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***MULTIDIMENSIONAL CHANGE IN SUDAN
(1989-2011): RESHAPING LIVELIHOODS,
CONFLICTS AND IDENTITIES***

**EDITED BY BARBARA CASCIARRI; MUNZOUL ASSAL;
AND FRANCOIS IRETON, BERGHAHN OXFORD; 2015**

This is an essential book to read as a background and springboard for delving into an extremely critical and complex period of modern Sudan (1989-2011), a period that is characterized by major, rapid, and seemingly lasting impact events and changes in the social, political, economic, and cultural fields in the country. The reviewed book poses critical queries at the levels of theory, methodology, ethnography, and empirical reality in an attempt to fathom the present socio-economic dynamics of change in Sudan. Though the book is specifically about the Sudanese case, it is quite clear that it positions itself as a part of a very broad and ambitious project on how we can document, analyse, interpret, and finally understand the processes of social change in general. The book's excellent introduction captures all these issues eloquently, and informs the readers about how the articles fit into the designated framework of the book.

The introduction points out that the important changes in Sudan during the above-mentioned period took place in different spheres, through different factors, and at multiple levels :

“the reshaping of landscapes, rural as well as urban, and the redefinition of their relationships; changes in forms of livelihoods and ways of producing and reproducing economic and social life, in terms of new actors and settings, class articulation, and patterns of life and consumption; the growing complexity of the political arena and its subjects, strategies, alliances and legitimating discourses; the rise of ‘new’ conflicts and the evolution of ‘old’ conflicts with their local, national and international entanglements; a spiral in identity claims with their

shifting boundaries and wider implications; and the simultaneous and growing intervention of outside forces in all their varieties- humanitarian aid, businessmen, 'peace builders' and developers." p. 1

The editors are aware of the thorny issues related to conceptualizing the mutual effects of the multifarious factors and elements involved in social change and/or their dominance. Though the problematic of grasping the interlink ages among existing structures and underlying social processes is by no means recent in sociological theory, the book successfully suggests new ways of viewing it. In the case of Sudan, this is dealt within terms of conceiving the above-mentioned forces and dynamics of change as processes in different domains within periodization (time structures) by using the idea of scaling – moving from local up to global. In their discussion of these complex interlink ages, the editors explain the many types of difficulties that must be faced. For example, there are opposing perspectives on the concept of globalization (with its different dimensions) in relation to its effect on local conditions, but the question is which one of these perspectives is to be adopted. The editors have opted for Duffield's position, which treats similar cases such as that of Sudan as ambivalent, in the sense that it is a case in which neither the logic of the interacting components nor the direction of change can be fully grasped. This position necessitates doing two things: conducting rigorous fieldwork and adopting an interdisciplinary approach towards both fieldwork and analysis. The book does not claim to have done either one or both in a comprehensive way.

The focus of the book and its contributions, however, are claimed to be on resource access and management, as located in the very broad manner outlined above (that is, local settings and elements, factors, processes, and domains within specific periods of time in a global context). Accordingly, the book is divided into four parts – land, water, new players (resources, social entities, and institutions), and identity and ideology– all based on interdisciplinary fieldwork studies covering different areas of Sudan. Again, neither the treatment of the cases nor the local coverage or interdisciplinary perspectives are claimed to be comprehensive; however, most of the cases discussed relate the micro-level processes to the national or even higher level, and show the dialectical relationship between them. One very good example is Assal's paper on land grabbing in a marginal suburb of the larger Khartoum urban conurbation. He meticulously details how Al-Saliha, a group of villages, has changed from being a cohesive tribal community whose communal land was used for grazing small animals into an ethnically diversified society that has become a target for investment and capital accumulation, and that is rapidly becoming part of the larger urban/capitalist dynamics of greater Khartoum due to the new regime's state economic, social, and political policies.

The book ends with an epilogue (by Marchal) which is meant to give shape to the apparently scattered topics (articles) in the book. In my opinion,

however, the epilogue is one of the best summaries I have encountered. It captures and attempts to explain how the ideological orientation of the current Inqath regime in Sudan (1989- ...) has been implemented under the banner of 'civilizational project', and why it has lasted up to now despite local, regional, and international adversity. Many of the perceptive points raised by Marchal in this regard may require extensive debate. Nonetheless, the most important of them, I think, are two interlinked ideas. First, the Islamist regime has been effective in transforming Sudanese societies to a point of no return, and second, the Islamists have failed to control and transform the State apparatuses in a way that matches their transformation of Sudanese society. Marchal's explanation of the reasons behind and results of the former discrepancy is open to lengthy discussion. The writer, like the editors, is aware that there might be other important missing pieces if an analysis of Sudan's situation is to be made fully comprehensible: these include the private sector (which is mentioned by Marchal), the army, the security apparatus, the youth and civil society organizations. Both the editors and Marchal acknowledge that there is a long way to go before we will be in a position to know the exact outcome of the ongoing processes and dynamics with regards to Sudan's future.

The editors have admitted that though the book should not be viewed as being solely about the Republic of Sudan (and thus North Sudan), they have not included any articles on the Republic of South Sudan, despite the mutual effect of socio-economic dynamics in the two countries. Given the fact that many works on the impact of the separation between the two states appeared before the publication of the book, one would have expected that at least one overview study like Marchal's would have sufficed. Also, it is not enough, in my opinion, to view the interdisciplinary approach as a simple notion of juxtaposing studies carried out in different fields and joined under a common theme or themes; in terms of theory and methodology it is more complicated than this. The book does not dwell long enough on this point. Again, in addition to the missing important aspects I have alluded to above, one can point to an extremely significant aspect without which our understanding of social change must be incomplete. Though Part Four contains two important articles on language and one on education, we need to have a background on the general ideological setting in Sudan against which the current debates on identity, ethnicity, Islamisation, modernity, and other cultural issues might be understood. In this case, a sociology of knowledge is indispensable for connecting the level of thought and practice over the recent historical epochs of Sudan's development.

Even though the ambitious project the book sets out to complete cannot be presented in one volume alone, the collection under review can undoubtedly be considered as a landmark and ground-breaking contribution in recent Sudanese studies. It opens new paths for further research and analysis in the study of socio-economic change in Sudan, and as such it is a must-read for everyone who wishes to grasp what is happening in Sudan at present, especially for Africanist researchers and those engaged in postgraduate interdisciplinary programmes.