



9th International South Sudan and Sudan Studies Conference

Identity, Economy, Power Relations and External Interests:
Old and New Challenges for Sudan and South Sudan

Venue:

Rheinische Friedrich-Wilhelms-Universität Bonn, Regina Pacis-Weg 3,
Halls 1, 7, 8, 9

Date:

23–25 July 2012

Concluding Remarks, 25 July 2012

By Elke Grawert

I am relieved and happy that we were able to reach our ambitious goal of continuing the International Sudan Studies Conference series - even with the new constellation of two Sudans. The atmosphere was good and friendly, with many international participants attending and the academic contributions were strong.

It is impossible to summarize the entire conference at this point, but I'd like to highlight a few themes which were running through this conference in an eclectic manner.

The conference started with the issue of "violence as initiation" (Magdi El-Gizouli) and the deep rift between 'Effendis' (lords, elites) and 'Nas' (people), which has shaped Sudan for centuries. Contributions throughout the conference proved this assessment right.

We heard about the challenge of inequality and imposed assimilation in many variations – in communities, in shanty towns in Khartoum, between

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internally displaced people (who are seen as 'newcomers') and locals, among many others. We also had discussions about inequality between communities and NGOs, people and government, within Sudan and within South Sudan. Equal status and reconciliation were key issues just like visionary demands which have not yet turned into action and the change of real life conditions.

Another recurring theme was "responsibility" as opposed to the "dependency syndrome", the claim of being victims, and self-victimization as an argument used by elites in the South, by ex-combatants and by communities. Victimization often leads to calls for help, yet in some cases, own creative initiatives have emerged which show that apathy can be overcome and a space for responsible action has opened up. This is opposed to engineered, top-down policies and development approaches.

A sub-theme underlying several contributions was rapid change due to the extreme mobility of people, which is shaping and reshaping Sudan and South Sudan today. Rapid urbanization has produced immense challenges regarding land use regulations, mutual respect, recognition of newcomers, and governance. Biases due to patronage relations, cooptation, favoritism and intransparency have led to new forms of exclusion – and to a strong demand for accountability of local, state and national governments, humanitarian and development agencies and the UN organizations active in Sudan and South Sudan. Government components impose regulations, fees, ideology and law and order, but hardly recognize the depth of social change in many rural areas and growing towns, the self-protection and initiative of people struggling with environments which are extremely challenging. People raise demands and put pressure on the leaders in order to receive a response from them.

'The political' was identified as crucial, as opposed to technical approaches and political engineering of social problems. 'The political' appeared to be at the core of conflicts at local, state, national and international level, and it requires political solutions instead of capacity-building or humanitarian intervention. People "playing the political game" (Luka Biong Deng) – another term for power relations – shape the potential for cooperation, but also for further conflict.

This pertains to oil production and the issue of wealth redistribution towards more equality in entitlements and development. 'The political' is crucial in the negotiations between the two Sudans, which mainly deal with the issues of the CPA that had not been implemented during the six years of its validity. Cooperation appears to be a desire of many, as aptly described during the conference as "Sudanese who miss their South Sudanese friends" (Buthaina Ahmed Belnaiem) – an issue also brought to the fore impressively in the film "My Beloved Sudan" by Taghred Elsanhoury.

Another core theme was “independence with interdependence” (Karl Wohlmuth), the arguments of which were similar.

To have this opportunity of exchange between researchers from Sudan and South Sudan was crucial to the debate and could be a model for further meetings between associations of people from both states. Strong people-to-people relations are one important way to force governments to cooperate.

Douglas Johnson will add to this sketchy conclusion which comes from my limited overview of the panels of this conference. But before I end, I again would like to thank the sponsors, all of you in the audience, and in particular the team ‘behind the scene’ for making this marvellous conference possible.

Feedback e-mails of the participants

Thank you again for the excellent job of organizing the 9th International Sudan Studies conference. We all agree that it was one of the best with generous external support. Thanks to the German tax payers, government and independent funders.

And thank you for circulating the list of participants with their contact information.

With best wishes,

Carolyn Fluehr-Lobban, PhD

Professor Emerita of Anthropology & Joint Doctoral Program in Education,
Rhode Island College Editor, Sudan Studies Association Bulletin Secretary and
Newsletter Editor, RI Beekeepers' Association

I was very impressed with the professionalism, the sacrifice of staff and intern to make the conference a success, and the honor to meet you, your staff and the great speakers and experts on the two Sudans.

Thank you.

Christopher Zambakari

South Sudanese presenter from USA

It was a pleasure to be a presenter and to have a high level academician and scholars to listen to us and enrich our paper for sure based on discussions during the plenary, panels and sideways, we will enrich ours.

Many tanks for the hospitality and everything, your support team was warm and professional

Regards and we keep in touch

Tinega Ong'ondi

VSF Germany

It was a very enjoyable conference, with many useful and interesting conversations. Many thanks to you and your colleagues and students for all the work of organising it.

I look forward to further discussion in due course of the question of publication of the proceedings.

Best

John Ryle

Chair of the Rift Valley Institute

I wish to thank you as well as your office for hosting and organizing the 9th international conference on Sudan and South Sudan. It was an excellent conference with numerous outstanding presentations.

The university rooms were full of deep knowledge and diverse experience of Sudan and South Sudan and were it not for you, this knowledge would not have met. So thank you.

Kind regards,

Margret Verwijk

Utrecht University, The Netherlands

What a total pleasure to be with you all in Bonn for the exceptional and delightful and truly wonderful conference on Sudan at this critical time. Thank you so much.

Dr. Richard A. Lobban

Jr. Professor Emeritus of Anthropology, Rhode Island College Executive Director

It was a very successful conference, due to your organisation and fund-raising, so once again I extend my heart-felt thanks to you both. Your student helpers were especially helpful. We will want to keep in touch with you as plans for the 2015 international conference proceed.

Yours sincerely,

Douglas H. Johnson

Chair of Sudan Studies Society UK

Thanks again for everything. Having hosted a past conference, I really appreciate your great work. I have sent certificates of appreciation to your address for Ruth, Ahmed and yourself. Please stay in touch, particularly if you visit the USA.

Randall Fegley, Ph.D.

Associate Professor of History and Politics, Co-ordinator of Global Studie,
President, Sudan Studies Association