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Iris Seri-Hersch

Chapter 20

Education, Violence, and Transitional Uncertainties: Teaching “Military Sciences” in Sudan, 2005–2011

This chapter started life as an incidental discovery made while I was doing research for my PhD on history teaching in colonial and early postcolonial Sudan. As I was looking for old history and geography schoolbooks in Khartoum’s libraries, bookshops and streets in 2009, the covers of three recent textbooks entitled “The Military Sciences” (*al-‘ulūm al-‘askariyya*) drew my attention. I bought them out of curiosity, without realising that they would become objects of history, belonging to a present that a revolution that would unfold ten years later (2019) would seek to turn into a past. From the vantage point of a volatile post-revolutionary moment, this study¹ seeks to understand the relationship between education and violence in another context of political uncertainty, namely the years stretching from the formal end of the North-South civil war in 2005 to Sudan’s partition into two states in 2011. As it explores connections between an *emic* category – violence as used by social actors; a concept – violence as an analytical tool; and a source – textbooks, this research intersects with two main fields.

The first is the academic literature on the self-named Sudanese *inqādh* regime (“salvation” in Arabic, 1989–2019), especially its ideological, educational and coercive dimensions (Guta 2009; Fluehr-Lobban 2012; Breidlid 2013; Berridge 2013; Gallab 2014; Tenret 2016; Salomon 2016; El-Battahani 2016). These works have analysed how the Islamist ruling elites attempted – with partial success – to transform cultural representations, legal norms, moral values, social conduct, political practices and even aesthetic models over the course of more than two decades. Noah Salomon’s ethnographic study (2016) has examined the social life of the state, focusing on the daily experience of ordinary Sudanese (both supporters and critics of the regime), and bringing to light local debates over the nature of “true” Islam

1 My thanks go to Candice Raymond and Mohamed Bakhouch, who organised a seminar on “Patterns, Dynamics and Representations of Violence in the Islamic World” (Aix-Marseille Université, 2016–2017). My initial ideas were developed in this framework. I would also like to thank Elena Vezzadini, Lucie Revilla, Anaël Poussier and two anonymous reviewers for their useful comments on earlier drafts of this chapter. All translations from Arabic and French are mine; the names of all the informants have been anonymised.

and its relationship with the political form of the nation-state. Although they were a central actor in the inception and maintenance of the *inqādh* regime, the Sudanese armed forces have attracted very limited scholarly attention (Kalpakian 2019: 47). The two main works (Sa'īd 2001; Ṭāhā 2002) were written by ex-military officers who had been excluded from the army following the 1989 coup as part of the large-scale purges carried out by 'Umar Ḥasan al-Bashīr's regime. They therefore provide vital background information from an insider's perspective, while also assuming an engaged, anti-regime position.

The second field of interest here is the social sciences scholarship on violence. In Latin languages, “violence” comes from the Latin term *vis*, which basically means “force” and relates to various forms of physical and immaterial violence (Faggion and Régina 2010: §18). The Arabic term *'unf* conveys not only notions of violence, aggressiveness and harshness, but also ideas of excess and severity (al-Ma'ānī 2021). The multifaceted nature of violence – which may be physical, verbal or symbolic; spontaneous or organised; individual or collective; private or public; and social, religious or political – makes it a complex subject of inquiry that has attracted the attention of historians, anthropologists, sociologists, psychologists and philosophers since the 19th century (Faggion and Régina 2010: §1–3). When they discuss research methods for investigating violence in African contexts,² historian Élodie Apard and political scientist Cyrielle Maingraud-Martinaud (2021: 3) remind us that violence as a social phenomenon is always relative. Still, physical violence can be broadly defined as a destructive process that hurts – deliberately or not – the physical integrity of people involved in it (Maingraud-Martinaud 2021: 5). As for symbolic violence, several concepts have been developed by social scientists. Pierre Bourdieu conceives it as the interiorisation of domination mechanisms to a point where dominated people stop perceiving them as such. It is by applying this reading that Sümbül Kaya (2013: 520) has interpreted the attitude of Turkish officers and conscripts who both endure and perpetuate an institutional form of violence in army barracks. In contrast with Bourdieu, political sociologist Philippe Braud (2003) defines symbolic violence as a *consciously lived* experience that generates subjective suffering.

Bourdieu's and Braud's conceptualisations of symbolic violence would prove useful for an ethnography of real teaching situations in schools or for testing Kaya's

² In France, the current dynamism of what might be termed “violence studies” applied to Middle Eastern and African contexts may be seen in European research projects such as “Social Dynamics of Civil Wars” (2016–2021): <https://cordis.europa.eu/project/id/669690> (20 May 2021) and a recent special issue of *Sources. Materials & Fieldworks in African Studies* (Apard and Maingraud-Martinaud 2021).

central hypothesis in the Sudanese context: do recruits undergo and exert physical and moral violence during military training along a vertical (hierarchical) axis and/or a horizontal one (between peers)? If so, does this violence lead to the internalisation of power relations based on social hierarchies such as class, ethnicity or religion? What part does it play in the symbolic killing of young conscripts who are later ready to endure the violence of war (Kaya 2013: 515, 520)? The concept proposed by historian and political scientist Hamit Bozarslan is more directly relevant to this study. According to Bozarslan (2008: 11), symbolic violence pertains to “the discursive construction of enmity that precedes, accompanies and *a posteriori* legitimises physical violence”. In addition to violence as discourse, this chapter will also argue that one subtle, but nonetheless powerful, form of symbolic violence is silence, especially in the educational field. Indeed, school education plays a central role in the socialisation process, which “induct[s] actors into the norms and rules of a given community” (Checkel 2017: 594). We shall see how the notion of a complex process involving the agency of both socialisation agents and targets (Checkel 2017: 595–597) materialises in the Sudanese case.

This chapter investigates the meanings of violence in a context characterised by both military appeasement and political uncertainty: Sudan in the “transitional” era (2005–2011) following the conclusion of the peace treaty between the North and the South that officially brought an end to one of the longest civil wars in postcolonial Africa (1955–1972 and 1983–2005). On 9 January 2005, the Sudan Government of the National Congress Party (NCP) and the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) signed the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in Naivasha, Kenya, under the auspices of US diplomacy. While committed to making the preservation of a united Sudan “attractive”, the agreement called for a referendum on Southern independence after a six-year transitional period. The Southern Sudanese voted massively in favour of independence (98.8%), leading to the partition of the country and the effective secession of South Sudan on 9 July 2011 (Aalen 2013; Johnson 2013). In the mid-2000s, therefore, it seemed that Sudan was “getting out” of two episodes of civil war that had opposed the central government in Khartoum and the Southern Sudanese rebel movements (Anyanya, then SPLM) for decades.

Over the past twenty years, scholars have nuanced the simplistic interpretation of these clashes as a purely ethnic or religious conflict between a predominantly Arab-Muslim North and an African Christian South. These civil wars should in fact be understood as the outcome of a multi-layered historical domination of Southern Sudanese people by Northern groups (Idris 2001; Collins 2005; Poggo 2009; Johnson 2016; Seri-Hersch 2020). Among the major phenomena worth recalling here are the experience of slavery and the slave trade, which expanded greatly in the 19th century; the separate administration of the two

regions by the British colonial authorities (1899–1956), which concentrated their meagre investments on infrastructure, education and health in the North; the marginalisation of educated Southern Sudanese in the negotiations with Britain and Egypt on Sudanese independence in the 1950s; and the aggressive Arabisation and Islamisation policies implemented by successive Khartoum governments from 1948 on.

With regard to the nature of the North-South civil war, it has been argued that the status of the forces involved in the fighting evolved significantly between the 1960s and the 1980s. According to Jack Kalpakian (2019: 56), from 1955 to 1972 the fighting was done by regular Sudanese troops on both sides (the Southern rebels being mutineers from the Sudan Defence Force³), whereas a variety of militias took part in the second civil war as allies or adversaries of the national army. The 1980s, 1990s and early 2000s therefore witnessed the fragmentation of armed violence, which was deployed by various state and non-state actors in Southern Sudan, the Nuba Mountains and Darfur (Kalpakian 2019: 54–6). However, this argument should be nuanced by the fact that the first civil war also involved pro-governmental militias who had been recruited from among poor Southerners (they were known as *al-ḥaras al-waṭani*, the “national guard”) (Ruay 1994: 132), as well as Southern rebel fighters drawn not only from ex-soldiers, policemen and prison guards, but also from students and civilians in general (Poggo 2009: 60–71, 131–144).

The signing of an agreement to end a war that had proved especially long and deadly⁴ aroused hopes at the local and international levels. These hopes materialised into a growing use of the expression “post-conflict Sudan” to refer to the post-2005 era. Implying the existence of a *before* and *after* clearly delimited by the CPA, this expression came to be used regularly by political actors and international agencies (World Bank 2012: 54, 85, 98, 119, 179), as well as by Sudan scholars (Ahmed 2009; Guta 2009; Leturcq 2009; Leu 2011). However, the transitional era witnessed a large-scale conflict in Darfur (Western Sudan), which attracted international attention from 2003 and was categorised by part of the academic community as a genocide (Prunier 2005; Daly 2007; Totten 2011). In addition, the Sudan government continued to increase its spending on defence, security and the police: in 2012, more than half the state annual budget was devoted to this sector (El-Battahani 2016: 4). Moreover, although the 2005 agreement was supposed to usher in a new era of

³ The Sudan Defence Force, which was established by the British in 1925, was renamed the “Sudan Armed Forces” after independence in 1956.

⁴ Whereas the first civil war left 170,000 people dead and 1,200,000 displaced (Vezzadini 2014: 181), the 1983–2005 war left 2 million dead and 4 million displaced, of whom 600,000 moved out of Sudan (UNMIS n.d. [2005]).

peace, a subject called “Military Sciences” (*‘ulūm ‘askariyya*) was taught in Sudanese public secondary schools, as indicated by the three textbooks I discovered in Khartoum (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2005, 2006, n.d.).

The notion of a “post-conflict” Sudan was therefore more akin to a performative discourse than it was to dynamics on the ground. The reality of the transition was characterised by multiple forms of armed, political and social violence, a great deal of which was directly linked to the authoritarian *inqādh* regime born out of an alliance between General ‘Umar Ḥasan al-Bashīr’s military faction and the National Islamic Front (NIF) of the Islamist ideologue Ḥasan al-Turābī.⁵ If one nuances the Weberian interpretation of the state as monopolising legitimate forms of violence (Colliot-Thélène 2003), one might say of the Sudanese army, police, security services and state militia that the violence they used before and after 2005 was neither legitimate nor exclusive because of the regime’s authoritarian character (El-Affendi 2013; Deshayes and Mahé 2020), the maintenance of irregular policing bodies as a tool of social control and a means of bypassing the judicial system (Berridge 2013) and the ongoing conflict in Darfur (Suliman 2011; Hastrup 2013; Mahé 2016).⁶

Did the CPA include precise provisions on the Sudanese educational system after the North-South civil war? What were the objectives of military teaching in this transitional context, and who were the target audiences? To what extent did military sciences dialogue with the various Sudanese internal conflicts? Lastly, how are militarism, the legitimisation of violence and being accustomed to violence interrelated? This chapter seeks to answer these questions by drawing on various primary sources, including Sudanese laws, the CPA, UN, UNESCO and World Bank reports, Danish and British state reports, Sudanese military instruction schoolbooks, official and informal Sudanese websites dedicated to education, local and foreign media, and personal correspondence with seven Northern Sudanese – four women and three men – born between 1958 and 1981, most of whom are university educated.⁷ The analysis of this primary source material is informed by recent

5 On the relations between state and society under the Islamist regime, especially in the 2000s and 2010s, see the works by Abdullahi A. Gallab (2014) and Noah Salomon (2016). On the links between the civil war in Darfur and authoritarian resilience, see Mahé 2016. William Berridge (2013) has analysed the role played by public order policing units in extending the political apparatus of the ruling party (the NCP from 1999) and enforcing the regime’s strict interpretation of Islamic morality.

6 The prerogatives of the army and security services were defined in the People’s Armed Forces Act (2007) and the National Security Forces Act (1999) respectively (Redress n.d.). On the history of the Sudanese police, see the chapter by Ammar Mohamed Elbagir Ibrahim in this book.

7 Rather than being representative of any specific social group, these informants provided insightful comments on educational realities in the 1990s and 2000s based on their own experiences or those of relatives, friends and acquaintances.

studies on contemporary Sudan, violence, and the link between military institutions and socialisation to violence in the Middle East. Most examples will be taken from the first-grade textbook because it was prepared during or after the signing of the CPA (first edition: 2006). Moreover, its impact might have been especially powerful due to the relatively young age of first-grade pupils (14–15). Indeed, political scientist Jeffrey T. Checkel (2017: 594, 597) and others have suggested that age is a key factor in socialisation, as children – as well as adults who lack primary socialising agencies – are more easily influenced. Particular attention will be paid to the words used in military instruction, and to violence as expressed through both discourse and silence.

This chapter does not rely on ethnographic observations of real-time textbook use, teaching methods or students' reactions; still, it offers important insights into our understanding of the *inqādh* regime and the ways in which it sought to produce and reproduce itself through the education of its prospective citizens. It therefore sheds some light on an authoritarian system that was increasingly called into question in the 2010s (Deshayes and Vezzadini 2019: 160–164), and was ultimately overthrown by the 2018–2019 revolution, during which people chanted slogans such as “*ḥurriyya, salām wa-ʿadāla al-thawra khiyār al-shaʿb*” (“freedom, peace and justice; the revolution is the choice of the people”) or “*suḷṭa madaniyya aw thawra abadiyya*” (“civil rule or everlasting revolution”) (Casciarri and Manfredi 2020a: 17, 36). More broadly, this chapter adds empirical evidence to theoretical studies on education in times of political transition (Smith 2005). Based on a Sudanese case study, it reflects on various conceptualizations of symbolic violence as useful tools for historians and sociologists of education.

Education, a Blind Spot in the CPA

In the 20th and 21st centuries, armed conflicts have had a deep impact on the type, quality and degree of education offered to young people – or withdrawn from them. Conversely, the transmission of certain kinds of knowledge, world view and value to future citizens may fuel conflict within a given society or conversely contribute to an easing of tensions (Davies 2004). In the words of education scholar Anders Breidlid (2019: 132): “The classroom was in one sense an extension of the battlefield” in Sudan. The education system was instrumentalised by the Khartoum regime in the 1990s and 2000s to cultivate an Islamist, Arab-centred ideology that largely overlooked the country’s real religious and ethnolin-

guistic diversity⁸ (Guta 2009; Breidlid 2013: 37–40; *id.* 2019: 126–128; al-Bashīr 2017: 265–317). In the SPLM-controlled Southern areas and the Nuba Mountains, the schools that continued to operate during the war often used Ugandan, Kenyan or Ethiopian textbooks. In the early 2000s, the SPLM developed its own school materials with a view to fostering an inclusive Southern Sudanese identity, one that would transcend ethnic cleavages (Sommers 2005; Leu 2011: 13–14; Breidlid 2013: 40–42).

One might expect that the CPA would have dealt with education matters in 2005 in such a way that teaching and learning would contribute to the Sudanese process of peace-building, and yet the opposite was true. The CPA focused on political and judicial institutions, the sharing of land, oil and fiscal resources, monetary policy, the status of border areas such as Abyei and security arrangements (The Comprehensive Peace Agreement n.d. [2005]). The “multi-cultural, multi-racial, multi-ethnic, multi-religious and multi-lingual” character of Sudan had certainly been officially recognised in the first round of negotiations three years earlier (“Chapter I: The Machakos Protocol, Signed at Machakos, Kenya on 20th July, 2002.” *The Comprehensive Peace Agreement* [2005]: 5), and the CPA’s final text did mention the “right to freedom of thought, conscience and religion” among a number of fundamental rights (“Chapter II: Power Sharing, Signed at Naivasha, Kenya on 26th May, 2004.” *The Comprehensive Peace Agreement* [2005]: 5). It also stated that “all the indigenous languages are national languages which shall be respected, developed and promoted”, while reaffirming the prominence of Arabic as the “widely spoken national language in the Sudan” and English as the second administrative language (*The Comprehensive Peace Agreement* [2005]: 26–27). But it did not include any provision regarding the education of Sudanese children and teenagers.

The public education system was maintained along the lines drawn by the *inqādh* regime in the early 1990s (al-Amīn [2005] 2007: 220–233). Formal instruction theoretically lasted for thirteen years and was divided into three stages: a two-year pre-school cycle (kindergarten or Quranic school for children aged 4 to 6), an eight-year primary cycle (*al-ta’līm al-asāsī* for children aged between 6 and 14, which was to be free and compulsory according to the 2005 interim Constitution⁹) and a

⁸ In 2010, the Sudanese population was made up of approximately 70% Sunni Muslims (mostly in the North), 25% members of “local” religions, and 5% Christians (Kramer, Lobban and Fluehr-Lobban 2013: 367). Among dozens, or even hundreds, of languages and varieties used in the country, the major languages are Arabic, Nubian, Fur, Masalit, Zaghawa and Beja in the North, and Dinka, Nuer, Bari, Zande, Juba Arabic and English in the South.

⁹ The 1973 Constitution had already mentioned education as “a right of every citizen” and the role of the state as “endeavour[ing] to spread and provide it free in all stages” (Article 53) (The Democratic Republic of the Sudan 1973: 10). The 1998 [Islamist] Constitution referred to the responsibility

three-year secondary cycle (*al-taʿlīm al-thānawī*, 14–17 years of age). Things were different in practice, as the Gross Enrolment Rate (GER) in 2008–2009 reached 72% for primary schooling and only 28% for secondary schooling, with significant territorial variations. Whereas the capital Khartoum and the riverine regions had much higher GERs than Darfur, Blue Nile or Kassala states (World Bank 2012: 51, 53, 81–82), the proportion of Southern Sudanese pupils who completed primary school was extremely low (Sommers 2005: 70–71; Vuni 2008), and reproduced inequalities that had already existed in the colonial era (Seri-Hersch 2018: 363, 367).

As for secondary schooling, there were 753,988 students in 2009–2010 (al-Bashīr 2017: 184), half of whom were girls. The secondary stage was organised into a two-year core course followed by a year of specialisation. The mandatory core subjects included Arabic, English, religious sciences and the Quran, mathematics, sciences (physics, chemistry and biology), geography and the environment, history and social studies. Military sciences had been introduced into public secondary schools as a separate subject in 1998–1999 (al-Amīn [2005] 2007: 233; Nafisa 2021), perhaps as a result of intensified fighting in the South from 1996.¹⁰ It was offered as an optional subject alongside engineering, agriculture and cattle-rearing, commercial sciences, physical education, family sciences, arts and computer science (al-Bashīr 2017: 205–206). Usually taught by history teachers, it was also offered to third-year students. The weekly amount of teaching of the subject was one period (45 minutes) in the first and second years, rising to four periods in the third year (Maḥmūd 2021; Shirāz 2021). Although military instruction was optional,¹¹ it could be chosen as an exam subject for the Sudan School Certificate (SSC), as indicated on the online portal “The Sudanese Electronic School” (*al-madrasa al-īliktrūniyya al-sūdāniyya*),¹² which provides videos prepared by teachers on various classes and exam subjects, including sequences of military sciences posted on the Eschoolsudan YouTube channel (Eschoolsudan 2014).

of the state for “implement[ing] educational policies, moral care (*riʿāya khuluqīyya*), national education (*tarbiya waṭaniyya*) and religious purification (*tazkiya dīniyya*) to produce a good generation (*jil ṣāliḥ*)”. (Article 14) (al-Majlis al-Waṭānī 1998: 2).

10 I do not know whether there were any specific military science textbooks between 1998 and 2005, or if so whether their content was different from those published in 2005–2006.

11 One informant (Maḥmūd 2021), who worked as an Arabic teacher at a public secondary school in Omdurman before moving to an administrative job in the town’s education office, stated that military sciences was a compulsory subject in the first and second years, but was only optional in the third year. There may have been significant variations between different schools and different tracks.

12 Its current website is <http://www.eschoolsudan.com/> (28 April 2021).

The Social Impact of Military Sciences Under the *Inqādh* Regime

One might first consider a number of parameters that rather limited the social reach of military instruction. Given the relatively low GER in secondary schools and the fact that military sciences was an optional subject, only a minority of Sudanese teenagers would have studied it. While it is quite clear that boys and girls followed the same curriculum (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2016; al-Bashīr 2017) – albeit at separate schools – the possible division of options based on gender is less well-established. According to Shīrāz (2021), a Sudanese university teacher born in 1981, girls rarely chose military sciences as an optional subject, and if they did it was merely to improve their overall grades because the subject was considered to be an easy one. In her view, family sciences (*‘ulūm usriyya*), on the other hand, specifically targeted female students. In addition, it is difficult to assess the extent to which Khartoum’s curricula were used in the South in the aftermath of the civil war. The Northern curricula may have been studied by some of the 6% of Southern Sudanese teenagers who were enrolled in secondary schools in 2009, especially in the regions close to the North (Leu 2011: 14, 18). We should also note that at least a part of the Southern population in exile in Khartoum – sometimes for decades – who amounted to 41% of the capital’s 4.4 million inhabitants in about 2001, must have been enrolled in public secondary schools (Sommers 2005: 207–250; Vezzadini 2014: 178; Casciarri 2016: 72). Finally, schools were only one among numerous sources of information and socialisation sites – including families, neighbourhoods, youth movements, religious organisations, cultural associations, political parties, and medias, among others¹³ – that obviously interlap, but are difficult to untangle from each other.

However, there are other factors that reveal the importance of military sciences. The subject needs to be understood as part of a broader process, namely the militarisation of education that had been under way since the beginning of the 1990s (al-Bashīr 2017: 194). This dynamic can be seen not only from the introduction of a new subject explicitly dedicated to the military field at the secondary school level, but also from the prominence of a martial vocabulary in the pedagogical materials used for other subjects such as Arabic, the Muslim religion, history, geography and literature from the earliest primary school grades up to secondary education (Guta 2009: 82–85; al-Bashīr 2017: 305–308). The militarisation of the school universe

¹³ The 2005–2011 transitional era was characterised by the opening of the political space to opposition parties and independent media (Deshayes and Vezzadini 2019: 159).

under the *inqādh* regime is perceptible in both schoolbooks and pupils' clothing. Throughout their education, students attending public schools were required to wear uniforms that mimicked military camouflage (see figures 28 and 29).¹⁴ This meant that two central institutions of the modern state – the army and the school system – were ideologically and visually connected in the Sudanese public space, no matter how much the pupils themselves actually identified with the military. A university teacher born in 1974 told the author that in the 1990s war songs were not only sung in class, but were also a constant presence on children's radio and television programmes (Mahā 2021). Until 2005, the regime used to broadcast a weekly thirty-minute programme entitled *Fī sāḥat al-fidā'* ("In the Fields of Sacrifice"), which used footage of battles between government armed forces and the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA) to promote jihad against Southern "infidels" and celebrate fallen "martyrs" (Fluehr-Lobban 2012: 83). Although the programme was taken off the air when the CPA was signed, Sudan Television briefly resumed broadcasting it in 2011, as conflict erupted in the Blue Nile and South Kordofan areas (El Gizouli 2011).



Figure 28: Sudanese girls in school uniform in 2007.¹⁵

¹⁴ There was also a strong military component in private school networks such as the (Islamist) *al-majlis al-ifriqī li-l-ta'lim al-khāṣṣ*/African Council for Private Education, where most teachers were serving in the army. In the 1990s, a weekly "jihad course" was taught, albeit with no textbook (personal communication to author by historian Anaël Poussier, 12 June 2021).

¹⁵ Di Lauro 2007.



Figure 29: Sudanese boys in school uniform in 2015.¹⁶

The military science textbooks themselves were vehicles for an educational discourse that was both authoritative and long-lasting. The books were authored by senior officers (Major-Generals Muḥammad Bashīr Sulaymān and Muḥammad Maḥmūd Jāmi' and Brigadier-General Majdhūb Raḥma al-Badawī), and the first-grade textbook was even reviewed by the Director of the Military College (*kulliyat al-ḥarb al-'ulyā*), Ḥaydar 'Abd al-Karīm Jawda. The authoritative quality of these school texts stems from at least three attributes: they were written by high-ranking officers; they had high scientific pretensions – consider the use of the term “sciences” (*'ulūm*), which echoed the regime’s long-term endeavour to “fundamentalise” or “Islamise” knowledge (*ta'ṣīl* or *aslamat al-ma'rifa*) since the 1990s (Salomon 2016: 97–107) – and they were published under the aegis of the Ministry of Education. It seems that they were in continuous use from the time they were published around 2005–2006 at least until 2020,¹⁷ even though 'Umar al-Bashīr's regime had been overthrown in the meantime and replaced by a transitional government under the leadership of Prime Minister 'Abdallāh Ḥamdök in September 2019.

Finally, military instruction cannot just be reduced to a bundle of theoretical knowledge disconnected from reality. Several sources have suggested that in the so-called “post-conflict” or transitional era, Sudanese secondary school students and graduates were still required to undergo sessions of military training organised by the

¹⁶ Habbānī 2015. This uniform, which aroused some debate inside and outside Sudan (see for instance al-'Arabī al-Jadīd 2015), has been widely dropped since the fall of the *inqādh* regime in April 2019.

¹⁷ Evidence of its continuing use is provided in the official National Centre for Curriculum and Educational Research (NCCER) website in 2016 (<http://www.manahg.edu.sd/index.php/manahg-books/studentbooks/secondary>), which is no longer available, and informal sites dedicated to uploading and downloading schoolbooks (Zarkachat 2020; 'Abdallāh n.d.).

quwwāt al-difā' al-sha'bī/Popular Defence Forces (PDF) – a regime militia¹⁸ – before they were eligible to be admitted to university or to secure a job in the government administration or large companies (Salmon 2007: 17–18; Home Office 2012: 114; al-'Arabī al-Jadīd 2015). Lasting from forty-five days to three months and held at PDF camps in Khartoum and elsewhere in the country, this training had been imposed on students who had been admitted to universities and higher education institutes as early as December 1990 (Lobban 2001: 119), and by 1992, it had become mandatory for all university students, both male and female (Danish Immigration Service 2001: 37). In 1994, the government also announced compulsory PDF training for secondary school students (Lobban 2001: 123), reflecting both the regime's attempt to control the minds and bodies of young, educated people and its growing need for recruits in its war against the SPLA. According to scholars J. Millard Burr and Robert O. Collins (2003: 17), PDF recruits were introduced to weaponry by army instructors, but “their indoctrination was more religious than military, including interminable lectures on Islam delivered by known members of NIF and Muslim Brothers”. Besides their PDF training, which may have been implemented less systematically after 2005,¹⁹ men aged between 18 and 33 – and women to a lesser extent – had to complete a period of national service that had been compulsory at least since 1992 (see “The National Service Act for 1992” in Danish Immigration Service 2001: 67–74). According to the law, national service could be carried out in the armed forces, police or other regular forces, in government and public sector units or in public projects in development, economic or social services (Danish Immigration Service 2001: 68). It lasted for twelve months for university graduates, eighteen months for secondary school graduates, and twenty-four months for all other young adults (Danish Immigration Service 2001: 36–37, 69; Home Office 2012: 114).

18 The precise history of the PDF is still somewhat obscure. It seems that it was established under Sudanese law as early as 1981, under the Nimayrī regime (see “The People's Defence Forces Bill, 1981” in Redress n.d.). The PDF prominently included Arab Baggara militias (*murāhīlīn*) recruited in South Kordofan by the Nimayrī regime and later by the Umma Party government (1985–1989) to fight the SPLA (the SPLM's armed wing). A new law was passed after al-Bashīr's coup in 1989, which continued to stress the PDF's aim as “instil[ling] in them [PDF members] a military spirit and military traditions and discipline so that they will be able to assist the People's Armed Forces and other regular forces wherever needed”, but broadened its function to encompass “any other task entrusted to them by the Commander-in-Chief himself or pursuant to a recommendation of the [PDF] Council”. The other major shift between 1981 and 1989 was the lowering of the minimum age of recruits from 18 to 16 (“The People's Defence Forces Bill, 1981” in Redress n.d.: 5; “Popular Defence Forces Act of 1989 (Translated from Arabic)” in Redress n.d.: 2, 4; Burr and Collins 2003: 16–17; Kalpakian 2019: 52–53).

19 As suggested by one of the anonymous reviewers of this chapter.

Military Instruction, Islam and the Sudanese Homeland

What were the declared goals of the educational discourse of military instruction? The first-year course was meant to teach military history and the arts of war to prepare the students to “protect this homeland’s faith, land and achievements” (*ḥimāyat al-‘aqīda wa-turāb wa-muktasabāt hādihā al-waṭan*) (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 1). On the assumption that human conduct and activities were primarily shaped by conflict and war rather than peace (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 6), the officer-educators sought to instil the centrality of “Sudanese national security” (*al-amn al-qawmī al-sūdānī*), reinforce patriotic inspiration to face “all the dangers that may threaten [Sudan’s] national interests” (*kull al-makhāṭir allatī qad tuhad-didu maṣāliḥahā al-waṭaniyya*) and above all foster “the spirit of jihad and sacrifice” (*rūḥ al-jihād wa-l-tadhīyya*) among all strata of society for the sake of the faith and the homeland (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 1–2).

In an echo of the totalising visions typical of modern Islamist movements,²⁰ the text characterises the Muslim religion as a “comprehensive system” (*manhaj mutakāmil*) governing all aspects of human life. From this perspective, military instruction was inseparable from the “right Islamic education” (*al-tarbiya al-islāmiyya al-ṣaḥīḥa*) (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 6). The three textbooks quote numerous Quranic verses, *ḥadīths* and chronicles from the early Islamic centuries in order to assert the existence of close connections between the Muslim religion, moral conduct and military strategies, thereby legitimising contemporary Sudanese security concerns through an Islamic framework (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 14–17, 55, 67–73; Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2005: 1–7, 20–27, 40–48, 73–76, 80–81; Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān n.d.: 33–36, 47, 58, 70–75, 88–104, 130–139). This pervasive Islamic referential (Seri-Hersch 2015: 316) perfectly fit the regime’s political ideology and “civilisational project” (*al-mashrū‘ al-ḥadārī*): since most Sudanese were Muslims, the application of Islam was seen as a democratic principle that derived from the will of the people. Thus, all Sudanese institutions and individual behaviours were expected to conform to the form of Islam conceived by the ruling elite (Salomon 2016; Deshayes and Vezzadini 2019: 156).

We should also note that the military sciences curriculum developed in the early and mid-2000s built on previous educational practices in Sudanese schools. In

²⁰ The thought of the Sudanese leading Islamist figure Ḥasan al-Turābī (1932–2016) has been debated. Some scholars see it as a direct incorporation of the “radical” ideas that had been developed earlier by the Pakistani Abū al-‘Alā al-Mawdūdī and the Egyptian Sayyid Quṭb, whereas others speak of a partial tactical appropriation (Berridge 2017: 144–176).

the 1990s, pupils at all school levels were required to sing what several informants termed “jihadi songs” (*anāshīd jihādiyya*) at the daily morning assembly (Murād 2021; Rashīd 2021; Sāra 2021; Shīrāz 2021). One of the most famous was “In Your Protection, Our Lord” (*fi ḥimāka rabbanā*), composed by ‘Abd al-Ḥakīm ‘Ābidīn (1914–1976), a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and the organisation’s secretary general in the 1940s. This song, which celebrated Islamic unity and dying for God, was thus transposed from British-dominated Egypt to the NIF’s late 20th century Sudan.²¹ Pupils also recited a war poem attributed to ‘Abdallāh ibn Rawāḥa, an early companion of Prophet Muḥammad who died at the Battle of Mu’ta between the Muslims and the Byzantines in 629. According to a Sudanese inspector of finance born in 1960 (Rashīd 2021), this poem was “distorted” (*tahrīfuhā*) to fit the regime’s ideological agenda against the “American tyrant” and to foster a culture of violence, hate and martyrdom among Sudanese youth.

To this we should add two illuminating points. First, there were significant variations depending on the teachers and the geographic locations. When recalling her own experience as a pupil at an intermediate school in Khartoum Bahri from 1992 to 1994, Shīrāz (2021) stressed that headmasters and teachers affiliated with the Islamist movement were far more intransigent than other educators. In her case, the headmaster had a black whip, and would beat any pupil who did not sing the “jihadi” songs at the morning assembly. After the signing of the CPA in 2005, martial songs continued to be imposed at secondary schools outside the capital, notably in Kassala, Nile, Gezira and Sennar states (Shīrāz 2021), whereas the practice was generally abandoned in Khartoum state (Shīrāz 2021; Rashīd 2021; Sāra 2021). The second point relates to the agency of the pupils, who were not passive recipients of “jihadi” songs. For instance, in one of Bahri’s government secondary schools for girls, pupils developed various strategies for resisting singing jihadi songs in 1995–1997: when the (male) headmaster played a religious song on the tape recorder, the girls would reply with a “science” song; they also unplugged the tape recorder from the microphone, which led to a reorganisation of the morning activities. The embarrassed headmaster lost “control” (*sulṭa*) over them and was replaced with the (female) physical education teacher, who had been officially responsible for morning activities but had been unable to direct them before the microphone incident (Shīrāz 2021). These examples demonstrate the agency of socialisation targets, who may resist or be unreceptive to a socialiser’s message (Checkel 2017: 597) and expectations.

21 The words of the song can be found on the web (“*Fi ḥimāka rabbanā – kitāb anāshīd Abi Māzin*” n.d.).

In the 2000s, the secondary course of military instruction sought to appeal to 14–15 year-old students by connecting them with slightly older schoolmates who were engaged in military training, as shown on the textbook cover (figure 30). At the end of the book, additional black and white pictures concretise this link between youth, military enrolment and patriotic commitment. An explicit legend²² shapes the meaning of the photographs.

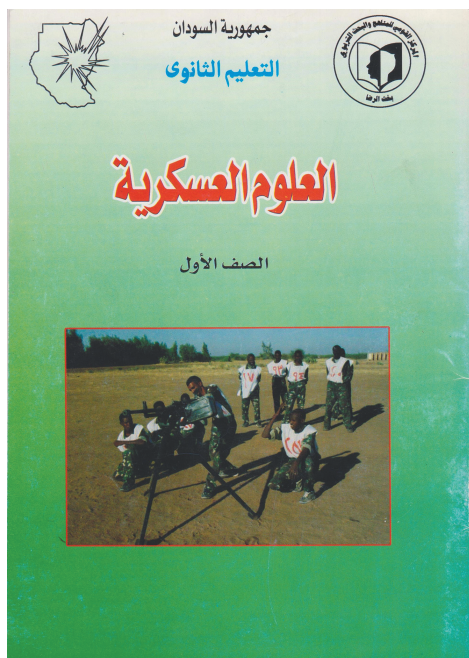


Figure 30: Cover of the military sciences textbook used in high school, 1st grade (2006).²³

The three textbooks were not organised along any clear thematic or chronological lines. In the first year (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006), students would learn a specific vocabulary (ranks, units and warfare), encounter examples of wars from various times and places (Greek and Roman antiquity, 7th century Islamic conquests, the Second World War and the Arab-Israeli wars) and become acquainted with the main

²² “Examples of secondary students as they join the ranks of the national service and train with unprecedented enthusiasm and an elevated patriotic spirit (*bi-ḥimāsa munqaṭiʿat al-naẓīr wa-rūḥ waṭaniyya ʿaliyya*). [They are] ready to extend the faith and the homeland” (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 75).

²³ Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006.

bodies responsible for Sudan's internal and external security (the army, the police, the security services and the PDF). The second year was devoted to the qualities and moral spirit of a soldier; the techniques and rules of warfare, the art of leadership (mentioning Sa'd bin Abi Waqqas – one of the first Muslim converts, a companion of the Prophet and the victorious commander at the Battle of al-Qadisiyya between the Muslims and Sassanids in 636 – and the French General and Emperor Napoleon Bonaparte as examples), national security and psychological warfare (Jumhuriyyat al-Sudan 2005). The presence of an entire chapter on Napoleon's biography and military campaigns and an assessment of his strengths and weaknesses (Jumhuriyyat al-Sudan 2005: 28–39) is surprising, given the *inqadh* regime's emphasis on cultural authenticity. It might have been a legacy of Napoleon's major influence on the modernisation of Ottoman Egypt's army under Mehmet Ali (1805–1848) and his successors, a process that has been coined “defensive developmentalism” by scholars such as James L. Gelvin (2016: 72–89). In the last year, the course developed around further military strategies and doctrines, different kinds of warfare (including space war), Islamic teachings about the qualities required of a commander, the country's preparation for war and three examples of battles from Islamic, Sudanese and world history (the Muslim-Quraysh Battle of Badr in 624, the Anglo-Mahdist Battle of Shaykan in 1883, and the British-German Battle of El Alamein in 1942) (Jumhuriyyat al-Sudan n.d.). The choice of these three battles allowed the textbook authors to highlight Islamic, Sudanese Mahdist and Allied military victories. In the last case, the respective strategies of German General Erwin Rommel and British Field Marshal Bernard Montgomery dominated the text, but astoundingly, the involvement of the Sudan Defence Force in the Libyan desert in 1941–1942 was omitted (Jumhuriyyat al-Sudan n.d.: 156–166).

The next section analyses how violence was expressed in and through the textbook narrative. It will allow us to reflect on the meanings of war and the ways in which state-sanctioned educational discourses sought to accustom teenagers to violence at the very time when Sudanese citizens were grappling with existential questions about their society's past and its political future (Deng 2010).

Non-Violent Wars, Absent Conflicts and the Army as a Vector of Democracy

A close reading of the first-grade textbook raises three important observations. The school narrative produces an interesting dissociation between war and violence; it praises the role of the army in Sudanese history, but remains silent on Sudan's

civil wars. We will now develop these three dimensions through the use of concrete examples.

The 1948 Arab-Israeli war, which was termed “the Palestinian war against the Jews” (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 22), was presented as an archetype of modern 20th century warfare. Why was this so? Sudan’s military and political involvement in the Arab-Israeli conflict might provide a part of the answer. Not only did Sudanese volunteers take part in the 1948 war (Hazkani 2021) and Khartoum host the Arab League summit in the aftermath of the 1967 Six-Day War, which endorsed the “Three Nos” Resolution (no peace with Israel, no recognition of Israel and no negotiation with Israel), but ‘Umar al-Bashīr himself fought in the 1973 Arab-Israeli war as a member of the Sudanese units that sided with the Egyptian army against Israel (Abd al-Ḥamīd 2016). After 1989, the *inqādh* regime provided Palestinian Islamist movements such as Hamas and the Islamic Jihad with steady ideological and logistical support (Sharfi 2015: 527–529). In depicting the 1948 war, the authors of the textbook focus on its different stages, the movement of Zionist forces and Arab armies and the balance of power between Jews and Arabs, which favoured the former (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 23–24). Several important aspects of this pivotal event in the history of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict are omitted, such as the civil war between Jews and Arabs in Mandatory Palestine (December 1947–May 1948), the massive Palestinian exodus, the number of casualties and the war’s territorial, demographic and political consequences.²⁴ Paradoxically, violence is absent from the description of the war, whereas it runs through a paragraph devoted to “the situation before the war” (*al-aḥwāl qabl al-ḥarb*):

Zionist terrorism (*al-irhāb al-ṣahyūnī*) stood out in Palestine before the war. From 1936 to 1939, Jewish gangs (*al-‘iṣābāt al-yahūdiyya*) committed numerous violent and deadly acts (*al-‘adīd min a’māl al-‘unf wa-l-qatl*) in Palestinian towns. The gangs’ operations lessened during the Second World War and then resumed in 1943. The goal of these terrorist acts (*hādhihi al-a’māl al-irhābiyya*) was to inflict a psychological debacle (*hazīma nafsiyya*) on the Palestinian citizen (*al-muwāṭin al-filasṭīnī*) (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 22).²⁵

Violence also showed through a question posed at the end of the chapter in the context of a summarising “discussion” (*niqāsh*) the teacher was supposed to have with his/her students: “How were the Jews able to despoil the land of Palestine (*istilāb arḍ Filasṭīn*)?” (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 27). The Arabic root سلب expresses the

²⁴ Among the wealth of scholarship on the 1948 Palestine war, see for instance the works by Benny Morris (2009), Ilan Pappé (2015), Walid Khalidi (2012, 2013), and Shay Hazkani (2021).

²⁵ The use of the word *muwāṭin* in the sense of a citizen would be anachronical here. In the 1930s, Palestinian citizenship was held by both Arabs and Jews living in British Mandatory Palestine. The Sudanese authors probably wanted to identify the country’s Arab Palestinian inhabitants.

idea of lifting, taking by force, looting, raiding and alienating, thus referring to the semantic field of violence. The Sudanese school narrative stresses the physical and psychological violence stirred up by armed Zionist operations against the Palestinians, yet this violence remains vague and has no concrete effects. Nothing is said about the Palestinian Arab revolt against Zionism and British policies in 1936–1939, nor is any reference made to the Palestinian national movement. Also, the Jewish appropriation of Palestinian land seems to be depicted as having unfolded *before* the 1948 Arab-Israeli war.²⁶ The educational discourse therefore produces a cognitive disassociation between war, which is technicised through an emphasis on military strategies, and violence, which is tangible at a moment that was not categorised as a war.

The second observation is perhaps less surprising. It relates to the representation of the Sudanese army as a vector of patriotism, peace and democracy. The textbook goes back in time as far as the Kushite kingdoms (2500 BCE–350 CE) and the Christian kingdoms of medieval Nubia, whose military organisation is briefly described as being based on irregular “voluntary” (*mutatawi’in*) troops. Interestingly, these non-Islamic polities are not framed as some “time of ignorance” (*jāhiliyya*) that preceded the advent of Islamic kingdoms in Sudan; on the contrary, a clear connection is established with the Sultanate of Sennar (1504–1821), whose rulers had “greatly benefitted from the previous experience of the extinct [Nubian] kingdoms in the organisation and constitution of their army, alongside the benefit they drew from the experience and legacy of Muslim armies” (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 29–30). After a few sentences on the Sudanese soldiers recruited into Mehmet Ali’s army (the *jihādiyya*), who are praised for their “exceptional heroism” (*buṭūla nādīra*), the narrative deals with the private army set up by the powerful slave trader al-Zubayr Pasha Raḥma (1830–1913), which is seen as the direct precursor of the armed forces of the Mahdist state (1885–1898): indeed, several Mahdist commanders, including al-Zāki Ṭamal, Ḥamdan Abū ‘Anja and Al-Nūr ‘Anqara, are said to have been trained at al-Zubayr’s “military school” (*madrassa ḥarbiyya*) (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 31). The textbook attributes a significant development to the Mahdist army, stressing the growth of a coherent military organisation that replaced the “haphazard tribal fighting” (*qitāl al-qabā’il al-‘ashwā’ī*) that had apparently predominated beforehand (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006).²⁷

²⁶ It is a well-established fact that the 1948 war constituted the turning point in the control of land. Jewish land amounted to only 7% of Mandatory Palestine in 1947, whereas after the 1949 Armistice Agreements, the State of Israel controlled 78% of the territory. The Sudanese textbook mentions the 1956 and 1967 wars briefly, but without providing any detail.

²⁷ On the Ottoman-Egyptian army in the late 1870s, see Moore-Harell 1999. Ronald M. Lamothe (2013) has studied Sudanese slave soldiers serving in the Anglo-Egyptian army in the 1890s.

Although the authors recognise the role of the British colonisers in the creation of the modern Sudanese army in the early decades of the 20th century, they mostly emphasise the participation of Sudanese military officers in the anticolonial struggle. Sudanese officers and soldiers took part in the foundation of the Sudanese Union Society (*jam'iyat al-ittihād al-sūdānī*) in 1919, the nationalist mobilisations led by the White Flag League (*jam'iyat al-liwā' al-abyaḍ*) in 1923–1924 – including the mutiny among Military School cadets and the street demonstrations following the British decision to evacuate the Egyptian army from Sudan – and the creation of the Graduates' Congress (*mu'tamar al-kharījīn*) in 1938 (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 34, 38–39). The school narrative has much less to say about the army's role after Sudanese independence in 1956, although it deals with the army's stance during the popular uprisings that led to the demise of the respective regimes of General Ibrāhīm 'Abbūd in 1964 and Colonel Ja'far al-Nimayrī in 1985. In both cases, the Sudanese armed forces are represented as “taking sides with the people in their revolution against the ruling regime” (*inḥāzat [. . .] ilā jānīb al-sha'b fī thawratihī ḍidd al-nizām al-ḥākīm*) (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 39). The army emerges as a patriotic actor that prevented potential bloodshed resulting from the collision between the regime and the demonstrators. Furthermore, it is depicted as the central force that allowed the return to a democratic political order in 1965 and 1986 (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 40). Three comments should be made here.

Ex-military officers and historians have started to unravel the scope of political and ideological divisions within the Sudanese army in the 1960s and 1980s (Sa'īd 2001; Ṭāhā 2002; Berridge 2015). The army cannot therefore be seen as a monolithic bloc that is unambiguously engaged “for” or “against” anti-regime mobilisations. It is also quite astonishing that in 2006 the officer-authors valued the army's potentially subversive role *vis-à-vis* the regime, while they themselves were part of the armed wing of a state apparatus that might well have been called into question after seventeen years of authoritarian rule. Should we interpret this as unintended clumsiness or as a discrete form of criticism of the ruling political elites? In the case of the 1985 uprising, is this representation related to the fact that the Commander-in-Chief of the army, 'Abd al-Raḥmān Siwār al-Dhabab, had decided to “side with the people” (that is, by removing Nimayrī from power) but later came sufficiently close to the *inqādh* regime to be appointed as head of the Khartoum-based international “Organisation for Islamic Predication” (*munazzamat al-da'wa al-islāmiyya*) (Berridge 2015: 53, 199)? Lastly, the textbook is silent about the three military coups that overthrew parliamentary systems and re-established authoritarian rule in 1958 ('Abbūd), 1969 (Nimayrī) and 1989

(Bashīr).²⁸ The aim of this omission was undoubtedly to opacify the striking contrast between the length of the authoritarian episodes (thirty-nine years) and that of the parliamentary interludes (eleven years) in Sudanese political life between 1956 and 2006.

However, the most deafening silence is around the Sudanese civil wars. A few fleeting hints are certainly scattered through the textbook, but they do not explicitly convey civil conflict. For instance, the authors evoke a “rebellion/mutiny in the Equatorial Corps” (*tamarrud bi-firqat khaṭṭ al-istiwā*) in 1955, and interpret it as the motive for “creating an army able to protect the nascent independence” (*khalq jaysh qādir ‘alā ḥimāyat al-istiqlāl al-walīd*) (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 37), as if the mutiny had called into question the very principle of Sudanese independence rather than the establishment of a state dominated by Arab-Muslim elites from Khartoum. Elsewhere, the text vaguely indicates “the deterioration of the security situation in the South” (*tadahwūr al-mawqif al-amnī bi-l-janūb*) in 1984 (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 63). In brief, it was a devastating rebellion that only the creation of the PDF could remedy:

The forces of rebellion (*quwwāt al-tamarrud*) assaulted the citizens’ villages and homes (*dāhamat qurā al-muwāṭinīn wa-masākinihim*) in Southern and Western Kordofan and in the Upper Nile. They seized their property and arrested the women (*nahabat mumtalakātihim wa-asarat al-nisā*). The citizens gathered their capacities and formed special groups to defend themselves and their property. (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 68)

These “local motives” (*dawā’i maḥaliyya*) explain the creation of the PDF on the advent of the *inqādh* regime in 1989.²⁹ PDF camps – which according to scholars were set up after 1991 with Iranian support (Salmon 2007: 17–19; Kapakian 2020: 53–54) – were meant to “train all the sons of the community/nation, empowering them to respect God’s order” (*tadrīb li-kāfat abnā’ al-umma, tamkīnan li-amr allāhī*) (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 67).³⁰ Playing on the double meaning of the Arabic term *umma* (Muslim community or nation in the political sense), this rhetoric incorporates all citizens into a single national and religious body – Muslim Sudan. The first-grade textbook therefore passes over thirty-nine years of conflict between Northern and

²⁸ Altogether, Ṭāhā al-Dīn (2002: 549–555) mentions seventeen (failed or successful) coups between 1956 and 1991.

²⁹ Previous developments, such as the 1981 “People’s Defence Forces Bill” or the *murāḥilīn* policy of Nīmayrī’s regime and Ṣādiq al-Mahdī’s government, are not mentioned, as if the *inqādh* had created the PDF from nothing.

³⁰ On the ways in which the *inqādh* regime elaborated its own notions of *tamkīn* (empowerment) and *tanwīr* (enlightenment) to develop multiple relays within society (such as the Sudanese General Women’s Union or community police units at a neighborhood level), see the chapters by Abir Nur and Lucie Revilla in this book. The PDF were integrated into the regular army in 2020.

Southern Sudan, as do the books for second and third grade students. The national army's role in these extremely long and deadly wars is hushed up. The Darfur conflict is never mentioned. The same silence characterises the history textbooks in use during the transitional era, as the historical narrative never goes beyond Sudan's independence in 1956.³¹

Conclusion: Violence as Discourse, Product and Silence

This study makes it possible to suggest a heuristic distinction between violence as described *in* the school narrative and violence as produced *by* this same narrative. On the one hand, the textbooks as a source contain a bundle of representations that need to be decrypted. For instance, the terminology used by the authors was aimed at delegitimising specific actors by associating them with violent behaviours, as was the case with Zionists and Southern Sudanese rebels. On the other hand, those textbooks sociologically acted as a vector of violence, preparing Sudanese secondary students for the discourses and practices they would encounter within the framework of official or unofficial military training. Thus, the school narrative *tells* of a certain violence but also *did* violence. This violence was both physical and symbolic.

This case exemplifies Bozarslan's concept of discursive violence. The analysis of Sudanese textbooks for military sciences brings to light a process of lexical technicisation, which certainly acted as a means of producing consent to instituted forms of violence. The officer-authors chose a strategical and technical vocabulary to euphemise the violence inherent in military activities. At the same time, the school narrative drew on a political nationalist discourse and a religious Islamic register to legitimise armed action. Mobilising ancient and modern history, Muslim sacred texts, and the prophetic model served to promote notions of national security and jihad – the latter being understood in the sense of an ultimate commitment in the path of God and a necessary armed struggle (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 70–73).³²

³¹ On the representations of colonialism in these history textbooks and how they resonate with Northern Sudanese contemporary educational discourses on globalisation, see Seri-Hersch 2015.

³² The enemies targeted by this jihad were not clearly identified. They were akin to “external threats” or “subversive activities” attributable to foreign organisations, individuals and states or to “Sudanese groups” (Jumhūriyyat al-Sūdān 2006: 57). Clément Deshayes and Anne-Laure Mahé (2020: 91) have noticed the semantic violence of an internal state jihad directed at populations in or from Southern Sudan, Blue Nile and the Nuba Mountains, who were called “slaves” or “cockroaches” by certain

Besides symbolic violence as a discursive tool, I suggest an additional concept that sheds light on the Sudanese case – but which would well apply to other national contexts, especially authoritarian regimes in their various guises: silencing certain facts, processes and actors allows one to deny the physical violence that is being carried out against obscured groups. The almost total silence about intra-Sudanese conflicts, despite – or rather because of – their length and disastrous human consequences is also a form of symbolic violence. It must be added to the types of physical and psychological violence that are consubstantial with civil war and repression of not only anti-regime activists, but also ordinary citizens from “ethnic” groups that have been structurally discriminated against (for example: Southern Sudanese, Darfuris and Nubas) and/or the lower social classes (Deshayes and Mahé 2020). In the uncertain transitional context of 2005–2011, this institutional denial impeded the dissemination of officially-sanctioned knowledge about the various conflicts, and hindered any potential recognition of Southern Sudanese or Darfuris as historical actors and full members of society.³³ At a theoretical level, this form of silent violence might be compared to what anthropologist Michael Taussig has termed a “public secret”: namely “that which is generally known, but cannot be articulated” (Taussig 1999: 5). This perspective nuances the Foucauldian theory linking knowledge and power by arguing that active not-knowing (“knowing what not to know”) is at the very core of power (Taussig 1999: 6–7). The absence of certain social groups, political events and armed conflicts from Sudanese school narratives and practices also brings to mind the phenomenon of enforced disappearances, which sociologist Didier Bigo (1994) has studied as a tool for invisibilising political opponents in authoritarian contexts around the world.

Behind the recurring expression of “national security”, one should see an attempt to reproduce the *inqādh* regime and avoid the partitioning of the country through the use of ideological indoctrination, the disciplinary control of bodies and the enrolment of young Sudanese in the paramilitary and armed forces. This political imperative explains why it became necessary to convey the image not only of a powerful state, but also of Sudanese society as cemented together by a shared history and religion, as well as by common interests – above all the defence of its territory and state structures against foreign and local threats. In fact, this fictional – and largely fictive – unity did not stand up to centrifugal socio-political realities, which clearly manifested themselves in the divorce between Sudan and South Sudan in 2011 and the popular revolu-

agents of the *inqādh* regime. ‘Umar al-Bashīr himself is reported to have called the Southern Sudanese “insects” before and after the secession of South Sudan in 2011 (Chirico 2018: chapter 10).

³³ Merethe Skårås and Anders Breidlid (2016) have shown that the silencing of the Southern civil conflict was also prevalent among South Sudanese teachers after the outbreak of the civil war in newly-independent South Sudan in 2013.

tion that led to the fall of the Khartoum regime in 2019 (Deshayes and Vezzadini 2019; Latif 2020; Bach, Chevrillon-Guibert and Franck 2020). In the street demonstrations and digital mobilisations that culminated in the removal of President al-Bashīr in April 2019, Sudanese activists called for inclusive citizenship by the widespread slogan “You [ʿUmar al-Bashīr or Ṣalāḥ Gosh³⁴] racist and arrogant, the whole country is Darfur” (*yā al-ʿunṣurī al-maḡhrūr kull al-balad Dār Fūr*). A variation of this slogan, “you [ʿUmar al-Bashīr] racist and coward, the whole country is women” (*yā al-ʿunṣurī yā jabbān kull al-balad niswān*), served to denounce a patriarchal order that had distant roots in the past but which the *inqādh* regime had strengthened through the imposition of strict dress codes and the repression of “shameful” conduct in the public space (Berridge 2013: 531, 535–538; Casciari and Manfredi 2020b: 982, 984).

The military sciences course was implemented at a time of political transition, when the major issue at stake in Sudan was relations between the North and the South. Ironically, the textbooks continued to be used in (Northern) Sudan after the 2011 split, illustrating a frequent gap between political and educative temporalities. This kind of inertia also reminds us of the multiple conditions – political will, specialised knowledge, social acceptability and human and financial resources – required to transform school curricula and educational practices, even within a classic top-down reform approach (Karami Akkary 2014). At the time of writing, the post-revolutionary era (2019–2023) is also one of political transition from the *inqādh* regime to a potentially new democratic order that might emerge from the parliamentary elections planned for 2023. As the nature of the Sudanese political regime and the relations between state and citizens are the issues currently at stake, a heated debate was stirred up by a reform of the history curriculum launched by the NCCER in 2020. The inclusion of a reproduction of Michelangelo’s 16th century “Creation of Adam” fresco in a sixth-grade textbook sparked a controversy among Muslim authorities, educationists and intellectuals. Sudan’s Islamic Fiqh Academy banished the book, describing it as an “ugly offence” and denouncing its supposedly pro-Western bias. After a preacher accused the textbook of promoting “apostasy” and “heresy” in a widely-circulated video and another called for it to be burned, Prime Minister Ḥamdōk froze curriculum changes and appointed a commission to investigate the matter in January 2021 (ʿAwaḍ 2021; AFP 2021). This decision, and the subsequent resignation of the head of the NCCER, ʿUmar Aḥmad al-Garrāy, show that educational changes – even those that seem to be very limited or symbolic –

³⁴ Ṣalāḥ Gosh headed Sudan’s National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) from 2004 to 2019. This slogan may have been directed at him rather than at ʿUmar al-Bashīr as a response to claims by Gosh that the 2018–2019 uprising was stirred up by the ʿAbd al-Wāḥid faction of the Darfuri Sudan Liberation Movement.

are at once possible and highly sensitive in the uncertain times of political transition, as competing social groups and ideological trends struggle over the cultural orientation of Sudanese society and its political translation into state institutions.

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