentiment that they can do what the Mahdi did in Sudan. Just as he expelled the invaders and infidels, they may be able to accomplish what he did. The Mahdi has stirred up a dangerous state of unrest against us in the Arabian Peninsula and Syria. Leaflets to this effect have already been distributed in Damascus, calling for a revolution against the Turks in order to expel them from that country.

If all of eastern Sudan submits to the Mahdi, it is possible that all the Arab tribes on both of the Red Sea coast will take up arms for the same purpose. If nothing is done in this regard, it is very possible that the Mahdi's victory over us will lead to the reconsideration of the matter of the East as a whole..

Echoes of the Mahdist Revolution's victories in British economic circles:

There is no doubt that the losses suffered by the British as a result of the Mahdist Revolution's victories over them were not limited to the military and political spheres alone. The British press recorded extensive details of how the battle to liberate Khartoum and the ensuing turbulent events shook the British stock market and the resulting economic losses that spread to other financial markets under their colonial influence, such as Egypt. Such economic setbacks were not long in coming after Al-Mahdi's triumphant entry into Khartoum, with objective expectations forming in the collective English mind that his forces would advance north to defeat the remnants of the invading British forces and then invade Egypt from the south, threatening their colonial interests in the region. In this regard, the London Daily News wrote:

"After the sad news arrived from Khartoum, all financial markets fell except for Grand Trunk Railways, which was the only one to record an increase. The Egyptian financial markets suffered the heaviest losses, of course, while the decline in British government capital was one of the most serious general features in this regard. Although the British losses were not as heavy as the Egyptian losses in percentage terms, the decline in the value of British bonds amounted to three million pounds sterling in terms of sale value, while Egyptian bonds suffered a decline in sale value equal to half that suffered by British bonds. These very wild estimates at this particular time came in line with the current difficulties and the accompanying economic costs, which in turn affected the English interest rate.

The London-based newspaper "The Morning Post" pointed to the severity of losses in British financial markets after what it called "catastrophic news from Sudan about the fall of Khartoum." However, it mentioned that there was a recovery later in this regard, despite confirming that trading prices remained at their lowest level at best. The same newspaper pointed out that trading on other global financial markets also remained weak, while British defeats in Sudan cast a shadow over trading in shares of the English Railway Corporation in London and northwestern England, as well as on the English financial market in Crystal Palace, which suffered the heaviest losses, leading to the deposit of £100,000 in gold to cover the gap.

To complete the objective assessment of the losses incurred by the Mahdi's resistance to the invading British forces, it is important to give ample space to the figures that capture the facts with the appropriate accuracy. In this context, we find that several English sources have estimated the total amount spent by Queen Victoria's government and her Prime Minister Gladstone to equip the British army sent to Sudan to confront the Mahdist revolution and rescue Gordon, jumped from 300,000 pounds sterling at the beginning of the campaign to 7,236,000 pounds sterling at its end.

If we consider that the British national income for that year, 1885, was approximately £77 million, the numerical equation here confirms that the losses incurred by the Mahdist revolution to the British economy as a whole in 1885 amounted to approximately 10% of the British national income for that same year. More specifically, it is clear that British government spending on the Sudan war exceeded 37% of the total budget allocated to the British Royal Army in 1885, which amounted to £19,355,000.

Ireland... Irish nationalists celebrate the liberation of Khartoum:

On the other coast opposite England, Irish nationalists eagerly awaited news of the Mahdist revolution, which was confirmed by many different sources. It is not difficult for the inquiring mind to understand the source of this enthusiasm for the echoes of the Sudanese victories there, given that the Irish island had been under British occupation for nearly 800 consecutive years, which were not without violent popular resistance to colonial influence, albeit without complete success. Irish nationalists, whose voices of rebellion against Queen Victoria's crown had grown louder at the time, turned to various creative means to express their celebration of the Mahdist revolution's victories over an enemy that most of them considered to be the common enemy of peoples aspiring to freedom. Irish nationalist artists excelled in using satirical cartoons to express, in their own creative way, their admiration for what had happened in Sudan. For example, the Weekly Freeman newspaper, known for its Irish nationalist leanings, published a satirical cartoon on February 23, 1884. The cartoon shows British Prime Minister Gladstone bowing before the Mahdi, who appears tall and proud, carrying a spear and a banner reading "National Rule." The cartoonist included a short dialogue between the two leaders. In it, Gladstone addresses the leader of the Sudanese revolution from his bowed position, saying: "My dear Mahdi... Your argument for the independence of your country was so powerful that I can no longer find any justification for interfering in your internal affairs and therefore accept my decision to grant you your freedom."
However, the artist himself responded sarcastically through Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi, a response that must have been swallowed by the English newspaper's readers with a grain of salt similar to his hypothetical words. He replied as follows: "Keep your decision for those who need it... We don't need it... Now you are the ones who need us to accept to allow you to leave for your homelands!"

كاركاتير إيرلندي يحتفي بانتصار المهدي على البريطانيين ويسخر من قلة حيلة رئيس وزراء بريطانيا، غلادستون، حيال انتصارات السودانيين على قواته..صحيفة «ويكلي فريمان الإيرلندية»، ٢٣ فبراير ١٨٨٥، أرشيف الصحافة الإيرلندية.

An Irish caricature celebrating the Mahdi's victory over the British, mocking the helplessness of the British Prime Minister, Gladstone, in the face of the Sudanese victories over his forces
Newspaper: The Weekly Freeman
Date: 23 February 1885
Source: The Irish Newspapers Archive

Only five days passed before the publication of that cartoon in Weekly Freeman before the well-known Irish cartoonist John Ferguss O'Hea followed suit with another drawing in the same newspaper, in which he exaggerated his mockery of the calls by British officials to crush the Mahdi's revolution, highlighting the irony of the situation when British forces were forced to retreat in the face of the Sudanese revolutionary forces in the northern desert. This was clearly illustrated in the cartoon, which shows Wolseley, the commander of the British rescue campaign, running away, leaving behind the bodies of his generals who had been killed by the Sudanese, such as Stewart and Earl, their bodies lying in the desert sand. Wolseley appeared to be overcome with panic, pursued by Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi with his sword, which he was about to plunge into his neck.

رسم ساخر بريشة الفنان الإيرلندي جون فيرغس أو هيا «John Fergus O'Hea» يجسد انهزام البريطانيين أمام قوات الثورة المهدية في شمال السودان. وفيه يظهر المهدي وهو يهوي بسيفه على الجنرال «ولزلي» قائد قوات الجيش البريطاني المبتعث لإنقاذ غردون في الحملة التي روّج لها البريطانيون تحت عنوان «سحق المهدي..Smashing the Mahdi» فانتهت بعكس عنوانها!. وانتهى كل شيء بفرار جحافل الإنجليز أمام قوات الثورة المهدية كما يجسد ذلك الرسم الساخر.. أرشيف الصحافة الإيرلندية، «Weekly Freeman»، ٢٨ فبراير ١٨٨٥.

A satirical drawing by the Irish artist John Fergus O'Hea, depicting the British defeat in front of the forces of the Mahdist Revolution in northern Sudan. In it, the Mahdi appears as a ghostly figure hovering in the sky, holding a sword on which the words "Hunger," "Thirst," "Fatigue," and "Heat" are written. The British army command had been sent to rescue Gordon during the British campaign under the title "Smashing the Mahdi." But the campaign ended in complete failure and the English army collapsed in front of the forces of the Mahdist Revolution, just as this satirical drawing illustrates.
From the The Irish Newspaper Archive , Weekly Freeman, 28 February 1885.

The writer and playwright known for her nationalist views, Lady Augusta Gregory, considered the Mahdist Revolution in Sudan to be revenge for the Irish people for the suffering they endured as a result of the British occupation of their lands. Lady Gregory published a pamphlet about these events with hard-hitting headlines such as "Here we are destroying the British beast: the Mahdi is avenging us overseas... and we are destroying the same beast with dynamite at home."

In the Irish press, the "World Irish" newspaper cleared the dust from the events in Sudan and reported on the liberation of Khartoum by the Sudanese forces, devoting its entire front page to news from Sudan. On February 7, 1885, the newspaper wrote: "The valiant Sudanese revolution deserves the full sympathy of all friends of freedom all over the world." All this coincided with multiple reports published by various Irish newspapers such as the Irish American", the "Journal Freeman", and the "Irishman", most of which agreed, according to "Irish historian Niall Weelehan, that the Mahdist Revolution's victories over the British would weaken the entire British Empire.

The editors of "The Irishman" wasted no time in engaging in a deep analytical reading of the repercussions of the Sudanese Revolution's victories in various parts of the world, including France and the British Empire itself. The newspaper's issue published on the morning of February 14, 1885, featured a lengthy report on recent events in Sudan. In a unique way, "The Irishman" drew on scattered opinions in which it approached the details of events as closely as the French press, which celebrated without exception the victories of the Sudanese revolution over the British. Among these was a report published by "La République française", which sharply criticized British global policy, which made their empire resemble an ostrich burying its head in the sand so as not to hear any news that might offend it. The French newspaper portrayed the Mahdi's victory over Britain as a bright light that it would be possible to ignore or forget.

FREE SUDAN GAZETTE

Cartographies of Survivals: Empire - Memory and Australia's War in Sudan

By : Ahmed Adam

El Mahdi to the Australian Troops.

And wherefore have they come, this war-
like band,
That o'er the ocean many a weary day
Have tossed; and now beside Suakim's Bay,
With faces stern and resolute, do stand,
Waking the desert's echoes with the drum—
Men of Australia, wherefore have ye come?

To keep the Puppet Khedive on his throne,
To strike a blow for tyranny and wrong,
To crush the weak and aid the oppressing
strong!
Regardless of the hapless Fellah's moan,
To force the payment of the Hebrew loan,
Squeezing the tax like blood from out the
stone?

And fair Australia, freest of the free,
Is up in arms against the freeman's fight;
And with her mother joined to crush the
right—
Has left her threatened treasures o'er the
sea,
Has left her land of liberty and law
To flesh her maiden sword in this unholy
war.

Enough! God never blessed such enter-
prise—
England's degenerate Generals yet shall rue
Brave Gordon sacrificed, when soon they
view
The children of a thousand desert's rise
To drive them forth like sand before the
gale—
God and the Prophet! Freedom will prevail.

EL MAHDI.

In the heart of Melbourne, on Spring Street near Parliament House, stands a monument that draws attention because of the sheer space it occupies, even as its history and significance remain largely unknown to most passers-by. The statue commemorates the British general Charles Gordon, who never set foot in Australia, yet whose death in Sudan reverberated across the imperial world, including the Australian colonies. This monument can be understood not simply as a memorial to a general who served the British Empire in China, India, and Sudan, but as part of an imperial geography that linked Melbourne, London, and Khartoum within a shared colonial economy and political imagination.

Gordon was sent to Sudan to defend imperial authority during the Mahdist uprising, at a moment when British confidence in the permanence of its global colonial reach appeared unshakeable. Yet by early 1885, Gordon found himself isolated in Khartoum, besieged by forces resisting imperial rule. In mid-January, he sent one of his final telegrams to London, warning that he would be killed if reinforcements did not arrive. Ten days later, on 26 January 1885, Mahdist forces liberated Khartoum and Gordon was killed. Across Britain and its colonies, this event was experienced not merely as a military defeat, but as a rupture in imperial authority and a sign that empire could be resisted and forced to fracture at its edges.

The shock travelled quickly across the globe, though it was not felt evenly. While Britain and its colonies mourned Gordon's death as an imperial tragedy, others read the event very differently. In parts of Europe, including Ireland, the defeat of the empire was openly celebrated, and poets wrote of Khartoum as a moment of imperial humiliation. These divergent responses reveal an imperial world already beginning to crack under the pressures of resistance, shared struggle, and refusal. Within weeks, the colony of New South Wales dispatched a military contingent to Sudan, the first overseas deployment of Australian colonial forces, transforming a distant imperial crisis into a local event. The departure of the troops was anything but subdued. The day was declared a public holiday in Sydney.

Thousands gathered near the harbour to farewell the soldiers, as streets and pavements filled in a collective ritual of imperial belonging. Newspapers described a city overflowing with flags, speeches, and cheers, as though everyone had surged toward the centre, shouting encouragement while the troops boarded their ships. The chant that echoed through the crowd, "Go and give the Mahdi what he deserves," captured the ease with which distant violence was embraced as a moral duty. Militarily, the New South Wales contingent achieved little and returned without altering the course of the conflict. Yet through a small number of artefacts preserved at the Australian War Memorial in Canberra, the campaign endures as a symbolic precedent, an early rehearsal of Australia's participation in foreign wars fought in service of larger imperial powers.

What began as loyalty to the British Empire would be reconfigured in the twentieth century through alliance with the United States, marking a continuity expressed not through sovereignty but through dependency. This continuity is most clearly materialised in the establishment of Pine Gap, one of the most strategically significant United States military and intelligence installations outside American territory. What began as colonial allegiance to Britain thus reverberates through contemporary geopolitics, revealing how distant wars, foreign alliances, and local infrastructures have long been entangled with Australia's role within global imperial networks.

Colonialism is not a closed chapter, but an ongoing condition. The deployment of military force, whether in 1885 or today, carries consequences that exceed strategy and statecraft. In Australia, the same structures that enabled participation in overseas wars also underpinned the control of First Nations lives and the dispossession of their lands. Acknowledging these continuities does not collapse distinct histories into a single narrative, but instead illuminates the varied ways empire exercised its expansion and domination, while also foregrounding Indigenous resistance, both in Australia and in Sudan, whose endurance stands as a lasting reminder of what empires can never fully erase.

Reading 26 January 1788 alongside 26 January 1885 reveals how the empire operated across the globe, producing invasion at one end and crisis at another. In Australia, the same decade witnessed an intensification of colonial control over First Nations peoples. During the 1880s, land dispossession accelerated, reserves and missions expanded, and governments increasingly regulated movement, labour, and family life, entrenching lasting harm and exclusion. The resistance of First Nations peoples in Australia and anti-imperial struggle in Sudan thus unfolded within the same imperial world, experienced unevenly, remembered differently, yet structurally connected. Together, these contexts show that resistance and survival were not exceptions, but central features of an imperial system built on domination and control. From this shared ground, we can trace imperial cartographies not only through battles and treaties, but through the everyday strategies of those who endured, adapted, and refused erasure from history.

The absence of the Sudan War from Australian public memory is not accidental. It occupies an uncomfortable place within national narratives that prefer to imagine Australia either as an innocent, isolated outpost or as a reluctant participant in empire. Remembering the New South Wales contingent requires acknowledging that Australia's formation was entangled not only with violence against First Nations peoples at home, but with imperial violence abroad. Invasion was normalised as settlement, while imperial war quietly faded from view. What remains visible are monuments stripped of their context.

The need to excavate this distant memory becomes even more urgent in light of contemporary debates surrounding Australia's role in the current conflict in Sudan. Recent public and parliamentary discussions have raised concerns about Australia's arms export regime, including approvals for military exports to the United Arab Emirates, a state shown to be involved in the Sudanese conflict. While the mechanisms differ from those of the nineteenth century, the underlying pattern remains familiar, distant violence, economic interests, and strategic alignment with dominant capital.

Remembering Australia's forgotten histories, from the New South Wales contingent to contemporary complicity, is not an exercise in moral equivalence or simple reckoning. It is an insistence that these histories are interconnected, and that their erasure serves particular interests. The task is not to inherit the maps drawn by the empire, but to learn how to forget them. Against imperial calendars and imperial crowds, movements of resistance point toward a different future, one organised not through domination and territory, but through endurance, solidarity, and the unfinished work of peace.

Ahmed Adam is an artist whose practice spans film, photography, writing, and African drumming.

Troops of the New South Wales Contingent in the desert in Sudan. Some of the men are carrying Martini- Henry rifles and a 9 pounder RML Mk1 gun is behind the men sitting in the foreground. The trooper in the right foreground is posing with a heliograph.

FREE SUDAN GAZETTE

The Philosophy of Imam al-Mahdi in Managing Change and Diversity and Its Impact on the Success of the Mahdist Revolution (1881–1885)

By : Dr. Mohamed El-Wathig Elgerefawi

There are no photographs of Alamam AlMahdi - all images are drawings by foreign artists.

Introduction

First: The Importance of Deconstructing and Liberating the Concept of Mahdism

It is extremely important, if we seek to engage in a new reading of Mahdism through a different methodological approach, to clearly distinguish between the concepts associated with Mahdism: The Mahdist propagation and its Imam, The Mahdist revolution and its leader, and The Mahdist state and its interactions.

For the purposes of research and analysis, it is useful and indeed necessary to differentiate between these components and to disentangle them from one another.
Although the Mahdist call was present in the Imam's daily activity, conceptually linking it directly to the Mahdi's revolutionary movement is harmful, as it creates serious difficulty in proposing answers capable of withstanding methodological scrutiny.

Second: The Necessity of Differentiation in Approaching Mahdist History (Propagation vs. Revolution)
In dealing with the history of Mahdism, a fundamental question immediately arises:
Do we approach Mahdism as a religious propagation (inseparably linked to its founder), akin to divine revelations? Or do we approach it as an action-oriented process, tied to behavior, a program of action and its interaction with society, its movement and effectiveness?

This paper advances a concise conclusion: in our attempt to present a different vision through a new reading of Mahdist history, Mahdism should be approached within its procedural, dynamic, and active framework, and through an objective reading of the revolutionary activity of its leader.

The difference in historical time and the absence of subjective data related to the central leader make it imperative to rely on reproducing the role played by Mahdism as an interactive movement. Accordingly, the Mahdi should be reintroduced as a national leader around whom people gather at that time, rather than confining the revolution dynamics by enclosing it within the dialectic of Muhammad Ahmad's Mahdisim.

We must not imprison the revolution within rigid conditions or remain captive to debates over the applicability of Mahdist prerequisites. It must be acknowledged that Muhammad Ahmad as "the Mahdi" is absent and historically concluded, yet his revolutionary program remains present, adaptable to the requirements of time and place, open to disagreement, modification, or even transcendence as circumstances demand.

After all, this is a worldly matter: a philosophy of governance and administration governed by contextual realities.

The Ansar may view Mahdism as a belief system through the lens of its mission, and translate that mission's program into reality through the tools of da'wa. Meanwhile, all Sudanese may view its leader through the lens of national leadership, invoking his dynamic role and effective revolutionary management.

Conceptual Foundations

First

Everyone seeks a history in a world that increasingly values culture and its components. History, in this sense, is one of the most important elements. One scholar remarked that some attempt to fabricate a history out of nothing, so what of us, whose history is deeply rooted?

Our methodological problem, however, lies in emotional engagement with history through projections, suspicions, biases, and preconceived judgments.

Second

We are not capable of changing historical events. Yet we possess the full right to re-read them. Not to reproduce them, but to understand our present and anticipate our future.

Third

Despite extensive criticism of the historical method for its inability, on its own, to produce generalizable conclusions—necessitating integration with social or political scientific methodologies—Ibn Khaldun overcame rigid historical approaches and encouraged studying the core of history (para-history).

This approach does not stop at documentation but delves into causes and consequences by examining internal and external factors: the subjective characteristics of key actors, as well as social, economic, and historical contexts.

Fourth

Avoid projecting contemporary standards onto history. Events must be judged by the standards, conditions, and data of their own time. Judging history by present day criteria constitutes injustice and a violation of scientific study.

Chapter One: Challenges in Studying the Biography of Imam al-Mahdi

Numerous challenges arise when studying the history of the Mahdist Revolution, particularly the biography of Imam al-Mahdi. These challenges are both methodological and source-related.

Methodological Challenges

Many studies of the Mahdist Revolution have relied on a purely documentary historical method, without presenting comprehensive analyses that account for all objective factors of influence and interaction.

Even those studies that analyzed the causes of the revolution and its success limited these causes—despite their objectivity—to the violence accompanying Turkish rule, particularly al-Defterdar's retaliation for the killing of Ismail, son of Muhammad Ali, alongside oppressive taxation and colonial administrative practices.

Regarding its success, most studies attributed it primarily to the weakness of Turkish administration, loss of control, and underestimation of the revolution in its early stages.

Although these studies portrayed the Mahdi as the leader of the revolution within a chronological narrative, they failed to dedicate chapters to his personal capacities in mobilizing and leading the revolution, his ability to integrate all surrounding factors into a cohesive force that highlighted his leadership abilities which led to these triumphant successes..

Methodologically, studies fell into two opposing camps:

An antagonistic approach, seeking to deny the Mahdi's claim and thereby invalidate the entire movement.

A defensive approach, striving to prove his Mahdism as the foundation of his success.

Both approaches harmed the man's historical legacy, diverting scholarly attention away from his personality and leadership skills toward theological debates over Mahdism.
Another challenge lies in the transformation of the Mahdi from a national symbol into a political symbol—historically and in contemporary times—first through colonial propaganda, then through regional polarization following his death, and later as a symbol of the Ansar sect and the Umma Party.

All of this diminished his status as a national figure.

Therefore, any reading of his biography must not follow a mere chronological narrative but adopt an objective analytical approach, linking premises to outcomes and treating events as precursors to historical results.

Source Challenges

Scarcity of Studies

Professor Qasim Osman Nour noted that in 1981, while preparing for the centennial celebration of the Mahdist Revolution, he found forty books on Gordon at the University of Khartoum Library and not a single book devoted to the biography of Imam al-Mahdi.

Oral Sources

A major challenge is the absence of sources on al-Mahdi's life before the revolution. Most available material is oral narration, which has influenced many studies that rely on popular storytelling marked by exaggeration and idolizing narratives.
Despite documentation in footnotes, such accounts remain secondary sources and weaken methodological research study.

Intelligence and Military Documents

Another challenge involves documents produced in the form of intelligence and military reports, often written in hostile wartime contexts.

Chapter Two: Imam al-Mahdi's Philosophy on Managing Change and Diversity
Personal Capacities

After proclaiming Mahdism and winning the Battle of Aba Island, Muhammad Ahmad assumed a dual responsibility: intellectual (defending his idea) and military (leading fighters). Here, his leadership genius emerged in his exceptional ability to logically connect intellectual and military realities.

Charisma

Contemporary observers—both allies and adversaries—acknowledged his charisma. Accounts from missionaries, intelligence officers, and Sudanese historians describe his powerful presence, eloquence, and ability to emotionally mobilize followers.

Comprehensive Knowledge of Sudan

Through his work in trade, travel, religious teaching and dissemination of the Sammaniyya order, Al-Mahdi traversed Sudan extensively, granting him deep understanding of the land and its people.
Strategic Military Organization
Al-Mahdi adopted a sophisticated military strategy inspired by the Prophetic model, including:

Secret phase of preaching

Strategic migration

Selection of battlefields

Guerrilla warfare

Efficient intelligence, psychological warfare, and siege tactics

These strategies culminated in successive victories of the Mahdist Revolution.

Chapter Three: Imam al-Mahdi's Philosophy on Managing Change

Al-Mahdi led a profound transformation targeting religion, society and governance.

Key indicators include:

His belief in change itself

Possession of tools of change

Presenting himself as a supreme Sufi authority and inspired leader

Recruiting new and young leadership

While the concept of Mahdism remains theologically contentious, its political utility lay in creating a collective psychological bond that enabled unity, obedience, and mobilization against injustice.

Chapter Four: Imam al-Mahdi's Philosophy of Managing Diversity

Sudanese society prior to the revolution was fragmented by tribal, sectarian, and class divisions.

Al-Mahdi addressed this diversity by:

Possessing intimate knowledge of society

Creating a new unifying bond centered on Mahdism

Establishing new criteria of affiliation and leadership selection sensitive to regional contexts

Chapter Five: The Strategic selection of Omdurman

Although al-Mahdi never explicitly stated his reasons for choosing Omdurman as his capital, a careful reading reveals strategic, social and political wisdom behind the decision. Omdurman embodied his philosophy of change and diversity management, producing a unified social and cultural model that later shaped Sudanese national identity.

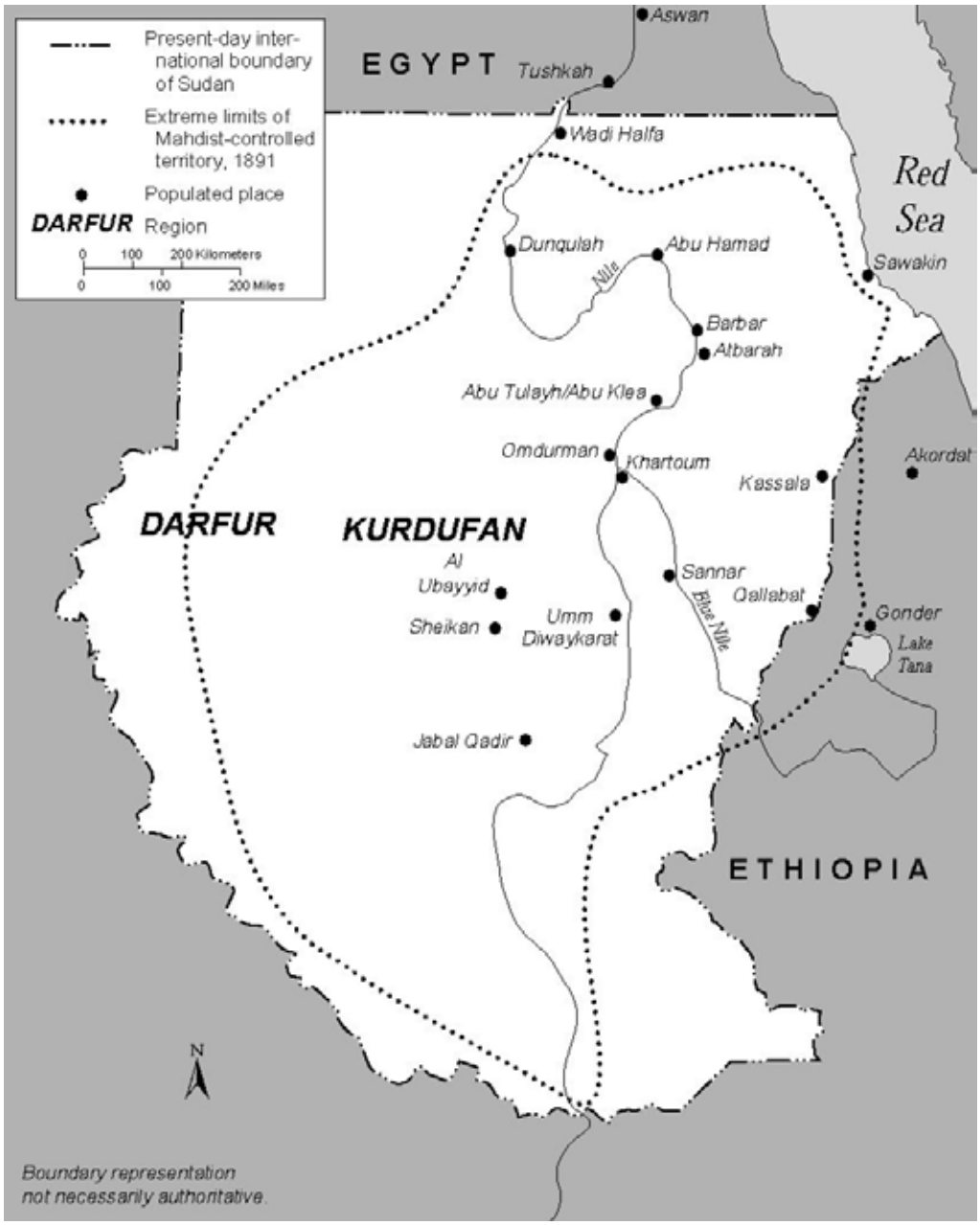
This social and cultural model initiated during the founding moment continued to evolve organically, giving rise to national movements opposed to colonialism that were grounded in the same philosophy of managing diversity and the same criteria of change adopted by Imam al-Mahdi. A unifying culture subsequently emerged as a shared frame of reference, developing naturally and peacefully in accordance with humanity's inherent inclination toward coexistence. This, in turn, produced a central cultural identity that often served as a strong bulwark against regression into tribalism and sectarian religious affiliations.

Is there, then, a possibility of a new Omdurman? one capable of shielding us from the perils of regression and the depths of ethnic and religious strife looming on the horizon?!!

Conclusion

We cannot change historical events.

But we have the full right to re-read them through new methodologies, not to reproduce the past, but to understand our present and to look forward to shaping our future.



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