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Slavery and the Search for Belonging in Modern Sudan

BY WILLIAM FANT

For many Sudanese, the migration of Islamic society into Sudan has produced difficulties in identifying belonging. Centuries in the making, Sudan has become a split nation in which the south has retained much of its African identity, while the north has become increasingly Islamized. While no discernable traits separate the divided portions of Sudan, the division has allowed the dominant north to forcibly gain control of the entire nation. This phenomenon has led to increased discontent among the regions, resulting in civil war and the reintroduction of slavery. Although the physical division in Sudan is as blurred as the ethnic lines of its people, the conflict has now spread into the Darfur region with disastrous results. In response, the international community, led by China, has hesitated to get involved while the African identity of Sudan is systematically swept away.

The Islamic slave trade has its roots in the convergence of African and Arabic societies based largely in the southern region of the Sahara desert. The traditional Arabic slave raids on African villages was substantially complicated by the spread of Islam into Africa and the intermarriage of African women and Arabic men, which created a mixed Sudanese society searching for an identity. The continued enslavement of African villagers by those who identified themselves as Arabic further perpetuated the idea that the individuals identified as having African ancestry were inferior to those to who claimed Arabic roots. Although slavery in Sudan was abolished under Anglo-Egyptian rule in the early twentieth century, the self identification of those in Sudan continued to be polarized by the people claiming Arabic ancestry and those who were defined as African, creating a division of the country between

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the predominantly Arabic north and the African south. The reintroduction of slavery in modern day Sudan is the direct result of the continued dominance of the country's political and economical systems by the Arabic north, their view of the inferiority of Africans, and the need for labor in northern Sudan. However, despite numerous narratives of slave experiences, the government of Sudan continues to deny the existence of slavery in their country by hiding behind the complicated nature of the subject of slavery itself, as well as the so-called traditional problem of tribal identification. The conflict raging in Darfur, the denials by Khartoum government, and the international protection provided by China has continued to stall intervention on behalf of those who have been enslaved.

Arab versus African

The current problem of slavery in Sudan is rooted in the historic division of the country between the Arabic North and the African south, and the understanding of this situation is crucial in order to clarify why slavery in Sudan still exists. While the division of Sudan upon the line of ethnicity is not absolute, it is more distinguishable by an examination of the geographical division of the country. As Peter McLoughlin points out, “[t]he northern two-thirds of the Republic of the Sudan encompasses the eastern end of the Sudan geographic zone, a belt of savannah grassland...which borders the southern edge of the Sahara and Libyan deserts.”¹ The northern portion of Sudan thus provided the land necessary to sustain the traditional nomadic herding lifestyle of those who claimed Arabian ancestry. Over time these nomadic herders began to settle the region now known as Sudan aided largely by the existence of the upper Nile River, further encroaching on the traditional African villages of sub-Saharan Africa.² By contrast, the

¹ Peter F. M. McLoughlin, “Economic Development and the Heritage of Slavery in the Sudan Republic,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 32, no. 4 (1962): 355-391.

² This is an over simplification of the north/south division which is largely used as the division between Arabic and African cultures. There also existed the presence of African nomads in the region, which led to the cross culturalization

southern portion of Sudan receives the rainfall necessary to develop consistent agriculture and a traditional African sedentary population.³

The largest country in Africa, Sudan has maintained the longstanding racial separation between those claiming Arabic ancestry and those who consider themselves African. These ideals of ancestry carried over to slavery in which the “nineteenth-century slaving frontier was defined by the actors in terms of Islamic versus non-Islamic pedigree, brown versus black colour, Arab versus non-Arab descent.”⁴ This was further perpetuated by the colonial government, who from the beginning “classified the population of the country into natives or Arabs and Sudanese.”⁵ It became evident that there was a distinct difference between what it meant to be called either an Arab or African, but what was missing was an exact definition of what the two categories encompassed. Over time the idea of an Arabic identity became interchangeable with those who are Islamized, while to be African meant that one was not Arabic. The distinct unifier of northern Sudan was, and remains today, the Moslem faith, which allows “groups which are not racially pure Arabs” to be Islamized.⁶ This punctuated the separation between the Islamic north centered on the capital of Khartoum, and the highly africanized south.

While the separation of ancestral lineage in Sudan can easily be construed as being a product of traditional racism, Robert O. Collins describes that the separation into differing groups is a direct result of “cultural racism”.⁷ Under his definition of cultural racism, Collins disregards the belief that slavery in Sudan is a

of Arabic and African culture within the northern region, as well as the Western portion of Sudan better known as Darfur.

³ This division is consistent with the traditional scholarly view that sub-Saharan Africa is the true Africa.

⁴G. P. Makris, “Slavery, Possession and History: The Construction of the Self Among Slave Descendants in the Sudan,” *Africa: Journal of the International African Institute* 66, no. 2 (1996): 159-182.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 163.

⁶ McLaughlin, *Economic Development*, 358.

⁷ Robert O. Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), 8.

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product of ethnic superiority, but is instead “more historical and cultural than based on color, and more individual and institutional than ideological.”⁸ While this may be true when rooted in the idea that all Sudanese may be considered black by an outsider, there remains a definitive social construction of race between the Arabic North Sudanese, and the predominantly African South Sudanese.⁹ And while there is a lack of the exact cause for such racial distinctions, what is central to the discussion of Sudanese slavery is that those who consider themselves to be of Arabic descent consider those of African heritage to be inferior to their own group, and that idealism is the historic basis of slavery in Sudan.

While the division among the Sudanese is apparent, it is the product of a combination of factors including self identification, religion, and geography which is the cause of polarization. However, this division of the north and southern portion of Sudan is never static, but is instead a separation which is ever-changing. And although the distinction of the imagined border is evident when considering the natural differences of the two regions, it is the ideologies of the peoples of these two regions which provided the basis for the existence of slavery. Thus, according to G. P. Markis, “[i]n actual practice this ostensibly absolute distinction between the two imagined communities was subject to the process of constant negotiation that governed the shifting of their boundary.”¹⁰ As the variables change and are rearranged, the Sudanese identity evolves and the basis of slavery becomes harder to identify.

History of Slavery in Sudan

The historic era of slavery in Sudan was at its height prior to the Anglo-Egyptian conquest in 1898, which found the country devastated by both the Turco-Egyptian occupation (1821-85) and a “harsh Islamic state under the Mahdists (1889-98).”¹¹ It is during

⁸ Robert O. Collins, *A History of Modern Sudan*, 8.

⁹ Jok Madut Jok, *War and Slavery in Sudan* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2001), 7.

¹⁰ Markis, *Possession*, 162.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 161.

this period that the historical view of northern Arabs versus southern Africans became the central theme. “Central to both [the Turco-Egyptian and Mahdist] regimes was the enslavement of pagan Africans from the Southern and Western Sudan by Northern Sudanese slave traders, with direct or indirect assistance of the authorities.”¹² During this period hundreds of thousand Sudanese were enslaved from the non-Arabic population and enslaved in both Sudan and neighboring countries.¹³ However, to complicate Sudanese slavery further, “northern Sudanese obtained slaves from non-Moslem and non-Arab groups, some in the northern Sudan itself.”¹⁴

During the nineteenth century, slavery in Sudan became a large part of the Sudanese economy in the northern region. Although prior to the Turkish conquest, slaves were allocated to more influential occupations such as in the bureaucracy and the military, as well as concubines for noblemen, slavery began to become associated with more menial jobs within society.¹⁵ Gradually slaves were used primarily in activities such as herding, household chores, and cultivation, many times left to their own devices while their master moved to areas with more reliable water supplies.¹⁶ This change represents the economic transition of the region as well as a growing view of the slave holding class seeing themselves as far superior to those whom they enslave.

The discriminatory classification of slaves during this transition is evident in both the way they were treated as well as their monetary worth. By the end of the nineteenth century, “slaves were legally classified as livestock along with sheep, cattle, horses, and camels, or occasionally as ‘talking animals’ (*hayawan al-natiq*).”¹⁷ Due largely to the reduction in importance of slave duties, the prices demanded for slaves had been reduced from an

¹² Ibid., 161.

¹³ McLoughlin, *Economic Development*, 361.

¹⁴ Ibid., 360.

¹⁵ Jay Spaulding, “Slavery, Land Tenure and Social Class in the Northern Turkish Sudan,” *The International Journal of African Historical Studies* 15, no. 1 (1982): 1-20.

¹⁶ McLoughlin, *Economic Development*, 364.

¹⁷ Spaulding, *Land Tenure*, 12.

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average value of approximately twelve Spanish dollars to less than one Spanish dollar between 1814 and 1895.¹⁸ The reduction of the price of slave ownership allowed for even those with modest means to own a share in slavery, creating a society which became heavily reliant on slaves for the growth of the economy.¹⁹ As McLaughlin points out, “[b]y the end of the nineteenth century it could be said that throughout the northern Sudan all the agricultural work was done by slaves, who were then said to account for almost a third of the population.”²⁰

When discussing slavery in Sudan, the Anglo-Egyptian colonization has been largely accredited with ending the country’s tradition of slavery. Beginning in 1898, the newly established Anglo-Egyptian “administrators abolished slavery in a gradual manner” in order to prevent economic devastation and uprisings by the slaveholding class.²¹ The declaration of slavery as being illegal was received with mixed results, with those of the North angered and those of the South believing that it was long overdue.²² However, it is difficult to believe that with the resentment of the northern Sudanese and the economy of the country in the balance, that slavery was ever completely abolished under English rule. According to Jok Madut Jok, “the British colonial administration did not completely abolish the slave trade and slavery, but rather opted for a “modern” form of slavery,” meaning slavery moved underground rather than operating in a more visible way as had the traditional Islamic slave trade.²³

Effects of Colonization

As Robert Collins suggests, “[t]he historiography of Sudan is complex and long, spanning from the Kingdom of Kush (760 BCE-350 CE) to the present day, but the history of independent Sudan begins with the withdrawal of the British and Egyptian

¹⁸ Ibid.,10.

¹⁹ Ibid., 12.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Makris, *Possession*, 163.

²² Jok, *War and Slavery*, 76.

²³ Ibid., 76.

rulers on 1 January 1956.”²⁴ However, there remains an underlying amount of negative effect that the Anglo-Egyptian government had on the ideas of the elite class in the newly formed Republic of the Sudan. The effects of the government’s pretense of the abolition of slavery provided those claiming Arabic ancestry with an increased amount of animosity toward those who were African. British officials also introduced “the Western notion of nationalism” to the Islamic elite, producing an increased search for self identity.²⁵ The advent of black slavery dominated by Islamic slavers, and the subsequent new ruling class of independent Sudan, had a lasting effect on the nationalistic idea of a Sudanese identity. Added to that is the idea that those claiming Arabic ancestry were not seen as authentic by the rest of the Arab world, and would largely be considered to be black in the Western world.²⁶ Thus the canyon between those who claimed to be Arabic and those categorized as African was furthered by the government under the British, creating a lasting animosity between the two groups.

In 1956, the authority of a newly independent Sudan was placed “directly into the hands of these Arabs, bringing to power the same populations who sixty years earlier had been engaged in the slave trade.”²⁷ This vaulted back into control the Arabic population of the north, who under the British received more and better education, and retained the lion’s share of the economy of the country. Those who were associated with the Southern portion of the country were faced with the problem of having a great deal of their population Islamized under the centuries of slavery, the lack of education among those who remained, and the lack of infrastructure to build from. These were among the contributing factors which led to the beginning of a national identity that was completely dominated by the Arabic population.

Following independence in 1956, the newly established government was again dominated by the Arabic elite in and surrounding Khartoum. The newly formed nation of Sudan began a

²⁴ Collins, *Modern Sudan*, 1.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9.

²⁶ *Ibid.*

²⁷ Makris, *Possession*, 163.

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quest for identity, which those of the Arabic north considered to be an Islamic nationalism. This was contrasted by the ideas of the South, who sensing their inferior position, requested either to become a separate state, or to remain under colonial rule until the two sides were more even.²⁸ Because the Northern elites were victorious, they followed their own traditional view of superiority over the south, and that perpetuated by the Anglo-Egyptian rule of previous decades, and began to assert their will on those of African origin to the South and West. In 1983 the government of Sudan, under then president Jaafar Nimeiri, proclaimed *shari'a* law in which all citizens were expected to live under the rules of Islam. This act undermined the religious diversity of Sudan and a brutal civil war erupted throughout the county.²⁹

The resultant civil war in Sudan led to the increase of slave raiding and trading throughout the region, usually encouraged by the government. As Jok points out, “[t]he successive Khartoum regimes since the start of the current civil war between the North and South in 1983 have been notorious for encouraging enslavement of southern blacks, and increasingly Christian Sudanese, by northern Arab Muslims.”³⁰ This was originally the way in which the Sudanese government rewarded “Arab militias fighting on the government side of Sudan’s civil war.”³¹ The preference of female and young slaves led to the systematic killing of male African men in order to prevent resistance, and the capture and enslavement of the remaining women and children.³² The bloody civil war continued for two decades resulting in the displacement of millions of southern Sudanese to refugee camps in Chad and Kenya, as well as 40,000 southerners enslaved in Northern Sudan.³³

²⁸ Jok, *War and Slavery*, 15.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 13.

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 1.

³¹ Nicholas D. Kristof, “A Slave’s Journey in Sudan,” *The New York Times*, 23 April 2002, A23.

³² Richard Lobban, “Slavery in the Sudan Since 1989,” *Arab Studies Quarterly* 23, no.2 (2001): 31-39.

³³ This is an estimate provided by the Commission for the Eradication of Abduction of Women and Children (CEAWC). This is an organization began by the Sudanese government in 1999 in response to international outcry of slavery

Modern Slavery

Throughout all of the blood, tears, and oppression of the previous decades in war-torn Sudan, the Khartoum government has held strong in denying that any practice of enslavement exists in their nation. Although in more recent times the government has begun cracking down on what is called “tribal raiding,” they still deny that slavery exists in Sudan.³⁴ The government at Khartoum instead deflects any blame for slavery in Sudan stating that what are being construed as slave raids are ancient tribal fights for resources. Recent discussions involving the definition of slavery have also contributed to the problem of defining if what is currently occurring in Sudan is in reality slavery. Through denying the existence of slavery in Sudan and the continued argument of what constitutes slavery, the government of Khartoum is allowed to support the slave trade in Sudan while deflecting any blame to be placed on them. However, the evidence provided by the captives themselves, have provided substantial amount of accounts to combat the claims of the Sudanese government.

Abuk Bak’s personal account of her capture and subsequent enslavement provides insight into what those of Southern Sudan were subjected to at the hands of the raiding militia. According to Bak, “the militiamen, wrapped in their white robes and turbans, were shooting every man who crossed their path and setting fire to our houses.”³⁵ Those who remained alive were then rounded up,

in Sudan. Of the 40,000 southerner estimated to be enslaved in the North, 20,000 are thought to have been abducted, and 20,000 are thought to have been born to women who are enslaved. However, according to Christian Solidarity International, southern community experts estimate that 200,000 southerners have been enslaved. The actual numbers may never be known.

Robyn Dixon, “For Sudan Slaves, Freedom at a Cost,” *Los Angeles Times*, 29 March 2005, A1.

³⁴ Kristof, *Slave’s Journey*, 1.

³⁵ Jesse Sage and Liora Kasten, eds. *Enslaved: True Stories of Modern Day Slavery* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008), 43.

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placed into corrals, and whipped.³⁶ At twelve years old, Abuk Bak was taken from her family, sold into slavery, and forced to live outside. As a slave, she was forced to tend to the herds and provide household support, while being beaten by both the master and his children.³⁷ Central to Bak's account of her enslavement was her loss of personal identity to which she somberly proclaims that "To them I was just *abeeda*."³⁸ Bak continually uses the term *abeeda* to describe her relationship with her captives and defines the word as meaning black slave.³⁹

The account provided by Gabriel Muong Deng provides a similar depiction of slavery to that of Abuk Bak. Taken from his home at nine years old, Deng was transported to the Darfur region, a trek which took about a month to complete.⁴⁰ Put in charge of about 30 grazing cows, Deng was also provided with a gun which was intended to protect the cows from wild animals.⁴¹ Renamed Mohamed, and taught to pray, Deng was also beaten by his owner.⁴² Fortunately for Deng, he was able to escape his enslavement after about five years as a captive.⁴³

"Abuk Achian was 6 years old when Arab raiders rampaged through her village in southern Sudan, carried her off on horseback and turned her into a slave."⁴⁴ In her account, Achian complained of the difficult transition to life in slavery, including her inability to understand her captor's language.⁴⁵ However, Achian eventually became a Muslim, learned the Arabic language, and was forced to marry a young man.⁴⁶ Her husband was killed when he was raiding for more slaves, and Achian was a widow at

³⁶ ³⁶ Jesse Sage and Liora Kasten, eds. *Enslaved: True Stories of Modern Day Slavery* ., 44-46.

³⁷ Ibid., 48-50.

³⁸ Ibid., 47.

³⁹ Ibid., 47-50.

⁴⁰ "Is there Slavery in Sudan?" *Antislavery.org*, (March 2001) 9.

⁴¹ Ibid., 9.

⁴² "Is there Slavery in Sudan?" *Antislavery.org*, (March 2001) 9, 10.

⁴³ Ibid., 9-10.

⁴⁴ Kristof, *Slave's Journey*, 1.

⁴⁵ Ibid.

⁴⁶ Ibid.

the age of sixteen.⁴⁷ The son she had bore to her husband was taken from her by his parents, and Achian was forced to flee.⁴⁸

While it is important to understand that the plight faced by slaves is primarily an individual event, there exists a significant amount of similarities among the slave narratives. Perhaps most alarming is the attempts of the enslavers to steal the self identity of those who they enslave. The slave owners continue to insist upon the assimilation of their slaves into the Arabic dominated Muslim culture of their masters. According to Michael Coren, “Survivors report being called ‘*Abeed*’ (black slave), enduring daily beatings, and receiving awful food. Masters also strip slaves of their religious and cultural identities, giving them Arabic names and forcing them to pray as Muslims.”⁴⁹ The assimilation of the slaves furthers the problems of definitively distinguishing the line upon which modern slavery in Sudan is based.

What is Slavery?

To further problematize the institution of slavery as a whole, much discussion has taken place over the past few decades of what exactly is the definition of slavery. Perhaps one of the most noted arguments is that of Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff which presents a view of African “slavery” as being distinct from that of the Westernized notion of chattel slavery as most clearly exhibited in the United States.⁵⁰ According to Miers and Kopytoff, the Westernized notion of chattel slavery as demonstrated by the plantation system in the United States propagates the Western idea that “the antithesis of ‘slavery’ is ‘freedom’, and ‘freedom’ means

⁴⁷ Ibid.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

⁴⁹ Michael Coren, “Sudan’s Slaves,” *Sun Media*, 25 November 2003, 1. <http://www.frontpagemag.com/articles/Printable.aspx?GUID=5F424171-CB25-4811-AD7> (accessed March 22, 2009).

⁵⁰ Suzanne Miers and Igor Kopytoff, *Slavery in Africa: Historical and Anthropological Perspectives* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1977), 254.

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autonomy and a lack of social bonds.”⁵¹ The contention then becomes that “In most African societies...the antithesis of ‘slavery’ is not ‘freedom’ qua autonomy but rather ‘belonging’.”⁵² Under such newly defined parameters, the “slaves” ability to partake in “social mobility” creates a reduction of marginality which allows the African slave to become a member of the owner’s tribe.⁵³ For Miers and Kopytoff “‘slavery’ is neither a single idea invented in some particular place from which it spread nor is it a single, clear-cut institution.”⁵⁴

In response to Miers and Kopytoff, Frederick Cooper states that “[m]any Africanists hesitate to use the term ‘slavery’ for fear of conjuring up the entire bundle of traits commonly associated with [chattel slavery].”⁵⁵ Cooper contends that the Africanist’s definition of a separate “African slavery” is a direct attempt to separate the slavery in Africa from the nasty connotations carried by the traditional word “slavery”.⁵⁶ In his view, slavery in Africa may differ from American slavery in that it “was not mainly an economic institution” but it is slavery nonetheless.⁵⁷ And to Miers and Kopytoff’s idea of the reduction of marginality of the slave in Africa, Cooper contends that although the slave may be integrated into a foreign society, “his foreign origin still made him distinct.”⁵⁸ Thus, the person enslaved never fully become a part of the society which enslaved them regardless of how much they are able to assimilate into their culture.⁵⁹

⁵¹ Ibid.

⁵² Ibid.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

⁵⁵ Frederick Cooper, “Review Article: The Problem of Slavery in African Studies,” *The Journal of African History* 20, no. 1 (1979): 103-125.

⁵⁶ Ibid., 105.

⁵⁷ Ibid., 106.

⁵⁸ Ibid., 107.

⁵⁹ While such discussions are necessary to distinguish the varying forms of slavery plaguing the world at any given moment, it is not the purpose of this article to get into arguments of semantics, but instead to provide a better understanding of the challenges of slavery still being faced today. By ignoring the implications behind the fundamental differences in defining slavery as a whole or a particular institution, the focus of this article regarding the existent slavery in Sudan can better be directed toward the atrocities which are

With regards to slavery in Sudan, the assimilation of the slave into the society in which they are enslaved creates a parallel with the “slavery” described by Miers and Kopytoff. A large part of slaves’ experiences in Sudan is a direct result of their own ability to assimilate into the Islamized culture which dominates the North. The fact that the assimilation of the slave was largely by the forcefulness of the host society, and does not extend past the Islamicization of the slave, the assimilation of the slave cannot be truly conceived as social mobility. Thus the result of the slave’s assimilation is more in accordance with what Cooper described as the slave becoming only part of the foreign society. However, such an argument must not be allowed to detract from the atrocity of what is occurring, and that each form of slavery is unique to its people, culture, economy, and geography.

While this assimilation process is limited for the slave, the patrilineal society of the Arabic society of the North allows the subsequent generations fathered by Arabic men to become a part of the Arabic society. The traditional male dominated structure of Arabic tribal society, combined with the acceptance of concubines and their children, allows the relatively easy assimilation of slave children. Further assisting the assimilation of subsequent generations born in the North is the existence of racial mixture between Arabs and Africans already prevalent in the North. This allows for children born to Arabic fathers and slave women to avoid the process of assimilation into the new society, although they may continue to be looked down upon by the others within their father’s household.

Distractions

The problems Sudan is facing with the conflict plaguing the Darfur region of the country have provided a distraction capable of

occurring. In order to deflect such discussions which may further problematize the purposes of analyzing the current state of Sudanese slavery today, I will agree with Jok Madut Jok who simplifies the definition of slavery by defining a slave as “a person in the condition or status of being owned.” Jok, *War and Slavery*, 3.

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overshadowing the slavery engulfing the entire country.⁶⁰ Prior to the ceasefire between the North and South in 2005, the issue of slavery was overshadowed and hidden by the civil war plaguing Sudan. Since the signing of the ceasefire, the conflict in Sudan has been transferred to the Darfur region in western Sudan. The conflicts in Darfur have been the subject of international intrigue, especially centered on allegations of genocidal actions sanctioned by the Khartoum government. The discussion of slavery in Sudan is along the same lines as the discussion of genocide in the Darfur region. This is not to say that the two instances are on par with one another, but the lack of interest by other nations in attempting to curb either of the problems are similar situations. Therefore, the reasoning behind the lack of international response to either event is essentially the same, and thus interchangeable. Although the Darfur conflict has commanded substantial attention from the international community, the lack of intervention in what is being called genocide leaves little hope for the dissolution of slavery in Sudan.

In discussing the situation in Darfur, Morton Abramowitz and Jonathan Kolieb have suggested that “only a top-level, sustained, and aggressive multilateral mediation effort backed by the United States, the European Union, and African, Arab, and Chinese governments can stop the violence and reverse the massive displacement of people.”⁶¹ Such a response is a clear indication that there is no easy solution when dealing with the problems in Sudan, but that a multilevel global effort must be the basis for correcting both the genocide and slavery problems plaguing the country. This “multilateral mediation effort” allows for the leadership of global superpowers such as the United States and China, and the economically powerful European Union, while still eliciting participation from the neighboring Arabic and African nations.⁶² The modern history of Sudan has allowed for

⁶⁰ For a more comprehensive view into the problems of Sudan, see an interesting documentary “The Devil Came on Horseback.” Directed by Ricki Stern and Anne Sundberg, (Break Thru Films, 2007).

⁶¹ Morton Abramowitz and Jonathan Kolieb, “Why China Won’t Save Darfur.” http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3847&print=1 (accessed February 23, 2009).

⁶² Ibid.

participation from both the United States and China. The international community seems to be waiting for their leadership, while neither seems to want a leadership role.

While the leadership of the United States and China are essential, cooperation of the European Union, and African and Arab governments are also considered to be important parts of any solution regarding Sudan. Participation of the European Union in a Sudanese solution plan would be imperative in attempting to apply sanctions on Sudan, assuring that other economically strong entities would not simply fill the void left by the China. As for the neighboring African and Arab governments, the history of ethnic troubles in the region would be more easily avoided in the future if both sides were properly represented and supported internationally. However, the international community's lack of response to the slavery crisis in Sudan has not only failed to provide the Sudanese government with an incentive to end slavery, but has also perpetuated an atmosphere which provides an umbrella of protection for the Khartoum government.

Although the United States is usually relied upon to provide some means to end the wrongs of the world, and to provide protection for the oppressed, they have been visibly absent from the crises in Sudan. This is not to say that the United States is unaware of the situation in Sudan, but instead seems either unwilling or unable to interfere with the Sudanese government. David C. Kang suggests that the United States' international involvement is many times based on strategic interests, leaving the United States to be "highly selective about who we're moral about."⁶³ While this is true in many instances, and can be applied in the case of Sudan, suggestions that the United States has done nothing to deter the Khartoum government are more a testament to the expectations of US intervention in humanitarian affairs than their lack of participation.

It is more plausible that the lack of interest by the United States is due largely to the complex history of their involvement in Sudan and neighboring African states. The United States finds

⁶³ Stephanie Hanson, "China, Africa, and Oil." <http://www.cfr.org/publication/9557/> (accessed February 18, 2009).

itself in a complicated position knowing that sanctions placed on Sudan in the past have not had the desired effect, but has instead opened the door for the country's economic partnership with China. According to Jokowi, "the Americans...have not given Sudan's crisis the attention it deserves partly because Sudan is remote and represents no immediate interest, and partly because the United States met with disaster when it sought to intervene in Somalia."⁶⁴ Thus, the disinterest of the United States coupled with their lack of recent success in the region, has created hesitancy on the part of Washington. This has caused the United States to take a back seat to China whose influence in Sudan far outweighs that of the US, in the hope that their diplomacy will end the atrocities in Sudan.

The rapid growth of the Chinese economy in recent decades has led to China's increased participation in the global quest for the natural resources necessary for sustaining that growth. This has resulted in China becoming the second highest trading partner in Africa, behind only the United States.⁶⁵ However, China is Sudan's primary trading partner, and essential to this relationship and the Sudanese economy is petroleum of which China has cornered the market.⁶⁶ Thus the importance of the economic relationship with China, allows that government to be in a position to greatly influence the Khartoum government and possibly implement change. And as Sudan's most important trading partner, Abramowitz and Kolieb state that China certainly "has the economic leverage to gain the ear of President Bashir," but are unwilling to get involved in Sudanese politics.⁶⁷ As to why this is the case, it has been suggested by the International Crisis Group in a 2002 report that China has "a vested interest in the continuation of a low level of insecurity [in Sudan]. It keeps the other major investors out."⁶⁸ To this end, China has a vested interest in the continued chaos plaguing Sudan, and the necessity

⁶⁴ Jokowi, *War and Slavery*, 170.

⁶⁵ Hanson, *China*.

⁶⁶ Gwen Thompkins, "Chinese Influence in Sudan is Subtle, Complicated." <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=92282540> (accessed February 23, 2009).

⁶⁷ Abramowitz, *China*, 1-2.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 1.

of a continued economic relationship with the Khartoum government. Any change in government or policy may have an affect on China's position in Sudan, and that is a risk they are unwilling to take.

For their part in international policy, China does not see itself in any position to attempt to interfere with the Sudanese government even when discussing human rights violations. This is largely due to China's foreign policy approach, which is based primarily on economics, with an obvious absence of political interference. Often accused of human rights violations themselves, Stephanie Hanson states that "Chinese leaders say human rights are relative, and each country should be allowed their own definition of them and timetable for reaching them."⁶⁹ These "noninterference" policies allow the Chinese government to continue economic relations with Sudan, while avoiding any sense of moral obligation.⁷⁰

However, the Chinese government's economic relations with Sudan extend beyond oil, and this relationship has provided Sudan with a powerful ally in the international community. It is understandable that China would maintain their noninterference policy to avoid any implications or repercussions in regards to Sudan, but they take the relationship one step further by continually backing the Sudanese government against the UN. For its part in this relationship, Danna Harman says "China sells Khartoum weapons and military aircraft and backs Sudan in the UN Security Council."⁷¹ The threats of veto by China in the United Nations' (UN) attempts to deploy peacekeeping forces to stabilize Sudan has significantly weakened the international efforts to pressure Sudan's government.⁷² Ignoring the problems in Sudan

⁶⁹ Hanson, *China*.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

⁷¹ Danna Harman, "How China's Support of Sudan Shields a Regime Called 'Genocidal.'"

<http://www.printhis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=How+China%27s+support> (accessed February 23,2009).

⁷² Danna Harman, "How China's Support of Sudan Shields a Regime Called 'Genocidal.'"

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can be construed as noninterference, but defending Sudan in the international community makes China a large part of the problem.

More recently, the International Criminal Court (ICC) announced a warrant for the arrest of Sudanese President Omar al-Bashir on charges of war crimes and accusing him of orchestrating the genocide in Darfur. China's response to this news was to state their worry over such a drastic measure. In response the Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman, Qin Gang, stated that "China opposes any acts that might interfere with the peaceful overall situation of Darfur and Sudan."⁷³ China further expressed concern that an arrest warrant coming after peace talks in Darfur may disrupt the agreements already reached.⁷⁴ Again China has presented themselves in between the Khartoum government and the due process of the international community. While China's position could be construed as Eastern diplomacy, it may also stem from the difficulties that the Chinese trade monopoly in Sudan may face with a change of government in Khartoum.

Conclusion

As part of the Islamic slave trade, Sudan has a long history of slavery. Sudan became a nation that was the center of interaction between Arabic nomads and African groups. This continued interaction, coupled with the traditions on both sides presented a basis for the continuation of slavery. While it is easy to simplify this slavery as being a product of racial difference, it is much more complicated than any simplification can define. However, these simplifications have merit in the attempt to give light to the problem of modern slavery.

Geographically, Sudan is divided between the northern region and the South. The North is generally defined as being Arabic in tradition, while the South is considered predominantly

<http://www.printthis.clickability.com/pt/cpt?action=cpt&title=How+China%27s+support> (accessed May 21, 2009).

⁷³ "China Regretful, Worried about Sudan President Arrest Warrant," available from http://news.xinhuanet.com/english/2009-03/05/content_10946492.htm (accessed May 21, 2009).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

African. Tradition has held that the slaves usually come from the South and are imported into the economy of the North. It is important to understand that the enslavement of foreign individuals is a part of traditional slavery, and that what initially occurred in Sudan did not differentiate from this norm elsewhere in the continent. Those from the African population that were initially enslaved were placed in positions within Arabic society which held some esteem. This leads one to believe that at least initially slavery in the region was not based solely upon race.

Over time, the introduction of Islam came to dominate the region, creating a unifying identity for the Arabic tribes. However, the interactions between Arabic men and African women provided a population which, although considered Arabic, blurred the line between those who considered themselves Arabic and those of African descent. Eventually, this transition provided two sides; those who were Islamized, and those who were not. This redefined the positions of the people of Sudan, creating a hierarchy dominated by the Islamic North. In continued attempts at an Islamic identity recognized by the rest of the Arabic world, the North began to look down upon the South, further perpetuating slavery based on cultural identity, not race.

Just as this oversimplification of the historiography of Sudanese slavery is complicated, so too is the solution to the present-day problem. The overlapping of identity in Sudan creates no definitive line which can be drawn between where slavery begins and ends. The generational differences between those who are enslaved and their offspring have further complicated the issue. Attempts to assist slaves by providing their freedom have proven to be as difficult as the causes of slavery itself.

Cour Koot was enslaved more than twenty years ago, taken to the North, and escaped after two years.⁷⁵ Upon escaping, Koot continued to work in the North until the opportunity to return to his homeland in the South came in 2005. Being helped by the UN, he requested that his daughter who had been enslaved and made a wife of an Arab man, also be returned to her ancestral home. In the transaction, her daughter Sara Ali was also transported to the

⁷⁵ Dixon, *Freedom*, 5.

South. For his part, Koot found that the South to which he so desperately wished to return was not in a position to support an economy, and was in a desolate condition. It was obvious that the decades of neglect and war had taken a large toll on the South and that in order to return slaves to their homeland it must be done in conjunction with economic development.

The story of Koot's family also provides interesting generational reactions to the re-appropriation of slaves to the South. When Koot's daughter, Achol Deng was taken north, she was married to an Arabic man, who always treated her well.⁷⁶ Although she was originally a slave brought to the North, Deng became assimilated to the Islamic culture, and wished to remain with her family. Her daughter, Sara Ali, is also being transported south with her mother and grandfather. At 20 years old, Sara has already developed her identity, and in her eyes she is Arab.⁷⁷ For Sara, the trip south has robbed her of her homeland, separated her from her father, and stripped her of any chance of a future.⁷⁸

The problems regarding the various stages of assimilation which lead to self identity among captives and their offspring has not deterred the attempts to free slaves and return them to the South. According to Jok, "[f]rustrated by the indifference of Western governments and the world community at large, Christian organizations from the Western world started the campaign to raise money for the purpose of freeing abducted and enslaved children."⁷⁹ By 2005, Christian Solidarity International (CSI) had bought and freed an estimated 80,000 slaves.⁸⁰ However, this decision to buy slaves has caused a great deal of controversy. According to Robyn Dixon, "Critics [of CSI] say most of the people they bought freedom for were not abductees and the money was pocketed by unscrupulous middlemen who staged the event."⁸¹ There is also the fear that by buying back slaves, traders will be encouraged to continue raiding.

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Ibid.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Jok, *War and Slavery*, 161.

⁸⁰ Dixon, *Freedom*, 3.

⁸¹ Ibid.

For Sudanese slaves, the answer to the problem is as complicated as the problem itself. As with most problems it is important to identify the root of the problem, a quest that is not easily concluded when dealing with the complications of slavery. Hidden behind the rhetoric of ethnic identity, religious affiliation, political involvement, and historic principles is the individual. The arguments over slavery in Sudan have continued, and individual solutions have been implemented, but both the problem and solution of modern Sudanese slavery is rooted in the self identity of the slave. Without an absolute separation between slavery and freedom, which is lacking in Sudan, the problem must be evaluated on an individual basis. However, it must also be understood, that the problem of slavery in Sudan has existed for centuries and has occurred to the detriment of the South, and any solution to the problem plaguing that country must include the development of the southern economy.

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