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Review

Reviewed Work(s): *The Black Book of Sudan* by

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## Book Reviews

*The Black Book of Sudan* reviewed by Abdalla Osman El Tom & M. A. Mohamed Salih.

Writing on politics in Arabic by Sudanese authors is often published un-attributed or under a *nom de plume*. *The Black Book of Sudan* is one such publication that appeared recently and caused a stir, both for its content and the manner of its distribution. The authors opted to remain anonymous, calling them-selves 'The Seekers of Truth and Justice'. The place of publication has also been withheld.

A one-off distribution of the book took place at Friday prayers in Khartoum and other cities in the country, evading the regime's tight grip on information circulation. Reportedly, top officials had copies on their desks on the same day. One man said:

*As I was coming out of the mosque, somebody handed me a copy of this book. I left it in my car and forgot about it. Suddenly every body started talking about the Black Book. It was three days later when I realised I was one of those who received a copy.*

Within weeks of its release, *The Black Book* (*al-kitab al-aswad*) had become the topic of discussion throughout Sudan, a success unparalleled in the recent history of the country. Unhindered by copy-right restrictions, distribution took a life of its own through spontaneous photocopying that accounted for the bulk of the copies in circulation. The owner of a photocopying shop in Khartoum is reported to have said:

*This book came to us from heaven. I made no less than 100 copies for our customers. We sometimes charge more due to the risk involved in duplicating illegal documents.*

The authors spell out their thesis in the following passage:

*This publication unveils the level of injustice practised by successive governments, secular and theocratic, democratic or autocratic, from the independence of the country in 1956 to this day (all translation is by the reviewers).*

They then set out to prove it with an impressive statistical presentation of relevant data. By and large these data is carefully selected and presented, though on occasion they are loosely defined. For instance, in Table 1 'representation' is said to apply simply to 'national government' level.

According to Table 1, Northern Region with a population of 5.4% of the total had 79.5% of central government positions, a striking illustration of political dominance by a minority. The book claims that three ethnic groups in the Northern Region – Shaygia, Jaalieen, Danagla – in effect dominate the country.

Table 1: Population & Representation  
1986

Regions	Pop.	%	Representation %
North	1,026,406	5.4	58 (79.5%)
East	2,222,779	11.8	1 (1.4%)
Central	4,908,038	26.5	2 (2.8%)
South	4,407,450	23.7	12 (16.4%)
West	6,072,872	32.6	0 (0%)

The authors classify the occupants of cabinet office in the five national governments, from 1956 to 1964, by region. Northern Region's share is above 50% throughout and occasionally exceeds 70%. Lest this be considered a hangover from colonial trends, the authors compile similar data for governments since 1964. All heads of government since independence came from the Northern Region, while several attempted military coups failed simply because their leaders were not from that region; for instance, in 1977, 1980, and 1991.

The authors give some credit to Sadiq El Mahdi's (1986-1989) democratic government for increasing the share of marginalised groups. This is taken to mean that liberal democracy goes some way towards redressing the imbalance of representation.

Considerable space is devoted in the *Black Book* to the composition of the incumbent regime to tests its claims to fair representation. The data presented reveals a striking conformity to the established pattern. Once power was consolidated, a return to normal politics is evident in the distribution of ministerial posts.

The demise of Turabi (December 1999), the spiritual leader of the National Islamic Front (now Popular National Congress) was a cause for euphoria for many Sudanese people. The authors of the *Black Book*, however, see little cause for celebration, as their thesis remains intact

**Table 4: Revolutionary Command Council (1989)**

Region	no. reps.	%
Northern	10	66.7
Eastern	0	0
Central	0	0
Southern	2	13.3
Western	3	20

**Ministerial Posts (1989)**

Region	no. of ministers	%
North	120	59.4
Eastern	6	3
Central	18	8.9
Southern	30	14.9
Western	28	13.8

for the subsequent period. This is attested to by the regional share of positions at the Presidential Palace and the Federal cabinet, as well as state governors, commissioners and state ministers, as shown in tables 5 and 6.

Using similar statistical support, the authors arrive at the same conclusion regarding the legislative bodies in the Sudan. While the domination of the Northern Region was not shaken by elections during the brief periods of democratic rule, the authors believe that democratic procedures gave marginalised areas increased representation. In the case of appointed legislative bodies, the authors conclude that many of those appointed in non-northern regions are in fact people of northern origin residing elsewhere.

## The Legal System

*The Black Book* acknowledges the important role played by the Sudanese legal profession in defending justice and equality. However, it shows that the legal profession also is subject to the insidious

**Table 5: Presidential Palace & Federal Cabinet Posts 2000**

Region	Presidential		Cabinet	
	no.	%	no.	%
North	10	83.3	18	60.1
Eastern	0	0	1	3.3
Central	0	0	2	6.6
Southern	2	16.6	4	13.3
Western	0	0	5	16.7

**Table 6: Governors, Commissioners & State Ministers (2000)**

Region	no.	%	no.	%	no.	%
North	9	56.2	160	51.1	240	47.5
Eastern	2	12.5	13	4.2	9	1.8
Central	2	12.5	27	8.6	25	4.9
South (excluded)			69	22	160	31.7
Western	3	18.8	47	15	71	14.1

influence of northern power brokers. In the words of the authors:

*the leadership of the legal system at the level of the Minister for Justice and the Attorney General has been controlled by the executive powers which are characterised by nepotism and discrimination among the members of the nation (p.28).*

Table 7 shows the regional affiliation of the heads of the legal system in independent Sudan.

## The Media

The mass media in Sudan have not escaped the attention of the authors of the *Black Book*. They too are described as dominated by the Northern region and playing its tune. This, the book claims, is evident at every field, including news, art and music, which manage to project the culture of the north and portray it as the national culture at the expense of the rest of the Sudan (pp.28-33). The authors assert that the *Jihad* itself has not escaped the northernisation process:

**Table 7: Sudanese Attorney Generals**

Region	no.	%
North	8	67
Eastern	0	0
Central	3	33
Southern	0	0
Western	0	0

*Examine with us the documentary films on Mujahideen produced by the Popular Defence Forces and (national) charity corporations. Look at the pictures and scrutinise the names. Wouldn't you be convinced that all the Mujahideen in the Sudan are from the Northern Region?*

That the defending army and its martyrs who fall every day are likewise from the same region? However, regional involvement in *Jihad* and the sacrifice it entails are different according to the data produced in the *Black Book*

## Wealth Distribution

It comes as no surprise to read that a power monopoly has led to the monopolisation of resources in the Sudan. According to *The Black Book* the Ministry of Finance is a Northern Region preserve, and the result is a gross misallocation of development investment among regions.

*No (non-northern) State has ever expended more than 36% of its allocated budget, while actual expenditure of the two northern States has never dropped below 60% of their annual approved allocations. This has put the northern States in position to attract extra funds originally destined for other States (p.39).*

The book bemoans the fact that eight development schemes were scrapped recently, none of which was in the north:

*These schemes were not sold or privatised but simply cancelled, despite the fact that they were developmental in nature and had an impact on the life of ordinary citizens. Since independence, not a single major development scheme has been implemented in Western region (p.43).*

Oil production has introduced a new dimension in the Sudanese economy. The so-called National Council for the Distribution of Resources was formed to deal with this new resource. According to the *Black Book*, the regional representa-

**Table 9: The National Council for Distribution of Resources**

Region	no of Rep.	%
Northern	19	76
Eastern	1	4
Central	1	4
Southern	3	12
Western	1	4

tion in its membership is in Table 9 above. Needless to say, the authors of the book see in this a confirmation of their thesis.

### Comment

The appearance of the *Black Book* sparked a frantic investigation by the security branch to find its authors. It was rumoured that several junior officials were fired from their posts in the presidential palace due to the appearance of the Book on the desks of top officials, including the President. Writers, journalists, academics and publishing houses were investigated and computer software, typewriters, etc. were checked. The search was fruitless and the authors remain unknown. Needless to say there is no shortage of speculation about their identity.

Certain features of the work are worth noting. The language of the *Black Book* reflects an Islamic perspective shared by Islamic parties in the country. Sudan is clearly perceived in an Islamic context. The grievances of the western region receive disproportional attention compared to other regions, including the South. There is no sympathy for the minority groups within the Northern Region that are said to be dominated by the 'Powerful Three': Shaigia, Jaaliyeen, Danagla.

The material in the latter part of the book is somewhat disorganised and carelessly presented. Some claims are not

substantiated, or are attributed to secondary sources, i.e. newspapers. Occasionally, the authors rely on anecdotal testimony lacking corroborating evidence. Finally, they often fail to distinguish between government policy and the eccentric behaviour of individual officials.

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*Somalia: Economy without State* by Peter D. Little, African Issues Series. Bloomington/Indianapolis: Indiana University Press; Oxford: James Currey Publishers, September 2003. Reviewed by Ken Menkhaus, Department of Political Science, Davidson College.

One of the many unfortunate side-effects of Somalia's prolonged period of state collapse is a shortage of good, field-based analyses of the country. Most of the academics who conducted extensive fieldwork in Somalia in the 1980s have understandably moved on to other, safer endeavours. What little is known about Somalia's current politics and economy is based mainly on the accounts of journalists and reports of aid agencies. The number of academics who continue to pursue research in Somalia is very low. Worse still, the bulk of research on contemporary Somalia is concentrated in and on the safer regions of the north-east (Puntland) and northwest (Somaliland). The more conflict-ridden zones of southern Somalia have been inaccessible to all but a handful of researchers. And no portion of southern Somalia has been more dangerous in the 1990s than Kismayo and the Jubba regions along the Kenyan border.

The publication of Peter Little's new work *Somalia: Economy without State* is thus welcome on a number of counts. It constitutes an attempt to integrate pre-war and post-collapse fieldwork on