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**Imaginary Sudan – Reflections on the Formation of the Notion of Sudan in the Period of European Influences**

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### **ABSTRACT**

The author explores how the images from the colonial past affected what we understand today under the notion of Sudan. He concentrates on the category of the Nile, Sudanese-Egyptian analogies, the history making processes and colonial rule. Moreover points out that the the British used and reproduced a Muslim concept of cultural geography of Africa, and in particular, the notion of Bilad as-Sudan ("Land of the Blacks"), constituting the essence of division into white and black Africa. In this tradition Sudan placed itself at the meeting point between those two worlds and was presented as the civilisation borderland of the Muslim culture. This image was taken over by the Europeans and the British in particular. For them Sudan was an arena of conflict of civilisation with barbarity, good with evil, Europe with primitive culture.

**KEY WORDS:** postcolonial studies, Greater Sudan, civilizational borderland

Sudan, like many African countries, is a creation of the European imperialism. Not only the matter of borders is meant here, but complex processes of destruction and creation

at the same time, which considerably affected what we understand today under the name of Sudan.

In 1898, the English sealed the fate of the Mahdi revolt at Omdurman – a religious rebellion against the growing influences from the outside. For Sudan it meant a totally new era. The country became the Anglo-Egyptian condominium. However, the Egypt's rule over Sudan was somewhat nominal. In fact Sudan became a part of the global colonial empire of Great Britain. And this country ruled people's hearts and minds. The conquest of this part of Africa took place on the military plane, but on cultural and ideological as well. Together with the imposition of the rule from the outside, transformation and appropriation of the local culture occurred. The land was colonised, but culture as well. Formation of categories, legal and social classifications played a considerable importance: who is civilised and who is not; which citizens are predisposed to rule and which may be merely their clients. The underlying thinking was the idea that Sudan was two different areas in terms of history and culture, North and South. The former was categorised as the "Orient", the latter was considered "wild", "primitive" Africa, an area with "no history". This model was used also to build a set of all sorts of generalities which are commonly used today in relation to Sudan and which, may be briefly described with the following pattern: Arabs – Muslims versus a "primitive" African population. Thanks to this, a bipolar, Nilo-centric concept of the ecological and cultural structure of Sudan was born, or in different terms, polarisation of this country into basically two parts: North and South.<sup>1</sup> Finally, this generalisation gave rise to a tradition of perceiving Sudan as a place of some sort of "ends of civilisation" – a country at the meeting place of the Near East, the Mediterranean world and Black Africa; the place where North meets South. This paradigm has been undergoing continuous mythisation within the space of time. In this way a stereotypical image of this part of the world was formed as "wild", but also not contaminated with civilisation, abounding in unique and archaic elements of culture. Such a picture is painted both by the authors of serious scientific dissertations and ordinary tourists visiting this country.

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<sup>1</sup> This division is nothing else but an imaginary line between the "White" and "Black" Africa, which, according to an distinguish systematician of African races, C. G. Seligmann, ran from the Senegal valley in the West, through Timbuktu, Khartoum, and further along the Egyptian border to the Jubba River and the Indian Ocean. North of this line we met white Hamites and Semites, while to the South, African peoples, and to be more specific the "true blacks" from Western Africa, the blacks who succumbed to Hamitisation (Bantu) together with Nilo-Hamites (FLUEHR-LOBBAN 2004:147).

Today the cultural stereotypes concerning this country do not fully belong to the past. On the contrary, they are still valid. Sudan is still being discovered, described or imagined stereotypically. What is more, these mental structures are the factors shaping the policy of the international community in relation to Sudan. The most recent history of this country, in particular military conflicts after the acquisition of independence, allegedly confirm the stereotypes about Sudan as a country of aggressive and expansive Arabs and Africans incapable of defending themselves. Hence the war in Darfur, or at the new border with South Sudan are for many other conflicts typical for this region.

In this article I am going to review the European ideas concerning Sudan, once the largest African country, which considerably contributed to the strengthening of Europe's hegemony in this territory during the period of colonialism and imperialism and today determine the phenomena of culture or a political situation in this country, the most outstanding example of which, in my opinion, was the declaration of independence by South Sudan. I do not mean here hegemony in the sense of conquering the land or enslaving people, but such its type, which consists in providing the local communities with a certain made-up vision of their identity and culture. The reflections presented here have been formed by exploring the archives of colonial Sudan deposited at the Sudan Archive in Durham in North-East England. The works were financed from the grant of the Ministry of Science and Higher Education. Soon I am going to publish the comprehensive results of the research in a book form.

### **The Empire on the Nile**

The process of creating Sudan as a separate political being consisted not only in making maps or demarcating boundaries, but also in encompassing its culture and ecology within generalised frameworks. The Nile played a fundamental role in this respect.

For the Europeans the Nile has been a source of fascination from time immemorial. At least since the 17th century sources of the river had been looked for (Charles-Jacques Poncet, James Bruce, William George Brown, Johann L. Burckhardt – just to mention the most famous ones). These searches were considered finished after the discovery of the source of the White Nile by John Hanning Speke in 1862. Since then the European's attention focused on great lakes of East Africa, considered then the main reservoirs of the life-giving Nile. The importance of the river kept growing however. In 1869 the Sues Canal was officially opened. While not so long later, Egypt became a British dependent territory. As a result, the Nile was promoted to one of the most important points on the geopolitical map of the world, became a key term for the notion of the Near East which was being popularised in European (particularly British) policy. And it was for Great Britain that this

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river was most important. In Victorian England a conviction was born, verging on obsession, that its *raison d'état* required controlling the entire Nile valley, from its delta to the Great Lakes region. At the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century the project grew to become a national mission, initiated allegedly by great travellers and visionaries: Bruce, Speke, Grant, Baker and Livingston. In the second half of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Egypt ceased to be an archaeological attraction only for the British, and became an area of strategic importance for communication with the Indies (COLLINS 1990:27). The expansion in the Nile valley was, therefore, a necessity, all the more so that the Mahdist Revolt broke out in Sudan, and the French, Germans, Belgians and Italians appeared in the valley of the Upper Nile.

That is why the Nile in Sudan became an object of special attention. This was continuation of a Romantic tradition of fascination with the river which, starting from the second half of the 19th century, was being developed by entire hosts of Europeans visiting those regions. The river, but also everything connected with it, is the permanent element present in letters, memoirs from journeys or press reports. It is perfectly illustrated by the photographs from the Condominium period deposited at the Sudan Archives in Durham, England. A man scooping water with a well sweep, a steamer, a Nubian boat with a spread sail, a ferry during its journey are just examples taken at random from photographic topics depicting Sudan in the early 20th century.

Together with the establishment of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, the river became also the main area of modernisation activities. At the first place emphasis was put on the transport infrastructure on the river; iron bridges were erected across the river, dams and canals were built, ferries and steam ships appeared on the river. The river became the main “highway” of colonial Sudan. (for many years this stopped the development of land infrastructure. North Sudan with Khartoum was connected with an asphalt road as late as in the 2000s!) Moreover, mechanisation of irrigation devices started in the entire country; in the areas of Gezira, between the White Nile and the Blue Nile, large cotton plantations were established (the so-called “Gezira Scheme”). Soon the plant became the main export good of Sudan. In the South, in turn, a swampy part of the White Nile was made passable, and then a river connection between Jongelei and the White Nile was built, which considerably improved transport in that region. All because of the Nilo-centric paradigm of the British imperial policy. In the colonisers’ intention, the Nile had fundamental economic and transport importance. “To be or not to be” of the English in Sudan depended on it.

That is why the Nile is inseparably connected with Sudan today. The British made it the central category of the notion “Sudan”. Since this country is composed, above all, of the Nile valley, beyond it, one may get an impression, there is nothing more worth paying attention to. This is a permanent element of the Sudan’s landscape. The Nile is a source of life, transport track and the main natural attraction of Sudan. In the intention of the

colonisers, the Nile became the guarantee of life, the reason for the full bloom of local cultures in the past, as well as the treasure from which benefits still may be drawn. Shortly speaking, Sudan was (and is) the gift of the Nile.

This specific Nile-centrism had also its share in strengthening the division into North and South and contributed to the excessively positive restoration of the areas located downstream the river. The prospect of the river strengthened the stereotype of rich and civilizationally advanced North and deficit and wild South. Since for the British it was, above all, North Sudan and the Gezira area, in the centre of Sudan, that presented an economic potential.

The Nile was an element both joining and differentiating. Both in the case of North and South alike, it constituted the central element of the landscape. The difference lied in presentations. The Nile valley of North Sudan reminded a pastoral landscape: a peaceful river, a boat against the background of the setting sun. Differently in the South. The more upstream, the more difficult ecological conditions became. In particular vast es-Sudd<sup>2</sup> swamps were demonised. Alan Moorehead (1985:374) writes that "there is no more formidable swamp in the world than the Sudd. The Nile loses itself in a vast sea of papyrus ferns and rotting vegetation and in the foetid heat there is a spawning tropical life that can hardly have altered much since the beginning of the world: it is as primitive and hostile to man as the Sargasso Sea.

### **Sudan and Egypt**

Sudan was most frequently travelled to (and still is) from the North, from Egypt. This fact has certain consequences. It is worth mentioning just the cataracts – characteristic river waterfalls, named in the order of their discovery. More important in terms of consequences is, however, the fact that for Sudan, Egypt and its culture were points of reference.

Sudan was imagined both in the context of contrasts and analogies to Egypt. In the colonial times this phenomenon was connected with the Anglo-Egyptian rivalry in Sudan. For Egypt, due to obvious reasons, it was important to emphasise cultural, ethnic or racial

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<sup>2</sup> The term Sudd, from Arabic "a barrier", "obstacle" came into use in the 19th century among Arabs and Europeans to name a boggy section of the White Nile, which, in fact, made transport impossible. In 1899, William Garstin recommended mechanical cleaning of Bahr el Jebel and Bahr el Zaraf. This project, extremely difficult as for those times, commonly referred to as "Garstin Cut", was completed by 1904.

links with the Sudanese. For Egypt, Sudan had been an area of expansion at least since the time of the Pharaohs. The supremacy of Cairo over “southern lands” (the way Sudan was frequently referred to in Egyptian historiography) was, therefore, something natural and logical. This matter was looked at differently in Great Britain. For England, Sudan had only an indirect relation with Egypt. Above all it was important for the British Empire itself. Hence it was important for the British to create a vision of identity and culture of Sudan in opposition to Egypt, to question its rights to this part of Africa. What is interesting, the dispute about it was joined by European scientists. For example, physical anthropologist Charles Myers, who in years 1901-1902 was convincing that morphologically the Sudanese considerably differed from the Egyptians, just to mention only one of numerous examples of physical anthropologists’ involvement in the imperial policy (TROUTT POWELL 2000:175,176). According to the scientists of those times: The Nubians are not Egyptians, but “Hamites” representing the “brown race” (Charles Armbruster). This view was a part of the once valid systematics of peoples of this part of Africa; the fact of dominance of non-African Egyptians of “Caucasian” roots over Africans, and more accurately the hierarchical division of Arabic Semites, Nubian Hamites and the Sudanese and the Nilots.

It is worth remembering that racist ideas were not fully a European creation. In fact they were taken over from the Muslim world, and have their roots in the slave trade in Islam. As early as in the Middle Ages (around the 9<sup>th</sup> century), the Muslims used the categories of “white” and “black” slaves. The latter were allegedly descendents of biblical Ham and therefore were supposed to be people of a worse category. In this context slavery was for them a nearly “natural” state and the blackness of the skin a metaphor of serfdom and curse. At one time Arab travellers gathered numerous “evidence” of primitivism and bestiality of Africans. Ibn Battuta – probably the most famous of the Muslim travellers described Africans as morally and culturally poor creatures. While Ibn Khaldun directly linked primitivism of Africans with slavery. He was of the opinion that Blacks are created for slavery since they are closer to dumb animals than rational beings (IDRIS 2001:15-17).

Let us come back, however, to colonial times. The supremacy of the British Empire in Sudan made the concept of the “specific nature of the Sudanese” finally triumph, becoming a key to understanding this country. However, Egypt still remained the point of reference.

Thus, in the eyes of normal travellers and specialists, Sudan is an Africanised variety of the Egyptian culture, where nearly each institution was subject to disturbance and mutation, or did not develop to a more sophisticated stage. And so: In Sudan, in contrast to Egypt, people prefer pastoral and nomadic style of life, follow a traditional, tribal social organisation, and as regards religion, they are satisfied more with a folk variety of Islam, characterised by the cult of saints and numerous superstitions. Even monuments of Sudan constituted the evidence of mutation or even, for some, degradation of achievements of the

ancient civilisations. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, for tourists travelling from Egypt, the ruins of Jebel Barkal or Meroe were merely imitations of what they could come across in the North.

In the times of the Condominium, Egypt became a model for Sudan of civilisational changes, modernisation reforms, replacement of local, primitive practices (e.g. cult of saints, custom laws, female circumcision) with a more advanced and humanitarian variety of the Muslim culture. According to colonial experts, Sudan should follow a path taken by Egypt. It had far-reaching consequences. Among the Sudanese a complex of the Northern neighbour emerged – a sense of inferiority, serfdom or peripherality. A conviction was strengthened in the Sudanese that whatever they do, they should follow in the “footsteps” of their Northern neighbour. Since their own culture was far from being perfect and stands in the way to modernisation. In common imagination, a Sudanese became a “little Egyptian”, someone who aspires to a society located higher in terms of culture, but is not a part of it. That is why on the threshold of independence, attempts were made to establish a sense of national unity in relation to Egypt. It is enough to mention the Ashiqqa (“Brothers”) group headed by Ismail Al-Azhari, the first political party in Sudan, which opted for a union with Egypt and proclaimed the slogans of unification of the entire Nile valley. Although the draft of the Sudanese and Egyptian union was never put into effect, Egypt remained an ideologically important point of reference for the Sudanese politics. I mean here, for example, the 1970s and the rule of Arab socialist Gaafar Nimeiry.

### **In the Shadow of Pyramids**

At the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century Sudan became an object of interest of European scientists and normal travellers. As far as the scientists are concerned, most of them were Egyptologists or belonged to a broad group of Orientalists, Near East specialists (Petrie, Junker, Breasted, Arkell, Reisner, Crawford, Griffith, just to name a few). The purpose of their search was only the relics of the bygone cultures, which could be connected either with Egypt or the classical world. For all of them the history of Sudan was strictly connected with the history of Egypt. Research was concentrated, therefore, in the Nile valley of North Sudan. The rest of the country, where there were no such discoveries, remains an archaeological “white spot” (ABDELRAHMAN and WELSBY 2011:24) till the present day. South or Central Sudan are, in fact, areas without history. Until the times of the famous action to save the monuments of Nubia in the 1960s, we have dealt with research on Sudan’s contacts with ancient Egypt (Edwards IX).

What is more, Egypt and its legacy were the basis for the diagnosis of the local culture. According to a common opinion, the greatest achievement of Sudanese cultures are

monuments connected with the influences of ancient Egypt. The ruins of Meroe or Jebel Barkal have been exploited with a Romantic fever since the 19<sup>th</sup> century, have been unanimously presented as the greatest civilization achievements of this part of Africa. For years those monuments were the main topic of descriptions of Europeans visiting those areas. At the same time they constituted a category classifying the works of the local culture. From this perspective, the presence was a source of disillusionment, evidence of transience of large civilisations, *Sic transit gloria mundi*.

The legacy of Ancient Egypt was something to be regained. Not literally. (Though it is worth mentioning that in the Condominium times an architectural style was developed, following the old Egyptian traditions, created by lieutenant G.F. Gorringer, governor of Sennar Province in 1902-1904). Rather the civilisational progress was meant. The ruling of the British was to restore the development of the local culture to a proper course. The Sudanese culture was to be again a source of pride for the future generations.

What about the areas upstream the Nile? The more southwards, the more man moved back in the history of civilisation. This is what Samuel Baker, a famous English traveller, wrote about areas located on the Upper Nile: "There are no monuments of the antiquity here which, waking the memories of old times, would add charm to the presence, all here is wild and brutal, austere and cruel ..." (MOOREHEAD 1985:373).

### **Ethnography and Native Administration**

While North Sudan was exploited from the point of view of its monuments, the South became attractive for a totally different reason. This reason were living people and their culture. The interest in cultures of modern societies of this country started a bit later, in totally different circumstances, and, what is very important, again in a very selective context. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, from the inspiration of colonial administration, and in particular with the concept of the so-called "Native Administration", a demand for a specific type of knowledge appeared: for data about the natives and their culture. At the request of colonial authorities, likewise in many other parts of the British Empire, anything that had any relevance to ruling Sudan started being collected. This had some consequences. For example: ethnographic facts were presented with such curiosities as: poisonous snakes or properties of Gum Arabic. As a result, our knowledge on Sudan is diversified yet superficial. Its accumulation was most frequently the domain of amateurs, not tainted to a large degree with theoretical fads of the turn of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries. All because of the need to learn and rule streaked with imperialism. It was directly



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expressed by Reginald Wingate, the proper creator of colonial Sudan<sup>3</sup>. “Superstitions and customary laws of primitive tribes are the objects of the deepest interest not only from the point of view of anthropology or ethnography, but for the effective administration as well (WINGATE 1918: Foreword). Information on the country and its citizens were put in all sorts of almanacs<sup>4</sup>, above all, however, in the flagship publication of colonial Sudan “Sudan Notes and Records”. For subsequent decades this extremely cognitively valuable magazine published everything about Sudan which seemed to be interesting and valuable from the point of view of the Europeans.

The need to classify people by race or tribe motivated the works of the luminaries of Anglo-Saxon science: MacMichael, Seligmann, Evans-Prichard, Lewis and many others. In the first decades of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, at the request of the administration, those scientists conducted a series of ethnographic reconnaissances: Nalder commissioned a survey of Mongalla Province; its result was a book entitled *A Tribal Survey of Mongalla Province*. Linguist Tucker and anthropologist Evans-Prichard, in turn, were engaged to conduct studies on the peoples: Azande, Nuer and Anuak. While Seligmann and Nadel carried out ethnographic research into the Nuba tribes. Also colonial officials dealt with ethnography of the region: Alban (Nuer), Cann (Shilluk), Coriat (Nuer), Tiernay (Nuer), Tunncliffe (Anuak), Wedderburn-Maxwell (Nuer), Wyld (Nuer) – just to mention only these few names. The pages of the already mentioned *Sudan Notes and Records* are full of information provided by those people. Their value is diversified, however this group includes those who are considered classics today, like MacMichael and Newbold. The former became famous for his two-volume history of Arabs in Sudan (*the History of Arabs in the Sudan*). The latter entered history as a researcher of archaeology and history of this part of Africa.

The research made people aware of complexity of the situation in the South and additionally showed the problems the colonisers who wanted to put the indirect rule model into effect would come across. The power was divided among heads of kinship groups, rain makers, prophets or cow chiefs. Shilluks had the most centralised political organisation, headed by a deified king, referred to as *reth*. This was not an absolute ruler, although not in the sense the British wanted to see him. While Azande were a diversified society – a military “aristocracy” that ruled the conquered autochthons, at the southern end of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, then called the “Lado Enclave”. However, smaller or larger acephalous

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<sup>3</sup> In 1899-1916 he was Governor-General of the Sudan.

<sup>4</sup> *Sudan Almanac 1949* Public Relations Office, Sudan Government, Khartoum or *Sudan Almanac 1963. An Official Hand Book*, The Republic of the Sudan, Khartoum.

societies dominated, like the Neur people, for whom a political structure was an absolute novelty. Dinka represented a bit different model of the segmentary society, nevertheless the power was divided between heads of kinship groups or religious leaders. The tribal structure was in most cases something that had yet to be created. And it was. From the colonial administration's perspective, there had to be rulers, tribal customs, a language or a territory. The result was a conclusion that Islamisation had to be stopped since it had a destructive influence on the native culture. It leads to unification and expulsion of primeval elements of culture. Arabic had to be replaced with English, and Islam with Christian proselitism, much attention was paid to stopping the penetration of the South by Arab traders who, as it is known, were ideal missionaries of the Islam.

In contrast to North Sudan, in this area, a necessary yet ungrateful, from the point of view of history, role of the manager and teacher fell to the Europeans. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the South, totally unknown and, what is equally important, endangered by the Islam, became the point of interest. This world was threatened with a fatal danger: Islam and slavery, which the local peoples were not able to resist themselves. One of the elements of politics in relation to the South was protection against destructive influences coming from the North (slavery, pharaonic circumcision).

Intensive ethnographic research contributed to the appearance of the myth of tribalism – tribalism as the basis of social identity. Its features were invented or exaggerated to clearly create boundaries between “tribes”. It played a considerable role in the process of ruling Sudan in the colonialism era, as well as later, during the recent civil war, or today, in already independent South Sudan. Colonial officials together with anthropologies brought new attributes of identity to life, which today are a part of the African society. As it is commonly known, this phenomenon dynamized social processes, but also created new planes of conflicts (ABDEL GHAFAR 2003:11,12).

### **“Human Zoo”**

At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the South turned the scale, and to be more specific: the so-called Nilotic tribes inhabiting it. This time North Sudan, except for its historic heritage, was considered hardly interesting. Reason: it is inhabited by Arabs, Muslims, well-known from the other parts of the Muslim world. For a change, the attention of researchers focused on black peoples, Nuers, Dinkas or Shilluks. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century knowledge about them was scarce. Whereas for the colonial authorities they were important for administrative reasons, the scientists were fascinated with their culture. In their eyes they were allegedly the wildest peoples in Africa. They were presented as people from the early Stone Age, with archaic appearance. They were stuck in timeless,

ahistoric barbarity. South Sudan, to use the words of Alan Moorehead (1985:375), like Australia in the early 19th century, was deprived of traces of human activity.

Reports of British officials pacifying the South were in the same tone. Major Geoffrey Wrench Titherington (1927:159) wrote: "Dinka are a contemporary picture of prehistoric man in their natural environment, who is untouched by external influences like any other race in the world."

However it was primitivism, which turned out to be the most attractive for the Europeans. On this rising tide of excitement in cultural evolutionism, this area turned to be the treasure of relics – archaic institutions which in vain could be searched for in more civilised parts of the globe.

At the turn of the 20<sup>th</sup> century at the Upper Nile one could meet deified rulers, who were ritually killed. Just like in the case of a legend of ancient priests–rulers of Nemi in Italy quoted by James Frazer. At Dinka's a tradition was alive of burying religious leaders under impressive mounds of clay and cow dung, which reminded Egyptian pyramids. In Dar Funj, in turn, one could come across the tribes, which, like Ancient Egyptians, worshipped the sun and the moon, and even made bloody sacrifices to baobabs. The way of treating the cattle by Neurs (deformation of horns, for example) was also evidence of living relics of Old Egypt's influence in Sudan (SELIGMAN and SELIGMAN 1965:34, 35, 436; MOOREHEAD 1985:201)

### **Imaginary Borderlands and Their Heroes**

For us, the Europeans, Sudan is the boundaries of civilisations, the end of the Near East, of the Mediterranean world, and the beginning of Black Africa. This is a fascinating world, the embodiment of the entire set of European images on the Muslim civilisation, which were described years ago by Edward Said in *Orientalism*.

Sudan is a part of this imaginary picture, utterly alien, giving rise to anxiety, verging on fear. This imagination has its beginning in the Mahdists' victory in Sudan. Once this movement was perceived as a considerable threat. Since due to its universalism it carried justified fears in relation to Egypt – allegedly the next aim of the fanatics from Sudan. The embodiment of fear of Sudan and Muslim fanaticism was a figure of Charles Gordon – a British general killed during heroic yet reckless defence of Khartoum against the Mahdi's warriors in 1885. His figure grew in legend, becoming some sort of a lay cult of colonial Sudan, which will be mentioned later (BODDY 2007:14). Gordon is an archetype of the hero of Victorian England: deeply religious, honourable, brave, devoted to the idea of

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humanitarianism. It is worth mentioning that our Polish contribution to the “cult” of this figure is a book by Sienkiewicz entitled “W pustyni i w puszczy” [“In Desert and Wilderness”].

The social memory of Gordon contributed to the strengthening of myth of Sudan as a borderland, the place where Islam meets Christianity, barbarity civilisation, negatively-featured traditionalism modernity. To a large extent it was thanks to the tragic fate of Gordon, Sudan was labelled as an unpredictable, wild country which, like a volcano, was ready to carry destruction at any time. A considerable role in strengthening of this image was played by Reginald Wingate himself – a hero of re-conquest of Sudan, and then its Governor-General – obsessively afraid of Islamic jihad (DALY 1986:118,119)<sup>5</sup>. Thanks to people like him, conflict and aggression were added to the features typical for the Sudanese identity. H.C. Jackson, a prominent colonial official, in this way explains this phenomenon in his memories: “For generations the inhabitants of Sudan have lived in the atmosphere of war or threat, enjoying only short periods of uncertain peace” (Jackson 1954b:73). Some other time, in the introduction to *The Fighting Sudanese* he writes: “*The Sudan is a land of warriors who, as long ago as 750 B.C., exercised dominion over Thebes in Egypt and, a few years later, conquered the whole of Egypt. Throughout the ages the peoples of the Sudan ... seem to have been constantly at war...*” (JACKSON 1954a:1).

The alleged proneness of the Sudanese to life with violence had however an ambivalent undertone. In the period of European influences, an *aggressive* Sudanese was invented, but also *valiant, brave*; in other words an opponent worth the British soldier of the Victorian era. Rudyard Kipling himself was the propagator of valour of the Sudanese, who called them “first-class fighting man”. It is worth mentioning that he expressed it in a popular poem *Fuzzy Wuzzy*<sup>6</sup>. The figure of a Sudanese warrior entered the pantheon of British militarism, where they found their place next to such terror-evoking, but respect as well, nations as Pashtun or Zulu people.

Since the death of Gordon, a conviction of exceptional proneness of the Sudanese to religion-oriented aggression has been particularly alive. This type, in a bit humorous form, was portrayed by Sudanese writer Tayeb Salih in a novel *The Dhow Tree of Wad Hamid*, in

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<sup>5</sup> Actually, at the beginning of the Condominium nothing heralded the disappearance of the messiah traditions in Sudan. Still several years after the fall of the Mahdists new messiahs appeared, ready to fight against the infidel. The most serious attempt to resurrect Mahdism in Sudan was Abd al-Kadir's Uprising in Kaftia on the Blue Nile in 1908 (DALY 1985:119, 125).

<sup>6</sup> The inspiration was a fighting attitude of the Sudanese warriors (Hadendova nomads) during famous Wolseley Expedition aimed to rescue Gordon (1884-85).

which inhabitants of the village are ready to defend their sacred tree connected with the burial of a pious man with all possible measures (VOLL and POTTS-VOLL 1985:3).

It was because of this of the natives' uncontrollable proneness to aggression, the colonial administration of Sudan was initially extremely militarised (Sudan Political Service 1930). Initially this applied to the whole of Sudan, with time, however, it became typical mostly in relation to the South - i.e. "Frontier of Insecurity" – as the southern provinces were referred to in the colonial nomenclature. Civilians were not allowed to stay in territories particularly south of Sennar. The first three Governor-Generals, Kitchener, Wingate and Lee Stack, were soldiers. Also lower-rank officials were British, former soldiers of the Egyptian army (HOLT and DALY 2000:106). What is more, officers serving in Sudan, like medieval knight-monks, had to be guided by very puritan principles. It is enough to mention that no women were allowed to accompany them in that country (BODDY 2007:64-69, COLLINS 1984:14). The first British officials were pioneers who could not count on any civilizational amenities. They had small funds. They suffered from lack of staff. They stayed continuously for many years at their posts. Because there was no one to replace them. Transport was also a problem. As late as in 1904, and with superhuman efforts, the Bahr el Ghazal river bed overgrown with tropical vegetation, was made passable, thereby providing the areas south of *Sudd* swamps with permanent connection with the rest of the country (DALY and HOLT 2000:103). In contrast to the next generation of officials, they travelled throughout Sudan by steam ships or on camel backs – instead by trains or lorries. They suffered from the sense of alienation, loneliness and tropical diseases such as malaria or yellow fever. It was due to the specific character of the first two decades of the Condominium that the so-called "Bog Barons"<sup>7</sup> were created – a group of officials with military roots who ruled their posts in the far south like sovereign rulers (WINDER 1991:20,21). One of such people was Chauncey Stigand, Governor of the Upper Nile in 1914-1918 or Vere Fergusson who applied the strong arm government in relation to Neurs, which cost him life, as well as others like: colonel "Tiger" Wylde, Geoffrey King, A.H. Alban or Harry Lilley. They were controversial figures. They were not refused courage or charisma. But were also criticised for their inhuman actions. What they had in common was the sense of mission, devotion and location at the frontiers of civilisation. Hence, probably, they had so much in common. All were eccentrics, freaks, despots, frequently of sadistic inclinations. They acted above the law, but always in the name of European humanitarianism or Christian religion. Despite numerous controversies,

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<sup>7</sup> A *Barony* was understood as a primitive area, usually south of Europe, while a *baron* is a soldier or ex-soldier on a contract.

even in their own times, they all passed into legend of colonial Sudan. This type of man, extremely typical in relation to the European of the imperialism and colonialism era in Africa, is known, for example, thanks to Conrad's Kurtz, the main character of the famous *Heart of Darkness*.

### **Mission to "Civilize" Africa**

In the Europeans' awareness a conviction became rooted that Sudan is a country in which someone is permanently harming someone. The perpetrators are basically wild, fanatically religious, nomadic followers of Islam; while victims are the neighbouring African societies or, basically, lowered-status groups. All need protection. Left alone, being on a low level of civilisation, like children, are incapable of defence, both in the physical and cultural sense. This truly imperialistic vision became the corner stone of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. It made Sudan its flagship territory, paraphrasing the title of a famous book by Janice Boddy – a mission to *civilize* Africa. The most important were considered the fight against pharaonic circumcision, "a primitive, degenerating, brutal, mutilating operation which results in infibulation and other irreparable losses, complications, physical and mental detrimental effects on health, and even death of mothers and infants (CRUICKSHANK 1948: SAD.851/11/1-4). In one of the reports of Sudan Medical Service we will find: "(female) circumcision is one of the most serious social problems of Sudan. This is a remain of "dark ages" which nowadays is connected with a social stigma and the duty of the contemporary generation is to make it go into the past forever (CRUICKSHANK 1948: SAD.851/11/1-4).

In the honourable Victorian era, with incredible zeal, European values, British ones in particular, started being propagated around the world. But nearly everywhere it was made under the pretence of humanitarianism boiling down, in practice, to convincing the natives to abolish slavery, abandon polygamy, or abandon making human sacrifices or cannibalism. The situation of Sudan in this respect was special. On the one hand it was a vast and extremely differentiated area, on the other hand it did not have any economic value (at the onset of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium no minerals were excavated there, there were no larger economic centres or intense farming). As a result, the essence of the British rule in this area was in fact to keep law and order, prevent conflicts and aggression, but also propagate the Occidental culture in selected spheres of life of people living there (women's rights, hygiene, or agriculture).

### **Gordon of Khartoum**

The heroic death of the general and the campaign of 1898 were the foundations of identity of British Sudan. Gordon became a legend so quickly that the conquest of Sudan in 1896-1898 was perceived as the reconquest. Likewise, Khartoum was rebuilt, not established from scratch. Everything which concerned Gordon and the heroic campaign became objects of lay cult in colonial Sudan. Battlefields and war cemeteries, the remains of the Kitchener railway line of 1896 were obligatory stops during journeys throughout Sudan in the times of the British rule. Emotions to this sentimental tourism were added by ample literature, including the following which unquestionably deserve being called classics: *Fire and Sword in the Soudan* by Rudolf Slatin (Arnold, London 1896); *A Prisoner of Khaleefa* by Charles Neufeld (Chapman&Hall, London 1899); *Ten Years Captivity in the Mahdi's Camp 1882-1892* by father Josph Ohrwalder (Sampson Low, Marston&Company, London 1892); or finally famous *The River War* written by even more famous Winston Churchill (Longmans, Green and Co., London 1899).

However, it was Khartoum that was the centre of cult of Gordon. This city belonged to Gordon, his name was omnipresent: Gordon's College, Monument to Gordon, Gordon Avenue, Gordon Hotel, Governor-General's Palace (also the place of Gordon's death) were the main attractions of the city– some sort of relics, at the same time, worth the state supreme respect. Let me mention also that one of holidays of the greatest importance was the anniversary of Gordon's death, 26 January. On this day impressive military parades were organised, which were to demonstrate the power of the British army.

The Gordon figure is a symbolic corner stone of Khartoum. Quoting Howard-Williams (1934:23) "for Sudan he is what the Nelson figure is for the navy." Gordon as some sort of symbol became an incentive for abrupt development of Khartoum in the times of the Condominium. Since the sacrifice of Gordon could not have been worthless. This is what famous American Egyptologist J.K. Giffen (1905:53) wrote about the transformation of the city under the colonial rule: "Old Khartum, which was a city of half-civilised people only, has been converted into a new city built of quite different material and possessing altogether new forms, and this new Khartum has been prepared for a civilised population. . The conception and the energizing force came from the West... In view of this, then, Gordon's death has a new and precious meaning, "*Blood goes by quality " rather than " quantity," and the blood of Gordon has done more, perhaps, than that of all others in making restitution to the poor people of the Sudan*".

Martin Daly and Susanne Hogan (2005:104) rightly observed that Khartoum is an excellent example of a symbolic role of the city in the age of imperialism. Many African cities of the colonialism era emphasised the superiority of the European culture. The role of

Khartoum was exceptional however. In 1885, the Mahdists moved the capital to Omdurman, sentencing Khartoum to ruin. The reason was obvious: for them it was the seat of the hated colonial rule. For that reason, one of the first colonial projects was to rebuild the city, with the only difference, however, that in an even more grandeur style. All to prove the power and superiority of the European culture. The initiator of the project was the hero of the victorious campaign himself, Lord Kitchener. He wanted to leave not only the memory of him as of the great “destroyer” but of a great “builder” as well. And so, it was his idea to design the network of streets on the example of the English flag – the “Union Jack” (DALY 1986:25). Buildings of the governmental institutions were made ornaments of the city: Governor’s Palace, barracks, Main Post Office. New, spacious streets, prepared for the car traffic requirements were planted with trees, thereby the city acquired some greenery, and the streets became pedestrian walkways as well. At the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century elegant Grand Hotel was built, intended for the rapidly growing number of foreigners. These are just some of the changes that “affected” the capital of Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. All were supposed to constitute contrast, manifest the superiority of the Occidental culture; the contrast more vivid since nearby, on the opposite side of the White Nile, a city of natives was built, Omdurman, the former Mahdist capital.

## Conclusion

European imperialism and colonialism were of gigantic importance for Sudan. It is actually a truism. This truth, however, must resound here. Sudan was simultaneously conquered and discovered. The British gave it a physical form, established borders and political structures, but also, based on their fantasies and political interests, “gifted” this country culture, history or identification systems. In other words, they gave Sudan an identity – as if it had not had it earlier. In the case of this process, the colonisers used and reproduced a Muslim concept of cultural geography of Africa, and in particular, the notion of *Bilad as-Sudan* (“Land of the Blacks”), constituting the essence of division into *white* and *black* Africa. In this tradition Sudan placed itself at the meeting point between those two worlds and was presented as the civilisation borderland of the Muslim culture. This image was taken over by the Europeans and the British in particular. For them Sudan was an arena of conflict of civilisation with barbarity, good with evil, Europe with primitive culture. In this situational context, a dichotomic structure of Sudan was established: North and South. The English, thanks to their policy, raised it to the rank of paradigms of social relationships in this country. With time, upon it, the entire structure of imaginations of all sorts was built, grouped by hierarchical and relative scheme: Egypt, North Sudan, South Sudan.



Today the history seems to be turning the full circle. In 2011, South Sudan declared its independence. Its citizens, after years of xenophobia and chauvinism on the part of Khartoum, had a full right to vote for independence. Was independence, however, the only optimum solution? The fact is that the separation of South Sudan, instead of solving, gave rise to new conflicts. Both countries have already had a border war for oil producing Abyei region on their scorecard (2012). In 2011, a new centre of fights was the Blue Nile and South Kordofan – border provinces with South Sudan. It turns out that the local population, despite practiced Islam, does not affiliate with unitary, based on Arab culture and religion, Sudan. The emergence of independent South Sudan is often presented as correcting a mistake made by the British imperialists who created Sudan, disregarding the race and culture. For many, this event is some sort of “second decolonisation” of this country – the final correction of artificial and colonial boundaries. Personally I find it something totally different. The disintegration of Sudan is a triumph of generalisation and common schemes, whose roots reach the times of European imperialism. This fact proves durability of divisions introduced by the British which were accepted by the Africans as their own.

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