


Hasan al-Turabi

Islamist Politics and Democracy in Sudan

W. J. Berridge





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Hasan al-Turabi (1932–2016) was seen as one of the most influential figures in modern Sudanese history and politics. This book, based on extensive research and a thorough analysis of al-Turabi's own writings, provides a comprehensive study of the upbringing, ideas and political career of the Islamist intellectual and political leader. Balancing hostile and favourable accounts of al-Turabi, it challenges assumptions of the 'Marxist' or 'Fascist' dynamics underpinning Islamism, arguing that its colonial and postcolonial origins define the nature of Islamism's message. By encouraging readers to move away from generic models and limited readings of Islamism, W. J. Berridge opens new and vital research for the understanding of Islamic politics across the Middle East and Africa. It makes for an ideal read for both undergraduate and postgraduate students focusing on the modern Sudanese state and those challenging core debates on democracy, the Islamic State and *jihad*.

W. J. BERRIDGE is a lecturer in history at the University of Newcastle. Her research explores the twentieth-century Islamic world, focusing on government and Islamic politics in Sudan. She is the author of *Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan* (2015), which assesses the recent history of civil protest in Sudan.



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W. J. BERRIDGE
Newcastle University



CAMBRIDGE
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University Printing House, Cambridge CB2 8BS, United Kingdom
One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA
477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia
4843/24, 2nd Floor, Ansari Road, Daryaganj, Delhi – 110002, India
79 Anson Road, #06–04/06, Singapore 079906

Cambridge University Press is part of the University of Cambridge.

It furthers the University's mission by disseminating knowledge in the pursuit of education, learning and research at the highest international levels of excellence.

www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781107180994

DOI: 10.1017/9781316848449

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First published 2017

Printed in the United Kingdom by Clays, St Ives plc

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Berridge, W. J., author.

Title: Hasan al-Turabi : Islamist politics and democracy in Sudan / W. J. Berridge.

Description: New York, N.Y. : Cambridge University Press, 2017. | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2017017837 | ISBN 9781107180994 (hardback)

Subjects: LCSH: Turābī, Ḥasan. | Muslim scholars – Sudan. |

Politicians – Sudan. | Islamic fundamentalism – Sudan.

Classification: LCC DT157.65.T87 B47 2017 | DDC 328.624092 [B]–dc23

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2017017837>

ISBN 978-1-107-18099-4 Hardback

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To my family

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Acknowledgements

For assistance with the work that produced this book, I would like to thank particularly the following: Kamal Ahmad Yousif, for the research he undertook on my behalf on Sudan and his many thoughtful suggestions, which contributed a great deal to this project; the British Academy, for funding research trips to the United States and the Netherlands, and within the United Kingdom; Paul Jackson and Northampton's Radical Research Group, which partly funded the research in Sudan; Professor Justin Willis, for his many helpful suggestions and comments on proposals relating to this project; my family, for their untiring support, and particularly my father, for his constant willingness to read my drafts; Maria Marsh and the team at Cambridge University Press, for their support during the production of this monograph; the two anonymous reviewers of this monograph, whose suggestions helped me to expand and clarify its arguments; all the staff at the Library of Congress, Institute of International Social History in Amsterdam, Palace Green Library at Durham and the National Archives in London; Karen Lewis and the Research Bidding Support team at the University of Northampton, for advice on the project; and others such as Hank Cohen, Scott Freeman, Magdi Gizouli, Nicki Kindersley, Cherry Leonardi, Larry Pope, Doug Rae and Cathy Smith, for help in a variety of ways.

A Note on Transliteration and Terminology

In general, I have attempted to pursue a transliteration style consistent with that advocated by the *International Journal of Middle East Studies*, while avoiding usage of long signs and diacritics except an inverted comma to represent the ‘*ayn*. Nevertheless, I have often rendered proper names using the more common spellings which feature in the literature on Sudan, for example, Abboud rather than Abbud. I have occasionally rendered *alif* as a double a (aa) where it is necessary to clarify the meaning, for example, when rendering a form-III verb or *masdar*, such as *muwaala* and *qaaraba*.

Except where otherwise noted in the bibliography, all translations of Arabic language works in this text are my own. Because of the difficulty of translating certain concepts, some of my transliterated words are often followed by the Arabic original in brackets, for example, ‘oath of allegiance (*ba’ya*)’.

All Quranic translations in this text are taken from Abdullah Yusuf Ali, *The Holy Qur’an: Original Arabic Text with English Language Translation & Selected Commentaries* (Kuala Lumpur: Saba Islamic Media, 2000).

Analysts of Sudanese politics often differ over whether to call the Islamist group that al-Turabi led the ‘Islamic Movement’ (*al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*) or ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ (*al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun*). While the Sudanese Islamists chose the name ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ in 1954, al-Turabi increasingly began to distance himself from this and use ‘Islamic Movement’, which became the predominant term used to describe his own Islamist grouping after a group of anti-Turabists entered the National Alliance as the ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ in 1985. Many Islamist scholars will use the terms ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ and ‘Islamic Movement’ interchangeably for the period before 1985.

Scholars are also divided over the contexts in which they should refer to the ‘mother’ movement or the various political parties associated with it, such as the student-led Islamic Liberation Movement, or the

Islamic Charter Front (ICF) and National Islamic Front (NIF) of the second and third parliamentary eras, respectively (1964–1969 and 1985–1989). While some commentators accept that the ICF and NIF were dissolved following the respective coups of 1969 and 1989, others continued to use the terms when discussing Islamist activities under the second and third military dictatorships, arguing that the Islamists acted *de facto* as a political party in spite of their official claims to have integrated themselves into a one party or ‘no party’ system.

For the sake of consistency, this monograph will (following Hasan Makki) use the term ‘Muslim Brotherhood’ up until 1969 and ‘Islamic Movement’ for the post-1969 era, and use the terms ‘ICF’ and ‘NIF’ with reference to the second and third parliamentary eras only.

Glossary of Key Arabic Words

<i>abkar</i>	eldest generation of Muslims in the seventh century
<i>qawmiyya</i>	nationalism
<i>aql</i>	reason
<i>Ansar</i>	originally refers to the supporters of the prophet in Medina; in a Sudanese context, refers to the partisans of the Mahdi and his descendants
<i>asabiyya</i>	tribal solidarity
<i>ba'ya</i>	oath of fealty
<i>baraka</i>	blessing given by a <i>sufi</i> saint
<i>dar al-Islam</i>	land of Islam
<i>da'wa</i>	calling to Islam
<i>dawla</i>	state
<i>dhimmi</i>	religious minorities (usually Jews and Christians) who have 'protected' status in the Islamic community
<i>effendis</i>	originally an Ottoman Turkish term, the recipients of a modern education in Egypt and Sudan. Collective plural – <i>effendiyya</i> .
<i>fard al-ayn</i>	lit. individual duty; refers in Islamic jurisprudence to situations in which <i>jihad</i> is incumbent upon every able-bodied male in the Islamic community
<i>fatwa</i>	a jurisprudential ruling in Islam
<i>fiqh</i>	religious jurisprudence
<i>fiqh al-darura</i>	jurisprudence of necessity
<i>fitna</i>	a state of discord within the Islamic community
<i>fitra</i>	innate character
<i>hadd</i>	a fixed penalty for the punishment of certain sins, including theft, drinking alcohol, adultery and fornication; pl. <i>hudud</i> .
<i>hadith</i>	sayings of the Prophet Muhammad; a source in Islamic law
<i>hakimiyya</i>	'divine sovereignty' in Islamist parlance

<i>haram</i>	forbidden
<i>hizb</i>	a political party – also connotes factionalism in early Islam; pl. <i>ahzab</i> .
<i>hurriyya</i>	freedom
<i>ibtıla’</i>	a tribulation, trial or test facing the Muslim community; pl. <i>ibtıla’at</i>
<i>ijma</i>	consensus; refers to the practice of basing jurisprudence on the agreement of a number of scholars
<i>ijtihad</i>	effort of an Islamic scholar/jurisprudent to provide another interpretation of the classical religious sources
<i>ilm</i>	knowledge
<i>iman</i>	faith
<i>intifada</i>	uprisings
<i>islahi</i>	one who reforms Islam
<i>istifta</i>	referendum
<i>al-jahiliyya</i>	the age of ignorance before the dawn of Islam in the seventh century; used by twentieth century Islamists to characterize contemporary Muslim society
<i>jihad</i>	religious struggle
<i>khilafa</i>	man’s vice-regency on earth
<i>kufr</i>	unbelief
<i>ma’dhun</i>	licensed official who officiates at Muslim weddings
<i>maslaha</i>	public interest
<i>al-milla</i>	community
<i>muhafazat</i>	districts
<i>muhafiz</i>	district/provincial governor
<i>muhajirin</i>	those who fled from Mecca to Medina with the Prophet
<i>mujaddid</i>	renewer
<i>mujahidin</i>	those who perform <i>jihad</i>
<i>mujtahid</i>	a religious scholar who performs <i>ijtihad</i>
<i>muwaala</i>	allegiance
<i>naskh</i>	the jurisprudential practice of abrogating an earlier Quranic verse by use of another revealed at a later time
<i>qiyas</i>	use of analogy in Islamic jurisprudence
<i>Salafi</i>	one who follows the <i>salaf</i> , or pious ancestors; in different contexts, connotes those who pursue either

	a ‘modernist’ or ‘purist’ interpretation of early scripture
<i>Shaikh</i>	term of veneration for an elderly Muslim, including both religious scholars and notables
<i>sharia</i>	Islamic law
<i>shirk</i>	attributing divine features to human beings, polytheism; sometimes rendered by al-Turabi as <i>ishrak</i>
<i>shumuliyya</i>	totalitarianism
<i>shura</i>	the practice of consultation in early Islam
<i>Sufi</i>	a follower of Sufism, a form of Islamic mysticism
<i>sunna</i>	the practice of the Prophet; used as a source of Islamic jurisprudence
<i>ta’azir</i>	discretionary punishments
<i>tafsir</i>	Quranic exegesis
<i>tajdid</i>	renewal
<i>takfir</i>	denunciation of another Muslim as an unbeliever
<i>tali’a</i>	vanguard
<i>taqlid</i>	lit. tradition; the practice of Islamic scholars relying on the judgements of previous scholars
<i>taqiyya</i>	dissimulation to hide one’s true religious beliefs
<i>tariqa</i>	a <i>Sufi</i> order;
<i>tathir</i>	purging, cleansing
<i>tawba</i>	repentance
<i>tawali</i>	connotes ‘mutual allegiance’ in political life – an innovation by al-Turabi
<i>tawhid</i>	divine unity
<i>ulama</i>	religious scholars; sing. <i>alim</i>
<i>umma</i>	the Islamic community
<i>usul</i>	fundamentals
<i>wahdaniyya</i>	al-Turabi’s term for creating a social order that puts the principles of divine unity into practice
<i>wali</i>	state governor
<i>wilaya</i>	(regional) state. Pl <i>wilayat</i>
<i>zina</i>	illicit sexual intercourse
<i>zindiq</i>	free-thinker

Abbreviations

AKP	Justice and Development Party [Turkish]
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DUP	Democratic Unionist Party
DRF	Darfur Renaissance Front
EIJ	Eritrean Islamic Jihad
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FIS	Front Islamique du Salut [Algerian]
FOIA	Freedom of Information Act [UK]
ICF	Islamic Charter Front
ILM	Islamic Liberation Movement
JEM	Justice and Equality Movement
KUSU	Khartoum University Student Union
NCF	National Consensus Forces
NCP	National Congress Party
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NIF	National Islamic Front
NUP	National Unionist Party
OAU	Organization of African Unity
OIU	Omdurman Islamic University
PAIC	Popular Arab and Islamic Conference
PCP	Popular Congress Party
PDF	Popular Defence Forces
PDP	People's Democratic Party
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organization
RCC	Revolutionary Command Council for National Salvation
RGG	<i>Report by the Governor General on the Finances, Administration and Conditions of Sudan</i> (Durham University Special Collections)

SAD	Sudan Archives Durham
SCP	Sudan Communist Party
SPLA/M	Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement
SSU	Sudan Socialist Union
TNA	The National Archives of the UK

Introduction

Conflicting Representations of al-Turabi

Since the rise of Hasan al-Turabi to prominence as the leader of the Islamic revival in Sudan, he has been seen as a saviour and at times a genius by his supporters, but as a hypocrite, a demagogue and even a megalomaniac by his opponents. Among the latter can be found individuals willing to offer a vitriolic opinion of al-Turabi at all points on the global political spectrum, from Western intelligence chiefs to Osama Bin Laden. They have variously described him as a ‘villain’, ‘the Godfather of international terrorism’,¹ ‘a Machiavelli’,² ‘a double-talking chameleon and cold-eyed master of realpolitik’,³ ‘a lying, self-serving windbag’⁴ and ‘wolf in democratic clothing’.⁵

Often, this scorn derives simply from ideological hostility, whether from Western neoconservatives, Middle Eastern or African Marxists, or secular nationalists. However, the various denunciations of al-Turabi are not always simply the product of an ideologically bipolar world; they also reflect the views of Western democrats initially attracted by his self-professed liberalism, members of the Sudanese intelligentsia who felt the same and even Islamists for whom he was an erstwhile ally. Their attitudes evoke a sense of disappointment, even of betrayal. As al-Turabi – who mastered romantic poetry as a schoolboy – probably knew himself, these are lovers’ emotions. Western commentators initially attracted by his apparently progressive and pacific form of Islam seethed when the Sudanese regime in the 1990s began to host militant extremists, including Bin Laden, and turn the civil conflict in southern Sudan into what appeared to be a war of religion. Similarly, many Sudanese outside his

¹ See Miller, ‘Global Islamic Awakening’: 184, for both these quotations.

² Both Sadiq al-Mahdi and Osama Bin Laden have used this term to describe al-Turabi. For the former, see his interview with Judith Miller in January 1992, cited in Miller, ‘Global Islamic Awakening’: 184. For the latter, see Cockett, *Sudan*: 122.

³ Jonathon C. Randal in *Washington Post*, 9 May 1995.

⁴ Scheuer, *Osama Bin Laden*: 102.

⁵ Bona Malwal, cited in *Washington Post*, 7 April 1988.

initial posse of campus Islamists had also been seduced by the democratic and liberal values he espoused in tirades against Sudan's first military regime during the October Revolution of 1964, which saw him raised aloft in the streets by admiring crowds. These same individuals were mortified when al-Turabi subsequently betrayed his own democratic pronouncements by allying with two military dictators – Jafa'ar Nimeiri between 1977 and 1985, and Umar al-Bashir between 1989 and 1999 – on the pretext that the ends justified the means in establishing what was to become an increasingly brutal Islamist state.

Nevertheless, there are still many both inside and outside Sudan who find al-Turabi appealing as a political theorist. Liv Tønnesson believes that his theories constitute a valid blueprint for a future Islamist democracy, albeit one that would function better within a predominantly Muslim country, as opposed to a multi-religious society like Sudan.⁶ For his part, John Voll has argued that 'the continuing civil war has made it difficult to judge the political system created by al-Turabi', rather than attributing the perpetuation of the civil war to his ideology as do many others.⁷ Meanwhile, Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim has lamented the tendency of Islamic modernist and Western critics to 'indulge in a ritual of al-Turabi bashing', and pleaded that both academic and non-academic communities should make a greater effort to engage with the ideas of a man he considers to have found original answers to the dilemmas of twentieth and twenty-first centuries Muslims faced with the challenges of modernity.⁸ Since consensus (*ijma*) was one of the key concepts articulated by al-Turabi, it is ironic that he has not been the subject of much academic consensus himself.

One factor underlying this lack of consensus is al-Turabi's complexity. As Muhammad Khair Awadallah has observed, to judge Hasan al-Turabi one has to assess three political personalities: al-Turabi the organization leader, al-Turabi the intellectual and al-Turabi the statesman.⁹ It is possible to reach a far more critical set of conclusions when judging one 'personality' than when judging another, as Awadallah himself does, expressing a preference for al-Turabi the intellectual. Indeed, it is striking not only that particular analysts choose to focus on either 'al-Turabi the

⁶ Tønnesson, *Hasan al-Turabi's Search*: 14.

⁷ Voll & Esposito, 'Hasan al-Turabi: the Mahdi-Lawyer': 149.

⁸ Ibrahim, *Manichaean Delirium*: 365.

⁹ Muhammad Khair Awadallah, 'Shaksiyyat al-Turabi al-thalata', *al-Sahafa*, 27 July 2005.

statesman’, or ‘al-Turabi the intellectual’, but also that this usually defines the tone of their approach. Critical writings – such as those produced by Gallab, De Waal and Abdel Salam or Burr and Collins – tend to focus on ‘al-Turabi the statesman’ and to some extent ‘al-Turabi the organization leader’, rather than ‘al-Turabi the intellectual’, engaging only occasionally with his voluminous Arabic language writings.¹⁰ Meanwhile, the less hostile analyses, such as those of Ibrahim and Voll, tend to focus primarily on these same writings and comparatively less on al-Turabi’s much maligned efforts to apply his model of the Islamic State on the ground in the 1990s.¹¹

Islamism, Tradition and Modernity

Although most aspects of al-Turabi’s political and intellectual personality are still open to debate, he is without doubt no simple ‘traditionalist’. It is true that a number of scholars have used his descent from a prestigious line of Sufis, saints and scholars to label him a ‘bearer of tradition’, but most recent writing on Islamism in Sudan, whether sympathetic or hostile to al-Turabi, has demonstrated that this is far from the end of his story. Gallab, Voll and Ibrahim have all shown that both he and his movement are products of the modern world and not simply manifestations of an atavistic backlash; and that they are more than adept at using modern technology and political techniques to achieve their goals.¹² Just as the wider literature on Islamism overwhelmingly accepts that the leader of the Iranian Islamic Revolution, Ruhollah Khomeini, and the Pakistani theoretician of the Islamic State, Abu’l-‘Ala Mawdudi, have produced inherently modern political ideologies in spite of having been trained as religious scholars,¹³ it is now well established that al-Turabi’s own descent from a line of religious scholars has not set him apart from modernity.

There remains, however, some debate about the form of modernity represented by twentieth and twenty-first centuries Islamists like al-Turabi. Many Western commentators think that Islamist modernity

¹⁰ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*; Gallab, *Second Islamic Republic*; Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*; De Waal and Abdel Salaam, ‘Islamism’.

¹¹ Ibrahim, ‘Theology of Modernity’ and Voll and Esposito, ‘Hasan al-Turabi: the Mahdi Lawyer’.

¹² See Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*. Ibrahim, ‘Theology of Modernity’.

¹³ Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*. Abrahamian, *Khomeinism*. Nasr, *Mawdudi*. Hartung, *A System of Life*.

does not, sadly, represent the liberal, democratic, capitalist and multi-cultural form of modernity increasingly prevalent in America, Europe and elsewhere; but rather the modernity manufactured by the twentieth century totalitarian movements that have posed such a threat to the Western world order – specifically, Communism and fascism. Olivier Roy highlights the origins of Islamist movements within the modern educational system of the various colonial, semi-colonial and postcolonial countries of the twentieth century Islamic world, imputing their intellectual indebtedness to the Marxists with whom they shared university campuses.¹⁴ Al-Turabi himself has been alternately labelled either a fascist or a communist by his political critics. De Waal and Abdel Salam describe him as an ‘Islamist Lenin’,¹⁵ while his old adversary Mahmud Muhammad Taha depicted him as a ‘pupil’ of Mussolini,¹⁶ and protestors attending his controversial 1992 lecture at the Royal Society of Arts barracked him by shouting ‘fascist’.¹⁷

Meanwhile, al-Turabi’s champions have been eager to demonstrate that he is more than a mere copycat, borrowing from Western ideologies. For Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, al-Turabi was distinct from other educated Sudanese in that he did not see modernity as something to mimic, but rather as an *ibtala’* – a term that might translate as tribulation, or perhaps trial or test.¹⁸ This *ibtala’*, for al-Turabi, can be overcome through the practice of *tajdid* (renewal) and *ijtihad* (an independent approach to jurisprudence). Al-Turabi, like Mawdudi, one might contend, is reinterpreting Islam via Brown’s ‘prism of modernity’,¹⁹ but this does not necessarily mean that he mimics the Western form of modernity. As will be seen later, his education from an early age gave him ideas born of a creative fusion of ‘Islamic’ and ‘Western’ systems of knowledge – which themselves, as should be acknowledged more often than it is – share common roots in the religions and philosophies of the Ancient World. It will be seen here that Islamism should not simply be judged according to its capacity to assimilate the liberal capitalist modernity of the Western democracies, or the ‘totalitarian’ modernity of the Soviet or Nazi regimes. Rather, it needs to be understood as the product of a specifically colonial and postcolonial form of modernity.

¹⁴ Roy, *Failure of Political Islam*: 60.

¹⁵ De Waal and Abdel Salam, ‘Islamism’: 83.

¹⁶ Taha, *Za’im*.

¹⁷ De Waal and Abdel Salam, ‘Islamism’: 72.

¹⁸ Ibrahim, *Manichaeism Delirium*: 334–345.

¹⁹ Brown, *Rethinking Tradition*: 3.

Postcolonialism, Manichaeism and Hybridity

Should Hasan al-Turabi be regarded as a 'postcolonial' thinker? If we understand 'postcolonial' in a literal sense, there would seem to be no other answer than 'yes': he grew up in a colony, was educated in colonial institutions and devoted his post-independence political career to the resistance of Western colonialism in its historic and contemporary forms. In these respects his life experience is comparable to that of other Islamist ideologues, among them Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt; the Brotherhood's most radical ideologue Sayyid Qutb; and Mawdudi. Yet, the founders of the intellectual school of postcolonialism often eschew engagement with Islamists as 'postcolonial' thinkers. Edward Said reacted angrily when accused of supporting 'Islamic fundamentalism', maintaining that fundamentalist thought was just as narrow-minded and ahistoric as the Orientalist world view he had denounced. Most of the theorists of postcolonialism are ideologically left-wing and secular and thus wary of engaging with the world views of religious thinkers, even figures such as Gandhi.²⁰ In spite of Ibrahim Abu Rabi's contention that the psychological reaction to colonialism 'is as strong a component ... in modern societies as the Quranic impact on the Arab mind',²¹ the majority of the writings on Islamists such as al-Banna, Mawdudi and Qutb do not engage with postcolonial theory.²² An exception within Sudanese scholarship is Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, who is willing to understand al-Turabi's ideas in the light of postcolonial theory, arguing that his network of concepts offered the Muslim community an escape from the 'Manichaeian delirium' brought about by the onset of colonialism.²³ Given that postcolonialism as a school of thought seeks to champion ideas which undermine narrow and binary views of the world, it is certainly questionable whether we should view a man who helped to empower a brutal and authoritarian regime as a 'post-colonial' intellectual. Nevertheless, we cannot escape the fact that a number of the concepts developed and explored by colonial theorists are relevant to an analysis of al-Turabi, who – like a number of 'post-colonial' intellectuals – grew up under colonialism and then travelled to Western universities to study. Moreover, one of the flaws of current

²⁰ Young, *Postcolonialism*: 338. ²¹ Abu-Rabi, *Intellectual Origins*: 51.

²² For an exception, see Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*: 170, 226.

²³ Ibrahim, *Manichaeian Delirium*

writing on Islamism is its tendency to assume that it is a direct offshoot of other twentieth century mass ideologies such as fascism and Communism, without understanding the specifically ‘colonial’ nature of the context in which it emerged and the grievances with which it is obsessed.

Ibrahim’s argument that Islamist ideology is a response to the Manichaeic divide between the colonizers and the Muslim ‘other’ has significant explanatory potential, particularly when we seek to understand why Islamists themselves have been so obsessed with binaries. Nevertheless, in light of al-Turabi’s education at the Sorbonne, there are limitations to his argument that he responds to this Manichaeic colonial modernity purely from an Islamic perspective. This study contends that al-Turabi was akin to one of the postcolonial theorist Homi Bhabha’s anti-colonial ‘mimics’, adapting to colonial values so as to subvert colonialism itself. In his wider research on the decolonization of the Sudan judiciary (in which his chapter on al-Turabi growing up in the Manichaeic world of a Qadi’s home features), Ibrahim contends that Bhabha’s concept of hybridity is difficult to apply in the Sudanese case, citing criticisms of the theory and its presumed tendency towards ‘dissolving the politics of resistance’ by undermining the notion of a firm divide between colonizer and colonized.²⁴ Indeed, Ibrahim maintains that such hybridity as did exist in colonial and counter-colonial scenarios was the product of hierarchical colonial power relationships, and not a result of conscious agency on the part of the colonized.²⁵ However, he does not apply his dialectical analysis of the ‘hybridity vs Manichaeism’ debate to his specific material on al-Turabi, and one wonders whether the future Islamist leader’s decision to seek an education in Paris – and to send members of his own movement to pursue postgraduate education in the West in later years – can really be construed as the product of colonial power inequalities. After all, al-Turabi claimed to have fought his British superiors at the University of Khartoum to get permission to travel to the Sorbonne.²⁶

As Euben has demonstrated, it is possible to apply Bhabha’s model of postcolonial ambivalence to Islamist intellectuals. While the hegemony of Western post-Enlightenment rationalist thought in the Muslim

²⁴ Ibrahim, *Manichaeic Delirium*: 19–21.

²⁵ Ibrahim, *Manichaeic Delirium*: 20–21. ²⁶ See Chapter 1.

world was constituted by a colonial power relationship, there was sufficient uncertainty about the connection between rational epistemologies and faith on both sides of the colonial divide for this ambivalence to be shared. Thus 'the universalization of particular Western categories and experiences interacts with, and is transformed by, those of cultural others, engendering meanings and concerns that are syncretic, indeterminate and relational'.²⁷ Perhaps the term 'mimicry' is unsuitable, implying as it does a certain superficiality; the term 'hybridity' has also been criticized for conflating cultural processes with biological ones.²⁸ Al-Turabi engaged with Western political theories in more than a superficial way. As will be illustrated later, he consciously sought to utilize the very same values and political practices of the Europeans who had colonized his world, utilizing them in his struggle against Western interventionism in the Islamic world as well as in developing an ideology to suit his own domestic political agendas. Indeed, it was one of his many ironies that he reproduced colonial modes of thought in attempting to battle them. It is for this reason that this study, while emphasizing the salience of postcolonial theory as a means of analysing Islamism, is wary of identifying al-Turabi as a 'postcolonial thinker' except in the most literal sense. His Islamism reproduced many of the binary and elitist world view of colonialism itself.

Islamism and the Charge of Inconsistency

In drawing on multiple cultural and intellectual traditions, Islamists are often accused of inconsistency. Critics usually attribute this either to erratic thinking and cultural confusion, or to outright duplicity. For instance, Elie Kedourie accuses the nineteenth century political activist and proto-Islamist, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, of intellectual and political hypocrisy, claiming that he presented a secular face to the West and religiously orthodox one to the East. Thus, he highlights al-Afghani's famous debate with the French philosopher Ernest Renan, in which he dismissed Renan's argument that Muslim society was incapable of adapting to modern rational ideas by citing the proud philosophical achievements of Muslim society and arguing that philosophy would inevitably overcome the retrogressive forces of religion in the Islamic world, as it had in Europe – and then tried to prevent transcripts of the

²⁷ Euben, 'Counternarrative': 75–76. ²⁸ Justin Willis, 'Hukm': 30.

debate being translated into Arabic and distributed in the Muslim world, where they might have done great damage to his reputation as a Muslim opponent of Western colonialism.²⁹ At the same time, Kedourie argues that private correspondence between Afghani and his mentee, the Egyptian scholar Muhammad Abduh, shows them to have been atheists feigning religiosity in order to defeat religion.³⁰ Whereas Kedourie accuses Afghani and Abduh of conscious duplicity, Roy Jackson's biography of Mawdudi attributes his supposed inconsistency to the intellectual schisms created by his colonial upbringing. For Jackson, 'Mawdudi's writings are very much a product of the whole of his diverse upbringing and his own sense of confused identity'.³¹

It hardly comes as a shock to find that a number of Western and modernist scholars have also accused al-Turabi of hypocrisy, or intellectual inconsistency, or both. Fawaz Gerges, for example, simply dismisses him as a scholar 'not known for his consistency or intellectual integrity',³² and the various critics cited above who maintain that al-Turabi was either a secret communist or secret fascist also fall into the category of those who accuse him of intellectual duplicity. For others, he is a religious ideologue feigning liberalism for the benefit of Western audiences: De Waal and Abdel Salam, for example, argue that he produced more liberal writings in English than in Arabic.³³ Since this criticism is directly comparable to Kedourie's criticism of al-Afghani, it is worth observing Keddie's response to Kedourie's text and remembering that inconsistency as a result of duplicity and inconsistency as a result of intellectual malaise are not one and the same. For Keddie, al-Afghani did have a definite set of aims – to emancipate the Islamic world from European colonialism and to strive for its political unity – and misrepresentation of his beliefs was acceptable in this context.³⁴ One might argue that these have also been the primary goals of al-Turabi, who has made so many efforts to bring together diverse Islamist trends and unite them against what he perceives to be Western Neo-colonialism. Regarding both al-Afghani and al-Turabi, tactical misrepresentation of one's beliefs does not have to imply an underlying lack of intellectual integrity. Nevertheless, even if this is accepted, it still leaves questions. What *are* al-Turabi's real beliefs?

²⁹ Kedourie, *Afghani and 'Abdub*: 43–44.

³⁰ Kedourie, *Afghani and 'Abdub*: 45. ³¹ Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdudi*: 48.

³² Gerges, *Far Enemy*: 235. ³³ De Waal and Abdel-salam, 'Islamism': 83.

³⁴ Keddie, *Islamic Response*: 37.

If ‘al-Turabi the statesmen’ has one consistent set of goals, where does this leave ‘al-Turabi the intellectual’? Al-Turabi was far more of a theoretician than al-Afghani ever was, although he is comparable to Afghani inasmuch as he was active in politics before he began writing on doctrinal and theoretical themes.

Must it be assumed that al-Turabi’s theoretical output is hopelessly compromised by his instrumental use of religion in his political career? Perhaps this is where Chatterjee’s model (originally derived from computer science) of ‘Bazaar’ as opposed to ‘Cathedral’ Islam might be of use. For Chatterjee, ‘Cathedral’ Islam is obsessed with religious authenticity, and assumes that the essential nature of Muslim society derives from dogma and injunctions provided by the Quran. Most Islamists claim that this is the Islam of Hasan al-Turabi and the various thinkers he has emulated, from Ibn Taymiyya to Mawlana Mawdudi. The Bazaar model, meanwhile, represents Islam as a civilization rather than simply a religion. Islam itself is simply what the various societies, cultures and intellectual movements that constitute this civilization make it, through interchange of concepts, beliefs and traditions in Islam’s great ‘bazaar’.³⁵ The irony of the relations between these models, Chatterjee observes, is that every Bazaar tends to ‘behave like a cathedral’.³⁶ Why is this? ‘While there are multiple *signifiers* for Islam’, argues Chatterjee, ‘each sign on its own is claimed to signify the “essence” of Islam as the referent’.³⁷ No one exemplifies this phenomenon more than Hasan al-Turabi. He appears to be the classic ‘cathedral’ Islamist. His writings rarely reference any text other than the Quran, although they do occasionally mention the likes of Mawdudi. Yet, he clearly has been influenced by multiple sources other than the Quran – the Greeks, the Mu’tazilites, the French revolutionary *philosophes*, his Marxist student colleagues, various Islamist scholars such as Abduh, Mawdudi and Qutb, as well as the scholars that influenced them. This also explains, of course, why Islamism itself is such a diffuse phenomenon, as its apparent ideological coherence and inflexibility is often more the product of different Islamists impersonating the same ‘cathedral’.

Is al-Turabi inconsistent, then? Inasmuch as he tries to attribute direct Quranic inspiration to a number of ideas that have come to

³⁵ Chatterjee, ‘*Ali Shari’ati*: 14–16. ³⁶ Chatterjee, ‘*Ali Shari’ati*: 16.

³⁷ Chatterjee, ‘*Ali Shari’ati*: 16.

him via other sources, yes. However, this does not mean that we must give in to the contention that al-Turabi's thought is essentially contradictory, the product of failed efforts to reconcile mutually incompatible epistemologies. To do so would be to agree that 'Islam' and 'the West' are essentially discrete and mutually irreconcilable categories, and thus fall in with Samuel Huntington's 'Clash of Civilizations' thesis. As will be seen, some of al-Turabi's most authoritarian tendencies are drawn from Western intellectual traditions. It is probable that the fault-line within al-Turabi's 'double discourse' is not the geographical division between East and West, but rather the social division between the educated elite and wider Muslim society. There is a long tradition among Islamic philosophers, from al-Farabi to al-Afghani, of offering a rationalist message to the elite while using religious dogma to communicate with the wider community.³⁸ Al-Turabi himself frequently offered a discourse to educated milieus within Sudan similar to that he preached in the West, while using far more dogmatic and, indeed, demagogic language at public rallies.

Observers of al-Turabi often overstate the *conscious* element of his inconsistency, noting the reputation for deceit he obtained after his efforts to conceal his role in the 1989 coup. As Burgat writes, there is often an assumption that only the 'negative side' of Islamists' 'double-speak' represents their real views.³⁹ Perhaps a more balanced approach would benefit from the insights of psycho-history, which stresses that individuals are 'buffeted by conflicts, ambivalent in their emotions, intent on reducing tensions by defensive stratagems, and for the most part dimly, or perhaps not at all, aware of why they feel and act as they do'.⁴⁰ The emphasis on ambivalence here is particularly salient in al-Turabi's case. Many of his apparent inconsistencies are just as much a product of his own internal intellectual conflicts as they are of a conspiratorial masterplan. In understanding the psychological roots of his inconsistencies, Bhabha's analysis of the 'decentering of the self' experienced by the colonized, which created 'split subjects', is suggestive.⁴¹ Al-Turabi, who experienced both Islamic and Western style educations in a colonial world that discursively constructed Islam and the West as binary opposites, encapsulates this phenomenon. Yet,

³⁸ Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror*: 98. ³⁹ Burgat, *Face to Face*: 5.

⁴⁰ Peter Gay, *Freud for Historians*: 75, cited in Tosh, *Pursuit of History*: 260.

⁴¹ Bhabha and Comaroff, 'Speaking of Postcoloniality': 21.

Bhabha himself admitted that colonial subjecthood was never fully defining;⁴² care must also be taken to locate the origins of al-Turabi's fractured discourse in his Islamic intellectual heritage – particularly the aforementioned philosophical tradition of presenting separate levels of discourse – as well as the immediate political environment in which he was engaged.

Given that so many of the analyses of Islamism by political scientists treat it as if it were assessed at the 'macro-contextual' level and disregard local variants,⁴³ it is particularly important to acknowledge that al-Turabi's inconsistencies might also be understood as a function of the particular dynamics of the Sudanese state. In this context it is worth observing that the Islamist position that the Islamic State is a government of sharia before it is democratic or authoritarian, or socialist or capitalist,⁴⁴ lends the ideology a certain adaptability. One of the peculiarities of the Sudanese state is that it is, in De Waal's words, 'turbulent'. The repeated transitions from democracy to military rule and back again (there have been three separate democratic periods and three periods of military authoritarianism since independence in 1956) and the inability of any of the factions at the centre of the state to dominate even during the lengthier periods of authoritarianism have led the country's rulers to resort to a policy of ideological shape-shifting in order to accommodate a rapidly changing political environment.⁴⁵ Just as Nimeiri as president experimented with alliances with communists, capitalists, southern regionalists and Islamists during his 16-year tenure, al-Turabi's repeated reformulations of his models of jihad, the Islamic State and Islamist democracy represented adjustments to the chronically unstable character of the Sudanese state (see Chapters 6, 7 and 8). Of course, this does not exonerate al-Turabi of the charge that he lacked intellectual integrity. Just as De Waal argues that the violent and unstable character of the Sudanese state ensures that only violent and opportunistic individuals can rise to the top,⁴⁶ it also seems that this only allows intellectual shape-shifters to prosper. However, this does not mean that the 'authoritarian' al-Turabi is any more the 'real' al-Turabi than the 'liberal' one.

⁴² Bhabha and Comaroff, 'Speaking of Postcoloniality': 21.

⁴³ For this observation see Strindberg & Wörn, *Islamism*: 7.

⁴⁴ For a similar claim see, for example, Khatab & Bouma, *Democracy in Islam*: 16.

⁴⁵ De Waal, 'Sudan: The Turbulent State': 4–5.

⁴⁶ De Waal, 'Sudan: The Turbulent State': 14.

This book will contend that al-Turabi's career, exploiting this lack of any fixed Islamist position on matters such as sovereignty and economic ideology, demonstrated just how flexible some Islamists could be in adjusting to their local political context. It is true that a number of the core ideas of 'al-Turabi the intellectual' – such as his rationalist interpretation of *ijtihad* – retained their coherence in spite of his multiple political U-turns. Unsurprisingly, it was the network of concepts most directly related to his opportunistic and shifting political discourse, including his interpretations of *jihad* and *shura*, that was characterized by the greatest dissonance. Al-Turabi's political integrity might, therefore, remain open to question; but, by the same token, so does the argument of those who predict that it is its very fixity that will bring about the demise of Islamist ideology.

Islamism between Reformism and Radicalism

The questions surrounding al-Turabi's purported political and intellectual duplicity are thoroughly interwoven with another major debate that again relates to the internal coherence of 'Islamism' itself – is he a 'reformer' or a 'radical'? Let us first pause and explore these terms. Youssef Choueiri has provided us with the most explicit definitions. For him, 'Islamic Reformism' and 'Islamic Radicalism' are epochal as well as qualitative terms. The 'reformist' phase lasted between the mid-nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, whereas the second began in the mid-twentieth century and has persisted to the present day. Islamic Reformism would 'lead to a fundamental reinterpretation of historical Islamic concepts as well as the appropriation of European intellectual categories'.⁴⁷ Thus, the classic Quranic injunction to *shura*, or consultation, was equated with parliamentary democracy, while *ijtihad*, which Choueiri describes as 'a jurisprudential device used to elucidate obscure injunctions or solve new problems within the strict requirements of the *shari'a*', was reinvented along the lines of the Western principle of freedom of thought.⁴⁸ Reformism is associated with intellectuals like Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh, as well as the reformers of the Ottoman Tanzimat.⁴⁹

⁴⁷ Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*: 38.

⁴⁸ Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*: 38–39.

⁴⁹ Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*: 38.

For Choueiri, Islamic Radicalism, while hardly a retreat into traditionalism, was – on the face of it – defined by a fundamentally more hostile attitude towards epistemologies external to the core religious truths of Islam. Specifically, Islamic Radicalism is a politico-cultural movement that postulates a qualitative contradiction between western civilization and the religion of Islam. Its emphasis on Islam as a comprehensive and transcendental world view excludes the validity of all other systems and values, and dictates an apparent restitution of a normative set of beliefs untainted by historical change.⁵⁰

Two major figures associated with Islamic Radicalism are the Pakistani ideologue Abu'l-Aala al-Mawdudi and the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood's most famous martyr, Sayyid Qutb. Their development of the twin concepts *hakimiyya* (God's sovereignty) and *jahiliyya* (the age of ignorance) was at the heart of Islamic Radicalism. Mawdudi and Qutb transformed the concept of *jahiliyya*, which previously denoted the era before the dawn of Islam in the seventh century, from an epochal to a typological concept.⁵¹ They argued that contemporary Islamic societies, partly as a result of European colonialism, and partly as a result of early divergences from the core Quranic truths, were mired in *jahiliyya* – the condition of being corrupted by the values of the age of pre-seventh century ignorance and shut off from real Islam. This crisis could only be resolved by the establishment of God's sovereignty, or *hakimiyya*, to replace the man-made forms of sovereignty and legislation responsible for creating a *jahiliyya* society. One of the major features of Islamic Radicalism was the ideologization of Islam for political purposes, that is, the use of Islam as a reference point for projects aiming to impose a uniform vision of society.⁵²

Choueiri's categorization implies that there is a direct chronological divide between 'reformism' and 'radicalism', and, since Hasan al-Turabi became politically and intellectually active in the latter half of the twentieth century, we might expect the latter label to be more suitable for him. Indeed, both Gallab and Moussalli seem to agree, focusing heavily on his indebtedness to Mawdudi in particular.⁵³ However, for both el-Affendi and Tønnesson, al-Turabi very much

⁵⁰ Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*: 157.

⁵¹ Hartung, *A System of Life*: 64–65. ⁵² Hartung, *A System of Life*.

⁵³ Gallab, *First Republic*: 100–104. Moussalli, 'Hasan al-Turabi's Islamist Discourse': 55.

develops Abduh and Afghani's 'moderate thinking'⁵⁴ and 'affirmation of the idea of progress'.⁵⁵ Perhaps Choueiri rarely mentions al-Turabi in his analysis because he problematizes the chronologically defined dichotomy between the 'reformist' and 'radical' periods. Understanding al-Turabi's complex role as both a 'radical' and a 'reformist' should thus help us tackle wider debates about Islamism's internal coherence.

Probably the most useful recent definition of Islamism, which makes similar distinctions between 'radical' and 'reformist' trends, is that recently provided by Denouex. Importantly, this makes a tentative distinction between 'Islamists' and 'Radical Islamists' in the late twentieth/early twenty-first century that implicitly acknowledges the continuing relevance of the reformist trend to the former group. Briefly mentioning al-Turabi, he suggests that 'Islamists' emphasize the value of modern technology and education, so that they are 'engaged in a process of intellectual, political and social engineering which, through the familiar language of Islam, aims to legitimize a thorough restructuring of society and polity along lines that have no precedent in history. Under the pretence of reestablishing an old order, what is intended is the making of a new one'.⁵⁶ Again, this definition implies, like the bazaar/cathedral model, that Islamism has considerable scope for ideological diversity – since the identification with the old order is only a pretence, any number of potential new orders might be established. It is certainly questionable whether all of the modern thinkers described as Islamist fit into Denouex's definition – a number of them, such as al-Qaradawi or Fadlallah, have had a much more rigorous and consistent relationship with the Quran and the Sunna.⁵⁷ However, it is certainly an apt description of the praxis of the two Islamists – al-Turabi and his fellow Sorbonne alumnus the Iranian intellectual Ali Shariati – who provided the intellectual inspiration for the establishment of the two major Islamist republics of the late twentieth century. Given its utility for understanding al-Turabi, who – while very capable of drawing on his Islamic heritage – was a great deal more novel than a casual reading would suggest, this is the form of 'Islamism' that will be subjected to analysis throughout this text.

⁵⁴ Tønnesson, *Hasan al-Turabi's Search*: 2.

⁵⁵ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*: 179.

⁵⁶ Denouex, 'The forgotten swamp': 61–62.

⁵⁷ Baroudi, 'Islamist Perspectives on International Relations'.

For Denouex, ‘radical’ Islamists ‘through extreme methods, strive to achieve drastic socio-political changes based on a revolutionary interpretation of Islamic doctrine that claims to go back to the fundamental message of the faith’.⁵⁸ Unlike ‘moderate’ Islamists, radicals reject democracy and favour revolutionary action over a gradualist approach.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, as Denouex also observes, the distinction is problematic in that many Islamist movements and individuals have adopted both ‘radical’ and ‘moderate’ programmes during different phases of their political lives.⁶⁰ As will be seen, no-one is more representative of this phenomenon than al-Turabi.

Al-Turabi’s relationship with the ‘radical’ and ‘reformist/moderate’ trends must be examined through comparative analysis of his ideas and forms of political practice with those of Abduh, al-Afghani, Qutb and Mawdudi, as well as those of the Shia Islamists, Shariati and Khomeini, the former of whom also perhaps fits somewhere between the ‘reformist’ and ‘radical’ labels. The significance of al-Turabi’s separate ‘intellectual’, ‘organization leader’ and ‘statesman’ personas must also be highlighted in this particular context. The contention here will be that while ‘al-Turabi the intellectual’ remained close to ‘reformist’ principles, both the ‘organization leader’ and ‘statesman’ in him felt obliged – in the interests of acquiring influence – to compromise with the ‘radical’ trends motivating Islamists both within Sudan and the wider region. In other words, ‘radical’ principles influenced al-Turabi’s political practice more than they did his theoretical output, although there was also a certain degree of interchange between the ‘intellectual’ and the ‘statesman’ in this regard. Using Denouex’s definition of Islamism, the subsequent account will aim to show that, in al-Turabi’s case, the distinction between its ‘radical’ and ‘moderate forms’ was often blurred and contingent upon political realities. Nevertheless, it will be wary of drawing definitive conclusions about Islamism from al-Turabi’s own inconsistencies – he was, after all, only one merchant in a very large ‘bazaar’.

In this context, it will also be worth assessing his relationship with another of the major strands of religious politics in the Islamic world, Salafism. Contemporary Salafism, which has both jihadist and quietist branches, is more concerned with a literalist application of religious

⁵⁸ Denouex, ‘The forgotten swamp’: 66.

⁵⁹ Denouex, ‘The forgotten swamp’: 69–70.

⁶⁰ Denouex, ‘The forgotten swamp’: 73.

scriptures and the private moral behaviour of the individual than it is with modernization.⁶¹ Al-Turabi's understanding of Salafism or *Salafiyya*, as we shall see, was more akin to the fluid and modernist conceptualization of the term employed by late reformists and Orientalist commentators in the first half of the twentieth century,⁶² but his trademark flexibility led him to negotiate both ideologically and politically with the more rigid Salafis of his own era, with significant consequences for both the integrity of his Islamism and the long term evolution of the Islamist regime in Sudan (see Chapter 5).

The One-Man Show?

Naturally, the debate surrounding the sources of Islamist political theory and political practice has influenced arguments around authority and legitimacy in Islamist movements. One group of scholars – utilizing the classic Weberian taxonomy – tends to emphasize the 'charismatic' legitimacy of Islamist leaders, effectively labelling men such as Hasan al-Banna, Fadlallah or Khomeini as demagogues to illustrate their argument that Islamism will never be able to foster the legal-rational forms of authority upon which Western democracy is based.⁶³ For them, these charismatic Islamists dominated their movements via recognition of status more than consent, to the extent that as individuals they held their movements together through sheer force of personality. For a number of critics of Sudanese Islamism, al-Turabi, particularly during his period 'in power' in the 1990s, exemplified this phenomenon. For De Waal and Abdel Salam, 'authority in the [Islamic] movement has stemmed from the personal charisma of the leader himself'. They describe him as the 'controlling influence' behind the country's military rulers, 'ruling from his house', in a highly personalistic manner.⁶⁴ Gallab even suggests that al-Turabi's disciples created a personality cult around him, extolling him as the 'magnificent leader'.⁶⁵

Other research has criticized the tendency to attribute too much importance to particular leaders. For instance, Brynjar Lia, in his

⁶¹ Denouex, 'The forgotten swamp': 62.

⁶² For the origins of the term, see Lauzière, 'The Construction of Salafiyya'.

⁶³ Appleby, *Spokesmen for the Despised*: 8. Mitchell, *Society of the Muslim Brothers*: 294–300.

⁶⁴ De Waal and Abdel Salam, 'Islamism': 84.

⁶⁵ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 112.

seminal revision of the history of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, criticized Richard Mitchell's over-emphasis on the personality of Hasan al-Banna, arguing that the expansion of local branches of the Brotherhood was dependent on local initiative more than direct action by al-Banna.⁶⁶ As will be seen in later chapters, this argument is certainly transferable to the Sudanese context, where various Islamist parties inspired by the Egyptian Brotherhood emerged nearly 20 years before al-Turabi became the official leader of any of them. Given that so many have imputed a direct ideological link between Islamism and Communism, developments in the field of Communism studies are also relevant here. A number of factors, including the end of the Cold War, the opening of the Soviet archives and the emergence of post-modernist theory, have all led to a more nuanced interpretation of Soviet leadership and particularly that of Stalin. Rather than attributing every aspect of political and social change to Stalin's centralizing and personalistic tendencies, Soviet historians have begun to focus on various 'local functionaries' and 'social groups' as 'actors in their own right'.⁶⁷ This is not to say, of course, that the Soviets were democrats after all; rather, that even in non-democratic political systems we can locate agency at all levels of the system. Overstating the agency of individual charismatic leaders can limit one's perspective. History as a field has become wary of over-stressing individual agency, as the 'historian who maintains an exclusive focus on the thoughts and actions of individuals . . . is likely to find no shape and to see instead only a chaotic sequence of accident and blunder'.⁶⁸ A number of commentators on Sudan have fallen into this trap, focusing narrowly on al-Turabi's agency and describing his political shape-shifting as 'bizarre'.⁶⁹

Interestingly, the one Sudan scholar most outspoken in criticizing the claim that Hasan al-Turabi's government in Sudan was a 'one-man show'⁷⁰ was Hasan al-Turabi himself! He often tried to understate his own role within the Islamist resurgence, emphasizing instead its supposedly egalitarian and spontaneous character.⁷¹ Naturally, he had motives for wishing to downplay his own significance to the Islamic Movement at various phases. From 1989 to 1999, he feared that the more obvious his role in the government became, the more Western

⁶⁶ Lia, *Society*: 282. ⁶⁷ McDermott, 'Stalin and Stalinism': 72–89.

⁶⁸ Tosh, *Pursuit of History*: 161. ⁶⁹ Collins, *History of Modern Sudan*: 227.

⁷⁰ Salih, *Al-Haraka*: 200. ⁷¹ Hamdi, *Making*: 62.

security agencies would try to overthrow it. Meanwhile, after the splits within the Islamic Movement in 1999 led to much candid discussion about the various brutalities and political inadequacies of the al-Bashir government, he was quick to distance himself from the regime for which many felt he was most responsible.⁷² At the same time, various commentators on Sudan have had a tendency to see al-Turabi as the personification of all the forms of extremism, totalitarianism and ideological fundamentalism that have appeared in Sudan, and to assume that his disappearance from the government in 1999 would guarantee the disappearance of these negative features as well.⁷³ Many have observed that his departure from the government deprived the movement of its only real ideologue, but there are broader transnational and historical influences on Sudanese Islamism that need to be considered. Historically, the Sudanese Islamic Movement has been influenced by a whole range of ideologues. These include Sudanese thinkers such as Babikir Karrar and Abdullah Zakariyya, as well as the famous Islamist ideologues outside Sudan, such as al-Banna, Mawdudi and Qutb.

One of the central contentions of this book will be that what has often been understood as al-Turabi's intrinsic inconsistency was more the product of his efforts to negotiate with these countervailing ideological trends within his own movement. It will be seen that his power stemmed not merely from his charisma so much as his ability to mediate between competing ideological, religious and social groups and adjust to the shifting contexts identified above. It will thus be wary of sources that appear to use 'al-Turabi' as a metonym for the Islamic Movement, NIF/NCP or Sudanese government, and will only attribute to al-Turabi himself those actions which can definitely be traced back to his personal instigation.

Centre and Periphery

Since the outbreak of the second Sudanese Civil War and subsequent extension of armed insurgency to northern regions such as Darfur, Blue Nile, the Nuba Mountains and eastern Sudan, the notion of a political divide between the 'centre' and the 'peripheries' of Sudan has gained currency in Anglophone writing on Sudan. The extension of the

⁷² See, for instance, his passage on the 1990s in *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 328–330.

⁷³ Cockett, *Sudan*: 136.

rebellion to regions of the north distant from the riverain centre has prompted questioning of the belief that the principal dynamic of conflict in Sudan was between an 'Arab Muslim' north and an 'African Christian' south, the two of them fighting for either regional autonomy or secession. Instead, scholars identified a central 'Arab riverain Muslim power bloc'⁷⁴ that exploited Sudan's eastern, western and southern 'peripheries' economically, while imposing its own narrowly defined Arabic and Islamic (or Islamist) identity on these same peripheries. Scholars argued that these economic and political divides often corresponded with the fault-lines between perceived 'Arab' and 'African' identities, although they were careful to observe that 'African' and 'Arab' communities existed less in reality than in the imaginations of the various competing groups.⁷⁵ Meanwhile, it has been stressed that the northern riverain elite sets limits to its own infighting so as to prevent factions on the peripheries from obtaining power.⁷⁶

Within this dynamic, Hasan al-Turabi is often seen as personifying the 'centralizing' tendencies of the state at its core.⁷⁷ He was a graduate of the capital's premier educational institutions, and it is often observed that, together with his various political parties, he attempted to impose an 'Arab-Islamic' identity on the population of the periphery, while ruthlessly exploiting the country's economic margins via the system of Islamic Banking he engineered.⁷⁸ Yet, following his split with Umar al-Bashir in 1999, his opponents were confounded when in 2001 he signed a Memorandum of Understanding with the predominant southern rebel faction, the Sudan People's Liberation Army (SPLA), and rumours started to emerge that his new Popular Congress Party was backing the Darfuri Justice and Equality Movement. How could al-Turabi cross the divide between 'centre' and 'periphery' so easily?

It is better to understand the gap between the centre and the peripheries of Sudanese social and political life less as a divide and more as a spectrum. Al-Turabi was a master of the politics of the centre, but he was also a master of the politics of the 'near periphery'.⁷⁹ The concept

⁷⁴ El-Battahani, 'Ideological expansionist movements': 57.

⁷⁵ See, for example, Idris, *Identity*: 88, 90; Daly, *Darfur's Sorrow*: 265

⁷⁶ De Waal, 'Sudan: The Turbulent State'. ⁷⁷ Johnson, *Root Causes*: 141.

⁷⁸ Johnson, *Root Causes*: 80.

⁷⁹ There are some parallels here with Immanuel Wallerstein's notion of a 'semi-periphery' in the field of not on global political economy. See Wallerstein, 'Semi-Peripheral Countries'.

of the ‘near periphery’ can encompass all manner of social and political phenomena. It might refer to the populations of the rural areas of the north that have not experienced the same Western colonial and post-colonial forms of education as the core riverain elite, and yet are not as geographically and economically ‘marginal’ as Darfurians or the inhabitants of the Nuba Mountains. It might refer to the inhabitants of rural Sudan who have migrated to the capital and thus distanced themselves from their rural identities without fully adjusting to the secular environment of the city, a category often targeted for recruitment by Islamists.⁸⁰ The category might also include the educated or ‘traditional’ elites within the most ‘peripheral’ regions, such as Darfur or the Nuba Mountains. It might even include the educated leaders of rebel movements, or splinter factions of rebel movements, that the centre believes it can co-opt. Al-Turabi, particularly through his policy of *infitah*, or opening the movement to society, often sought to transcend the narrow ideological base of his own political centre. He attempted to appeal to Sufis, rural shaikhs, young migrants from the rural areas, leaders of SPLA breakaway movements such as Riek Machar, and in his later years even rebel leaders such as John Garang and Khalil Ibrahim. For al-Turabi, the ‘near periphery’ had to be integrated to prevent the ‘far periphery’ either becoming too powerful or breaking away. The purpose of this observation is not to apologize for al-Turabi, or deny the divisive and exploitative nature of his mode of politics; rather, its purpose is to steer us away from caricatures that overlook the flexibility that was the source of so much of his political influence.

Sources

Since al-Turabi’s critics have accused him of changing his views to suit the particular political environment he inhabited, or audience he was addressing, the relevant sources available from every context and time period have been analysed. The monograph is heavily based on examination of his writings, including those translated into English, as well as his various media interviews and other utterances. It makes a point of cross-referencing his English language statements with his Arabic language writings so as to penetrate the debate surrounding his

⁸⁰ See, for example, Layish and Warburg, *Reinstatement*: 46.

intellectual consistency, or lack thereof. For the same reason, it also cross-analyses his public English and Arabic interviews. Nevertheless, it is not as easy today for a cultural interlocutor like al-Turabi to present different ‘faces’ to West and East as it was for Jamal al-Din al-Afghani. Operating in a global media village, al-Turabi knew that his interviews with Western journalists were frequently reported in the Arabic language media, and he knew that his Arabic language writings would be scrutinized by Western Arabists. He recognizes this in his 1994 text *al-Hiwar ma’ al-Gharb*, where he observes that ‘the whole world has come to be among us’ and that any speech he addresses to the Muslim world or Muslim diaspora audiences must also be addressed to the West.⁸¹ While it is often possible to identify shifts of emphasis in his discourse addressed to Muslim World/Sudanese and Western audiences respectively, these distinctions are often quite subtle, and at others times he might appear more ‘moderate’ addressing a Muslim World/Sudanese audience than a Western one. Often the changes in his discourse were more a result of shifting political contexts than choice of audience. His numerous media interviews dating back to the 1960s serve as an essential complement to his writings, as they illustrate the contingent nature of the language that he used. While his written works from the 1970s onwards perhaps seem to offer an apparently more total vision of Islam, these are to some extent also defined by the time in which they were written. Texts such as *al-Siyasa wa’l-Hukm* and *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*, which were composed after his 1999 split with Umar al-Bashir and attempt to recast his project of the 1990s as a struggle against riverain hegemony, are indicative of this.

One of the greatest challenges in studying al-Turabi is the fact that the Islamist leader clearly considered an economical approach to the truth sanctioned by the ‘jurisprudence of necessity’ (*fiqh al-darura*). This is particularly problematic since we often find ourselves reliant on al-Turabi’s own account, especially for information regarding his upbringing, education and early political career. While, like most Islamists, he produced no autobiography, he provided extensive details on his life and political career to interviewers such as Ghassan Sharbal, Makashi Kobayashi and Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim. Al-Turabi’s reputation for duplicity should not automatically invalidate material from his interviews. Indeed, after the 1999 split with Umar al-Bashir, he

⁸¹ Al-Turabi, *Hiwar ma’ al-Gharb*: 5.

acknowledged (he probably had no other choice) that he had been dishonest throughout the 1990s in denying any involvement with the regime or the military coup that installed it. However, the fact that he chose to deceive his opponents to guarantee the survival of his nascent Islamic project does not necessarily mean that he fabricated every detail of his life and career. Nevertheless, as will be seen from Chapter 1 onwards, even regarding his early life there are a number of places in which his narrative contrasts with that offered by his acquaintances and critics. Thus, the author has to juxtapose his account wherever possible with those of former schoolmates, political allies and opponents from within the Islamist movement and without, and the numerous Western commentators who had observed al-Turabi's career. Where it is impossible either to corroborate or comprehensively refute his account, the monograph attempts to reflect on *why* al-Turabi chose to view his life and career in this particular way.

This work attempts to balance Islamist and non-Islamist accounts of its subject. Islamist writers find it just as difficult to reach a consensus on al-Turabi as non-Islamists. The variety of Islamist views on al-Turabi is chiefly explained by the semi-liberalization of the government media in the late 1990s and the public split that occurred soon afterwards between the Field Marshall and the *Shaikh* of the Islamic Movement, as al-Turabi had long been known by his more enthusiastic supporters.⁸² With the sundering of the Islamic Movement, three prominent 'groups' of commentators emerged. First, there were the Islamists who aligned themselves with al-Bashir and criticized the *Shaikh*, while shying away from dismantling his legacy entirely. Second, there were Islamists aligned with al-Turabi's Popular Congress Party (PCP) whose accounts sought to vindicate al-Turabi and attempted to understand his political history in the context of his role as a 'champion of the marginalized' after 1999; Mahbub Abd al-Salam's *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya* is a prominent example of such a text. Finally, there are the Islamists who eschewed involvement in the fratricidal PCP–NCP conflict and whose autopsies of the Islamist Civilizational Project are more detached from the political agendas of the present. These include elders of the Islamic Movement, such as Tayyib Zain al-Abdin and Abdel Wahhab el-Affendi, who can afford to remain aloof, but one prominent voice in the younger generation is Abd al-Rahim Muhieddin. His *al-Turabi*

⁸² Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 132.

wa'l-Inqadh: Sira' al-Huwiyya wa'l-Hawa has been used frequently in this text, which will attempt to triangulate the narratives produced by these three categories of 'Islamist' to the greatest degree possible.

While one must be aware of the inherent bias of Islamist accounts, it is impossible to escape reliance on such texts in the chapters that assess the internal dynamics of the Islamist governance, particularly Chapter 3 and related sections of Chapters 6, 7 and 8, all of which discuss the period in which the Islamist regime was at its most secretive, between 1989 and around 1996. Opposition accounts of the inner workings of the regime in this period are too often based on hearsay, and the factionalization of the Islamist media after 1999 does at least offer the analyst the opportunity to cross-analyse separate accounts. Another problem with both opposition media organs, such as *Sudan Democratic Gazette*, and the various accounts of the regime's activities provided by international human rights groups such as *Human Rights Watch* and *Amnesty International* is that perhaps inevitably they focus on the regime's iron fist rather than its velvet glove, detailing illegal arrests, torture and ethnic cleansing in regions such as the Nuba Mountains. Reading such accounts inevitably leads one to perceive a regime built on coercion alone that has created a state of 'dominance without hegemony'.⁸³ While this text by no means intends to challenge the veracity of the accounts of the regime's abuses provided by international human rights groups, we need to acknowledge that part of the reason al-Turabi's mode of Islamism has managed to remain influential in Sudan is that, as observed above, it has attempted to transcend its narrow ideological base and manufacture consent.

While the main newspapers of the 1989–1996 period, such as *al-Sudan al-Hadith* and *al-Inqadh al-Watani*, were propaganda organs for the regime, they do at least enable us to measure its efforts to achieve al-Turabi's vision of the 'melting' of the Islamic Movement into society. Studying the regime's own media also allows this monograph to criticize al-Turabi's discourse first hand, rather than rely on the unattributed claims about his speeches that appear in *Sudan Democratic Gazette*.⁸⁴ Nevertheless, the Arabic language media outlets of the expatriate opposition, including organs such as *al-Khartoum* and *al-Ra'y al-Akbar*, have

⁸³ Guha, *Dominance Without Hegemony*.

⁸⁴ See, for example, the claims about al-Turabi's jihadi language that appear in the March 1996 edition.

remained a vital source.⁸⁵ The former organ has proved particularly useful for understanding the 1996–1999 period, when its writers were able to reflect on the output of the semi-liberalized media in the Sudanese capital and some of the crucial events within al-Turabi's flawed efforts to create an Islamist democracy.

On a final note – while I have attempted to convey as comprehensive an account of al-Turabi's life and career as possible, I felt that it was impossible to fully address his complex attitudes towards the role of women in the Islamic Movement within the confines of a single monograph. I am hoping to write on this subject in the future.

⁸⁵ For a discussion of *al-Khartoum*, see Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 146.

1 *Early Life and Education, 1932–1964*

Writing on Islamism is often criticized for its ‘high level of abstraction’ and consequent inability to recognize the ‘micro-level idiosyncrasies’ that define the specific experiences of specific movements in specific countries.¹ A study of Hasan al-Turabi’s early life and education and the peculiarities of his relationship with both the British colonial state in Sudan and Sudanese society as a whole is therefore pertinent to an appreciation of how his idiosyncratic brand of Islamism emerged. As this chapter shows, while also benefiting from an extensive indoctrination in Islamic subjects at the hands of his father, al-Turabi acquired his colonial education at a time when ideologies of colonial developmentalism and Anglicization were at their peak in Sudan. Combined with his experience of postgraduate education in London and Paris, this helped to cultivate the almost unparalleled duality of thinking that would prefigure the ideological liminality of his political career. It is also significant that higher education in Sudan benefited a particular elite that hailed from a relatively narrow regional and ethnic base. As much as al-Turabi attempted to present himself as a Gramscian ‘organic intellectual’ with origins outside the colonial elite, his world view was shaped by membership of this elite.

Claims concerning the first 30 years of Hasan al-Turabi’s life are central to efforts by both critics and sympathizers to construct a purposeful image of the Islamist leader. Champions describe his origins outside the *effendiyya* elite, while critics focus on his education as a member of that same body. Sympathizers claim that his travels to Europe and America in his postgraduate years shaped his future as a cultural interlocutor, while opponents condemn him for rejecting his Western education.² Frustratingly, anecdotal and often hostile narratives provided by former schoolmates aside, the vast majority of our first-hand accounts of al-Turabi’s upbringing and intellectual career

¹ Strindberg and Wörn, *Islamism*: 60. ² Ibrahim, *Manichaeism Delirium*: 324.

before the 1964 October Revolution thrust him into the political lime-light come from the Islamist maestro himself. Two of al-Turabi's interviews at the height of his political fame in the 1990s, with Masaki Kobayashi and Ghassan Sharbal, focused extensively on his early career. This phase of his life has been touched on in other interviews, and at the beginning of his political career in the 1960s, his party newspaper *al-Mithaq* produced a number of sympathetic profiles discussing his upbringing and education. These accounts have sought to bolster al-Turabi's charismatic persona, emphasizing his intellectual and sporting prowess and political activism. Nevertheless, at times al-Turabi was willing to reveal details of his early life that might have embarrassed his more conservative supporters.

While the factual verity of accounts of al-Turabi's early life may be difficult to ascertain, they provide some illumination of the role that Islamic, colonial and Western education played in shaping his intellectual and political liminality, which led him to critique both colonial modernity and Sudanese tradition.³ It will be seen here that he used institutions such as Hantoub Secondary School, Gordon College, the University of London and the Sorbonne to carve out what Bhabha would call a 'third space', in which, like Bhabha himself, he appropriated Western modernity in order simultaneously to challenge it and display its hybridity.⁴ This approach was a development of the 'Islamic Reformist' logic of early Islamists such as al-Afghani and Abduh, and the comparability of these thinkers to al-Turabi will be explored later in the chapter. At the same time, it will be seen that his more ambivalent relationship with his own Western intellectual inheritance helps to explain his future flirtations with 'Islamic Radicalism'.

Family Background and Upbringing

Critics have often drawn on al-Turabi's background to label him a 'traditionalist'.⁵ Indeed, one of his many apparently paradoxical features is that a great deal of his initial appeal among Sudan's Islamists was the product of descent from a lineage encompassing famous scholars,

³ For a similar application of Turner's concept of liminality to educated elites in Egypt, see Ryzova, *The Age of the Effendiyya*: 34. See also Turner, *The Ritual Process*.

⁴ For this observation regarding Bhabha, see Ramone, *Postcolonial Theories*: 116.

⁵ Ibrahim, 'Theology of Modernity': 195–196.

Sufis and Mahdis – the same category of religious figures that he would attempt to delegitimize as part of his own efforts to bring about a ‘Theology of Modernity’.⁶ As a result, al-Turabi’s interpretation of his family’s past often contrasts markedly with that put forward by other Sudanese historians. The most notable example of this is his reinterpretation of the history of his most famous ancestor, Hamad al-Nahlan al-Turabi (1639–1704). The *Tabaqat* – a nineteenth-century compendium of saint and Sufi lives – records that Hamad al-Nahlan was an ascetic Sufi who twice declared his Mahdship, once on a pilgrimage to Mecca and once in a message sent to the King of Sennar.⁷ Al-Turabi himself maintains that his ancestor was a scholar who was independent of the Sufi orders and also a political activist imprisoned for fighting against injustices in Mecca.⁸ As Ibrahim observes, this is a classic example of al-Turabi ‘inventing a tradition’ to suit the purposes of the present.⁹ One might contrast this perspective with that of his cousin, Mudawi al-Turabi, a member of the Democratic Unionist Party backed by the Khatmiyya Sufi order with which many of the al-Turabi lineage were affiliated from the early nineteenth century. Mudawi al-Turabi still maintains that his ancestor was genuinely a Mahdi and a member of the Qadiriyya Sufi order whose founder, Abd al-Qadir al-Jilani, Hamad al-Nahlan met on the pilgrimage.¹⁰

Just as al-Turabi sees his seventeenth-century ancestor as a rebel against an oppressive monarchical regime, he spins his more recent family history in order to align himself with the majority of Sudanese marginalized by the British colonizers. It is true that his father, Abdullah al-Turabi, lived only on the margins of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, the colonial state established by Britain in 1898 after ‘reconquering’ the country on behalf of Egypt, which was itself one of her more informal colonies. Abdullah entered the Sudan judiciary in 1925, having been among the first batch of graduates of the Mahad al-Ilmi, established by the British to train sharia judges or Qadis in Omdurman.¹¹ But since the British colonizers had revamped the legal system in Sudan and remodelled the criminal – and most of the civil –

⁶ Ibrahim, ‘Theology of Modernity’: 196.

⁷ Ibrahim, *Manichaeae Delirium*: 329–330.

⁸ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 33–34.

⁹ Ibrahim, *Manichaeae Delirium*: 329–330.

¹⁰ Mudawi al-Turabi, Interview with *al-Sahafa*, 26 December 2004.

¹¹ Ibrahim, *Manichaeae Delirium*: 82–83.

codes on a Western secular model, Qadis were relegated to the humiliating position of ‘women’s judges’, dealing purely with family law.¹² Since his father’s role involved him in everyday Muslim life to a far greater degree than the other bureaucrats, or ‘*effendis*’, trained by the British colonial state, al-Turabi maintains that his family was one of the few that were able to bridge the state-society divide created by colonialism. His father was, in his words, a ‘counter-effendi’.¹³ Even within the contingent of Islamic judges, he was relatively marginal – on his retirement in 1950, he had not risen beyond the position of second-class Qadi, and thus spent his career moving between various small urban centres away from the major colonial towns.¹⁴ However, al-Turabi’s upbringing gave him experience of some of the margins of the colonial state, but not others. Although he would later maintain that his various peregrinations infused him with a ‘national spirit’ and sense of belonging to the whole Sudan,¹⁵ none of the various places he lived in during his childhood were in any of what are now regarded as Sudan’s most ‘marginalized’ zones – Darfur, South Kordofan or the recently seceded region of South Sudan.¹⁶ Both the young al-Turabi and his father, therefore, inhabited what might be called a ‘near periphery’ of Condominium Sudan, living within a northern society alienated by the British administration without witnessing any of the extremes of colonial neglect.

There was a wide gulf between the social attitudes of Abdullah al-Turabi and those of his son. Abdullah had a politically and socially conservative mindset. He scorned *effendis* as *awlad sakit* (irresponsible kids) who had moved away from their religion,¹⁷ and abhorred the rise of socialism in Sudan, in 1964 even naming one of his sons ‘Abd al-Khaliq’ so as to ‘reclaim’ the name from the leader of the Sudan Communist Party (SCP), Abd al-Khaliq Mahjub.¹⁸ Predictably

¹² Ibrahim, *Manichaeae Delirium*: 331–332.

¹³ Ibrahim, *Manichaeae Delirium*: 331–332.

¹⁴ Sudan Government List 15 March 1950, accessed on www.dur.ac.uk/library/asc/sudan/staff_lists/.

¹⁵ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ahmad al-Mansur (Part 1), *Al-Jazeera Arabic*, April 2016.

¹⁶ For a map of the various places al-Turabi inhabited during his childhood, see Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 31.

¹⁷ Ibrahim, *Manichaeae Delirium*: 331.

¹⁸ Al-Turabi, Interview with *Africa al-Youm*, 16 April 2013, www.africaalyom.com/web/Details/6176-2/.

suspicious of some of his son's more liberal attitudes, in the early 1970s, responding to a question about his unconventional position on Islamic divorce law, Abdullah reportedly declared that 'My son Hasan, if God extends his life, will cause a great *fitna* [strife] in this country which only God knows the extent of ...'¹⁹ For his part, speaking in 1995, al-Turabi was very critical of his father's decision not to send his daughters to school.²⁰

Abdullah al-Turabi's remarks perhaps reflected his fears that – corrupted by a Western education both in Sudan and abroad – his son had become one of the 'irresponsible kids'. He had in fact tried to mitigate the potential effects of such an education from an early stage in Hasan's life. While he never attended any formal institute of religious learning, his father provided him with a 'home schooling' in the Islamic religious sciences to complement, and perhaps guard against, the secular education he acquired in the schools of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium.²¹ In this regard, al-Turabi is perhaps unique among twentieth-century Islamists, Mawdudi possibly excepted. Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim has shown us how his background enabled al-Turabi to be 'at home in both "tradition" and "modernity", as he understands the terms'.²²

There are a number of other important points to make about the impact of this domestic education on al-Turabi. What is particularly interesting is that the 'classical' schooling his father provided did not focus initially on religious topics, but on linguistics and literature. He told one interviewer that his father taught him 'the furthest degrees of' Arabic grammar (*nahw*), inflection (*sirf*), rhetoric (*balagha*), rhyme (*qawafi*), poetry (*shi'r*), noun and verb formation (*wazn*), and also made him memorize the majority of the *mu'allaqqat* – the oldest collection of Arabic *qasidas*.²³ As an intermediary school student, he absorbed the classic texts of Arabic grammar and linguistics – *al-Alfiyyah*, *Qatru al-Nada* and *al-Ajarumiyya*.²⁴ It was only after this that his studies were directed towards the major schools of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*).²⁵ Al-Turabi claims that by the age of 12 he was

¹⁹ Ibrahim, *Qissat al-Kifah wa'l-Najah*: 214–215.

²⁰ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 37.

²¹ Ibrahim, 'Theology of Modernity': 200.

²² Ibrahim, 'Theology of Modernity': 196.

²³ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

²⁴ *Al-Mithaq*, 'Al-Turabi fi al-Maktab', 28 April 1965.

²⁵ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

able to embarrass his Arabic teacher at school by his superior knowledge of these subjects.²⁶ It was perhaps this early obsession with language that scripted his perception of his own role as an interlocutor as much as a preacher or ideologue, as well as his later emphasis on investigating the original linguistic meanings of political and religious Arabic terms in texts such as *al-Mustalahat al-Siyasiyya fi Islam*. The study of rhetoric in particular would have broadened al-Turabi's horizons, since Arabic rhetorical practice was heavily influenced by Persian and Greek rhetoricians and has helped to preserve the social and political philosophies of the ancient world.²⁷ Furthermore, the fact that he obtained his religious education in a solitary domestic environment rather than a formal institution probably explains his unconventional approach to Islamic jurisprudence.

More suggestive is the fact that al-Turabi often remarked on his desperation to escape his home education and return to the British schools!²⁸ Even allowing for his well-known tendency to indiscretion in interviews, this is a surprising admission by al-Turabi, who is lauded by his many admirers as a master of Islamic learning. It was probably his desire to escape isolation that led him to crave a return to the colonial schools – although it seems that he spent many hours absorbed in solitary self-tuition in the libraries there as well.²⁹ What is clear is that he enthusiastically embraced both curricular and non-curricular activities at Hantoub Secondary School, although – as we shall see – there is debate over which specific pursuits he cherished most.

Colonial Education

Ibrahim argues that the problem of the 'hybridity thesis' is that it neglects the extent to which the colonial 'moral surrender' in the days of indirect rule led the British to abandon their plans to 'civilize' the colonial subject.³⁰ Nevertheless, al-Turabi pursued his secondary education in the aftermath of World War II, when the ethos of indirect rule disappeared in the face of the 'second colonial occupation' in colonial

²⁶ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

²⁷ Mitchell, *Practice of Politics*: 8–11.

²⁸ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999. Ibrahim, 'Theology of Modernity': 200.

²⁹ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

³⁰ Ibrahim, *Delirium*, 20, 115, 156.

Africa.³¹ Hantoub, located in Blue Nile Province, was a product of post-World War II educational developmentalism. It was established in 1946 and designed by its British headmaster, Lewis Brown, under pressure from nationalist Sudanese who wanted a more 'British' educational programme that would help develop an elite capable of self-government:³² both curricular and extra-curricular activities were akin to those of a British school. Boys were examined in accordance with the Cambridge School Certificate, and played football, as well as learning swimming and sailing.³³ In 1948, the school established a drama society that, among other plays, ran George Bernard Shaw's 'Arms and the Man' and 'Saint Joan', and Galsworthy's 'Justice'.³⁴ It was in this context that al-Turabi underwent the process that Bhabha would term 'hybridization'.

The year 1948 was also the one in which al-Turabi – after his intermediate education at Wad Medani and Rufa'a – joined Hantoub, thereby entering a very English world. On being asked by an interviewer in 2013 which part of this education he most enjoyed, he claimed that it was playing football, observing

It did not matter whether I or anyone else scored the goal, I was not selfish, if I was surrounded I passed the ball to someone unmarked, I did not want everything to be attributed to myself, and I was playing in the spirit of the group, if we were defeated I would not anger but I would accept the opponent was better and criticize our own style of playing and analyse why we were defeated . . . politicians should learn the spirit of sportsmanship, in which there are many benefits for politics and the economy.³⁵

One wonders if al-Turabi was aware of the extent to which his recollections reflected the ethos of the British colonizers, who perceived sport and football in particular as a means of inculcating a team ethic and averting the dangers of excessive individualism.³⁶ At the same time, football was – unlike the other games played at Gordon College – a mass not an elite sport, so such claims represent his efforts to establish himself as

³¹ See the term 'Second Colonial Occupation' in Low and Lonsdale *History of East Africa*: 1–63.

³² Robin Hodgkin, 'Obituary: Lewis Brown', *Independent*, 14 July 1994.

³³ RGG 1949: 135. ³⁴ RGG 1948: 142.

³⁵ Al-Turabi, Interview with Sabah Musa, *Africa al-Youm*, 16 April 2013. www.africaalyom.com/web/Details/6176-2/html.

³⁶ Mangan, *Games Ethic*: 51–56.

a populist.³⁷ It is possible that he was also reacting to the criticism following his decade in power in the 1990s coming from Hantoub contemporaries within the Sudanese elite, namely, that he had not been a team sportsman at all, just as he had become nothing but a ruthless individualist in his political life. ‘We all enjoyed football, basketball, athletics ... he [Turabi] did nothing of that.’³⁸ At other times, while insisting that it was his favourite sport, al-Turabi acknowledged that his enforced home education limited his opportunity to play football.³⁹

Al-Turabi’s focus on football might reflect his concern with promoting a masculine image for the benefit of his conservative critics. Similarly, political opponents who were Hantoub contemporaries have been eager to highlight his enthusiasm for less ‘masculine’ activities such as acting and singing.⁴⁰ Ironically, al-Turabi himself in other interviews recalled his passion for both studying and writing romantic poetry (*ghazal*),⁴¹ and remained outspoken against more conservative Islamists on the values of art.⁴² Even his own party newspaper, *al-Mithaq*, was happy to report that al-Turabi showed considerable prowess playing chess (*al-Shataranj*) at Hantoub,⁴³ even though this was regarded as *haram* by many Islamic scholars. Perhaps these teenage experiences of strategy games helped to cultivate the arch-pragmatist he was to become in his political career.

One matter that the majority of al-Turabi’s former schoolmates and instructors do not challenge is the extent of his scholarly achievements while at Hantoub. He was, by all accounts, the most intellectually gifted pupil in every class and was even able to complete his period in Hantoub in three years instead of the usual four.⁴⁴ He spent

³⁷ See Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism*, 47 for Gordon College graduates’ involvement in football as an ‘early exercise in mass politics’.

³⁸ Interview with Richard Cockett, cited in Cockett, *Sudan*: 69.

³⁹ Ibrahim, ‘Theology of Modernity’: 200.

⁴⁰ Muhammad Uthman al-Hajj, *SudaneseOnline*, 27 February 2007, www.sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bb.cgi?board=3&msg=1172242228&cseq=msg.

⁴¹ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999. See also comments by Ahmad Ali Tayyib on al-Turabi’s fondness for poetry, cited in ‘Hikayat min Hantub’, 28 December 2009, <http://hantoob.hooxs.com/t3-topic>.

⁴² Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 182–184.

⁴³ ‘Haqa’iq wa Tara’if min Haya al-Turabi’, *al-Mithaq*, 28 April 1965.

⁴⁴ Cockett, *Sudan*: 69. Muhammad Sharif Muzammil, ‘Li-Nazir Abd al-Bagi Muhammad Abd al-Bagi ... Tarikh Jamil’, *al-Sahafa*, 12 January 2013. Muhammad Mahmud, Interview in *al-Sahafa*, 23 May 2004.

much of his free time in the school's well-stocked library, devouring encyclopaedias, newspapers and cultural magazines.⁴⁵ In 1995 he told Kobayashi that his schooling at Hantoub, combined with that given to him at home, taught him to analyse all issues from both a Western and a traditional perspective.⁴⁶ This approach would define the rest of his political and scholarly career.

Perhaps more contentious is al-Turabi's claim that Hantoub taught him nationalism (*al-qawmiyya*) since the students there hailed from 'everywhere in Sudan'.⁴⁷ In reality, while the school was notionally open to all, when he arrived in 1948 the majority of students hailed from Kassala, Kordofan and Blue Nile Province.⁴⁸ Therefore, while he would probably have developed a sympathy for Sudanese nationalism, it would have been the same as that shared by the rest of the northern elite, which did little to represent the country's southern and western peripheries. Many great 'national' figures attended Hantoub at the same time as al-Turabi. These included Jafa'ar Nimeiri, the military president between 1969 and 1985; Jizouli Dafa'allah, the 1985–1986 interim prime minister; and Muhammad Ibrahim Nugd, the SCP leader from 1971 to 2012. All of these men – with whom, despite often severe political differences, al-Turabi remained on friendly terms throughout his life⁴⁹ – had their origins in the central riverain areas of Sudan.

The regional bias in access to the best educational opportunities would shape the character of postcolonial politics, and al-Turabi was no exception to this rule. A further example, this time regarding the long term links established by his experience of intermediate education at Rufa'a, illustrates this point. In 1986, at the head of a National Islamic Front (NIF) delegation, he conducted a surprise visit to Wau, the capital of the southern province of Bahr al-Ghazal, for the purposes of last-minute electioneering before the polls of that year. The civil war in the southern region – and in Wau in particular – was at its most intense, and al-Turabi's NIF had been providing the northern military

⁴⁵ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

⁴⁶ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 39.

⁴⁷ Al-Turabi, Interview with Sabah Musa, *Africa al-Youm*, 16 April 2013. www.africaalyom.com/web/Details/6176-2/html.

⁴⁸ RGG 1948: 142.

⁴⁹ Al-Turabi, Interview with Sabah Musa, *Africa al-Youm*, 16 April 2013. www.africaalyom.com/web/Details/6176-2/html. One man not marked by this riverain elitism at Hantoub was Ahmad Diraige, who hailed from Darfur and would in future be one of the political champions of Darfuri regionalism.

with a great deal of financial and media support. When the delegation arrived, there was considerable resentment among the local southern population at al-Turabi's presence, and one protestor even set fire to the building in which the delegates were staying. However, the northern commander of the local military garrison warmly embraced him, telling him that had he known of the visit in advance he would have prepared more lavishly; the NIF chief had, after all, been head of his dormitory when they were both classmates at Rufa'a.⁵⁰

This reminds us that al-Turabi had experience of leadership well before his political career began, even though at Hantoub it was the future military president, Jafa'ar Nimeiri, who took on the role of dormitory chief in al-Turabi's wing. At both Rufa'a and Hantoub, al-Turabi was eager to claim involvement in numerous political activities. He was in Rufa'a during 1946, at the time of the famous riots provoked by the arrest of a local woman by the colonial police force for practising female genital mutilation. Ironically, these riots were led by Mahmud Muhammad Taha, a man who as the leader of the Republican Brothers movement would in future years advocate liberal reinterpretations of Islamic doctrine that led him to frequent clashes with al-Turabi. Al-Turabi insists not only that he participated in the riots,⁵¹ but that he and the schoolmates he maintains were responsible for burning the local District Commissioner's office were venting their rage not just against the British colonizers but also Taha himself, claiming they resented his 'posing as a Prophet'.⁵² It is difficult to know whether this represents a convenient effort by al-Turabi to trace back his later conflict with Taha – who some have accused him of imitating⁵³ – to an earlier phase of his life.

Al-Turabi also claims to have been politically active at Hantoub, maintaining that he helped organize demonstrations and boycotts of his classes.⁵⁴ Others allege that he was apolitical in this period; for example, a former assistant at the school describes him as having been a 'calm and non-confrontational' character.⁵⁵ It is also well established

⁵⁰ Muhieddin, *al-Islamiyyun*: 104.

⁵¹ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 38.

⁵² Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

⁵³ Mubarak Tayyib al-Zain, 'Bayna al-Fikr al-Jumhuri wa'l Sha'abi', *al-Sahafa*, 22 March 2013.

⁵⁴ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 39.

⁵⁵ Muhammad Mahmud, Interview in *al-Sahafa*, 23 May 2004.

that even though the Islamic Liberation Movement (ILM) – a loose affiliate of the Muslim Brotherhood that would go on to dominate student politics in this period – was set up during al-Turabi's time at Hantoub, he opted not to join it.⁵⁶ Busy penning romantic poetry and taking part in dramatics at the time, al-Turabi would later claim that he was too disenchanted with the Brotherhood's old-fashioned attitude towards women and the arts to join them.⁵⁷ Another reason may have been the extent of the influence of Communism on the ILM – its founder, Babikir Karrar, had originally been part of a communist cell, leaving only when he started to believe that Communism was inherently atheistic.⁵⁸ Al-Turabi maintains that he was also targeted for recruitment directly by the communists, but with characteristic haughtiness insists that he was far too intelligent to be won over by their arguments.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, the precocious young student became familiar with socialist principles after his dotting headmaster, Lewis Brown, awarded him a book by the prominent English socialist, Harold Laski.⁶⁰

To Gordon College: Turabi the *effendi*?

Al-Turabi's entry into Gordon Memorial College to study law in 1951 was a defining moment of his life. This college, which would evolve into the University of Khartoum during the decade al-Turabi spent there – first as an undergraduate and then as a lecturer – was the British colonial state's premier educational institution. Its role was to produce the *effendiyya*, Sudanese endowed with British knowledge, culture and ideals, who would serve as loyal functionaries of the colonial state.⁶¹ Yet al-Turabi, although he already absorbed many of these values at Hantoub, was never simply transformed into an 'effendi' by Gordon College – he retained sufficient agency to define his own 'ef[f]endi-hood'.⁶² What is interesting is that, unlike the self-made elites

⁵⁶ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*: 63.

⁵⁷ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 42.

⁵⁸ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*: 47.

⁵⁹ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

⁶⁰ 'Al-Turabi: al-Rajul wa Thawrathu', *al-Mithaq*, 28 April 1965.

⁶¹ Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism*: 40–41.

⁶² This term is taken from Ryzova, whose argument I am following here. *Age of the Effendiyya*: 7–8.

of Egypt who proudly declared themselves as effendis,⁶³ al-Turabi did not identify as such and indeed emerged as an acerbic critic of the effendiyya in his later political career.

Al-Turabi entered Gordon College during the era of Sudanization, at the twilight of colonial rule – the country would gain its independence on the first day of 1956 – but the majority of its staff still had European backgrounds. A number of al-Turabi's critics, both his secular opponents and rival Islamists, have pointed to this interlude and his subsequent studies in the West in order to label him as an effendi himself.⁶⁴ Nevertheless, al-Turabi was keen to present himself as a 'counter-effendi' like his father. Indeed, in his various writings, he condemned effendis for relying exclusively on a Western concept of world history, establishing themselves as an 'alien ruling caste' and ignoring their religion.⁶⁵ In his efforts to distance himself from these men and bolster his own authenticity, al-Turabi was caricaturing the effendiyya, over-emphasizing their role as 'collaborators'. As Sharkey has written, even though effendis were a part of the colonial system, they often resented it and indeed played a substantial role in the nationalist project. They were thus 'colonialism's intimate enemies, making colonial rule a reality while hoping to see it undone'.⁶⁶ One might argue that al-Turabi's relationship with the inherited institutions of the postcolonial state was not altogether dissimilar. Although he would attempt to undermine the University of Khartoum's status as the country's premier educational institution when the Islamists came to power in 1989, he was not just one of its alumni but later on one of its most distinguished lecturers. This 'alien' institution would be central to both his political and scholarly careers.

It was in Gordon College that al-Turabi first began to identify himself as an Islamist and embrace Islamist politics, eagerly devouring the writings of Abduh, al-Ghazali, Mawdudi, Qutb and al-Banna.⁶⁷ After initial hesitation, it was there that in 1951 he joined the ILM.⁶⁸ This movement identified closely with the brand of Islamic socialism

⁶³ Ryzova, *Age of the Effendiyya*: 17–18.

⁶⁴ Magdi al-Gizouli, 'Al-Turabi the Effendi', *Still Sudan*, 31 July 2011. Ibrahim, *Manichaeen Delirium*: 353.

⁶⁵ Ibrahim, *Manichaeen Delirium*: 350.

⁶⁶ Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism*: 1. Sharkey derives the term 'intimate enemies' from Nandy, *The Intimate Enemy*.

⁶⁷ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 42.

⁶⁸ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*: 63.

popular among campus Islamists in the 1950s, and its leading lights – such as Babikir Karrar, Mirghani al-Nasri and Abdullah Zakariyya – would later break away from al-Turabi and in 1964 found the Islamic Socialist Party. Just how welcome was al-Turabi's entry to the ILM at the time is unclear. Abdullah Zakariyya, who loathed him so much as a dormitory companion that he drew a chalk line across the floor of their room, insists that he was not popular with the other members because of his limited prior commitment to student politics.⁶⁹ Another leading Islamic Socialist maintains that al-Turabi's entry caused so much division that it nearly tore the organization apart. Nevertheless, his prestigious ancestry and thorough training in the Islamic religious sciences at the hands of his father would have made him a significant asset to the new movement,⁷⁰ and it was Babikir Karrar who insisted on accepting his request to join.⁷¹ While he was only able to study the emasculated form of Islamic law under two al-Azhar-trained *alims* as part of his law degree, he nevertheless won the first of the three El Sayed Mohammed El Berberi prizes for work in this area.⁷²

Al-Turabi's jurisprudential knowledge would also have made him an important contributor to the movement at a time when it was growing in strength. Although Marxism and nationalism had hitherto dominated student politics, in 1953 the ILM (or Muslim Brotherhood, as it was referred to in British reports) achieved a landslide victory in the student union elections: it won nine seats out of ten on the union's executive body,⁷³ although it would lose all of them in the next round of elections.⁷⁴ The student Islamists were active in street politics in al-Turabi's time, and in January 1954, ten of them were arrested for clashing with police after launching a demonstration over Sudan's relationship with Egypt.⁷⁵

⁶⁹ Abdullah Zakariyya, Interview with *al-Sayha*, 15 February 2015.

⁷⁰ Esposito and Voll, *Makers*: 122.

⁷¹ Nasir al-Sayyid, Interview with *al-Sudani*, 17 March 2013.

⁷² TNA, 'The University College at Khartoum: Incorporating Gordon Memorial College and Kitchener School of Medicine: Report and Accounts, to 31st December, 1955', BW 90/678.

⁷³ TNA, 'Sudan Political Intelligence Summary No. 2 of 1953', January/February 1953, FO 371/102700.

⁷⁴ TNA, Intelligence report dated 23 December 1953 [front page missing], FO 371/108328.

⁷⁵ TNA, 'Sudan Political Intelligence Summary No. 1 of 1954', December 1953/January 1954, FO 371/108328.

Narratives concerning the extent of al-Turabi's contribution to the early movement differ. Thus while the resentful Zakariyya insists that he remained inactive throughout his student years,⁷⁶ al-Turabi himself maintained that at the Eid Congress of August 1954, in which the ILM was dissolved into the Sudanese branch of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, he was elected leader of the organization, only to give way to one Muhammad Khayr Abd al-Qadir so that he would be free to pursue his studies.⁷⁷ This narrative does not appear in any of the other accounts of the 1954 Congress.⁷⁸

Although al-Turabi's background in a Qadi's home and involvement in Islamist politics on campus may have made him antagonistic to the existing culture of effendi politics, in many ways the environment in Sudan's premier educational institution was far from alien to him. Although he was born in Kassala and his family had inhabited Wad al-Turabi for a long period, ethnically he hailed from the Bideriyya Dahmashiyya. This was a subgroup of the Ja'alín,⁷⁹ one of the three factions originating in northern Sudan that enjoyed the most privileged access to the country's educational and employment opportunities in the twentieth century. Furthermore, he was not the first member of his immediate family to attend Gordon College or even the first to go on to a PhD; that honour fell to his brother, Dafa'allah, who enrolled at Gordon College a few years before he did and was just as academically successful. After obtaining his doctorate in engineering in London in 1959,⁸⁰ Dafa'allah progressed to become Dean of the Faculty of Engineering and Architecture at the University of Khartoum.

Together with his brother, al-Turabi – appointed an assistant lecturer in civil law in 1957 – represented a new generation of the educated elite at the University of Khartoum, even though the senior posts were still mostly held by Europeans.⁸¹ Both brothers pushed for the Arabization of the educational curriculum, Hasan delivering a number of his lectures in Arabic in spite of the requirement for English in the

⁷⁶ Abdullah Zakariyya, Interview with *al-Sayha*, 15 February 2015.

⁷⁷ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 42.

⁷⁸ For example, Abd al-Qadir, *Nashat al-Haraka*.

⁷⁹ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 27.

⁸⁰ TNA, 'The Vice Chancellor's Report for the Year 1959–61', BW 90/679.

⁸¹ TNA, 'The University College at Khartoum: Incorporating Gordon Memorial College and Kitchener School of Medicine: Report and Accounts, to 30th June, 1957', BW 90/679.

official guidelines.⁸² Only a year after his appointment as an assistant, he became a full lecturer in the Department of Law and Public Administration, in spite of the fact that he won his academic prize in the field of Islamic law.⁸³ This could simply have been a matter of job availability, but it also reflects al-Turabi's strategy of Islamizing the world of the effendi, as opposed to staying within the realm of the Islamic 'other'. Naturally, he made himself a part of the world of the effendi in the process – although, given his obsession with Arabization, one wonders whether this Ottoman Turkish term serves any purpose where he is concerned beyond games of political labelling. As was the case with effendis of old, his education and then lecturing career provided him with the opportunities to integrate himself into an exclusive political, social and professional network in a manner that would prove highly useful as his academic and political career progressed. It was as a law lecturer that al-Turabi found the opportunity to marry into Khartoum's most prestigious family – his engagement to Wisal al-Mahdi came after he had met her as one of his law students.⁸⁴ Thus, while the new educated elite of which al-Turabi was a part, and helping to strengthen, was far less willing than its predecessor to accept the colonization of its intellect, it resembled it in terms of its narrow social base and elitism.

Studies in the West

In the decade following 1955, al-Turabi completed an MA at the University of London and a PhD at the Sorbonne; he also briefly visited the USA. During this period, therefore, he experienced life in each of the countries that would define the West's relationship with the Islamic world in the twentieth century and beyond. His visits to the West shaped his world view in two important regards. First, they helped his Islamist vision acquire a truly global scope. Second, they helped shape his ambivalent perspectives on the West itself. Unlike Qutb, whose contempt for the America he witnessed in 1948 went on to define his binary view of the world, al-Turabi related to the societies

⁸² Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

⁸³ TNA, 'The University College at Khartoum: Incorporating Gordon Memorial College and Kitchener School of Medicine: Report and Accounts, to 30th June, 1958', BW 90/679.

⁸⁴ Wisal al-Mahdi, Interview with *al-Wasat*, 30 March 1998.

he encountered in the West in a much more nuanced manner. Condemnations of racism and perceived superficiality were intertwined with praise for the warmth of the people he encountered as well as the political and intellectual freedoms he witnessed. By selectively identifying with certain ‘Western’ values, he was, like Bhabha’s counter-colonial ‘mimics’, able to challenge the racial divides underpinning colonialism, which posited that certain ideals were specific to certain ethnic groups.

Al-Turabi had a tendency to associate the virtues and vices of the West more with some countries than with others. Resenting colonialism so much, he focused most of his rancour on Britain, where he worked for his MA during 1955 and 1956; as with Qutb in America after the war, racism and the over-sexualization of women were targets of his criticism.⁸⁵ And, like many other Sudanese Islamists who studied in Britain, he felt that he was discriminated against because of his skin colour.⁸⁶ His supporters claimed that while working in a pro-Algerian group he was sent a slice of pork as an Islamophobic insult by an English author with whom he had attempted to engage in debate.⁸⁷ In an interview much later, al-Turabi remarked that one of the features of British society that displeased him most was that its women ‘spent most of their efforts distinguishing their bodies and not their personalities, and became a tool for advertising’.⁸⁸ However, these retrospective views reflect the kind of sociological critique that others like Ali Shariati later put forward regarding the commercialization and over-sexualization of women in the West.⁸⁹ In the same interview, he added: ‘I do not hate the West. I am a critic, not a hater or a lover’. In other words, his critique was more scientific, and not characterized by the revulsion towards American sexual freedoms that fed Qutb’s attitude to the West. Britain, for Turabi, also exemplified the atomization of social life in the West; he was, apparently, shocked by the fact that many British people did not even know their neighbours.⁹⁰

⁸⁵ Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*: 150–151.

⁸⁶ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 43.

⁸⁷ ‘Haqa’iq wa Tara’if min Haya al-Turabi’, *al-Mithaq*, 28 April 1965.

⁸⁸ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

⁸⁹ Al-Turabi, *Women in Islam*: 44–45. Shariati, *Fatima is Fatima*, *Shariati.com*, www.shariati.com/english/fatemeh/fatemeh1.html, accessed on 17 April 2017.

⁹⁰ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

Another explanation for al-Turabi's contempt for the British way of life is to be found in his first-hand experience of British colonialism and its hypocrisies. While he would have learned of British democracy and liberalism at Hantoub and Gordon College, he shared with the rest of the Sudanese intelligentsia a collective memory of colonial racism, authoritarianism and political violence. Al-Turabi could not identify with the political and social ideals of post-Enlightenment Britain because they were tarred by the legacy of colonialism. If he had continued his studies and law career in Britain or Sudan, his world view might have turned towards a Qutbist Manichaeism. However, his fascination with other languages and cultures provided him with a way out of this postcolonial impasse. Instead of going on to a doctorate at the University of London, he sought permission – in the face of persistent obstruction from his British colleagues, he claims – to travel to Paris and the Sorbonne.⁹¹ Initially, he struggled to understand and speak French;⁹² but, having adjusted to the language, he obtained access to an entire repository of Western post-Enlightenment thought untainted by colonialism – or colonialism in Sudan, at least.

Most Islamists acknowledge, albeit cautiously and often grudgingly, the scientific achievements of Western civilization. However, al-Turabi extolled French culture in particular with a gushing enthusiasm, claiming that, in contrast to London, in Paris 'individuals are free'.⁹³ By establishing a dichotomy between Britain and France, al-Turabi simultaneously deconstructed both Occidental concepts of a monolithic West and the Manichaean divide between the colonizer and colonized, the Western and Islamic worlds. Studying French liberalism and democracy offered him the hope of rediscovering these elements in his own cultural memory without losing his original identity, and he would later claim that it was his time in Paris that persuaded him that the Islamic world could undergo a transformation similar to that of French society during the Revolutionary period.⁹⁴

Even in the Francophone world, al-Turabi's opportunity was a rare one. He would have had access to epistemologies denied to the subjects of the French Muslim territories, where educational officials deemed the ideals of the French Revolution both culturally inappropriate and

⁹¹ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

⁹² Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

⁹³ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

⁹⁴ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 48.

politically dangerous.⁹⁵ He exploited his opportunity to the full, telling fellow Muslim students astonished by his literary eclecticism that he had come to France ‘not [just] to obtain a degree’ but to gain a full grasp of French historical, religious and legal culture.⁹⁶ He enthusiastically attended the cinema and musical concerts, further developing his existing interest in art and culture.⁹⁷ Ironically, in his memories of France he does not criticize French women for the way they dressed, or condemn any lack of social integration, although France was comparable to Britain in these regards. In spite of his criticisms of the West in general, he remained on friendly terms with the French government even during his most ‘radical’ phase in the 1990s.⁹⁸ Al-Turabi’s trips to multiple Western countries helped to shape his multiple views of the West. For him, Britain was hostile and oppressive; France open, diverse and free.

Taking a two-month break from his programme at the Sorbonne, in the summer of 1960 al-Turabi visited the United States.⁹⁹ His views of American society were probably more mixed than those he developed towards France and Britain. He described the Americans as a warm and friendly people, expressed surprise that the family with whom he stayed shared deep personal experiences with him within a day of his arrival, and found that there was no American hostility towards Islam – only curiosity. Nevertheless, he did encounter hostility based on his skin colour, rather than his religion, particularly in the south.¹⁰⁰ In the era of confrontation with the West in the 1990s, these were the experiences he recalled. ‘I know America well’, he told Judith Miller in 1994, referring to the 1960 trip and lamenting that the country ‘sadly ... is racist’.¹⁰¹

Al-Turabi’s sojourns in the West were also significant in that they led to the crystallization of a genuinely global anti-colonial vision. His period in Britain ‘ripened inside me’, he said, ‘an Islamic commitment

⁹⁵ Segalla, ‘Georges Hardy’.

⁹⁶ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

⁹⁷ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 48.

⁹⁸ Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: 155.

⁹⁹ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 47.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ahmad al-Mansur (Part 2), *Al-Jazeera Arabic*, April 2016.

¹⁰¹ Miller, ‘Faces of fundamentalism’. Miller in fact gives the date of the trip as 1961, but I shall defer here to Kobayashi, who has provided a comprehensive chronology of the important periods in al-Turabi’s life. See his *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 343.

and translated into an elaborate world view'.¹⁰² This was because the nationalist intelligentsias of Britain's colonies and former colonies were all able to meet, discuss and interact in the metropole's institutions of higher learning in a manner the embattled guardians of empire on its disintegrating periphery would not permit. Al-Turabi, with his multi-ethnic and multi-linguistic background, was better positioned than most to exploit this environment. He soon became involved in the expatriate community in London, being elected president of the Sudanese Students' Union and attending regular meetings of an 'Inter-Arab Islamic Group'.¹⁰³ He reported that they campaigned against French colonialism in Algeria, but found it easier to identify with the Malaysian, Indian and Pakistani students than with the Arab students because they perceived the conflict as an 'Islamic' rather than an 'Arab nationalist' struggle.¹⁰⁴

Al-Turabi's linguistic abilities also put him in a position to forge links between Muslim student activists in Europe. Visiting a convention of the International Union of Students in Prague in 1956 in his capacity as a Sudanese student leader, he maintains that his fluent English enabled him to help Yasir Arafat's Palestinian delegation prepare its speech; and he remained on friendly terms with Arafat afterwards.¹⁰⁵ Paris provided him with further opportunities to establish networks and bridge cultural and linguistic divides within the Muslim world. At the time, there was no Sudanese embassy in Paris or any other Sudanese students, and he claims that none of the North African students he met spoke any Arabic (or at least not the *Fussba* Arabic of which al-Turabi was fond, presumably). He nevertheless helped to establish an Islamic group in the city, and although most of these individuals were apparently surprised at his interest in French history, his mastery of the French language enabled him to forge links within a milieu to which few other nationalists or Islamists in the Anglophone Muslim world had access.¹⁰⁶ Later in his political career, he would form strong links with the North African Islamic movements, building on his

¹⁰² Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

¹⁰³ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 41.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ahmad al-Mansur (Part 1), *Al-Jazeera Arabic*, April 2016.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

¹⁰⁶ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 43.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

early acquaintance with students in Paris such as Abd al-Salam Yassine and Abd al-Karim Khatib, who would later go on to be the founding figures of Moroccan Islamism.¹⁰⁷

Al-Turabi's experiences in London in particular also marked the beginning of his efforts to forge new political alliances in Sudan, expanding his network beyond the narrow milieu of student Islamists. This juncture saw the beginning of his tempestuous relationship with Sadiq al-Mahdi, the great grandson of the famous Sudanese Mahdi, leader of the Ansar religious order and future Sudanese prime minister. In the 1960s, Sadiq and al-Turabi would form the 'New Forces' movement, pitting the 'new' religious parties against those they perceived to be rooted in a more traditional form of politics.¹⁰⁸ Their reconceptualization of Sudanese politics in this period probably owed a great deal to their shared experience of postgraduate studies and activism in London. Al-Sadiq took his master's degree at Oxford at the same time that al-Turabi was at the University of London, and the two travelled together to Prague to attend the meeting of the International Union of Students in 1956.¹⁰⁹ Both acknowledge that this was a period of close friendship and mutual respect.¹¹⁰ Al-Turabi maintains that al-Sadiq held Trotskyite views at the time, and that he tried to bring him back to a more Islamic political agenda.¹¹¹ However, it seems likely that al-Turabi himself was more willing to ride the 'Islamic socialist' wave of the 1950s and 1960s than he was later prepared to admit.¹¹²

The knowledge and experience that al-Turabi acquired during his period of doctoral study enabled him to rise to a position of prominence within Sudanese Islamism even before he had completed his thesis. He made use of a study break to attend the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood's annual conference at Ailafoun in 1962, one of the purposes of which was to redraft the movement's constitution. Even a prominent critic acknowledges that he spoke with such 'passion and clarity' – exploiting his studies of constitutional law in France – that the chair of the conference agreed to surrender his position to him.¹¹³

¹⁰⁷ Abd al-Salam, *al-Harakah al-Islamiyya*. ¹⁰⁸ See Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁹ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

¹¹⁰ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999. Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, Interview with Fathi al-Daw, *al-Wasat*, 6 October 1997.

¹¹¹ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999.

¹¹² See Chapter 4. ¹¹³ Azraq, *Min Tarikh*: 59.

The modified constitution became known as ‘al-Turabi’s constitution’, and prefigured a number of his later writings by expanding the previous constitution’s concept of *da’wa* (calling to Islam) to emphasize its relevance to the cultural, economic and social realms.¹¹⁴ Even during his sojourn in Paris, al-Turabi was positioning himself as one of the architects of a comprehensive Islamist vision.

Conclusion: Radical or Reformist?

As already observed, commentators on al-Turabi have usually found it impossible to agree on a label for him. Many see him as a ‘reformist’ in the tradition of nineteenth-century Islamists such as Jamal al-Afghani or Muhammad Abduh, whom European scholars have preferred to identify as more ‘liberal’ and rationalist; by contrast, others place him in the same camp as the ‘radicals’ who were his more immediate contemporaries, like Abu ‘Aala al-Mawdudi, Sayyid Qutb, Ruhollah Khomeini, Hasan al-Banna and possibly Ali Shariati, men far more concerned with the state and its authority.¹¹⁵ Comparing al-Turabi’s early upbringing, education and experiences in the West with those of the various Islamists he both emulated and competed with can help illustrate why he is such a complex and original figure, in many ways confuting both the ‘radical’ and ‘reformist’ labels.

As a result of his extensive parental education in Islamic literature and law, al-Turabi’s level of classical religious knowledge surpassed that of most contemporary Islamists. It is true that men such as Shariati, Qutb and al-Banna all had fathers who, like al-Turabi, had a significant religious bent and were concerned that modern education might cause their children to become alienated from their religion; and all three of those just mentioned made efforts to enhance their level of religious knowledge in their youth. Shariati took courses on religious education provided by his father, and Qutb attended occasional lessons given by graduates of al-Azhar who passed through his village home in Musha.¹¹⁶ However, their fathers were not religious judges (Shariati’s father had studied religion, but then taught in a secular school), and this did not compare with the systematic form of individual tuition provided by al-Turabi’s

¹¹⁴ Azraq, *Min Tarikh*: chapter 60–61.

¹¹⁵ See Introduction for full debate.

¹¹⁶ Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*: 39. Chatterjee, ‘Ali Shari’ati’: 75.

father. Moreover, unlike al-Banna, al-Turabi was far too busy reading books to engage in moral vigilantism;¹¹⁷ his interest was in Islamic knowledge per se, rather than its application, at least at this stage.

Al-Turabi's level of domestic religious education resembled that of Khomeini, which probably explains why he became a theorist of the Islamic state like him and not just an advocate of Islamic activism like the three individuals cited above. However, even Khomeini, the only major twentieth-century Islamist who was also a senior cleric, had to wait until he enrolled in the Qum seminary in his twenties before he could study the same jurisprudential subjects that al-Turabi had become acquainted with in his teens, Khomeini's own father having died a year after his birth.¹¹⁸ Greater similarity in parental education can be found in the case of the Pakistani Islamist Abu'l-Aala Mawdudi. Mawdudi, like al-Turabi, came from a long line of Sufis and religious notables. One sixteenth-century ancestor was a saint of the Chishtiyya Sufi order, while his father and grandfather were members of the same order. His father had originally entered the academy at Aligarh, established by the Anglophile Sayyid Ahmad Khan, but had been horrified by the secular values it promoted. Accordingly, he abandoned it, and later gave up a promising law career as well, to become a Sufi ascetic.¹¹⁹ Like al-Turabi's 'counter-effendi' father, Ahmad Mawdudi decided to give his son an advanced education in religious law and Islamic literature at home so as to save him from being stripped of his religion and culture in a colonial school. There is no reason to believe that this education was not as thorough as al-Turabi's, but there was one significant difference: Mawdudi was educated in both Persian and Hindi – as well as Arabic – literature by his father,¹²⁰ whereas al-Turabi only reports having been educated in Arabic subjects. Presumably, therefore, he studied none of the Persian classics in his youth, and his writings criticize the negative impact of Persian literature on Muslim politics after the period of the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs.¹²¹ These differences had a significant impact on their respective approaches to the conceptualization of the Islamic state, as will be seen in future chapters.

While his exposure to advanced levels of Islamic religious and legal study at an early age set him apart from a number of his

¹¹⁷ Kramer, *Hasan al-Banna*: 8–10. ¹¹⁸ Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*: 29.

¹¹⁹ Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdudi*: 10–11.

¹²⁰ Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdudi*: 12–13.

¹²¹ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 172.

contemporaries, it is ironic that al-Turabi also exceeded them in the quantity of European knowledge and culture that he absorbed. Mawdudi, whose higher education was at the Dar al-Ulum Deoband in Delhi and focused specifically on learning Hanafi Law, came into contact with European authors and languages mainly via his work as an apprentice journalist in his late teenage years.¹²² Al-Banna and Qutb, for their part, both finished their education at Cairo's Dar al-Ulum, which balanced 'modern' subjects with religious ones and used Arabic as the sole medium of instruction.¹²³ While Qutb lamented that he did not get the opportunity to study a more Westernized curriculum taught in English at the Egyptian University,¹²⁴ al-Turabi was taught in English and by a partly English body of staff at both Gordon College and Hantoub, whose headmaster, Lewis Brown, he remembered fondly.¹²⁵ One cannot imagine Qutb, al-Banna or Mawdudi admitting the virtue of approaching issues from both European and Muslim perspectives.

It is al-Turabi's visits to Europe and America and their influence on the attitudes he developed to Western civilization that appear to set him apart from most other 'radical Islamists', the latter having at least nominally rejected Western cultural and social values as well as political philosophies, while acknowledging and utilizing Western scientific and technological advancements.¹²⁶ The precise mechanics of al-Turabi's engagement with Western political philosophies will be considered in future chapters. At this point, it is sufficient to note that he was clearly inspired by reading about the French Revolution, and that, while he may have disliked some of the superficial features of Western behaviour, he was genuinely in awe of the sheer diversity of French culture. Although he may have been irritated by British intervention and American racism, his experiences in the West did not move him to any remark as damning as Qutb's claim that America represented a 'nadir of primitiveness' or as absurd as Mawdudi's contention that 90 per cent of Americans were infected with venereal diseases.¹²⁷ Unlike al-Turabi, neither al-Banna nor Mawdudi studied in Europe or the United States. Qutb's resentment of the West was provoked by his

¹²² Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdudi*: 22, 29.

¹²³ Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*: 58–59. Kramer, *Al-Banna*: 17–18.

¹²⁴ Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*: 60.

¹²⁵ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 39.

¹²⁶ Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*: chapter 5.

¹²⁷ Qutb, 'The America I have seen'. Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdudi*: 134.

stay in America at the end of the 1940s for the purpose of studying educational curricula; he never went to France or England. In a literal sense, the most obviously comparable figure to al-Turabi is the Iranian Ali Shariati, who studied for a PhD at the Sorbonne, apparently at almost exactly the same time, that is, from 1960 until 1965.¹²⁸ Like al-Turabi, he engaged with Western political philosophies at the Sorbonne, although his PhD was in medieval Islamic literature. He was substantially influenced by Massignon and Berque and spent most of his time absorbing the same sociological theories that would influence his politics and lecturing when he returned to Iran.¹²⁹ It is unclear whether the two men met, even though the latter also spent his time hanging around in North African circles and organizing pro-Algerian demonstrations.¹³⁰

Nevertheless, because – unlike Shariati’s – his activism was not limited to Shia communities, al-Turabi had far more opportunity to use his time in the student milieu of Paris to forge networks essential to his future Islamic activities. The manner in which al-Turabi utilized his time in Paris – as well as London and Prague – is comparable to al-Afghani and Abduh’s own efforts to use France as a base from which to rally the Muslim world against Western imperialism in the 1880s. All three found in Paris the opportunity to embrace Western social and political philosophies without having to pander to the English colonizers oppressing them in Egypt and Sudan. Al-Afghani accepted in his famous debate with the French philosopher Renan that Europe had achieved great philosophical breakthroughs, and that the Eastern societies that had preserved and advanced Greek philosophy would be just as capable of achieving similar advances if they were freed from the shackles of religion.¹³¹ Although al-Turabi engaged in no similar debate with any twentieth-century French philosopher, it is clear that he valued French philosophy just as strongly as al-Afghani and Abduh. While he was careful not to denounce religion as explicitly as al-Afghani, the similarities in their approaches to the rational sciences are clear and will be explored in future chapters.

¹²⁸ Ervand Abrahamian, ‘Ali Shariati: the Ideologue of the Iranian Revolution’, MERIP 102 (January/February 1982).

¹²⁹ Chatterjee, ‘Ali Shari’ati: 77. ¹³⁰ Chatterjee, ‘Ali Shari’ati: 77–78.

¹³¹ Answer of Jamal al-Din to Renan, *Journal des Débats*, 18 May 1883, cited in Keddie, *An Islamic Response*: 175–187.

2 | *Charisma and Its Limitations, 1964–1989*

For many of al-Turabi's critics, the quarter century following 1964 embraced not only the journey from the end of Sudan's first military regime to the beginning of its third but also his personal trajectory from hero to villain of Sudanese politics. In 1964, he was raised aloft by crowds following a number of decisive interventions during the October Revolution of that year, the civilian uprising that overthrew the first military regime of Ibrahim Abboud and ushered in Sudan's second parliamentary democracy. Then, after eight years spent mostly in the prisons of Jafa'ar Nimeiri, who had seized power in the 'May Revolution' of 1969, al-Turabi formed an uneasy alliance with his former gaoler, helping the erstwhile socialist to Islamize his autocratic regime. Once Nimeiri had been overthrown by a second civilian uprising in 1985, al-Turabi belatedly participated in the parliamentary regime led by his brother-in-law Sadiq al-Mahdi, but then in 1989 instigated his overthrow via an alliance with Sudan's third and longest lasting military dictator Umar al-Bashir. Thus was his transformation from democrat to autocrat complete.

It is important not to subsume broad and complex political transformations in the saga of Hasan al-Turabi's 'hero to villain' narrative, for this would be to subscribe to the 'great man of history' theory; it would also mean assuming that al-Turabi's personal charisma made his agency and leadership supreme, in the same way that a number of commentators on Islamist movements in the wider region have conceived of men like al-Banna, Fadlallah or Yassin as all-controlling and charismatic leaders.¹ An analysis of al-Turabi's political activism in these years highlights the difficulties that arise when applying this pseudo-Weberian logic to the Sudanese Islamist leader. Unlike al-Banna or Mawdudi, al-Turabi was not the founder of the Islamist movement in his country – the Muslim Brotherhood had arrived in

¹ See, eg., Appleby (ed.), *Spokesmen*.

Sudan in 1946 and, as previously recorded, he had initially refrained from joining it. Neither was he the sole 'guiding light' for Sudanese Islamists in this period, for a whole generation of them had matured intellectually before his rise to prominence and had drawn inspiration from many other ideologues, such as Qutb, Banna and Mawdudi.² It is true that al-Turabi developed a charismatic persona after 1964, eventually coming to be identified as the *Shaikh* of the movement by his more enthusiastic followers, as already noted. However, what many analysts of influential Islamist leaders fail to recognize is that Weber's model implies that charismatic authority is socially constructed by the adherents of a particular leader as much as it is the product of that particular leader's innate abilities.³ Al-Turabi certainly had a particularly agentic personality, *Kobayashi, Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 13 but his agency was not always all-encompassing. There were times prior to 1989 when his influence was symbolically represented by members of the Islamic Movement as greater than it actually was, particularly in the years between 1969 and 1976 that he spent mostly in Nimeiri's jails. In this period, in particular, many ideologies and trends appeared in the Islamic Movement over which he had relatively little control.

Moreover, it should be remembered that in Weberian thought charismatic authority is never a 'pure' category; it is always likely to co-exist with other sources of authority.⁴ This includes 'legal-rational' authority, built not on personalities but on ideas and principles. Since Sudan experienced phases of both autocracy and democracy during the period in question, it is not surprising that at some times the Islamic Movement was able to balance al-Turabi's charismatic authority with 'legal-rational' forms more than at others. In particular, the democratic periods and the period of the Islamic Movement's 'reconciliation' with Nimeiri offered opportunities to expand and institutionalize bodies such as the Shura Council, which was intended to guarantee that decisions within the movement were based on consultation. However, al-Turabi's efforts to practise democracy within his own movement did not necessarily ensure a harmonious engagement with the processes of parliamentary democracy that operated in Sudan between the late 1960s and late 1980s.

Al-Turabi's fluctuating relations with the democratic and military regimes of the 1964–1989 period highlight the importance of political

² Badri, 'Tribute'. ³ See Joosse, 'Becoming a God'. ⁴ Weber, *Theory*: 383.

context in shaping Islamist ideology. It has been argued that the radical exclusivist character of Qutbist ideology was a product of the brutal and arbitrary nature of the Egyptian military regime that had ruthlessly repressed the Islamists in the 1950s and 1960s.⁵ However, whereas the Egyptian Islamists were the opponents of a firmly entrenched military regime over a 59-year period (1952–2011), in the same years in Sudan there were three separate parliamentary and three separate army regimes. It was the numerous political upheavals in Sudan that lent Turabist ideology its somewhat mutable character: to prosper politically, al-Turabi was required to mediate between competing trends – democratic and authoritarian, radical and moderate – both within the state and his own movement. Meanwhile, the necessity of forging alliances with parliamentary politicians and dictators, specifically Sadiq al-Mahdi and Jafa’ar Nimeiri, illustrated the limitations of al-Turabi’s charismatic authority.

Turabi Ascendant: The October Revolution

The October Revolution of 1964 is fondly remembered by many Sudanese as their very own ‘Arab Spring’, and the fact that it broke out almost half a century before its Middle East equivalents serves as a reminder of the unique regional character of the country’s rich democratic experiences in the second half of the twentieth century. The achievement of the civil protestors who led the October Revolution was not so much that they brought about a system of parliamentary democracy, for the ‘second parliamentary regime’ it inaugurated was not altogether different from the first, which had itself been established by British colonizers and Sudanese nationalists during the Condominium era in 1953, and had lasted until dismantled by General Ibrahim Abboud in 1958. Instead, their triumph was managing to overthrow an authoritarian military regime, a feat their contemporaries in the Arab world would not be able to emulate for another two generations. In doing so, they ushered in a new and much more youthful generation of politicians. These included the many luminaries of the newly legalized SCP who were determined to revolutionize both society and political life, including Abd al-Khaliq Mahjub, Shafi Ahmad al-Shaikh and al-Turabi’s old schoolmate, Muhammad

⁵ Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*: 204.

Ibrahim Nugd; they also included al-Turabi's brother-in-law, Sadiq al-Madhi, a man determined to rejuvenate the Umma party, which acted as a front for the *Ansar* religious movement established by his grandfather; and they included al-Turabi himself.

Gallab regards 'al-Turabi Islamism' as a 'counter-revolutionary' movement that emerged in response to the progressive forces unleashed in the wake of the October Revolution.⁶ However, this assessment does not sit easily with the Islamist supremo's role as one of the instigators of this same upheaval. It was on 10 September 1964 that al-Turabi, having recently returned from Paris infused with the ideals of the French revolutionary *philosophes*, delivered a speech in the University of Khartoum's examination hall in which he declared that the 'southern question' could only be resolved through the acquisition of political liberty in the north.⁷ It was this speech, which inspired the subsequent student activism culminating with the outbreak of the revolution in the following month, that established al-Turabi as a charismatic political personality. He was genuinely admired by many in student, intellectual and political milieus at the time, not just within the Muslim Brotherhood.⁸ Once the revolution broke out following a clash between police and students on the University of Khartoum campus on 21 October, the young academic immediately became involved, addressing crowds and organizing the subsequent dissent with other campus Islamists. His role in the revolution would later be celebrated by Ahmad Shamouq's *October al-Thawra al-Zafira*.⁹ It was as a result of the credit that he received from his participation in the October Revolution that al-Turabi both acquired the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood and was able to establish his own Islamic Charter Front (ICF) as its most prominent political front in the subsequent transitional period. In light of his later politics, what is remarkable is that his address to the university students concerned only matters such as political freedom and decentralization, and made no mention of the sharia for which he would campaign in the later era of mass democracy. This very much fits in with his strategy of offering separate discourses to educated milieus and the wider public.¹⁰

⁶ Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 76–79. ⁷ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 19.

⁸ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 68–69. ⁹ Shamouq, *Oktober*.

¹⁰ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 29.

It should prompt no surprise that al-Turabi was less afraid of portraying his role in the October Revolution as a ‘one-man show’ than he was of claiming responsibility for the failures of the 1989–1999 period, and repeatedly asserted that he was acting independently of the Muslim Brotherhood throughout.¹¹ Nevertheless, el-Affendi maintains that his activities in September and October 1964 were a direct result of decisions to intensify Islamist mobilization against the Abboud regime made in the Brotherhood’s Shura Council.¹² Members of the old Islamic Liberation Movement (by then reformed as the ‘Islamic Group’) such as Mirghani al-Nasri and Babikir Karrar joined the protests as the Revolution unfolded, and arguably took more radical positions.¹³ Meanwhile, al-Turabi also manufactured his strategy as the Revolution unfolded in discussion with a number of campus Islamists, including his future rival Muhammad Salih Umar.¹⁴ It was with these men that he planned to bring the old ‘sectarian’ parties into the Revolution so as to counterbalance the influence of the SCP.¹⁵

Al-Turabi’s actions to prevent the SCP taking control of the Revolution after 21 October are more worthy of being described as ‘counter-revolutionary’. While his address to angry crowds in the Midan Abd al-Muni’im square on 22 October has been interpreted by some as evidence of the centrality of his role, his declaration that ‘you will find us [i.e. the lecturers’ board] more eager than you to avenge the blood of the martyr’ suggested that he wanted to keep the professional movement in control of the revolution, fearing that a broader popular mobilization could lead to a left-wing takeover.¹⁶ He also helped to de-radicalize the Revolution he had helped to initiate by bringing in the relatively more conservative political parties to strengthen the United National Front that went on to negotiate the transition from military to civilian rule.¹⁷ During the transitional period, al-Turabi’s ICF opposed allowing workers’ bodies sectoral representation, fearing this might also lead to a communist takeover. Nevertheless, while the Islamists feared the Communists, they shared a number of their aims. Once they were no longer a threat, al-Turabi

¹¹ Al-Turabi, Interview with *al-Sahafa*, 22 October 2011. Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 68.

¹² El-Affendi, *Turabi’s Revolution*: 70. ¹³ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 72.

¹⁴ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 70–71. ¹⁵ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 71.

¹⁶ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 69. Shamouq, *Oktober*: 180.

¹⁷ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 69, 71.

would revive the principle of sectoral representation during his Islamist democracy of the 1990s.¹⁸ Moreover, in 1964, the one ICF representative in an interim cabinet largely dominated by the left backed its plans to start dismantling the ‘Native Administration’, the neo-traditional system of local governance seen by representatives of both ideological movements as a reactionary force.¹⁹

Although al-Turabi’s charismatic persona did contribute significantly to his agency during the October Revolution, he was in a position to deliver his famous speech only because he had recently acquired a doctorate in Constitutional Law, and was thus able to base his authority on command of what Weber would call ‘legal-rational’ principles. At the same time, he acted during the Revolution as a member of a number of corporate institutions – the Lecturers’ Union, the Professional Front and, arguably, the Muslim Brotherhood’s Shura Council. One of the definitive paradoxes of al-Turabi’s post-October charisma was its specifically secular character. Due to his limited political history prior to the October Revolution and his strategy of using separate discourses to address elite and mass audiences, many in Sudan failed to realize that he was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood, and a number took him to be a Communist.²⁰ Meanwhile, such was his iconic status among the urban middle class that one of the hairstyles adopted by the liberated young girls of the capital came to be named after him!²¹ In future years, the paradoxical secularization of al-Turabi’s charisma would be one of the most significant aspects of his appeal, particularly among educated and urban milieus, enabling him to reach beyond his narrow support base of ideological Islamists.

Al-Turabi Challenged: The Rift with the ‘Educationalists’

Al-Turabi’s establishment of the ICF as the most significant Islamist political party, in addition to his ascent to the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood, was built on the public reputation he acquired following his participation in the October Revolution just as much as on his reputation among Sudan’s Islamists. However, the Muslim Brotherhood in Sudan predated al-Turabi’s leadership of it, and

¹⁸ See Chapter 8. ¹⁹ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 163.

²⁰ ‘Haqa’iq wa Tara’if min Haya al-Turabi’, *al-Mithaq*, 28 April 1965

²¹ El-Affendi, *Thawrab*: 221–222.

possessed a Constitution, Shura Council and Assembly, within all of which established institutions al-Turabi's leadership was repeatedly challenged in the name both of its wider programme and Islam itself.

Among those willing to challenge al-Turabi's authority was a group of senior Islamists, including Jafa'ar Shaikh Idris, Malik Badri and Muhammad Salih Umar. These men – usually referred to as representing the 'educationalist school' – charged that al-Turabi was expending too much effort and too many resources on achieving political gains through the ICF instead of focusing on calling the Sudanese public to Islam directly through *da'wa*.²² In 1966, they forced him to step down from the leadership of the Muslim Brotherhood, which was then functionally separated from the ICF, so as to safeguard it from contamination in the murky realm of politics.²³ Muhammad Salih Umar, as the new leader of the Muslim Brotherhood, subsequently attempted to dictate a policy for the ICF that conflicted directly with al-Turabi's own agenda.²⁴ After a number of heated debates within the Shura Council, the leadership decided to convene another general conference of the Muslim Brotherhood in 1969, the first since al-Turabi rose to prominence at Ailafun in 1962. This conference, which was held at Dar al-Bahri in Khartoum North and was attended by 258 delegates,²⁵ represented the climax of a struggle for leadership both of the ICF and the Muslim Brotherhood, with al-Turabi running directly against Jafa'ar Shaikh Idris.²⁶

These internal conflicts demonstrated that al-Turabi's prestige within his own movement was based not just on his charisma but also on his mastery of both 'traditional' and 'modern' forms of education, and that individuals with similar credentials could challenge him in this regard. (One of the 'educationalist' faction, Malik Badri, had acquired his PhD from the University of Leicester three years before al-Turabi graduated from the Sorbonne.²⁷) Another reason for al-Turabi's prestige within the movement was his knowledge of Islamic law, but Jafa'ar Shaikh Idris, his most tenacious opponent, was well positioned to challenge him on these grounds. At the time he ran

²² El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*: 86. ²³ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*: 87.

²⁴ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*: 87. ²⁵ Azraq, *Min Tarikh*: 114.

²⁶ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*: 87.

²⁷ See profile at *Human Behaviour Academy*, <http://hbacademy.org.uk/about-us/our-committees/professor-malik-badri/>

against him for the movement's leadership, he was pursuing at the University of Khartoum a doctorate on Islamic causality rooted in the study of Ibn Taymiyya, one of the classical scholars cited by a number of contemporary Salafis.²⁸ Idris, who as a member of the Muslim Brotherhood's student wing had acted as the President of Khartoum University Student Union (KUSU),²⁹ would have been well positioned to act as the intellectual leader of the Sudanese Islamists, but – unlike al-Turabi – had not profited as extensively from the university's involvement in the October Revolution. He returned from his studies in London only after al-Turabi had seized centre stage,³⁰ and, although he joined the ICF, he was unsuccessful in his bid to gain a parliamentary seat in Port Sudan in the 1965 elections.³¹ While his early education was remarkably similar to al-Turabi's – both had studied at Hantoub, Idris two years later – one significant difference was that Idris had become close to the Salafist Ansar al-Sunna movement in his teenage years, which might explain his rejection of some of al-Turabi's more flexible positions on religious issues.³²

The conflict between the 'educationalists' and the 'political' school was nominally one of strategy, the educationalists particularly objecting to al-Turabi's decision to participate in the 'New Forces' movement with William Deng's Sudan African National Union (SANU) and Sadiq al-Mahdi's wing of the Umma party in 1967.³³ Nevertheless, al-Turabi was also criticized on the grounds of his perceived deviations from classical Islamic jurisprudence. Idris argued that al-Turabi was distancing himself from conventional Sunnism, as demonstrated by his limited engagement with the traditional hadith compilations, such as Ibn Kathir and Bukhari.³⁴ At a particularly fractious meeting of the Brotherhood's Shura Council in 1967, various individuals within the 'educationalist' faction maintained that al-Turabi was 'not suitable for the leadership', and condemned his lack of clarity in expressing his

²⁸ 'Biography, website of Jafa'ar Shaikh Idris, www.jaafaridris.com/sample-page/biography/.

²⁹ 'Ta'arif bi'l-Dr Jafa'ar Shaikh Idris', 15 November 2012, Idris' website, www.jaafaridris.com/sample-page/biography/, accessed 16 April 2017

³⁰ Mahbub Abd al-Salam, Interview with Kamal Ahmad Yousif, 14 July 2015.

³¹ 'Ta'arif bi'l-Dr Jafa'ar Shaikh Idris'. ³² 'Ta'arif bi'l-Dr Jafa'ar Shaikh Idris'.

³³ Azraq, *Min Tarikh*: 100.

³⁴ 'Hadha Tajbribati', Interview originally conducted by Majalla al-Asr and reposted on Idris' website on 2 June 2012, www.jaafaridris.com/.

views, as well as his alleged preference for politics before prayer.³⁵ His decision to write one of his earliest books (*al-Salat Imad al-Din*) on the integral relationship between prayer and political activism was perhaps a reaction to this latter criticism.

While al-Turabi overcame the 'educationalist' challenge, winning the leadership of both the Muslim Brotherhood and ICF at the April 1969 conference, the conflict reminds us that Sudanese Islamism was not a *tabula rasa* on which he inscribed his views. The opinions of both Mawdudi³⁶ and Qutb,³⁷ the latter of whom had eschewed all engagement with both democratic and authoritarian political systems, were used by Idris and the other 'educationalists' to confront al-Turabi. While he would entrench his authority in the movement later on, many of his future 'pupils' were at the time swayed by the arguments of the educationalist faction. Most of the student wing, including future al-Turabi-stalwart Ibrahim Sanussi and future betrayer Ali Uthman Taha, voted for Idris.³⁸ There were proposals to nominate Sadiq Abdullah Abd al-Majid as a 'compromise candidate', before Abd al-Rahim Hamdi, al-Turabi's staunchest supporter throughout the conflict and the future economic guru of the Salvation Regime, forced the issue by announcing both his own resignation and that of al-Turabi. The subsequent outpouring of sympathy for the latter enabled him to return in the position of secretary-general.³⁹

In the short term, Jafa'ar Nimeiri's initially left-leaning coup of 1969 would cause the Islamic Movement to bury the divisions caused by this conference. A number of anti-Turabists had made plans to form a separate faction, but held back from doing so until 1978, when their resentment at al-Turabi's re-emergence and alliance with the May Regime (so-called because of the month in which Nimeiri staged the coup) led them to form this separate 'Muslim Brotherhood' group in earnest.⁴⁰ Including Sadiq Abdullah and headed by Hibr Yusuf Nur al-Da'im, it was not initially recognized by the international Muslim Brotherhood, but al-Turabi's efforts to bypass the organization in the 1980s and establish his own international organization led it to reverse this policy later in the decade.⁴¹ Members of this faction conceived of

³⁵ Azraq, *Min Tarikh*: 101–102. ³⁶ Badri, 'Tribute'.

³⁷ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*: 87.

³⁸ Mahbub Abd al-Salam, Interview with Kamal Ahmad Yousif, 14 July 2015.

³⁹ Azraq, *Min Tarikh*: 117. ⁴⁰ Azraq, *Min Mawaqif*: 18–19.

⁴¹ Azraq, *Min Mawaqif*: 31.

the conflict with Turabi's group as one between a Salafi agenda and a 'developmentalist' (*tatwiri*) one, expressing their horror at al-Turabi's novel approaches towards apostasy and the mingling of men and women.⁴² Jafa'ar Shaikh Idris in particular would continue to hound al-Turabi throughout the rest of his political career, mounting another ultimately unsuccessful challenge for the movement's leadership in 1978,⁴³ and persistently condemning his views, notably in a lecture at the University of Khartoum in 1995 in which he described the Islamist project of that decade as an experiment in 'coerced secularism'.⁴⁴ While Western audiences tend to prefer listening to secularist denunciations of Turabist manipulation and distortion of Islam, what the 'educationalist' episode reminds us is that the 'Islamic' character of al-Turabi's Islamic project was challenged by many Islamists themselves. While his intellectual charisma had enabled him to reach beyond the Islamic Movement and made him a vital asset to it, it also left him exposed to continual criticism on religious grounds within that same movement.

Al-Turabi Goes to Jail, the Islamists to Libya

While al-Turabi's significance within the Islamic Movement between 1969 and 1976 remained substantial, his imprisonment at the hands of Nimeiri's military regime for the majority of this period affected his capacity to shape the Movement's development. Given the secular outlook of the military regime that took power in uneasy collaboration with a faction of the SCP, it is not surprising that al-Turabi – at the forefront of the campaign to mobilize the then defunct religious parties to deliver an Islamic constitution – was the first politician that the May Regime interned. His detention, by his own account, was not particularly unpleasant, and he maintains that he even received friendly visits from Nimeiri himself.⁴⁵ However, the fallout of the 1971 showdown between the May Regime and its erstwhile ally, the SCP, must have acted as a warning to him. After an abortive coup attempt led by an SCP-affiliated officer, Nimeiri retaliated by executing Abd al-Khaliq Mahjub, the leader of the party, and two other senior members. Salih claims that soon before al-Atta's brief takeover, al-Turabi – in

⁴² Uthman Abu Naru, Interview with *al-Wasat*, 8 March 1998.

⁴³ Mahbub Abd al-Salam, Interview with Kamal Ahmad Yousif, 14 July 2015.

⁴⁴ *Sudan al-Hadith*, 23 October 1995.

⁴⁵ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 25 February 1999.

his position as secretary-general of both the ICF and the Islamic Movement – had attempted to direct a coup from his prison cell by using a senior member of the movement as a go-between with a high-ranking army officer.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, the coup attempt was apparently aborted after Nimeiri's vice-president found out about it, and in the coming years the military strategy against him was dictated by those members of the movement who remained at liberty. Al-Turabi himself was able to hear the sounds of the executions of Mahjub and the other SCP leaders from his prison cell,⁴⁷ and it likely served as a warning to him of the dangers of confronting, as opposed to co-opting, military leaders.

While it is true that al-Turabi remained for many the symbolic leader of Sudan's Islamists, during the period of his imprisonment a number of trends emerged within the movement over which he exercised little control. This happened because a number of Islamists had fled Sudan to countries such as Saudi Arabia and particularly Libya. Furthermore, in 1969 many from the officially dissolved ICF/Islamic Movement joined the National Front opposition, which also incorporated factions of the other major religious parties, particularly Sadiq al-Mahdi's branch of the Umma party and Sharif Hussein al-Hindi's branch of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP).⁴⁸ For Abd al-Salam, a major tactical divergence emerged between the Islamists who remained in Nimeiri's prisons in Sudan and those who travelled to Libya to receive military training from the regime of Mu'ammār Gaddafi, who was eager to topple the Sudanese president. The first group, including al-Turabi himself, became more bookish and more cultured.⁴⁹ Al-Turabi would later report that they studied economics, as well as social and political organization as preparation for government.⁵⁰ This was also the period in which he began to commit his re-conceptualization of Islam to paper, producing two books on faith (*al-Iman*) and prayer (*al-Salat*).⁵¹ Meanwhile, according to Abd al-Salam, the group that went to Libya and developed the plans for armed opposition to Nimeiri that eventually culminated in the 1976 trans-Saharan raid,

⁴⁶ Salih, *Al-Haraka*: 36.

⁴⁷ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ahmad Mansur (Part 4), *Al-Jazeera Arabic*, May 2016.

⁴⁸ Salih, *Al-Haraka*: 30. ⁴⁹ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 38.

⁵⁰ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 88. ⁵¹ Salih, *al-Haraka*: 92.

became more militarist and security minded.⁵² He argues that it was these men who would establish the ‘Information Bureau’ (*maktab al-ma’lumat*) within the Islamic Movement following their return, and introduce a belief that one must respond to violence with greater violence.⁵³ A number of the men who attended the training camps in Libya would later occupy senior positions following the Islamist seizure of power in 1989, among them Tayyib Ibrahim, the future Popular Defence Force militia leader Ibrahim Sanussi, and two of those who signed the famous 1998 memorandum against al-Turabi: Ghazi Salahaddin and Ali Karti.⁵⁴ Ghazi Salahaddin occupied a number of ministerial positions in the 1990s, in addition to acting as the secretary-general of the National Congress, before becoming one of al-Turabi’s most bitter critics in the 2000s; Ali Karti would rise to prominence as foreign minister in the post-Turabi period. While it has been observed that Ghazi had revered al-Turabi since he came under his political tutelage as a teenager,⁵⁵ it is probable that his experience of the Libyan camps had endowed him with a somewhat more independent outlook.

Al-Turabi’s imprisonment and the emergence of the May Regime also enabled the ‘educationalist’ faction to reassert itself, following its split with the ICF earlier in the year, and contribute significantly to the Islamist opposition to the new regime. After the Free Officer takeover, the ‘educationalists’ immediately made peace with the other factions, all parties accepting that the existential threat the new regime posed to Sudanese Islamism was more serious than their own internal differences.⁵⁶ It helped to raise their status that the *Ansar* Imam al-Hadi al-Mahdi, who was close to the educationalists, was at the forefront of the struggle against Nimeiri, although both al-Hadi al-Mahdi and Muhammad Salih Umar would be slain following Nimeiri’s bombardment of the *Ansar* stronghold at Aba Island in 1970.⁵⁷

Meanwhile, al-Turabi’s incarceration also allowed a much younger and more financially empowered generation of Islamists to rise to prominence within the movement. This was led by Ali Uthman Taha, the man al-Turabi would later come to regard as the most ungrateful of

⁵² Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 31–32.

⁵³ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 32.

⁵⁴ Muhieddin, *al-Islamiyyun*: 137. ⁵⁵ Petterson, *Inside Sudan*: 85.

⁵⁶ El-Affendi, *Turabi’s Revolution*: 111.

⁵⁷ El-Affendi, *Turabi’s Revolution*: 111.

his rebellious children. In the late 1980s, al-Turabi chose Taha as his number one deputy within the Islamic Movement, and he would acquire a number of prominent portfolios within the Salvation Regime, including the vice-presidency in 1998, before splitting with his former benefactor in 1999. Nevertheless, his prominence within the movement predated al-Turabi's patronage. In 1970, Taha was made president of Khartoum University Students' Union and soon became the de facto secretary-general of the Islamic Movement in Sudan in the absence of al-Turabi and others. He used these positions to mobilize campus Islamists against the secularist regime and engineer a new network of relationships with up-and-coming Islamists that would prove extremely valuable to him when he challenged al-Turabi in the later 1990s.⁵⁸ In 1972, he organized the Nizam Sirri (Secret Organization), which collaborated with foreign Islamists fighting in conflicts in Libya, Afghanistan, Iran and Lebanon to provide its young Sudanese members with military and security training.⁵⁹ Meanwhile, the younger generation that circled around Ali Uthman was swelled by numerous Islamists who had migrated to Saudi Arabia and were able to flood the Sudanese market with hard currency on their return, bolstering their position in the economy.⁶⁰ Although he later goes on to argue that this youthful and ambitious generation developed into a 'distinctive creation' that exploited their leader's enforced absence, Gallab also states that they initially emerged within 'al-Turabi Islamism', the 'citadel' of which was the University of Khartoum, even arguing that their style of politics was a by-product of al-Turabi's own personality cult.⁶¹ However, al-Turabi Islamism was still very much contested at this stage, not least within Sudan's premier educational institution.

Non-Turabist Islamists remained prominent in the National Front, particularly during the civil protests against the May Regime that occurred at the University of Khartoum in 1973. However, al-Turabi's own narrative has him manipulating the entire movement via remote control.⁶² It is true that when the Sha'aban uprising broke out in late August 1973, he had been out of jail for nearly a year after Nimeiri's conflict with the Communists had led him to relax his

⁵⁸ Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 143.

⁵⁹ Warburg, *Islam, Sectarianism*: 207. Taha, *al-Ikhwan*: 192–194, 214.

⁶⁰ Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 145. ⁶¹ Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 142.

⁶² Ahmad, *al-Haraka*: 65–66.

attitude towards the Islamists.⁶³ Most of this period had been spent lecturing abroad, although this did give him an opportunity to meet the London-based leaders of the National Front, as well as the KUSU leaders visiting Britain.⁶⁴ It was agreed at this meeting that the Islamists would pursue the struggle inside Sudan, and after further lecture trips al-Turabi returned to Khartoum that August.⁶⁵ KUSU's Islamist president Ahmad Uthman Makki maintains that he was at al-Turabi's house for five or six hours every day preparing the students' movement against the regime.⁶⁶

Al-Turabi's involvement in the campus agitation was significant enough to draw the attention of Nimeiri's security agencies, for he was re-interned as soon as the uprising broke out. However, while his ability to send missives to the movement from prison is well acknowledged, it seems that none of the Islamists was able to contact him during the Sha'aban uprisings.⁶⁷ Moreover, it is noticeable that many of his opponents within the Islamic Movement had a leading role in the on-campus opposition to Nimeiri. For instance, at one of the seminars convened on campus while the Sha'aban protests were in full flow, the group of speakers calling for the removal of Nimeiri's regime included the 'educationalist' Jafa'ar Shaikh Idris and the 'Islamic Socialist' Mirghani al-Nasri.⁶⁸ The next year, a new generation of Islamist activists inspired by Sha'aban emerged on campus, including Ghazi Salahaddin, Mutrif Siddiq and Sayyid al-Khatib – three of the younger generation who al-Turabi would try to mould in his own image, but all three of whom would turn against him in 1998.⁶⁹ Although he was released once more in 1974, the environment of Islamist activism in which these figures emerged was far from dominated by al-Turabi.

Nevertheless, the fact that al-Turabi remained at liberty in Khartoum for well over a year between 1974 and 1975 facilitated his efforts to restructure the Islamic Movement according to his own designs. His initiatives in this period demonstrate that the sources of his authority

⁶³ Ahmad, *al-Haraka*: 60, 103. ⁶⁴ Ahmad, *al-Haraka*: 66.

⁶⁵ Ahmad, *al-Haraka*: 66–67. ⁶⁶ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 86.

⁶⁷ Hasan Makki Muhammad Ahmad, Interview with Kamal Ahmad Yousif, 6 June 2015.

⁶⁸ Muhieddin, *al-Islamiyyun*: 102.

⁶⁹ Muhieddin, *al-Islamiyyun*: 102. All three signed the 1998 'Memorandum of the Ten' against al-Turabi; see Chapter 3.

were legal-rational as well as charismatic, as he spent many years in his house in Khartoum laying down the new constitution of the movement and defining the functions of a number of new offices; these included the new 'Executive Bureau', which was divided into an 'Administrative Bureau' and 'Political Bureau'.⁷⁰ A reasonably democratic and rational system had existed, at least on paper, before these reforms – the entire membership elected a congress, which then elected a Shura Council, which in turn elected a ten-man executive council, which itself chose the national leader. Al-Turabi re-engineered this system so that the Shura Council would directly elect the leader, who would then appoint the members of the executive committee. What he managed was, in effect, to blend the two sources of his legitimacy. While the legal rational and democratic character of the system remained, his changes maximized the impact of his charisma and oratory – he knew he could sway the middle rung of the movement more easily than its higher echelons.⁷¹ At the same time, he transformed the outlook of the movement, encouraging a much more visible engagement with social, cultural and sporting life in Khartoum and elsewhere so that it would have a presence in society in a future period of political freedom.⁷² However, later in 1975, he was imprisoned again after his plans to establish a wider 'Islamic Movement' incorporating the exiled National Front were leaked to Nimeiri.⁷³ While this internment did not prevent him from smuggling out bombastic messages to his student supporters in the University of Khartoum,⁷⁴ it made it impossible for him to influence the political activities of the National Front leaders abroad.⁷⁵ By this point, al-Turabi had become only the symbolic captive leader; the more practical guidance came from elsewhere.

The next two years would be of tremendous significance for the Sudanese Islamic Movement. While the 1976 desert raid on Khartoum would fail to oust Nimeiri, it came so close to doing so that Sudan's president found it necessary to come to terms with the National Front the next year. This diluted the secular character of the regime by enabling the integration of the religio-political parties into Nimeiri's Sudan Socialist Union, and ultimately set the scene for the Islamization of the law in 1983 and Islamist coup six years later.

⁷⁰ Ahmad, *al-Haraka*: 150. ⁷¹ Miller, 'Global Islamic Awakening': 191.

⁷² Hamdi, *Making*: 18–19. ⁷³ Ahmad, *al-Haraka*: 152.

⁷⁴ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 23.

⁷⁵ Hasan Makki, Interview with Kamal Ahmad Yousif, 6 June 2015.

However, the lead player in these events was not al-Turabi but his brother-in-law, Sadiq al-Mahdi. Al-Mahdi acted as the operational leader, and many Islamists blame him for the eventual failure of the coup, claiming his instructions to his own followers were focused more on keeping his uneasy allies on the margins of the operation than on ensuring Nimeiri's ouster.⁷⁶ Sadiq al-Mahdi also acted somewhat unilaterally in initiating the reconciliation in a meeting with Nimeiri at Port Sudan in July 1977.⁷⁷

Al-Turabi was forced to react to these events from a prison cell. Again, Islamists of various hues were involved in bringing about the reconciliation. It appears that it was a number of the 'educationalists', Rashid Taha Bakr, Jafa'ar Shaikh Idris and Malik Badri, who first discovered al-Mahdi's initiative, and then informed the Libyan faction, which had itself moved to London.⁷⁸ Following a meeting in the house of Uthman Khalid Mudawi, they sent Ahmad Abd al-Rahman to Sudan to secretly inform their captive leader, who consented to Islamist participation in the reconciliation.⁷⁹ He was only approached by Nimeiri after the main principles of the settlement had already been agreed with al-Sadiq in Port Sudan.⁸⁰ Following his subsequent release from prison, Al-Turabi reciprocated one unilateral action by al-Sadiq with another, infuriating his brother-in-law by taking it upon himself to announce the dissolution of the National Front.⁸¹

Someone Else's Sharia: Al-Turabi and the May Regime

If anything highlighted the limitations of al-Turabi's charisma, it was the fact that – having failed to achieve his political ends either by participating in a parliamentary democracy or siding with the democratic opposition to military authoritarianism – in 1977 he was compelled to ally with a military government to pursue his programme. Unlike the future military regime of Umar al-Bashir, Jafa'ar Nimeiri's

⁷⁶ Muhieddin, *al-Islamiyyun*: 116–117.

⁷⁷ Ahmad Abd al-Rahman, Interview with al-Tahir Hasan al-Tom in *al-Sahafa* (part 4), 29 March 2013.

⁷⁸ Salih, *al-Haraka*: 33.

⁷⁹ Salih, *al-Haraka*: 33. Ahmad Abd al-Rahman, Interview with al-Tahir Hasan al-Tom in *al-Sahafa* (part 4), 29 March 2013.

⁸⁰ Ahmad, *al-Haraka*: 101.

⁸¹ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 22 February 1999. Makki, *al-Haraka*: 101.

authoritarian government was not backed by the Islamists from the very start. Indeed, Nimeiri had actually seized power through an uneasy alliance with Sudan's leftists, and it was the ending of this alliance following Hashim al-Atta's abortive coup of 1971 that gave Nimeiri a motive to reconcile with the religious-orientated parties later in the decade. When the Islamic Movement reconciled with Nimeiri, it was not incorporated directly into the regime – rather, its members were elected to seats within Nimeiri's one-party system (the Sudan Socialist Sudan) along with representatives of other political groups. Thus, although it suited Nimeiri to introduce a programme of 'Islamization' in which members of the Islamic Movement played a significant role, al-Turabi was never able to fully dictate the manner in which this process would unfold.

Although al-Turabi did not control the May Regime, the reconciliation certainly gave him and other leading Islamists the opportunity to rebuild a movement that had suffered badly due to Nimeiri's repeated crackdowns earlier in the decade. The Islamists were able to exploit this by manipulating networks of Islamic finance and institutions such as the Faisal Islamic Bank, which had begun operations in Sudan almost immediately after its patron, Muhammad al-Faisal al-Sa'ud, had acted as one of the sponsors of the 1977 Reconciliation.⁸² For Gallab, this transformed the higher echelons of the Islamic Movement into a 'corporation', empowering a small elite of financiers and officials whose links to the Islamic banking system enabled them to accrue power and influence in both the public and private sectors.⁸³ Al-Turabi's reputation as the architect of Islamic Banking in Sudan is built principally upon his role as a legislator – as Nimeiri's attorney-general he was able to provide the basic jurisprudential framework for the Islamization of the financial sector in 1983.⁸⁴ It was Islamists with strong connections in Saudi Arabia, notably Ali Abdalla Yacub and Abd al-Rahim Hamdi, who first established the relationship with al-Faisal and procured the capital used to fund the emergence of Islamic banking in Sudan.⁸⁵ Thus, al-Turabi's movement in cash-strapped Sudan became beholden to Saudi financial institutions and pious foundations, many of which identified with a Salafi brand of Islam quite

⁸² Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 79–80.

⁸³ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 79–80.

⁸⁴ See, for example, Verhoeven, *Water*: 93. ⁸⁵ Mann, *Retreat*: 67.

distinct from his own. This would have important consequences for the ideological integrity of his Civilizational Project in the 1990s.⁸⁶

The extent of al-Turabi's relationship with these banks did cause criticism within the Islamic Movement, particularly from the student wing, which was already unhappy with the alliance with Nimeiri and by the 1970s was increasingly coming under the influence of the anti-capitalist ideals of the thinkers who had inspired the 1979 Iranian Revolution.⁸⁷ However, in spite of their unpopularity with the younger generation, it was the Islamic banks that helped fund the Islamic Movement's transition into a body that justified its name: a mass movement. Islamic finance bought influence in the military and intelligence services, and helped the movement found schools and hospitals in areas neglected by a state that was increasingly being scaled back by International Monetary Fund restructuring policies.

The substantial rise in the social, economic and political influence of the Islamic Movement during the post-1977 period led a number of al-Turabi's critics to accuse him of personal responsibility for the harsh Islamic law codes promulgated by the government, and the repression that followed in their wake. The reality is more complex. It is true that of all the groups that came to terms with Nimeiri's regime, al-Turabi's grew closest to it. While Sadiq al-Mahdi left the government in 1978, al-Turabi assiduously developed his personal relationship with Nimeiri, slowly moving his supporters into key positions and in 1979 accepting for himself the post of attorney-general. Since 1977 he had headed a committee charged with bringing Sudan's legislation into line with sharia,⁸⁸ and his promotion to attorney-general marked such a shift in the ideological character of the regime that one of Nimeiri's old Free Officer comrades resigned in disgust.⁸⁹

The alliance between the May Regime and the Islamic Movement has often been understood as the event that set Sudan on a path to 'radical' Islamism. However, it is telling that sources connected to the British Embassy frequently described al-Turabi during this period as a 'moderate' within his own movement.⁹⁰ This seems to have been

⁸⁶ See Chapter 5. ⁸⁷ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 41.

⁸⁸ Layish and Warburg, *Reinstatement*: 77.

⁸⁹ TNA, Collacot to Roycroft, 23 December 1981, FCO 93/2843.

⁹⁰ See, for example, TNA, Shapland (Research Dept., FCO) to Lander (Near East and North Africa Desk, FCO) 14 October 1980, FCO 93/2526, and note by Walker on 'Sudan Internal Situation', 6 June 1980, also FCO 93/2526.

because of his willingness to accept the increasingly pro-Western tilt of Nimeiri's regime, which he proudly informed the British ambassador was becoming less and less socialist and more inclined towards capitalism.⁹¹ He was also eager to restrain the more 'radical' Islamist youth, many of whom were influenced by the 'Islamic socialism' of the 1979 Revolution in Tehran, and were mortified by their own movement's participation in a regime that had supported the Camp David Peace accords. The British ambassador reported in 1982 that al-Turabi was determined to prevent the 'real danger of "his" students and the left joining forces'.⁹² While factions within the Islamic Movement backed the railway workers' strike of 1981, al-Turabi worked busily at Nimeiri's behest to prevent further strikes by changes in labour legislation.⁹³

However, by the time Nimeiri announced the 'Islamization' of the law in 1983, al-Turabi was no longer attorney-general and the relationship between the two men had deteriorated. Nimeiri removed him from his position in June, making him instead a 'presidential advisor' for legal affairs.⁹⁴ Three relatively obscure lawyers were chosen to complete the final draft, and were banned from visiting al-Turabi's office, whether 'openly or secretly'.⁹⁵ It says a great deal about his relationship with dictators that he vociferously endorsed the 'September Laws' of 1983, even though he had been marginalized in the final stages of their completion and they did not fully reflect his own views. Once supported by a raft of emergency legislation in 1984 that enabled the state to establish 'Instantaneous Justice Courts', the September Laws' highly flexible interpretation of the right of Islamic courts to apply the *hadd* penalty to thieves led to around 100 amputations being carried out.⁹⁶ Al-Turabi publicly supported these laws, although he later claimed that his earlier draft, which had been rejected by Nimeiri, had recommended their more gradual application.⁹⁷ In conversation

⁹¹ TNA, Walker to Collecot and Leach, 'Conversation with Hasan al-Turabi', 14 June 1980, FCO 93/2526.

⁹² TNA, Collecot to Roycroft, 10 February 1982, FCO 93/3198.

⁹³ TNA, Walker, FCO Diplomatic Report No. 126/82, 'Sudan: Annual Review for 1981: The Emperor Loses most of his clothes', 1 February 1982, FCO 93/9138.

⁹⁴ TNA, Cliff to Watt, 29 June 1983, FCO 93/3543.

⁹⁵ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 46. El-Affendi, in his *Thawrah*, reports a similar version of this story: 222–223.

⁹⁶ Peters, *Crime and Punishment*: 167.

⁹⁷ Layish and Warburg, *Reinstatement*: 91.

with the media and members of his own movement, al-Turabi was quite open about the pragmatic nature of his approach. For example, he told an English reporter that his movement's main motive for backing the government was to avoid the chaos that would ensue should it be overthrown.⁹⁸ Thus, although outspokenly critical of the May Regime in his conversations with the international media,⁹⁹ when Nimeiri declared himself Imam of Sudan, he was happy to swear an Islamic oath of fealty (*ba'ya*) towards him, something for which he was much criticized later.¹⁰⁰

Although Nimeiri's decision to shift al-Turabi once more from the position of legal advisor to foreign advisor was interpreted by some as a move against him,¹⁰¹ one of its purposes was to put him in a position to publicize the regime's Islamization campaign abroad.¹⁰² In the event, Nimeiri's decision to bring al-Turabi on his visit to Washington in November 1983, soon after the declaration of the new laws, was held both by State Department and Foreign Office officials to have contributed to the Americans' failure to persuade Nimeiri to moderate his policy towards southern Sudan as well as his policy of Islamization. Al-Turabi apparently played a 'prominent part' in the discussions.¹⁰³ Meanwhile, the position of foreign advisor also enabled him to organize the 'First Global Islamic Conference', held in Sudan on the first anniversary of the new laws in 1984, which was attended by Islamist intellectuals from all over the Muslim world – and anticipated the Popular Arab and Islamic Conferences of the 1990s.¹⁰⁴ Although his former schoolmate made sure to steal the limelight and deliver the keynote speeches,¹⁰⁵ it was to al-Turabi whom the visiting scholars turned to discuss the new laws, just as it was al-Turabi whom foreign journalists sought out for an explanation of the new 'Islamization' campaign.¹⁰⁶ Yet the convening of the conference was by no means

⁹⁸ *Guardian*, 14 May 1983.

⁹⁹ *Guardian*, 14 May 1983. Abdelwahab el-Affendi, 'Shaikh Hasan fi al-Thamaneen', *al-Sahafa*, 12 September 2012.

¹⁰⁰ *Al-Midan*, 1 April 1986.

¹⁰¹ 'Sudan: Allah and the South', *Africa Confidential*, vol. 24, no. 21.

¹⁰² TNA, Cliff to Holmes, 28 September 1983, FCO 93/354.

¹⁰³ TNA, Wright to FCO ('Immediate'), tel. no. 3537, 23 November 1983, FCO 93/3545.

¹⁰⁴ *Al-Ayyam*, 9 January 1984.

¹⁰⁵ *Al-Ayyam*, 26 February 1984, 22 September 1984.

¹⁰⁶ El-Affendi, *Thawrah*: 223–224.

a triumph for al-Turabi – especially since a number of the scholars who attended criticized the deviations of the Instantaneous Justice Courts from classical sharia.¹⁰⁷

Whether al-Turabi was genuinely happy about the severity with which sharia law was enforced by Nimeiri is unclear. In late 1983, he reassured the British ambassador that Nimeiri did not intend to ‘push on with further Islamic measures’,¹⁰⁸ although it was suspected that al-Turabi was being put under pressure by the Islamists’ ‘militant wing’ to push for further Islamization.¹⁰⁹ Indeed, a number of the more militant individuals within the Islamic Movement participated enthusiastically in enforcing the more punitive elements of Nimeiri’s new laws. Members and sympathizers served on Nimeiri’s ‘Instantaneous Justice Courts’, using them to target the more secular and left-wing elements remaining in the regime and reinforce the status of the Islamic Movement.¹¹⁰ These included the chief justice, Mukashifi al-Kabbashi.¹¹¹ Yet the British Ambassador, who frequently met with the Islamist leader, suggested that al-Turabi might be happy if Nimeiri was replaced by another more pliable military president, noting that ‘he is himself increasingly concerned at being held responsible for the excesses of the Emergency Courts that clearly do offence to the reputation of Islamic jurisprudence. He would welcome any change that would allow him to pose as the champion of scholastic and strict but acceptable (in the Sudan) Islam.’¹¹²

Al-Turabi eagerly supported the Islamization of the law in the media as an emancipation from cultural colonization,¹¹³ but fainted when he witnessed the first of the *hadd* penalties being applied.¹¹⁴ Again, it is important here to consider that al-Turabi did not engineer this chain of events – indeed, they remind us that it was his own followers who shaped his public persona as much as he did himself. Gallab argues

¹⁰⁷ TNA, Cliff to Holmes, 3 October 1984, FCO 93/3891.

¹⁰⁸ Fyjis Walker’s words: TNA, Walker to FCO (‘Priority’), tel. no. 402, 6 October, 1983 FCO 93/3544.

¹⁰⁹ TNA, Walker to FCO (‘Immediate’), tel. no. 410, 17 October 1983 (FM Khartoum 170930z Oct 83), FCO 93/3544.

¹¹⁰ El-Affendi, *Turabi’s Revolution*: 125.

¹¹¹ El-Affendi, *Turabi’s Revolution*: 125.

¹¹² TNA, Fyjis Walker to Long, 13 June 1984, FCO 93/3890.

¹¹³ *Al-Ayyam*, 9 January 1984.

¹¹⁴ Khalid, *Nimeiri*: 271. This was admitted by al-Turabi himself in an interview with Ahmad al-Mansur, *Al-Jazeera Arabic* (Part 6), May 2016.

persuasively that in the later years of the May Regime they ‘turned their leader’ into a symbol of ‘a program of Islamism conforming to the logic of the operational political system and the growing corporation that developed during his absence’.¹¹⁵

Al-Turabi was also ambivalent about the most brutal of the newly ‘Islamized’ regime’s acts – the execution of the elderly Republican Brother intellectual Mahmud Muhammad Taha, who al-Kabbashi sentenced to death for apostasy on account of his denunciation of the new laws.¹¹⁶ His movement’s involvement in the government and his own bitter personal feud with Taha led a number of al-Turabi’s critics to quickly lay responsibility for this at his door.¹¹⁷ However, he had no executive position at the time, and it seems that Nimeiri and al-Kabbashi were the foremost protagonists of the elderly intellectual’s judicial murder. After Nimeiri’s downfall, al-Turabi criticized Taha’s execution from a legal and theological perspective, but admitted that he did not personally regret the execution of a man who had directed very personal criticisms towards him in the past.¹¹⁸ Even though he was not its instigator, al-Turabi could not escape the legacy of Nimeiri’s crude and arbitrary ‘Islamization’ campaign. While his charismatic image remained the same, it was linked to a political programme identified with someone else’s sharia. His politics would never regain this lost integrity.

Al-Turabi’s Fraught Relationship with Parliamentary Democracy

Al-Turabi engaged in two experiments with parliamentary democracy. The first was sandwiched between the military regimes of Abboud and Nimeiri in the late 1960s, and the second followed two decades later, which he dismantled by supporting the coup of Umar al-Bashir. Through their participation in them, the ICF and later the NIF acknowledged the brief legitimacy of these parliamentary regimes. Although their achievements were limited, it is worth studying the manner of their failings as these would later define the nature of al-Turabi’s social and political engineering during the authoritarian

¹¹⁵ Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 162. ¹¹⁶ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 47–48.

¹¹⁷ Fluehr-Lobban, *Sharia and Islamism in Sudan*: 286.

¹¹⁸ Ibrahim, *Manichaean Delirium*: 276.

regimes of Nimeiri and al-Bashir, the purpose of which was to eliminate the various traditional social forces and legacies of colonialism he considered detrimental to true democracy.

Al-Turabi's parties fielded candidates in three one man, one vote parliamentary elections: in 1965, 1968 and 1986. In Sudan's first parliamentary period, between 1953 and 1958, the Islamists had chosen to publicly back candidates of the already established religious parties, notably the Umma party. Immediately before the 1965 elections, al-Turabi declared that ICF members would be voting for their own candidates and no others. Nevertheless, his own success in one of the graduate constituencies – non-geographic seats for which only those who had passed through the country's modern educational institutions could vote – aside, the results were disappointing. The ICF fielded 100 candidates in the 1965 elections, but only achieved 11 seats in parliament.¹¹⁹ Moreover, Al-Turabi's influence was confined to the educated elites in the graduate constituencies of Khartoum: the still largely rural population of Sudan, which identified with the major Sufi orders, remained beyond his reach. When he ran for the position of prime minister in 1966, he received only seven votes to the 138 of the winning candidate Sadiq al-Mahdi's.¹²⁰ The 1968 elections were even more frustrating for al-Turabi. When he ran in his home constituency of Masid, he lost out to another member of his own lineage, Mudawi Muhammad Ahmad al-Turabi of the Khatmiyya-backed Democratic Unionist Party¹²¹ – a defeat later cited by critics as evidence that even his own family thought his views a distortion of Islam.¹²² Meanwhile, the rest of the party fared no better. He claimed that the government had applied pressure at local level and manipulated the electoral results, maintaining that it had 'used the Native Administration to falsify the will of the voters'.¹²³ These elections demonstrated that he struggled to extend his own legitimacy, based on charisma and modern education, to the regional areas of Sudan where lineage-based and neo-traditional forms of authority were still entrenched.

The 1986 elections, which occurred following the downfall of the May Regime and al-Turabi's reformulation of the ICF as the NIF,

¹¹⁹ Layish and Warburg, *Reinstatement*: 16.

¹²⁰ TNA, Munro to Foreign Office, 26 July 1966, FO 371/190420.

¹²¹ Abu Shouk and Abd al-Salam, *Intikhabat*: 317.

¹²² Ali, *al-Turabi-al-Bashir*: 28. ¹²³ *Al-Mithaq*, 8 May 1968.

were also a bitter personal blow. Again, he used these elections to test the limits of his influence beyond the graduate seats, this time contesting al-Jabara, one of the urban constituencies in Khartoum. However, once more he lost out to the DUP, this time because each of the parties united in supporting a single candidate to run against the NIF chief.¹²⁴ Meanwhile, the party itself was considerably more successful, reflecting its emergence as a mass movement in the latter half of the Nimeiri period; but it still came in third place in the polls overall, behind the DUP and Umma. Moreover, the majority of its victories came in the graduate constituencies, although it did seize a number of the geographic constituencies in Khartoum in addition to some regional constituencies, including al-Masid. The elections also revealed to some extent where power lay within the NIF itself. Al-Turabi had to rely on old timers Ahmad Abd al-Rahman and Uthman Khalid Mudawi, by then established figures on the Khartoum political scene, to win the key geographic constituencies of Khartoum 1 and Khartoum 5.¹²⁵ Again, this would have been frustrating for the NIF leader, since it showed that the generation he was attempting to phase out had the greater ability to win votes among the public at large. This may explain why, after the military takeover, he marginalized the two old-timers just mentioned.¹²⁶ Meanwhile, with the exception of Ali Uthman Taha, the younger generation he was attempting to bring to prominence was forced to target the educated classes. Men such as Ahmad Uthman Makki, Ibrahim Ahmad Umar and Ibrahim al-Sanussi, whom al-Turabi would attempt to substitute for the old guard after 1989, acquired their seats in the graduate constituencies.¹²⁷ This group represented a vanguard within a vanguard.

The failure of al-Turabi and his partisans to garner mass public support in the one man, one vote elections forced them to seek influence by forging alliances with the more established religio-political parties. These parties were backed by Sudan's most prominent religious orders, namely, the neo-revivalist Mahdist Ansar, which sponsored the Umma party, and the Sufi Khatmiyya order, which acted as a patron to the National Unionist Party (NUP), a splinter faction of which formed the People's Democratic Party (PDP) before the two groups reunited to

¹²⁴ *Al-Midan*, 2 and 3 April 1986.

¹²⁵ Abu Shouk and Abd al-Salam, *Intikhabat*: 330. ¹²⁶ See Chapter 3.

¹²⁷ Abu Shouk and Abd al-Salam, *Intikhabat*: 330.

establish the DUP. These alliances were always uneasy, although in the late 1960s they were strengthened by mutual fear of the SCP; this was a lesser factor between 1986 and 1989 and consequently the coalitions they forged with these groups were even more fragile.

In spite of his future efforts to delegitimize these parties, in his early career al-Turabi's personal background made him an ideal candidate to reach out to them. His ancestors had been among the founders of the Khatmiyya order in Wad al-Turabi, and in 1961, he had confirmed his marriage to Wisal al-Mahdi, the sister of the future Imam of the Ansar Sadiq al-Madhi. The ability to forge links on both sides of the sectarian divide could be crucial in Sudanese politics – Sirr al-Khatim al-Khalifa was chosen as a 'safe' candidate for the post of interim prime minister in the 1964–1965 transitional period precisely because, like al-Turabi, he came from a Khatmi background and married into the *Ansar*.¹²⁸ Al-Turabi and the ICF participated in strategic alliances with the NUP and Umma against the SCP at key stages of the transition from military to parliamentary rule following the October Revolution. They mobilized along with the supporters of these parties when a communist takeover appeared imminent during the November 1964 'Night of the Barricades', supported their campaign to deny the SCP plans to sectoral constituencies representing labourers and professionals, and most famously helped mobilize support in favour of the decision to ban the SCP itself in late 1965.¹²⁹ Al-Turabi was at the forefront of the campaign to legalize the dissolution of the Communists' party in parliament, and took the lead on the three-man commission that parliament appointed two years later to challenge the High Court's rejection of the banning order as unconstitutional.¹³⁰

Until 1989, any effort by al-Turabi to push an Islamist political programme through a democratic parliament required the support of the 'sectarian' parties. Unfortunately for him, while these parties shared his enmity towards the Communists, they were far from being the pliant tools that would be willing to abet the establishment of his particular Islamist vision. Al-Turabi told Richard Hill in 1964 that al-Sadiq was 'more progressive than most of his followers', and most likely empathised with his brother-in-law on these grounds.¹³¹

¹²⁸ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 150. ¹²⁹ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 155–162.

¹³⁰ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*: 82.

¹³¹ SAD, Meeting with Richard Hill in December 1964, Richard Hill Papers, 974/9/14.

Nevertheless, the two men quickly began to see each other as competitors. Al-Sadiq would later claim that his relative became more hostile towards him after 1964, when al-Turabi's critics began to argue that he had only been able to achieve political prominence because of his relationship with the al-Mahdi family.¹³² Al-Turabi criticized his Umma party for supporting a 'more Western' form of democracy than the ICF,¹³³ and yet still allied with it in the 'New Forces Congress' of 1967. It was his relationship with Sadiq that enabled him to become heavily involved in the Constitutional Committee of 1967, although his proposal for an Islamic Constitution was eventually rejected in favour of the NUP proposal for a constitution with an 'Islamic Orientation'.¹³⁴

Al-Turabi would have hoped that his alliance with Sadiq would help him transcend his narrow urban support base, and yet during his ultimately unsuccessful campaign for the rural seat of Masid in 1968 Sadiq was unable to persuade the local Umma candidate to stand down in al-Turabi's favour, causing much tension between the two parties.¹³⁵ The relationship between the two men further deteriorated as a result of the abortive coup of 1976 and al-Turabi's subsequent reconciliation with Nimeiri, during which both the Umma party and the Islamic Movement made plans to act without the other. It reached its nadir during the last days of the Nimeiri regime, when the Umma party circulated a secret pamphlet entitled *al-Mubiqat al-Ashara (The Ten Great Offences)*, condemning the Islamic Movement for its alliance with a government that had supported the Camp David peace agreement with Israel and introduced the 1983 September Laws.¹³⁶

When Nimeiri was overthrown in 1985, al-Sadiq's Umma – together with almost all the other northern political parties and movements – signed the 'Charter to Protect Democracy', thereby leaving the NIF isolated. After the Umma party reaped the largest share of the vote in the subsequent elections and Sadiq became prime minister, the NIF remained in opposition during the period of the first two short-lived coalition governments. However, in 1988 Sadiq brought the NIF into his third coalition and appointed al-Turabi as attorney-general. It seems that Sadiq's personal relationship with him contributed significantly to this

¹³² Al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, Interview with *al-Wasat*, 6 October 1997.

¹³³ Al-Turabi, Interview with *The Vigilant*, 9 June 1965.

¹³⁴ Warburg, *Islam, Sectarianism*: 147.

¹³⁵ *Khartoum News Service*, 4 May 1968.

¹³⁶ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 55.

rapprochement, which had met opposition in the prime minister's own party.¹³⁷ Why was he willing to make his peace with al-Turabi? The answer is that, regardless of their differences, Sadiq considered al-Turabi a moderate within the NIF, and it may be that he considered that by bringing it into the regime he could use his relationship with his brother-in-law to save the Islamic Movement from its own extremist faction.¹³⁸ He also judged that including al-Turabi in the government might enable him to shift to him the blame for the least popular aspects of any new sharia code.¹³⁹ Moreover, al-Turabi and Sadiq al-Mahdi had a common interest as shareholders in the Islamic banks, and collaborated during the 1988–1989 coalition governments to prevent action being taken against them.¹⁴⁰

As attorney-general, al-Turabi used his position to prepare a draft penal code even more severe than that brought into force under the September Laws. However, Sadiq still remained a far from willing collaborator with his brother-in-law. Later in 1988, he reported to *al-Sharq al-Awsat* that he had turned down a proposal from him that – with military backing – their two parties should rule together.¹⁴¹ Al-Turabi would later blame Sadiq for giving in too willingly to the army's alleged demand that the Islamists be rejected from the government in 1989.¹⁴² Al-Turabi could not Islamize the existing democratic system without Sadiq; yet neither could he Islamize it with him. In 1989, he rejected both Sadiq and the existing democracy in favour of a military-Islamist alliance.

Conclusion

Al-Turabi's charismatic authority is often thought to have been as dominant as that supposedly possessed by Hasan al-Banna in the

¹³⁷ Already in mid-1987, in spite of reports that four-fifths of the Umma's political bureau objected to bringing al-Turabi's party into the regime, al-Sadiq was willing to inform the media that the Umma and NIF agreed on the majority of important issues, *Al-Midan*, 17 May 1987, 16 July 1987.

¹³⁸ Sadiq would later write after the 1989 coup that he had believed al-Turabi was a moderate, and that the extremist wing of the NIF restricted his room for manoeuvre; see Anderson, *Sudan in Crisis*: 179.

¹³⁹ Warburg, *Islam, Sectarianism*: 198.

¹⁴⁰ Khalid, *Government They Deserve*: 385–386. Henry and Wilson, *Politics of Islamic Finance*: 157.

¹⁴¹ Ahmad Sulayman, Interview with *al-Sahafa* (part 2), 11 October 2003.

¹⁴² Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 122.

1930s and 1940s, or Mawdudi in the *Jamaat-i-Islami* in the 1960s. In reality, this authority was far more contested. The situation of the Sudanese Islamic Movement from the 1960s onwards was more akin to that of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood in the same era, for it contained a split between a faction demanding a radical break with the existing social and political system and another aspiring to more direct engagement with it. Although al-Turabi's personal charisma enabled him to secure the leadership of the movement and ward off challengers influenced by overlapping Qutbist, Salafist and 'educationalist' trends, those followers who helped to bolster his position were by no means his direct intellectual progeny. The lingering influence of the Qutbist, Salafist and Mawdudist ideals that he had attempted to challenge in the 1960s, as well as the military, political and financial experience accumulated by the Islamists in Libya in the 1970s during his incarceration in Khartoum, led to the formation of a generation that was far more independent of its leader than has often been assumed. The limited character of his charismatic authority was one of the principal reasons why al-Turabi's own ideology became so mutable in future years, as will be further demonstrated in the following chapters. Always the political shapeshifter, he adjusted his political strategies to accommodate the rise of the new generation. He appeared to make a number of efforts in the 1970s and 1980s to establish a more legal-rational basis of authority within the Islamic Movement, but a number of his strategies were also focused on the 'phasing out' of the old guard in favour of this ruthless younger generation. He frequently adapted his own discourse to accommodate shifts in the political landscape, as was further revealed during his uneasy alliance with Nimeiri, the dictator who had initially imprisoned him on coming to power. Al-Turabi was not the final architect of the 'September Laws' of 1983, which forced him to shift his position to avoid conflict with the regime and those within the Islamic Movement who favoured its harsh legislation. Although he could not control Nimeiri any more than he would later be able to control al-Bashir, his experiments with parliamentary politics in the second half of the 1960s and two decades later illustrated why military partners were necessary for him to achieve political influence. Neither his ICF nor NIF could compete with its two 'sectarian' rivals, the Umma party and DUP/NUP, in one man, one vote elections; and his continuing frictions with his brother-in-law, Sadiq, underlined the ultimate futility of forming coalitions with these groups.

3 | *Salvation Regime, 1989–1999* *‘One-Man Show’?*

For many commentators, the Islamists’ seizure of power via military coup in 1989 inaugurated a decade-long ‘one-man show’¹ in which al-Turabi acted as the puppet master behind the government, attempting to reconfigure politics and society in a vain effort to achieve an essentially utopian Islamist vision. De Waal and Abdel Salam describe him as the ‘controlling influence’ behind the country’s military rulers, arguing that he ‘ruled from his house’ in a highly personalistic and centralized manner.² The worst failings and brutalities of the Salvation Regime are often identified as being expressive of al-Turabi’s own caprice – for instance, Verhoeven describing the church-burnings, slave raiding and genocide in the Nuba Mountains as ‘Turabi at his most hypocritical’.³ During his ‘decade in power’, al-Turabi refused to acknowledge that he played any role in the government before his appointment as speaker of parliament in 1996; and even after he belatedly acknowledged his movement’s direct involvement in the 1989 coup following his split with Umar al-Bashir in 1999, both he and his supporters continued to downplay his own role: failure is an orphan. After al-Turabi’s dismissal as speaker by al-Bashir in 1999 split the Islamic Movement, the Islamists themselves began to acknowledge within a semi-liberated media atmosphere that the ‘Salvation Revolution’ had been a disaster. Not only had the Islamists created a regime responsible for gross human rights abuses, but they had also failed to unify the nation, intensifying the war in the south and the Nuba Mountains and sparking a new conflict in the East. Meanwhile, the state system that had emerged did not appear to be either convincingly democratic or convincingly Islamic.

For al-Turabi’s critics, these crises were a result of his monopolization of political power and illustrated both his inadequacies as a statesman

¹ For this term, see Salih, *al-Haraka*: 200.

² De Waal and Abdel Salam, ‘Islamism’: 84. ³ Verhoeven, *Water*: 111.

and the irrelevance of his particular brand of Islamist ideology to the lives of ordinary Muslims. Within the fractured Sudanese Islamic Movement, two predictable narratives have emerged – one within al-Turabi’s new party, the Popular Congress Party (PCP), which attributes the debacle of the 1990s to the hegemony of the military, and one within al-Bashir’s National Congress Party (NCP), which blames it on the hegemony of al-Turabi. Filling out the latter narrative, Sayyid al-Khatib, a former al-Turabi acolyte and now senior member of the NCP, has used interviews with Richard Cockett to claim that the split occurred as a reaction to al-Turabi’s increasingly dictatorial tendencies, refusal to accept other points of view and desire to implement his own particular Islamist vision at all costs.⁴ Non-Sudanese analysts who give credence to such arguments tend to maintain that since his influence before 1999 had been so pervasive, it was inevitable that his removal should have diluted the ideological character of the regime and ushered in a more pragmatic and pliable government.⁵ However, one non-Islamist Sudanese commentator, Mansour Khalid, acknowledges that al-Turabi himself had begun to recognize the limits of his ideology in the years before the split. Dismissing the rebels against al-Turabi as ‘at bottom, just criminals’, Khalid seems to accept that his mooted of a democratic agenda immediately before the split was a belated recognition that his early authoritarian policies had failed.⁶

The most explicit articulation of the PCP counter-narrative comes in Mahbub Abd al-Salam’s epic text on the Islamic Movement, published in 2010. For *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya: Da’ira al-Dou*, al-Turabi remained far more committed to human rights and democracy in the 1990s than the regime associated with his name. However, he was sidelined from the beginning by a military junta that prioritized state over society and feared that any form of democracy or media liberalization would lead to a revival of the fortunes of the banned opposition parties. Crucially, al-Turabi’s marginalization was made possible by the decision of his ‘second man’, Ali Uthman Taha, to support the army’s hardline stance against the more progressive positions of his leader throughout the first decade of the ‘Salvation Regime’.⁷ Similar versions of this narrative are offered by other members of the PCP, not

⁴ Cockett, *Sudan*: 125–126, 133–134. ⁵ Cockett, *Sudan*: 136.

⁶ Khalid, *War and Peace in Sudan*: 200, 245.

⁷ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 130–132, 148–149, 153–161.

least al-Turabi himself.⁸ Nevertheless, while inevitably partisan, Abd al-Salam’s text contains many implicit criticisms of al-Turabi’s policies during the 1990s. Indeed, in 2014 the Sudanese media obtained access to an internal PCP memorandum in which Abd al-Salam condemned al-Turabi for not apologizing sufficiently for the mistakes of the 1990s and called upon him to resign.⁹

There are a number of other accounts from Islamists close to al-Turabi that allow us to add nuance to the polarized PCP-NCP narrative. Abd al-Rahim Muhiedden’s *al-Turabi wa’l-Inqadh: Sira’ al-Huwiyya wa’l-Hawa* (Al-Turabi and the Salvation Regime: The Struggle between Identity and Ambition), published in 2006, is a case in point.¹⁰ Having worked for a pro-NIF newspaper in the 1980s, Muhieddin held a number of minor government positions under the Salvation Regime. Although he chose to stay with the government following the split, his account of the post-1989 regime is genuinely ambivalent and his criticisms of al-Turabi are balanced. Indeed, he pours considerable scorn on those he considers to be the most unreasonable of al-Turabi’s detractors.¹¹ Muhieddin’s 650-page text, which draws on interviews with Islamists on both sides of the PCP-NCP split, will thus be used extensively in the subsequent analysis, bearing in mind that, while relatively unbiased in the context of the PCP-NCP dispute, his outlook is still that of a member of the Islamic Movement. Another set of useful perspectives comes from the older generation of Islamists, an age group marginalized after the 1989 coup both by al-Turabi and its younger successors. Although its perspective had inevitably also been jaundiced by resentment at the sidelining of its members by al-Turabi in 1989, their relative distance from the events of 1999 makes their accounts somewhat more objective. They include Ahmad al-Tijani, Ahmad Abd al-Rahman and Tayyib Zain al-Abdin.

This chapter will draw largely on sources from within the Islamic Movement. Accounts provided by Western journalists and diplomats will be exploited, too, but the challenge here is that such sources have a tendency to exaggerate al-Turabi’s influence due to his particular interest in playing the role of interlocutor with the West and

⁸ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 328–329. Hasan al-Turabi, quoted in *al-Sahafa*, 20 October 2005.

⁹ *Sudan Tribune*, 20 January 2014. ¹⁰ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*.

¹¹ Such as Bahieddin Hanafi, the architect of the famous ‘Memorandum of the Ten’, 505–507.

co-ordinator with foreign Islamic movements. Since the post-1989 regime only permitted Islamists – or at least those professing to be Islamists – to take up positions within the state, it is inevitable that only Islamist sources can offer some understanding of the extent of his power within the state. It is only by exploring the rival narratives generated within Sudanese Islamism that we can appreciate the extent to which al-Turabi’s power was contested. Sami Zubaida’s observation that the state acts not so much as a coherent institution but as a ‘political field’ in which various groups compete for influence is relevant here.¹² Al-Turabi was forced to define his Islamic State as part of a dialogue not only with more authoritarian members of his movement but also with the military officers upon whom his government depended for its existence.

An opposition leader remarked of al-Turabi in 1995 that one of his distinguishing features was his acceptance of the need to ‘swim with the current even if it goes against his wishes’.¹³ This recognition signals the relevance of the local political context to the particular form that Islamism took in Sudan. Al-Turabi’s Islamist experiment was shaped by the fluid and unstable character of the Sudanese state. His power was not so much a product of his personal charisma, significant as this was, as his ability to adapt to Sudan’s highly fluid political environment by repeatedly reconfiguring the network of alliances that held the formal government, the shadow government and the security apparatus together. His personal agency was circumscribed by the necessity of playing various factions off against each other, including first- and second-generation members of the Islamic Movement, its military wing, former May Regime officials, members of non-Islamist parties and representatives of the marginalized. His eventual fall from grace in 1999 was not a result of the failure of his ‘Civilizational Project’, so much as his alienation of some of the most important factions within the state.

Another Military Imbroglio

For a number of both Western and Sudanese critics, the ‘original sin’ of al-Turabi’s Islamist regime was that it was brought about through a military coup. His decision to overthrow the prime minister, Sadiq al-Mahdi, and thus abort another of Sudan’s short-lived parliamentary

¹² Zubaida, *Islam, the People and the State*: 146.

¹³ *Al-Hayat*, 11 September 1995.

regimes, is held to indicate his contempt for democracy and belief that his own Islamist ideals should be imposed by force.¹⁴ Indeed, a number of al-Turabi's more militant protégés justified, and have continued to justify, the coup in this manner. Ibrahim Sanussi, a veteran of the Libyan training camps who took charge of the Popular Defence Force militias under the Salvation Regime, remarked in 2014 that coups were common in Africa at the time and thought to be noble.¹⁵ In the immediate build-up to the al-Bashir takeover, the communist-turned-NIF stalwart Ahmad Sulayman urged members of his new party to bring the military back, telling them that by such means they could access power 'like the key in my car here'.¹⁶ Sulayman was the principal architect of the SCP's alliance with the Free Officers in 1969, and the similarities were striking. In both cases, an ideological movement cultivated a cell within the army, which then took over and established a Revolutionary Command Council, or RCC. Although this rather predictable acronym was partly chosen to disguise the Islamist role in the coup and persuade the international community that it was dealing with a conventional military regime, it also illustrated the extent to which al-Turabi was forced to adapt to the operational logic of regional politics.

There is another Islamist narrative concerning the 1989 coup. This asserts that it was a defensive response to anti-democratic measures taken against the NIF by the military establishment. Specifically, al-Turabi and his cohorts often refer to the army memorandum of 20 February 1989, which effectively ended the short-lived coalition between the prime minister Sadiq al-Mahdi and the NIF. The memorandum, presented by the army commander-in-chief, Fathi Ahmad Ali, demanded that Sadiq endorse a peace initiative proposed by the DUP and SPLA and make efforts to form a government with a wider political base. It is unclear whether the generals specifically demanded that Sadiq remove the NIF from the government. Sudan's Islamists certainly follow this narrative, although their critics blame them for refusing to engage with either the civil-military negotiations that subsequently attempted to resolve the political crisis, or the next coalition government, which included practically every other political force apart from the Islamists.¹⁷ Nevertheless,

¹⁴ See, for example, Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 59, 121.

¹⁵ Ibrahim Sanussi, Interview with Muzammil Abd al-Ghaffir, *al-Intibaha*, 30 June 2014.

¹⁶ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 165.

¹⁷ Khalid, *Government They Deserve*: 374–375.

al-Sanussi argues that Fathi Ahmad Ali, believed to be close to the United States following a three-year stint as a military attaché in Washington,¹⁸ was the ‘al-Sisi’ of 1989, comparing him to the Egyptian general who overthrew a democratically elected Islamist regime in 2013.¹⁹ Al-Turabi’s own imprisonment by Nimeiri in 1969, following the most recent incursion by the Sudanese military into the political arena, would also have made him eager to pre-empt any political intervention by the army via a military movement of his own.

It is unclear how pivotal al-Turabi’s own role was in the decision to go ahead with the coup. Most former members of the NIF maintain that it was taken democratically, a motion in favour of the coup being passed with only a few refusals in the Shura Council.²⁰ It was, it seems, after this decision was taken that al-Turabi was tasked with liaising with the movement’s military wing and engineering the coup along with a team of six other senior Islamists.²¹ However, his alliance with the military was not simply a knee-jerk reaction to the threats of 1989. The Islamic Movement had been pursuing a deliberate strategy of sending its members into military college since 1977 and had since the early 1980s been actively developing an Islamist cell within the military.²² According to Yasin Umar Imam, it was al-Turabi who was charged by the executive bureau with overseeing this cell.²³

A unique and highly significant feature of the 1989 takeover was the secrecy associated with it. For al-Turabi, this was necessitated by the hostile regional and international environment that the Islamic Movement faced – any government openly declaring its affiliation to an Islamist party risked being deprived of international recognition. Thus, the initial regime that followed the coup came to be known as the ‘Salvation Regime’, after al-Bashir’s Revolutionary Command Council for National Salvation.²⁴ Meanwhile, members of the NIF Shura

¹⁸ Al-Mirghani, *Al-Jaysh*: 151–152.

¹⁹ Ibrahim Sanussi, Interview with Muzammil Abd al-Ghaffir, *al-Intibaha*, 30 June 2014.

²⁰ Ali, *Suqut*: 19. ²¹ Ali, *Suqut*: 19.

²² Yasin Umar Imam, Interview with Abd al-Rahim Muhieddin, cited in Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 177.

²³ Imam, Interview with Muhieddin.

²⁴ Although this institution was usually just referred to as the ‘Revolutionary Command Council’. The term ‘salvation’ (*al-Inqadh*) does not have the same religious connotations in Arabic as it does in a Christian context – al-Bashir’s putchists merely made themselves out to be saving the country from mundane economic and political crises, as did generals who seized power elsewhere in the continent.

Council swore on oath not to reveal the nature of their involvement. The trick worked at least for a while, as the Egyptian government recognized the new regime immediately.²⁵ Even a year later, the British ambassador dismissed as ‘conspiracy theorists’ those suggesting al-Turabi had deliberately imprisoned himself – although his view that al-Turabi would never have done such a thing for so long if he had really been in control of the RCC makes sense in light of later claims that the NIF chief’s incarceration was extended beyond that which he had initially suggested.²⁶

The effort to present al-Bashir’s takeover as a regular military coup is usually dismissed as a thin mask for NIF dominance, but it is worth noting the impact that the party’s dissimulation had on the character of the new regime and its relationship with the army. It was the ‘Super-Tanzim’ (super-organization) that emerged at the core of the Islamic Movement following the 1977 reconciliation that co-ordinated the takeover with the military, but this organization continued to run the new state behind closed doors and separately from the rather non-descript civilian cabinet appointed by al-Bashir.²⁷ Although al-Turabi was nominally the controller of this ‘Super-Tanzim’, his incarceration gave immediate power and responsibility to those of its members who did not volunteer for fake imprisonment. These included the men responsible for drafting al-Bashir’s opening address, Ali Uthman Taha and Nafi Ali Nafi, the latter of whom who would soon become the Salvation Regime’s top security chief;²⁸ as we shall see, al-Turabi slowly lost control over these particular disciples. After the 1999 split, he expressed bitter regrets over this secrecy, admitting it had made it hard for the Islamic Movement to stick to its original purpose and led to the corruption of its members.²⁹

Authoritarian regimes in the late twentieth-century Middle East and North Africa tended to fall into one or other of two patterns: the one, as in Iraq, where an entrenched party organization would at first infiltrate the military and then absorb it; the other, as in Egypt, where the

²⁵ Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: 26.

²⁶ FOIA, Shapland to Hurr, 23 May 1990, FCO. For the extension of Turabi’s period in detention, see Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 130, 153.

²⁷ El-Affendi, *Thawrah*: 47–48. See also Abdelwahab el-Affendi, ‘Laysa raddan ‘ala Tijani Abd al-Qadir’, *al-Sahafa*, 14 November 2006, where Ali Uthman Taha, Nafi Ali Nafi, Awad al-Jaz and Mahjoub al-Khalifa are named as members of the ‘Super-Tanzim’.

²⁸ Kok, *Governance and Conflict in Sudan*: 100.

²⁹ Al-Turabi, quoted in *al-Sahafa*, 20 October 2005.

military itself would seize power and then create a party system to legitimize its rule.³⁰ In Sudan, neither of these scenarios was seen, as not the military nor the civilians were able to establish a system that would fully absorb the other group. While the Islamic Movement had since 1977 developed a long term strategy to infiltrate youthful members into the military by encouraging its secondary school graduates to enrol in the military college, it was not this generation that led the coup.³¹ It was instead regular, established officers who had historically been members of the movement, such as al-Bashir and Abd al-Rahim Muhammad Hussein, or who had been co-opted into it in the 1980s, such as Bakri Hassan Salih and Zubeir Muhammad Salih, the vice president of the 1980s.³² For many of the latter category, the motive was material as much as ideological, for senior officers attending the African Islamic Centre were offered financial incentives to join the movement.³³ Meanwhile, the fact that the NIF officially dissolved itself along with the other parties as part of a strategy of calculated deception ensured that the military was not directly incorporated into any ideological organization. Indeed, al-Bashir would later tell the media that, in 1971, he and Faisal Abu Salih had formed the Islamist cell in the military on their own initiative.³⁴ Although this story was entirely fictitious, the fact that al-Turabi allowed al-Bashir to keep on peddling it ensured that Sudan’s new president acquired a form of legitimacy he would not otherwise have had.

Although al-Bashir launched the 1989 coup at the behest of al-Turabi and the rest of the NIF leadership, it does not seem that – with the exception of his old schoolmate Ali Uthman Taha – the soldier was personally well known to them. It appears that he was only selected within a few days of the coup, after the previous candidate Uthman Ahmad al-Hasan had stepped down on the grounds that the NIF refused to surrender complete political power to the military.³⁵ Nevertheless, a series of victories for the army in the south in 1992, and al-Turabi’s protracted convalescence following the near-fatal Karate blow dealt to him by the would-be assassin Hashim Badreldin in Ottawa in 1992, ensured that al-Bashir’s stock continued to rise.³⁶ When al-Turabi persuaded his new ally to dissolve the Revolutionary

³⁰ Ayubi, *Over-stating*: 268–269. ³¹ Al-Mirghani, *Al-Jaysh*: 230–231.

³² Al-Mirghani, *Al-Jaysh*: 245–246. ³³ Ulaysh, *Yaumiyyat*: 31.

³⁴ Ali, *Suqut*: 16. ³⁵ Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 28–29, fn 11.

³⁶ Ronen, ‘Rise and Fall’: 996.

Command Council in 1993, he was unable to convince him to retire from the military and carry on as a civilian president.³⁷ Meanwhile, one of al-Bashir's close aides, Abd al-Rahim Muhammad Hussein, repeatedly blocked efforts by al-Turabi to appoint civilians to 'reform' the presidency.³⁸ Neither al-Bashir's military nor al-Turabi's civilians fully incorporated the other. They continued to maintain a mutually dependent, if hardly symbiotic, relationship – although the identification of a number of civilians with the security-orientated world view of the military would prove crucial in later power struggles.

The Dissolution of the Shura Council and Rise of the National Congress

In the last 15 years, the now older and wiser Islamist elites of Khartoum and elsewhere have turned the diagnostics of the decline of al-Turabi's Islamist experiment into a veritable science. The fatal mistake identified by a number of this cohort – apart from the 'original sin' of taking power via military coup – was al-Turabi's decision to dissolve not just the NIF but also the Shura Council of the Islamic Movement. It is widely accepted that the initiative for this decision came from al-Turabi himself as secretary-general of the Islamic Movement's soon-to-be defunct Executive Bureau.³⁹ There were probably three principal motivations behind his course of action: first, he was still maintaining the pretence that the Islamic Movement had not sponsored the coup, and as such could not be allowed to maintain any visible political prominence; second, in accordance with his theory of 'melting' (*dhaw-ban*) the movement into society, he could not allow its existing institutions to remain in their present form; third, the dissolution of the movement's principal democratic body would give him free rein to exercise his revolutionary authority as he thought necessary.

Senior Islamists, many of whom were marginalized as a result of the dissolution of the Shura Council, have blamed this decision for the regime's almost total lack of accountability. Although the senior echelons of the Islamic Movement were absorbed by the state, as Tayyib Zain al-Abdin maintains, their lack of any formal body by means of which to express their grievances or form a consensus made their

³⁷ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*. ³⁸ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 156, fn 10.

³⁹ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 131–132.

participation as individuals and not as a movement unavoidable, and equally so their incorporation into the corrupt and patrimonial logic of the state apparatus rather than confrontation with it.⁴⁰ Although, as we have seen, the legitimacy of the Islamic Movement in the 1970s and 1980s was a product both of al-Turabi’s charisma and a legal-rational institutional framework, the fact that he was able to dissolve its core advisory institution with such ease illustrated how frail the legal-rational element still was. Nevertheless, the dissolution of the Shura Council did not imply a return to pure charismatic leadership – it empowered the military and the ‘Super-Tanzim’ within the Islamic Movement, just as much as al-Turabi himself.

In the absence of the Shura Council, the movement’s intelligence and security apparatus came to play an increasingly prominent role in the leadership’s decision-making.⁴¹ Salih attributes the appearance of the ‘ghost houses’ in which political detainees were brutally tortured to the emergence of this ‘security’ ethos in the absence of the main *shura* body.⁴² The arrival of the new Islamist security elite problematizes any straightforward ‘military-civilian’ analysis of the factions within the Salvation Regime, since securocrats such as Nafi Ali Nafi and Salah Gosh came from the civilian Islamic Movement but shared the security-orientated mindset of the military Islamists.

What of the Council of the Forty (or Thirty, according to some accounts), which had reportedly replaced the Islamic Movement’s Shura Council following the assault on it by al-Turabi? It was a common assumption by foreign observers that this was the parallel institution manipulating the Revolutionary Command Council and civilian cabinet on behalf of the Islamic Movement. In fact, even after Sudan’s Islamists acknowledged the NIF role in the coup, they admitted that the one significant meeting this body convened was when it dissolved itself.⁴³ Instead, the state was run by a different set of parallel institutions. It is now established that once al-Turabi left prison, the Islamists and their allies established a Leadership Office (*maktab qiyadi*), the membership of which was divided between military and civilians on a 50–50 basis. Thus, rather than a shadowy Islamist organization pulling the strings of the military, the parallel government generated

⁴⁰ Tayyib Zain al-Abdin, ‘Khataya qatila fi masira al-haraka al-Islamiyya’, *al-Sabafa*, 19 February 2012.

⁴¹ El-Affendi, *Thawrah*: 47–48. ⁴² Salih, *Al-Haraka*: 131.

⁴³ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 132.

more of a joint venture.⁴⁴ As will be seen later, this was significant – it only took one civilian to side with the military point of view for the soldiers to hold sway. It was also significant that while half of the membership of this institution came from the Islamic Movement, a number of the historic NIF and ICF stalwarts such as Ahmad Abd al-Rahman, Ahmad al-Tijani Salih and Uthman Khalid Mudawi were marginalized by this process, whereas members of the ‘new generation’ – Taha, Abdullah Hasan Ahmad, Awad al-Jaz, and Ali al-Haj – were all prominent members of the new body. Meanwhile, in June 1989, the government had established a Transitional National Assembly which took on legislative responsibilities at a national level. However, each member of this body was to be appointed by al-Bashir.⁴⁵ It was not until five years after the coup that any semblance of a nationwide democratic institution was even considered by the Islamists and their military allies.

The establishment of the National Congress in early 1994, which in theory was to represent the collective whole of a series of regional conferences established in 1992 and 1993, appeared at least superficially to represent a revival of the consultative institutions associated with the pre-1989 Islamic Movement. It appears that in 1995 the leaders of the Islamic Movement – by then marginalized – agreed to officially dissolve it and reconstitute it within the framework of the National Congress; this reproduced within the new body such institutions as the student wing, security committee and – most importantly – the 400-man Shura Council.⁴⁶ However, the revival of the pre-1989 *shura* was illusory. For a start, al-Bashir and al-Turabi agreed that only 40 per cent of its members would come from the old Islamic Movement!⁴⁷ The remaining positions were used to co-opt representatives of Sudan’s other social and political forces – former partisans of the May Regime, representatives of the Libyan-backed ‘Revolutionary Committees’, a branch of the Sudanese Ba’athist movement, splinter factions of the DUP, Salafis from the Ansar al-Sunna Movement and officers from various recesses of the security services.⁴⁸ This policy reflected al-Turabi’s belief that the movement had to expand beyond its limited base and dissolve in political society, a perspective that had

⁴⁴ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 188–189. ⁴⁵ Rone, *Behind the Red Line*: 33, fn 15.

⁴⁶ Nafi Ali Nafi, Interview in Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 218–219.

⁴⁷ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 146. Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 159.

⁴⁸ Ahmad, *Al-Sudan*: 99–103.

alienated senior Islamists in the 1960s and 1970s and alienated even more in the 1990s. While the Shura Council should in theory have re-emerged as the Islamic Movement and the regime’s premier democratic institution, in practice it was absorbing leading members of both past and present military regimes, including such senior lieutenants of Nimeiri as Abu’l-Gasim Muhammad Ibrahim and al-Fatih Irwa.⁴⁹ Moreover, even though officially established in 1994, the National Congress did not achieve any real significance for some years. In the absence of effective leadership institutions within the Congress itself, executive decisions continued to be the prerogative of the shadowy and seemingly unaccountable Leadership Office.⁵⁰ During the 1996 elections it was unable to facilitate the re-emergence of democracy, even within a one-party context. It was allowed to nominate 125 out of 400 representatives for the National Assembly in that year, whereas the government interfered with elections for the other 275 seats either through vote rigging, intimidation of candidates or – in the case of the South – outright cancellation of the process.⁵¹ Al-Turabi would make further efforts to democratize the institution and enhance its status later in the decade, which would lead to further conflict with the authoritarians he had empowered at its beginning.

Shaikh Hasan, the Supreme Leader?

For Gallab, al-Turabi’s leadership style was akin to a personality cult. Drawing on Hannah Arendt’s theories of totalitarianism, he argues that his followers attempted to flood both the media and the academic world with an image of him as an infallible leader and intellectual mastermind of the contemporary Islamic revival. Meanwhile, the leader created an image of himself as the only man to possess the ‘keys of history’ and answers to the ‘riddles of the universe’.⁵² However, this line of analysis can only be pursued so far. There were significant differences between the practices and ideologies of al-Turabi and his followers and those pursued by modern totalitarian leaders employing cults of personality. Men like Stalin and Hitler presented themselves as military idols, and leaders of a nation in arms, whereas al-Turabi had

⁴⁹ Ahmad, *Al-Sudan*: 99–103.

⁵⁰ Nafi Ali Nafi, Interview in Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 219.

⁵¹ Lesch, *The Sudan*: 124–125.

⁵² Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 92–94, 111–112.

no military status whatsoever. Moreover, these personality cults were rooted in the concept of popular sovereignty and saw the fate of the leader as analogous with the fate of the nation.⁵³ The Sudanese Islamists, meanwhile, based their legitimacy on the notion of *hakimiyya*, or God's sovereignty. According to al-Turabi's own politico-religious theory, a personality cult would represent a form of *shirk* – attributing divine features to human beings – and thus a violation of the principle of *hakimiyya*.⁵⁴ One might argue that this was simply another example of his Islamism's lack of internal consistency. It is also true that his followers had borrowed from nationalist and Marxist political practices of indoctrination, mobilization and political control; but in building up al-Turabi, they always had to be aware of the religious nature of the legitimacy they claimed. This was why his personality cult, to the extent that it existed, never reached the same proportions as that of Stalin or Hitler – a visitor to Sudan in the 1990s would not have found pictures of al-Turabi's face on every billboard, book and public building.

Probably, the most obvious distinction of all that can be drawn between al-Turabi and the totalitarian leaders of the twentieth century, however, was that until 1996 he possessed no formal political position. Gallab compares his status to that of Khomeini, who governed Iran in accordance with his theory of the 'leadership of the Jurist';⁵⁵ but again, al-Turabi possessed no religious or political office of equivalent status to that of Khomeini as Imam and leader of the Council of Guardians. Much has been written about how al-Turabi acted as the 'puppet master' of the Salvation Regime, but acting as the 'supreme leader' and embodiment of the state while simultaneously claiming to have no political role whatsoever would have been a difficult act to pull off even for a man as politically versatile as him: Dr Frankenstein is not the same as his monster. It is telling that Mansour Khalid, one of the most strident critics of the authoritarian character of the Salvation Regime, compares al-Turabi not to Lenin or Stalin but to the man who preceded them immediately before the Bolshevik Revolution. Khalid writes: 'In a sense, Turabi to Bashir was like Rasputin to the Tsar . . . his magnetism over Bashir – indeed over all the leadership of

⁵³ For a recent analysis of modern personality cults, see Leese, 'The cult of personality': 339–354.

⁵⁴ For al-Turabi's views on *shirk*, see al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 61–62.

⁵⁵ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 93.

the NIF – was no less sweeping than that of the Russian magus over the Tsar.⁵⁶ However, this analogy does not explain the subsequent escape of both al-Bashir and the NIF leadership from al-Turabi’s supposedly magnetic embrace. Throughout Islamic history, governance has often been the product of a partnership between a powerful military and/or dynastic ruler, and a religious scholar presenting himself as a renewer of religion – the relationship between the classical scholars and the caliphs, Muhammad Ibn Abd al-Wahhab and Ibn Saud, and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and the Ottoman Sultan are all examples of this.⁵⁷ It is true that al-Turabi offered a more holistic vision of the relationship between religion and politics, and through the Islamic Movement he had far more of an independent financial and political base than any of these historic *mujaddids*. Evidently, therefore, his relationship with al-Bashir was *sui generis*; and yet, by dissolving the Islamic Movement in 1989 and presenting al-Bashir as the ‘real’ authority and himself as a mere intellectual, he limited his own influence over the new Sultan. Often, like the Caliphs, Amirs and Sultans before him, al-Bashir did not accept the guidance of his new *mujaddid*.

One flaw in the arguments of those who touted al-Turabi’s pre-eminence within Sudan was their tendency to base this judgement on their experience of him as an interlocutor with governments and media outlets in the region and beyond. For instance, in 1994, Kamil Hamad of *al-Wasat* composed an article entitled ‘Is al-Turabi President?’ in which he argued that al-Turabi had met both the Kenyan foreign minister and president before al-Bashir’s visit to the country that year.⁵⁸ The same newspaper also noted that it became a diplomatic convention that visiting ambassadors and *chargé d’affaires* should visit his office at the headquarters of the Popular Arab and Islamic Conference (PAIC).⁵⁹ But we should remember here the significance of the division of foreign and domestic responsibilities between al-Turabi and Ali Uthman Taha (see below) – external pre-eminence was no guarantee of pre-eminence within Sudan itself. While distracted by his grandiose foreign projects, al-Turabi often showed little interest in internal Sudanese affairs. The British Ambassador remarked in 1990 that he was ‘better at general and emotive appeals to the

⁵⁶ Khalid, *War and Peace*: 199.

⁵⁷ Voll, ‘The Impact of the Wahhabi Tradition’: 155–156.

⁵⁸ *Al-Wasat*, 3 October 1994. ⁵⁹ *Al-Wasat*, 12 September 1994.

Muslim Community at large than in getting down to the nitty gritty of administering a large and backward country'.⁶⁰

Gallab has shown how al-Turabi's 'personality cult' was promoted in the West and elsewhere by Sudanese expatriates co-operating with PR men such as Sean Gabb, Mansoor Ijaz and Lyndon LaRouche⁶¹ – but surely this is as much evidence of Gallab's 'corporation' developing him as a brand for external export, whether to foreign Islamists or Western audiences, as it is of a personality cult. Marketing the various forms of the al-Turabi brand abroad brought in handsome returns in positive media coverage in France, as well as investments from *dawa*'ist agencies and those multinationals willing to overlook Sudan's poor human rights record.⁶² Nevertheless, it will be seen that the Islamist 'corporation' only persisted in selling the al-Turabi brand in Sudan itself insofar as it was compatible with its own interests.

If we are to compare al-Turabi to any twentieth-century leader, perhaps it might be Mahatma Gandhi, even though the content of their ideologies was quite different. Both produced highly inspiring and yet essentially quite abstract political visions, ensuring that the two men acted as icons for popular mobilization while the pragmatists in their own movements ensured that the states they helped create were run according to a separate political vision. Fadlallah, for instance, implicitly stresses al-Turabi's symbolic importance above that of his value as a political theorist, recalling that 'the inimitability of al-Turabi and his attractiveness reached such an extent that the vast majority of those whose throats he set alight did not understand half of what he said but still screamed till the point they burst into tears'.⁶³ In other words, his authority was essentially charismatic and symbolic while the concepts that fired his rhetoric were insufficiently understood to be guides to practice. None of al-Turabi's various writings became the equivalent of Mao's Little Red Book or Gaddafi's Green Book, a required reading for every loyal citizen.

Al-Turabi himself has been eager to deny that the movement was dependent on his own personality, contending in 1989 that 'The

⁶⁰ FOIA, Ramsay to Hurr, 28 October 1990, FCO.

⁶¹ Gallab, *First Islamic Republic*: 93.

⁶² See Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: Chapter 7, for al-Turabi's positive media image in France, and chapter 11 for a discussion of Sudan's relationship with the Canadian oil firm Arakis.

⁶³ Ulaysh, *Awlad al-Turabi*: 30.

movement in Sudan is distinguished by not having been established by the initiative of a shaikh whose charisma, historical position or religious stature caused him to tower above the rest and become a reference and guide who could obviate the need for a broader and more democratic leadership . . .⁶⁴ He even dismisses the significance of references to him as the *Shaikh* by his followers, arguing that this was simply a codename from the movement’s underground days and was bereft of any religious or political meaning.⁶⁵ However, Ahmad Abd al-Rahman argues exactly the opposite, contending that he and other members of the old guard felt the increasing use of this term among the younger generation showed that they were beginning to act as al-Turabi’s disciples.⁶⁶ This said, he never raised disciples in line with the principles of pure charismatic leadership; instead, by dispatching them to study the rational sciences in the West, he was raising a generation with sufficient independence of mind to challenge him.

The Rise of the Patricides

A few years after being unceremoniously ejected from the Salvation Regime by his former military and civilian disciples, al-Turabi famously remarked that ‘we have heard of the revolution that eats its children, the cat that eats its kittens, but we have never heard of the kittens that eat their father’.⁶⁷ His surprise seems somewhat incongruous when we consider the following passage from *The Islamic Movement in Sudan*, which he originally published in 1989, the year of al-Bashir’s coup:

At a later stage, as followers increase, the old leadership begins to appear, in spite of its historical prestige, as a privileged elite which monopolises leadership, and an ageing, outdated clique with antiquated ideas out of step with the times. As the leadership advances in age and learning, it tends to become more rigid and dogmatic in outlook, thus stunting and arresting the development of its movement . . . [the movement] has no qualms against retiring historical figures if their contribution began to diminish or if competent successors emerged.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 98. ⁶⁵ Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 98.

⁶⁶ Ahmad Abd al-Rahman, Interview with Tahir al-Tom, *al-Sahafa*, 19 March 2013.

⁶⁷ Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 104. ⁶⁸ Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 100.

Al-Turabi wrote these words in the context of his own struggle with other members of the 'pioneering' generation. When he referred to this 'ageing and outdated clique', he did not seem to consider the possibility that he would be identified as a part of it by the later generation. Indeed, he saw the empowering of a new generation of Islamists as an opportunity to fashion a new elite more attuned to his own outlook than to that of his contemporaries.

Petterson contends that al-Turabi's influence on the next generation was substantial, noting that Ali Uthman Taha and Ghazi Salahaddin 'had come under Turabi's direct tutelage' as teenagers.⁶⁹ Nevertheless, as Gallab has argued, the idea of al-Turabi's 'pre-eminence' among the younger Islamists 'deserves to be re-examined'.⁷⁰ In spite of acquiring the title *Shaikh*, al-Turabi never moulded his acolytes as directly as would a traditional Sufi master. There were four principal influences on this younger generation that he could do little to control: first, the militant environment that emerged in the universities and then the Libyan training camps as the Islamists battled the May Regime in the early 1970s; second, the proliferation of texts produced by other Islamists, notably Qutb and Mawdudi; third, the influence of his own political philosophy, which was so slippery that it could be used against him; and fourth, the impact of postgraduate education in the West.

Ali Uthman Taha, head of Khartoum University Student Union in 1970 and the leading light of the 'successor' generation, was credited with fostering a new culture of campus violence.⁷¹ Tayyib 'al-Sikha' Khair, who would become governor of Darfur under the Salvation Regime, furthered this culture by promoting the use of iron rods in campus battles with the more secular-minded students.⁷² Meanwhile, Ibrahim Sanussi, one of the veterans of the Libyan training camps, took over the newly established Popular Defence Forces after 1989, and many other veterans from Libya became senior leaders in this militia.⁷³ Men who had developed a militant outlook fighting against the May Regime had secured dominance in al-Turabi's state while he was in prison writing books.

Until the late 1970s, al-Turabi's literary output was limited to one or two ideological texts on prayer and the nature of faith. Thus, when men

⁶⁹ Petterson, *Inside Sudan*: 85. ⁷⁰ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 110.

⁷¹ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 97 ⁷² Flint and de Waal, *Darfur*: 20–21.

⁷³ Collins, *History of Modern Sudan*: 193.

like Ghazi Salahaddin and Ali Uthman Taha initially embraced the Islamic Movement on campus, the first texts from which they would have drawn ideological succour would most likely have been those produced by Qutb, al-Banna and Mawdudi, which were widely read in the Islamic Movement at the time. Hasan Makki, when asked in 2004 who recruited him to it, responded that ‘no one man recruited us, we came as a result of our readings . . . In those days the books of Sayyid Qutb and [the Egyptian Muslim Brother] Muhammad al-Ghazali were famous and widely available.’⁷⁴ Later on in the 1970s and 1980s, al-Turabi produced a number of other important texts which defined his own particular understanding of Islam and would remain of tremendous significance to his political outlook, although the only one he wrote that dealt directly with contemporary politics was *The Islamic Movement in Sudan*. Since his most extensive works discussing the relevance of *fiqh* to politics and governance were not produced until after his ejection from power in 1999, it is more likely that al-Turabi’s disciples would have relied instead on Mawdudi’s well-known theories of the Islamic State, and that this explains the difference in outlook that emerged between al-Turabi and his disciples over questions concerning the role of the state. Nevertheless, the sources of the later generation’s revolt against al-Turabi can also be traced to his own writings and not only the remark about the movement having ‘no qualms against retiring historical figures’, as quoted above. According to al-Turabi, almost any individual with the relevant professional knowledge should practise *ijtihad*⁷⁵ – not just highly trained religious scholars. This rhetoric provided a natural framework within which his own legitimacy might be challenged, as will be seen below.

Finally, al-Turabi also laid the seeds of his own demise by sending numerous members of the ‘successor generation’ to acquire the same kind of postgraduate qualifications in the West that had bolstered his own authority. For instance, in the 1980s, Nafi Ali Nafi acquired a PhD in Genetics from the University of California, and Ghazi Salahaddin a PhD in Clinical Biochemistry at the University of Surrey.⁷⁶ For his part, Bahieddin Hanafi, the writer of the famous ‘Memorandum of the Ten’ that challenged al-Turabi in 1998, felt that the period he spent

⁷⁴ Hasan Makki Muhammad Ahmad, Interview in *al-Sahafa*, 28 November 2004.

⁷⁵ Esposito and Voll, *Makers*: 129.

⁷⁶ For Nafi, see Lobban, *Global Security Watch*: 160; for Ghazi, see profile on *Aljazeera Forum*, <http://forum.aljazeera.net/speakers/ghazi-salahuddin-atabani>.

studying for his master's degree in Britain in 1977 was 'a revolution' in his life, in which he turned away from reading Islamist literature and went on to consider work produced by secularists, even Communists.⁷⁷ This transformed him from being simply a 'cog in the machine'⁷⁸ to a man who, like al-Turabi himself, could develop an outlook based on multiple epistemologies. In the early 1980s, Hanafi went on to study for a doctorate in America, and says that it was the sharpening of his intellect during these years that led him to become so critical of the man he had once idolized.⁷⁹

The leading member of the next generation of Islamists was Ali Uthman Taha, a professional lawyer whom al-Turabi was widely perceived to have identified as his successor. PCP narratives on Taha now display extreme bitterness. For Abd al-Salam, Ali Uthman Taha did not just seize power from al-Turabi in 1999, but ten years earlier, at the beginning of the Salvation Regime. He argues that it was Taha who made the decision to keep the former NIF chief in prison for six months instead of the one month originally agreed, and who also made the decision to keep him under house arrest for a further six months.⁸⁰ According to this narrative, Taha used the period of al-Turabi's detention to entrench his own position within the state, purposefully exploiting his former position as the liaison between the NIF political bureau and the military Islamists, as well as his relationship with his former schoolmate, Umar al-Bashir.⁸¹ Abd al-Salam blames Taha first and foremost for upsetting the balance between the civilians and the military – by taking the side of the soldiers on major policy issues and decisions over appointments, he argues, al-Turabi's ability to influence state policy was undermined.⁸²

While Abd al-Salam's narrative is polemical, it is also worth considering that members of the older generation saw Taha – as much as al-Turabi – as bearing the principal responsibility for their exclusion from the movement and the introduction of a new style of politics. It was he who in the early days of the Revolution, during which al-Turabi remained in prison, informed members of the soon to be dissolved Shura Council that the purpose of meetings would now be

⁷⁷ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 498–499. ⁷⁸ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 499.

⁷⁹ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 505, 507.

⁸⁰ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 130.

⁸¹ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 132.

⁸² Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 130, 132.

tanwir – the provision of information regarding the new political situation.⁸³ Tayyib Zain al-Abdin argues that through this notion of *tanwir* Taha essentially gave a military character to the relationship between the movement and its leadership, demanding that they sit in silence and listen to their commanders.⁸⁴ It was Taha who, at a private meeting in 1990, handed over copies of the Quran to members of the old guard with messages of thanks for their past service as a symbol that their contribution was no longer required.⁸⁵ It also seems likely that Taha exploited al-Turabi’s interest in exporting Islamist Revolution abroad to empower himself within Sudan; his acquisition of the position of minister of social planning in 1994 seems to have been a result of his negotiation with al-Turabi of a division of external and domestic responsibilities.⁸⁶ However, Taha’s subsequent acquisition of the office of foreign minister showed that he was manoeuvring himself into a position where he had all the expertise to supplant al-Turabi as secretary-general of the movement.⁸⁷

Al-Turabi’s patricidal disciples would soon accuse him of attempting wrongly to cling to his charismatic authority. Invoking Weber, Bahieddin Hanafi would later argue that he was certainly the charismatic leader Sudan needed to help it transition from a traditional to a legal-rational order – but that once he had taken the first step of removing traditionalism, he should have surrendered his charismatic authority!⁸⁸ It is worth considering this in the context of al-Turabi’s own claim that he was a ‘father’ eaten by his ‘kittens’. While this remark undermined his claim in 1989 that the Islamic Movement did not have one guide towering above the rest, the point is that he saw his role as being to generate the state, not to embody and personify it in the manner of Stalin or Saddam Hussein. By raising ‘kittens’ whose doctorates in the West and exposure to his own fluid interpretations of notions such as *ijtihad* and *ijma* would allow them to continue

⁸³ Tayyib Zain al-Abdin, ‘Al-Haraka al-Islamiyya al-Maw’uda’, *al-Sahafa*, 15 January 2012. Ahmad Abd al-Rahman, Interview in Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 386–387.

⁸⁴ Tayyib Zain al-Abdin, ‘Al-Haraka al-Islamiyya al-Maw’uda’, *al-Sahafa*, 15 January 2012.

⁸⁵ Salih, *Al-Haraka*: 137–138.

⁸⁶ Gallab, *First Islamic Republic*: 120. Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 148–149.

⁸⁷ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 149, fn 4.

⁸⁸ Interview in Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 509–510.

advancing his own brand of Islamized modernity, he was attempting to facilitate a transition from his charismatic authority to a form of legal-rational authority rooted in *tajdid* – it was presumably his desire to encourage this transition that led to his attempts to deny that his charismatic authority ever existed in the first place. This was also presumably the reason that al-Turabi initially decided to dedicate himself to a variety of quixotic foreign ventures and chose to leave the management of domestic affairs to his ‘disciples’. The eventual conflict between the father and the kittens can be understood as a mutual failure to negotiate this transition from a charismatic to a legal-rational order.

Conflicts within the Regime

On the supposition that al-Turabi’s efforts to routinize his own charisma by dissolving the movement into society and establishing a new generation of Islamic democrats were genuine, one of the greatest challenges he faced was that many of his own ‘disciples’ identified more with the logic of the military-led state apparatus that he had brought into being than with his own vision. The extent of the control al-Turabi exercised over the regime’s decision-making is debated. Don Petterson, US Ambassador in Sudan between 1992 and 1995, acknowledged that al-Turabi’s status ‘did not mean he exercised close control over the daily affairs of the government or by himself made the major decisions affecting its directions’.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, concluded the diplomat, ‘major decisions would rarely if ever be at odds with Turabi’s expressed beliefs and opinions. When Turabi himself participated in deliberations, his words carried very heavy weight.’⁹⁰ Al-Turabi and the PCP would later challenge such views after the 1999 split, arguing that Ali Uthman Taha and the soldiers combined to isolate him from the beginning. Abd al-Salam maintains that there was a fundamental difference between the outlooks of Taha and al-Turabi – al-Turabi prioritizing society over state, Taha the opposite.⁹¹ These disagreements became most evident after 1996, when al-Turabi – frustrated at the limited achievements of his adventurous international projects – decided to reassert himself inside Sudan.

⁸⁹ Petterson, *Inside Sudan*: 84. ⁹⁰ Petterson, *Inside Sudan*: 84.

⁹¹ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 148.

The claims of al-Turabi and his partisans that they persistently opposed policies they laid exclusively at the door of al-Bashir and Taha were evidently prompted by an anxiety to dissociate themselves from a regime whose authoritarianism and human rights abuses are now well established. But this does not mean that these claims should be dismissed outright. It is all too easy to assume that al-Turabi was the personification of the Sudanese state; that, in other words, his policy and state policy were one and the same. This is the mistake made by Burr and Collins when, regarding the arrest and torture of DUP politicians, they say that ‘The Mirghanis had opposed Turabi for decades, and now Turabi had his revenge on old political and religious rivals’.⁹² Given the government’s almost complete lack of transparency, and the informal nature of the parallel decision-making process associated with the Leadership Office, it is unlikely that any sources will ever surface that can tell beyond doubt whether al-Turabi sanctioned the use of torture, or attempted to challenge it. For the record: the al-Bashir supporter Sayyid al-Khatib insists that al-Turabi’s near-death experience in Ottawa in 1992 made him believe that the Islamic Revolution should be advanced by all means and thus encouraged him to overlook the abuses perpetrated by his followers;⁹³ on the other hand, he never publicly condoned torture or attempted to justify it ideologically; the post-1999 PCP stalwart Yasin Umar Imam maintained that he attended meetings of the Leadership Office and could swear on the Quran that on more than one occasion he witnessed al-Turabi object to arbitrary detention and abuse of detainees;⁹⁴ and in 1995, a ‘former minister’ was cited in the regional media arguing that ‘al-Turabi and the youth of his [National Islamic] Front (*jabha*)’, were behind the initial violence, but that after Ottawa he changed his mind, partly due to his close links to the al-Mahdi family and partly to his recognition that the process was being driven by personal vendettas.⁹⁵

Al-Turabi was more willing to acknowledge that abuses had taken place after he had been ejected from power than when he was affiliated to the regime. In 1992, following a lecture delivered at the Royal Society of Arts in London, he was confronted by a member of the audience whose leg had required amputation as a result of his torture

⁹² Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: 90.

⁹³ Interview in Cockett, *Sudan*: 118.

⁹⁴ Interview in Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 550–551.

⁹⁵ *Al-Wasat*, 11 September 1995.

in the 'ghost houses', and brandished his replacement limb in front of him.⁹⁶ The Islamist leader's response was that 'If it did happen, if the facts are true, then it wasn't in the spirit of Islam or the name of Islam'.⁹⁷ Al-Turabi's pretence of being independent of the regime enabled him to feign ignorance here, although he made sure to claim to a meeting of American scholars later in the same year that the individual in question had had his leg amputated as a result of cancer rather than maltreatment, and that he had only refrained from calling him a liar out of sympathy for his suffering.⁹⁸ Once his role in the government was revealed in 1999, he began to acknowledge that torture had occurred, and tended to attribute responsibility to the military, as well as the 'Public Security' (*al-amn al-aam*), the branch of the security apparatus closer to al-Bashir.⁹⁹ However, elsewhere in his post-1999 writings, he came close to providing worldly, if not religious, excuses for the torture that occurred. In his *In Political Jurisprudence (Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi)*, he observes that

throughout the May Regime [the Islamists] were exposed for long years to prosecutions and surveillances and dismissals and imprisonment, and insults in the media. So no surprise that when the situation was turned on its head and they achieved a position of strength through the Salvation Revolution . . . they dealt with others in a spirit of revenge and repayment in kind.¹⁰⁰

Although al-Turabi does not specifically mention torture here, he clearly suggests that the abuses the NIF perpetrated in the early 1990s were justified by the treatment to which they had been subjected by the May Regime, overlooking the fact that many of Nimeiri's security officials were rehired by the NIF.¹⁰¹ The reason for al-Turabi's apologetics is presumably that many of his more militant partisans were also involved in the torture of the detainees. Parallel organs linked directly to the former NIF participated in the abuses, and many of these men would have gone with al-Turabi into the PCP.

Another aspect of the government's security policy that led to clashes between al-Turabi and his military allies was the development of the

⁹⁶ De Waal and Abdel Salam, 'Islamism': 72.

⁹⁷ Al-Turabi, 'Islam as a Pan-national Movement': 618.

⁹⁸ Lowrie, *Islam, Democracy*: 95.

⁹⁹ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 447. Cockett, *Sudan*: 118.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 340.

¹⁰¹ 'Ajawin', 'Human Rights Violations': 117.

Popular Defence Force (PDF) militias, which had their origins in the efforts of the NIF as well as the Umma party since the mid-1980s to establish an auxiliary force supporting the regular army. After the PDF was established, al-Turabi declared, in line with his theory of *dhawban* or ‘melting’ the movement into society, that the purpose of the PDF was not to complement but – in the long term – to replace the regular military. This, he explained to one interviewer, was ‘one of the largest projects to unify Sudanese society, so that it may not be divided into military and civilian, leading to the dissipation of its power and to weakness’.¹⁰²

Al-Bashir himself had initially facilitated the militia strategy, purging the regular non-Islamist military and bolstering the PDF and other parallel security organs.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, while al-Bashir was an Islamist he was still a professional soldier, and al-Turabi’s policy would have threatened him and others in the junta not just because of the threat to their institutional status but also because the army itself helped to preserve the division of power within Sudanese society. The rank and file were recruited from the peoples of the ‘African’ peripheries, while the overwhelming majority of officers hailed from the ‘Arab’ riverain elite, and even those who sided with the NIF – such as al-Bashir himself – were keen to preserve this imbalance.¹⁰⁴ Al-Turabi’s ‘dissipation’ strategy, which led to the emergence of prominent militia leaders such as the Zaghawa Darfuri and future rebel leader Khalil Ibrahim, was a real threat to them. His efforts to readdress Sudan’s gender imbalance by incorporating women into the PDF in the early 1990s also encountered opposition from many within the military.¹⁰⁵ Conflicts between the PDF and military began to parallel conflicts within the Salvation Regime, as both struggled for access to weaponry and new military resources.¹⁰⁶ These tensions peaked after defeats by the SPLA and its allies such as that which occurred at Kurmuk in 1997; PDF leaders blamed the army for the lack of aggression, while the generals lambasted the tactical ineptitude of the

¹⁰² Rone, *Behind the Red Line*: 282.

¹⁰³ *Sudan Democratic Gazette*, October 1995. ¹⁰⁴ Jok, *Sudan*: 140.

¹⁰⁵ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 272. According to Abd al-Salam, PDF leaders and civilian Islamists also reacted negatively to this policy.

¹⁰⁶ Abd al-Wahhab El-Affendi, ‘Khiyar al-Unf Ghayra Madmoun wa Qad Yudammir al-Hizb wa Nizamhu’, *al-Wasat*, 20 December 1999.

militias.¹⁰⁷ It would, however, be unwise to overdraw the ‘military-civilian’ split within the government – with the exception of the Islamist generals, al-Bashir had alienated the regular army as much as had al-Turabi.¹⁰⁸ This is why al-Bashir cultivated the support of a number of civilian as well as ‘security’ Islamists during the split. Moreover, a number of the PDF regiments were subject to the direct authority of al-Bashir’s allies in the military, such as Ibrahim Shams al-Din, which was why there was no direct conflict between the PDF and military after 1999.¹⁰⁹ In short, it was al-Turabi’s strategy for the Popular Defence Forces that threatened al-Bashir, rather than the institution itself.

Al-Turabi’s ambitious designs to export Islamist revolution abroad also disconcerted members of the junta and their civilian allies, who were more concerned with entrenching their position within Sudan itself. In line with his strategy, the Islamist leader invited a number of radical militants to Khartoum under the guise of participation in his Popular Arab and Islamic Conference, and it became state policy to waive visa requirements for all Arab nationals; it seems that a number were also issued with Sudanese passports. Faisal Abu Salih, the official minister of interior and member of the military junta, was bypassed by this process and in 1991 resigned in protest.¹¹⁰ Civilian Islamists were also alienated by the emergence of the PAIC: ‘you will stir the Americans up against us’, Ahmad Sulayman recalled telling Yasin Umar Imam,¹¹¹ while it seems that Taha’s exclusion from its activities worsened his relations with al-Turabi.¹¹²

There is a view that al-Turabi’s policy towards both domestic and international militants signified his leadership of the more ‘extreme’ faction within the regime. However, when it came to matters such as democratic transition and media freedoms, he was far more open to change than the vast majority of his colleagues. His rebellious kittens, of course, would later claim the opposite, insisting that their former *Shaikh* had behaved like a dictator throughout his period of influence.¹¹³ As for the old guard, they took a similar view, condemning al-Turabi for adopting a system more akin to that of a Sufi Tariqa

¹⁰⁷ El-Affendi, ‘Khiyar’, *al-Wasat*, 20 December 1999. Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 278.

¹⁰⁸ *Sudan Democratic Gazette*, October 1995. ¹⁰⁹ See Chapter 10

¹¹⁰ Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: 87.

¹¹¹ Ahmad Sulayman, Interview with *al-Sahafa* (part 1), 11 October 2003.

¹¹² Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: 178. ¹¹³ Cockett, *Sudan*: 133.

than an Islamist democracy, with Ahmad Abd al-Rahman arguing that his disciples’ assault on the leader in 1998 was an effort to restore democracy.¹¹⁴ The PCP offered a different narrative, maintaining that al-Turabi consistently attempted to democratize the regime but was thwarted by Taha, al-Bashir and others. Abd al-Salam argues that al-Turabi used the establishment of the new Shura Council in 1995 to press for the return of democratic freedoms, including multi-partyism and media liberalization. According to this narrative, Taha and the military Islamists counselled their *Shaikh* to restrain his democratic impulses until the Islamic Movement had achieved such a dominant position in the state that it could triumph in competitive elections, arguing that once the oil revenues arrived they would be able to buy public support.¹¹⁵

Most of Abd al-Salam’s narrative has now been indirectly accepted by members of the National Congress Party. In 2000, Amin Hasan Umar admitted that one of the causes of the split was that al-Turabi’s faction wanted to spread public freedoms, while his own faction felt that freedoms should be granted only gradually because of the exigencies of the situation facing the regime.¹¹⁶ Ishaq Fadlallah, one of the more militant Islamists in the al-Bashir camp, later condemned al-Turabi for being so obsessed with democracy that he would be happy if it got rid of sharia.¹¹⁷ Even some of those who eventually sided with al-Turabi in 1999 felt he was too eager to democratize Sudan at the time; Yasin Umar Imam, for example, now admits that, together with Ibrahim Sanussi, like him a post-1999 PCP stalwart, he sided with Umar al-Bashir against al-Turabi in one of the first meetings in which the *Shaikh* called for democracy and political pluralism.¹¹⁸ The opposition newspaper, *Sudan Democratic Gazette*, also identified al-Turabi as taking a more moderate position regarding the re-establishment of the old ‘sectarian’ parties as early as 1993, although it had identified him as part of the ‘hardline’ faction two years previously.¹¹⁹ The subjective nature of such terms notwithstanding, if al-Turabi was

¹¹⁴ Ahmad Abd al-Rahman, Interview with Tahir al-Tom, *al-Sahafa*, 19 March 2013.

¹¹⁵ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 153–154.

¹¹⁶ Amin Hasan Umar media interview, cited in Ulaysh, *Awlad al-Turabi*: 47.

¹¹⁷ Ishaq Fadlallah, cited in Ulaysh, *Awlad al-Turabi*: 30.

¹¹⁸ Yasin Umar Imam, Interview with Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 550.

¹¹⁹ *Sudan Democratic Gazette*, September 1991, August 1993.

a 'radical' internationally he was at least in the late 1990s a 'moderate' domestically, more committed to democratization than many of his more authoritarian followers and allies.

Flashpoints

There were two major flashpoints that exacerbated the divisions between al-Turabi and his various civilian and military allies before tensions reached their moment of catharsis in 1999. The first was the failed assassination attempt against Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in 1995; and the second was the 'Memorandum of the Ten' presented at a meeting of the National Congress's Shura Council in 1998, which criticized al-Turabi's leadership of the movement. As will be seen, these two events were closely linked. The failed attempt on Mubarak's life, in which members of the Egypt-based Islamic Group (*al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya*) – trained and armed by factions within the Sudanese security services – sprayed the Egyptian president's vehicle with bullets as he was attending an OAU summit meeting, put the Sudanese regime in an uncomfortable position. Already facing sanctions after being listed as a state sponsor of terrorism in 1993, by then Sudan faced further penalties following condemnation in the UN Security Council for its own alleged involvement, as well as its failure to surrender the Egyptian suspects.¹²⁰ Meanwhile, Mubarak publicly blamed al-Turabi for the attack.¹²¹

The Mubarak incident has often been cited as the event that ended al-Turabi's drive for regional Islamization and empowered the more pragmatic faction led by al-Bashir, a faction for which appeasing the international community had greater appeal.¹²² However, most voices in the Islamic Movement now agree that neither al-Bashir nor al-Turabi knew anything about the planned attack on Egypt's president and that it was the senior men in the central security organs, Nafi Ali Nafi and Salah Gosh (later prominent henchmen of al-Bashir), who were 'central to the conspiracy'.¹²³ A number also maintain that the attack could not have been financed without the knowledge of Ali Uthman Taha, who was foreign minister at the time and also in charge of the parallel

¹²⁰ Cockett, *Sudan*: 124–125.

¹²¹ Robert Fisk, 'Mubarak names his Prime Suspect', *Independent*, 27 June 1995.

¹²² For example, Johnson, *Root Causes*: 107–108. Verhoeven, 'Rise and Fall': 120.

¹²³ Verhoeven, 'Rise and Fall': 124.

government’s funds.¹²⁴ It seems that both al-Turabi and al-Bashir were livid at being kept in the dark, although neither wished to lose face in the Islamist community by officially condemning the effort on Mubarak’s life; publicly, therefore, al-Turabi went so far as to praise the would-be assassins.¹²⁵ Nevertheless, like al-Bashir, he clearly realized that his regime’s militant tendencies had gone too far and accordingly established a committee to investigate the episode. This duly oversaw the dismissal of the miscreants, the most senior of whom were Nafi as the overall security chief, Mutrif Siddiq as the deputy director of external security and Salah Gosh as the director of operations in the internal security organ;¹²⁶ others meeting the same fate included Hasaballah Umar and Kamal Abd al-Latif.¹²⁷

Mu’awiya Yasin, at the time the correspondent for the pan-Arab daily *al-Wasat*, claimed that al-Bashir and al-Turabi together took the decision to remove these security men, but that the former was the more disgruntled, for, in spite of the fact that the men dismissed were civilian Islamists who had come out of the NIF, they had grown close to the president.¹²⁸ Demonstrating his pragmatic streak, al-Turabi used the opportunity to empower another of his non-Islamist allies from the former May Regime – the chief of foreign security, al-Fatih Irwa. Irwa, who had forged close links with the CIA during the period of Nimeiri’s gravitation towards the United States, helped al-Bashir and al-Turabi reorganize the security services, promising them that if Nafi’s Iranian trained men remained loyal to their former chief he could replace them with others from military intelligence trained in America.¹²⁹ Despite the fact that some Islamists regarded the security chief as an American stooge,¹³⁰ al-Turabi had a high opinion of him, in 1995 even supporting him for the post of ambassador at Washington

¹²⁴ Yasin Umar Imam, Interview with Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 551. Verhoeven’s sources also agree that Taha was involved in the plan, ‘Rise and Fall’: 124. See also ‘Tasribat wa haqa’iq amaliyya ightiyal Husni Mubarak’, *Sudanile*, 1 December 2015, www.sudanile.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=89348:1995&catid=42&Itemid=60 (accessed 17 April 2017).

¹²⁵ See Chapter 6.

¹²⁶ ‘Tasribat wa haqa’iq amaliyya ightiyal Husni mubarak’, *Sudanile*, 1 December 2015.

¹²⁷ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 407, fn 32.

¹²⁸ Mu’awiya Yasin, *al-Wasat*, 15 May 2000.

¹²⁹ Mu’awiya Yasin, ‘Al-Bashir wa al-Turabi’, *al-Wasat*, 11 September 1995.

¹³⁰ Yasin Umar Imam, Interview with Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 557.

on the grounds that he might be able to reassure the Americans that the security agencies were removing the rest of the militants.¹³¹ Al-Turabi's closeness to Irwa had caused his relations with Nafi to deteriorate to the point that, prior to Nafi's dismissal, he was refusing to allow al-Turabi to see security reports.¹³²

Al-Turabi dealt with the men judged responsible for the attempt on Mubarak's life by the time-honoured device for getting rid of political enemies whose continuing influence could make harsh punishment risky: they were exiled with the 'reward' of ambassadorial appointments, in this instance in various African and Western countries. Unfortunately for al-Turabi, the success of this expedient did not endure. As well as resenting such treatment, these men – all 'second generation' members of the Islamic Movement – felt that al-Turabi, having been the man who had sanctioned the arrival of the various foreign militant groups in Khartoum and neither prevented the assault on Mubarak nor condemned it publicly, was a hypocrite. Three years after their original dismissals, they had all returned from their diplomatic exiles and soon regained positions from which they could take revenge on their former master, as the campaign against him inside the Islamic Movement grew and his power diminished.¹³³

The movement against al-Turabi reached its peak with the 'Memorandum of the Ten', which was presented at a Shura Council meeting on 10 December 1998. For some critics, his move towards liberalism was a tactical adaptation to this and similar, earlier assaults on his status in the Islamic Movement designed to establish a new power base among the politically and regionally marginalized.¹³⁴ For supporters such as Mahbub Abd al-Salam, however, the reverse is true – it was al-Turabi's drive towards liberalization and decentralization that provoked a backlash from an authoritarian and centralizing Khartoum elite. As we have seen, elements of Abd al-Salam's narrative have been admitted to be true by al-Turabi's opponents within this elite. For Abd al-Salam, it was al-Turabi's plans to develop the National Congress into a functioning democratic institution during the theoretical transition to popular democracy of 1996 that caused most unrest among the members of this group. When the National

¹³¹ Mu'awiya Yasin, 'Al-Bashir wa al-Turabi', *al-Wasat*, 11 September 1995.

¹³² Mu'awiya Yasin, 'Al-Bashir wa al-Turabi', *al-Wasat*, 11 September 1995.

¹³³ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 407.

¹³⁴ For example, Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: 265–267.

Congress was initially appointed, its first secretary-general was Shafi Muhammad Ahmad,¹³⁵ who had achieved prominence as one of the leaders of the 1981 *Intifada* in Darfur that had forced Nimeiri to reserve his decision to appoint a non-Darfuri, Tayyib al-Mardi, as regional governor.¹³⁶ In 1996, with the significance of the National Congress increasing, Shafi acquired substantial support from both its western and southern constituents during his campaign to be re-elected secretary-general. Abd al-Salam argues that, without al-Turabi’s knowledge, a group of northern politicians, fearing the potential consequences of Shafi’s victory for the distribution of economic and political power within the country, intervened to ensure Ghazi’s election victory.¹³⁷ A critical reading of the official media supports this. It was reported – without explanation – that four of the seven candidates first nominated, including two leading regime figures, withdrew before the final polls, leaving only Ghazi to contest Shafi and a southerner, Michael Mario.¹³⁸ One might surmise that this was so that votes could be ‘pooled’ to support the northern candidate. Nevertheless, when al-Turabi subsequently succeeded Ghazi to the secretariat-general of the National Congress following a new set of elections in February 1998,¹³⁹ he continued to back the decentralization of power, promising regional representatives at a number of unofficial meetings that in future polls, state governors would be directly elected by provincial electorates.¹⁴⁰

A further source of discontent among the regime’s new hardliners emerged in 1997. This was al-Turabi’s support for a law that appeared to promise – via the introduction to Sudan’s political lexicon of the concept of *tawali* (‘mutual allegiance’) – the legalization once more of political parties. Al-Turabi was confident that the Islamic Movement was by then established firmly enough to defeat the reintroduced parties in future polls, but others were not so sure. At a meeting of the Shura Council in late 1997, conservatives in the National Congress urged caution. In the wake of the government’s recent humiliating

¹³⁵ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 159–160.

¹³⁶ Abd al-Jabbar Dosa, Interview with Ibrahim Sulayman, *Al-Rakoba*, 19 May 2011, <https://www.alrakoba.net/news-action-show-id-21455.htm>.

¹³⁷ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 161.

¹³⁸ *Sudanow*, February 1996. The four who withdrew were Abd al-Karim Musa, Abd al-Basit Sebdarat, Mahdi Ibrahim and Hasan Suleiman Muhammad.

¹³⁹ Ali, *Suqut*: 268. ¹⁴⁰ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 408.

defeat by SPLA and Ethiopian forces at Kurmuk and Qeissan, they observed that a liberalization of the political environment would empower the parties in the National Democratic Alliance, the oppositionist grouping which had backed this assault.¹⁴¹ When the proposed law was passed at a meeting of the Shura Council in the following year, Nafi Ali Nafi stormed out in protest.¹⁴² Meanwhile, al-Turabi incorporated the *tawali* concept into the draft of the national constitution he subsequently helped to prepare.

Al-Turabi is often understood to be directly responsible for both the draft and the final version of the 1998 constitution.¹⁴³ When the initial draft was radically modified by the removal of a number of the more liberal articles before being presented to the National Assembly in March, it was he who was instantly blamed. The opposition *Sudan Democratic Gazette* concluded that 'El Turabi and two or three of his hand-picked cronies removed the offending forty-five chapters before the draft went to the assembly'.¹⁴⁴ The reality was more complex. It was the office of presidency of the republic, which al-Bashir had been developing as a power base against al-Turabi, that took possession of the draft of the constitution for two days before it was submitted to the assembly.¹⁴⁵ Although it seems that al-Turabi was involved in the debates in the presidential palace and may have been responsible for some of the final tweaks, the draft constitution was sent to the assembly directly from the presidency, and the most controversial changes concerned the president's prerogatives, among them those limiting the autonomy of regional governors.¹⁴⁶ Since al-Turabi was at the time attempting to exploit regional sentiment against his opponents in the centre (see Chapter 9), it is unlikely that he would have been responsible for these changes to the constitution. They were as indicative of splits within the regime as they were of his duplicity.

After the constitution had been approved by popular referendum, al-Turabi changed his strategy. On 3 August 1998, he announced his intention to resign from the National Assembly in order to focus

¹⁴¹ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 156–157.

¹⁴² Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 189.

¹⁴³ Kok referred to 'al-Turabi's draft constitution': 'El Turabi's Constitution; Islamic totalitarianism in neo-liberal garments', *Sudan Democratic Gazette*, June 1998.

¹⁴⁴ *Sudan Democratic Gazette*, April 1998. ¹⁴⁵ *Al-Khartoum*, 10 March 1998.

¹⁴⁶ *Al-Khartoum*, 10–15 March 1998.

his energies on developing the National Congress into Sudan's dominant political party.¹⁴⁷ He eventually withdrew his resignation from parliament under pressure from the deputies, but his initial move was understood by the military to be part of a calculated strategy to seize the presidency from al-Bashir once the National Congress became Sudan's premier vehicle for mass popular participation.¹⁴⁸ It was in this context that the Memorandum of the Ten was presented to the meeting of the National Congress Shura Council at Friendship Hall on 10 December 1998.

The memorandum was not crafted by any of al-Turabi's most prominent political competitors or those who had most vocally opposed his policies of liberalization, such as Taha, Nafi and al-Bashir. It was in fact first conceived by Sayyid al-Khatib, a prominent Islamist and leading member of the newly founded Centre for Strategic Studies, who was soon assisted in developing his proposal for the restructuring of the movement by its director, Bahieddin Hanafi.¹⁴⁹ Although Hanafi's Western education had turned him into a bitter critic of al-Turabi, no more did he than al-Khatib seem to have been motivated by hostility generated in the recent disputes within the Shura Council – indeed, Hanafi later claimed that he would never have penned the memorandum in the first place had he anticipated its broader political consequences.¹⁵⁰ Both claimed that their concerns were more with the long term lack of *shura*, or consultation, within the Islamic Movement, and the diminution of its position within the state. Thus the memorandum drew attention to the extent to which al-Turabi's liberalization of religious doctrine empowered his critics in the movement, and contained a sophisticated series of proposals for reforming it that derived from the expertise they had gained from their involvement in the Centre for Strategic Studies and postgraduate education in the West. In introducing the memorandum to the members of the Council al-Khatib claimed that he and its other authors had performed *ijtihad*,¹⁵¹ reflecting al-Turabi's own argument that it was not only religious

¹⁴⁷ Ali, *Suqut*: 267. ¹⁴⁸ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 408.

¹⁴⁹ Amin Hasan Umar, Interview with *Sudanile* in 2008, reproduced by Hasan Abd al-Hamid on *Islamic Meshkat Net* (<http://www.meshkat.net/content/14274>), 16 November 2011.

¹⁵⁰ Bahieddin Hanafi, Interview with Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*.

¹⁵¹ Ali, *Suqut*: 269.

scholars but also any individuals with relevant professional expertise who could innovate in religious matters in this way.

As Tayyib Zain al-Abdin has observed, similar memoranda had been delivered to and ignored by senior Islamists ever since the dissolution of the original Shura Council soon after the Salvation Revolution; the difference here was that senior parties within the state supported this one.¹⁵² First of all, Ghazi Salahaddin – still smarting from having been ousted from the leadership of the National Congress by al-Turabi – got involved as a friend of both Hanafi and al-Khatib, and helped them to produce the final draft. After this, the memorandum was presented to Bakri Hassan Salih, a senior military Islamist;¹⁵³ and, while he remained the only signatory from the army, it is widely believed that it was at this stage that the agreement of the senior military Islamists was obtained to put the memorandum forward.¹⁵⁴ Mutrif Siddiq and Nafi Ali Nafi also volunteered their names, looking to take revenge for al-Turabi's decision to exile them from the security services following their involvement in the failed attempt on Mubarak's life in 1995. The signatories included no southerners and only one Darfuri, Hamid Torien, a former state minister who had been promoted by al-Bashir to the position of national aviation minister earlier in the year.¹⁵⁵ Torien was a relatively insignificant figure who has achieved little prominence since, and it appears likely that he was brought in only to create a semblance of national unity.¹⁵⁶ The movers and shakers behind the memorandum very much represented the established riverain elite threatened by al-Turabi's decentralization strategy.

Not all of the signatories of the Memorandum of the Ten would have been driven by recent enmity against al-Turabi – a number of the statements in the document also reflected the concerns of members of the 'old guard' isolated following the dissolution of the Shura Council, particularly its criticism of the increasing divide between the senior echelons of the state and the Islamic Movement itself. While it was signed by only one member of this group, Uthman Khalid Mudawi, others sympathized with the sentiments expressed. Among these was

¹⁵² Al-Abdin, 'Al-Haraka al-Islamiyya al-Maw'uda'.

¹⁵³ Amin Hasan Umar, Interview with *Sudanile* in 2008, reproduced by Hasan Abd al-Hamid on *Islamic Mishkat Net*, 16 November 2011.

¹⁵⁴ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 535. ¹⁵⁵ *Sudanow*, April 1998.

¹⁵⁶ *Al-Abram*, 4 August 2011.

Ahmad Abd al-Rahman,¹⁵⁷ although he criticized the irregular manner in which the memorandum was presented to the members of the Shura Council.¹⁵⁸ This was indeed somewhat conspiratorial, and confirmed that its agenda went far beyond addressing the lack of consultation that concerned men such as Mudawi and Abd al-Rahman. Al-Turabi, despite being secretary-general of the National Congress, was not informed that it would be discussed, and when his supporters in the security services warned him about it on the eve of the meeting, he assured them that it would not get through as the meeting had a fixed agenda.¹⁵⁹

It was at this stage that the president played his role in the campaign against al-Turabi. When Sayyid al-Khatib proposed to read the memorandum in the meeting, Umar al-Bashir, who had made an important symbolic statement by attending in military uniform,¹⁶⁰ used his position as president of the Congress to overrule al-Turabi’s objection and sanction delivery of the memorandum.¹⁶¹ Al-Bashir almost certainly knew of the memorandum in advance, for he had appointed two of the signatories, Mutrif Siddiq and Ahmad Ali Imam, as special presidential advisors earlier in the year.¹⁶² Moreover, he had every interest in it being delivered: it proposed establishing him as the president and the head of a National Shura Council, which would have the power to oversee a subordinate Leadership Office to which the secretary-general of the National Congress – al-Turabi – would be relegated.¹⁶³ It is unclear whether this part of the proposal had been conceived by al-Khatib, or whether it had been suggested by later participants such as Ghazi – who many claimed was the true architect of the memorandum¹⁶⁴ – or others with a particular grudge against al-Turabi. Either way, the presenters of the memorandum had managed to weave together a series of long awaited proposals to address the lack of consultation in the movement with a more calculated assault on al-Turabi himself. When the motion was passed, it represented his most significant political defeat for a decade.¹⁶⁵

¹⁵⁷ Ahmad Abd al-Rahman, Interview with Tahir al-Tom, *al-Sahafa*, 19 March 2013. Salih, *al-Haraka*: 210.

¹⁵⁸ Ahmad Abd al-Rahman, Interview with Tahir al-Tom, *al-Sahafa*, 19 March 2013.

¹⁵⁹ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 410, fn 38. ¹⁶⁰ Ali, *Suqut*: 270.

¹⁶¹ Ali, *Suqut*: 269. ¹⁶² *Sudanow*, April 1998. ¹⁶³ Ali, *Suqut*: 365–366.

¹⁶⁴ Ali, *Suqut*: 272. ¹⁶⁵ Cockett, *Sudan*: 134.

As we have seen, the Memorandum of the Ten signified the desire of a group of mainly second generation Islamists from the riverain centre to replace al-Turabi. However, drawing both on his personal charisma and ability to speak the language of decentralization, he was able to mobilize a considerable support base in regional Sudan – particularly the West – and deploy it with notable success against his opponents within this elite. He thus launched a twofold campaign to exploit his regional powerbase in the National Assembly and the National Congress.

Immediately following his reverse in the Friendship Hall, al-Turabi toured the regions once more, acquiring promises from his local supporters to vote against the measures associated with the Memorandum of the Ten at the October 1999 General Conference of the National Congress.¹⁶⁶ This conference was far more widely attended than the meeting of the Shura Council at which he had been ambushed in December 1998, with around 10,000 Congress members from all over the country attending.¹⁶⁷ Following the recommendations of the Shura Council, the institutions dominated by Umar al-Bashir since 1998 were dissolved and a new Leadership Body (*ha'ia qiyadiyya*) was established with al-Turabi at its head.¹⁶⁸ Immediately before its dissolution, the old Leadership Office narrowly voted to give al-Turabi, rather than al-Bashir, supreme executive powers within the Congress.¹⁶⁹ Meanwhile, four of the signatories of the Memorandum of the Ten lost their positions in the internal elections of the Shura Council, with Hamid Torien alleging that his name was deliberately omitted from the voting register.¹⁷⁰ Amin Hasan Umar, one of al-Turabi's temporarily thwarted critics, recalled bitterly that he built the membership of his new leadership bureau by empowering individuals who mostly came 'from the regions'.¹⁷¹ Such statements illustrated the tendency of Khartoum-based elitists to decry the threatening intrusion of the margins into the politics of the centre. Nevertheless, al-Turabi attempted to make sure he could draw on support from outside the National Congress as well, meeting Sadiq al-Mahdi in Geneva to bring him back into the political fold via his *tawali* law.¹⁷² Meanwhile, both parties scrambled for control over the oil revenues that began to materialize in August 1999, as

¹⁶⁶ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 366. ¹⁶⁷ *Al-Khartoum*, 9 October 1999.

¹⁶⁸ *Al-Khartoum*, 9 October 1999. ¹⁶⁹ *Al-Khartoum*, 9 October 1999.

¹⁷⁰ *Al-Khartoum*, 9 October 1999, Ronen, *Rise and Fall*: 1000.

¹⁷¹ *Al-Sahafa*, 11 October 2012.

¹⁷² Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 414–415.

al-Bashir strove to marginalize Islamic banks linked to al-Turabi and divert income towards the central bank as well as various companies owned by his allies.¹⁷³

It was particularly in Darfur that al-Turabi exploited a growing sense of marginalization and exploitation by the regional centre, fuelling local ambitions for greater federal autonomy and the redistribution of wealth to the periphery. In early 1999, a bloc of regionalists who resented al-Bashir’s intervention in a conflict in West Darfur began to campaign for legislation that would restrict presidential powers over local governors and introduce local elections for this position.¹⁷⁴ Abd al-Salam contends that, while al-Turabi backed these measures in his role as speaker of parliament, al-Bashir and his other allies within the riverain Islamist elite opposed them, knowing that locally elected southern and western governors might be able to combine their efforts to pass legislation rebalancing the regional distribution of wealth.¹⁷⁵ Nevertheless, while al-Turabi offered the regional governors greater federal autonomy, he was also ensuring that they would reciprocate by backing his plan to establish himself in the post of executive prime minister, thus effectively reducing al-Bashir to a figurehead.¹⁷⁶ The threat of this legislation being passed through parliament forced al-Bashir to act. On 12 December 1999, he employed his presidential prerogatives to declare a state of emergency, dissolved the National Assembly and removed all of al-Turabi’s powers; he would never regain them.¹⁷⁷ These actions marked the final sundering of the Sudanese Islamic Movement and ended al-Turabi’s project to build an Islamic State in alliance with the military.

Conclusion

The character of the Salvation Regime’s takeover was very much *sui generis*, as can be seen by comparing al-Turabi’s seizure of power in Khartoum in 1989 with the methods by which other Islamist movements have achieved governing authority in the last 40 years. There is, to begin with, no other example of an Islamist movement’s ascent to power being so dependent on the state’s armed forces. In the twenty-

¹⁷³ De Waal, *Real Politics*: 81. ¹⁷⁴ See Chapter 9.

¹⁷⁵ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 425.

¹⁷⁶ De Waal and Abdel Salam, ‘Islamism’: 108.

¹⁷⁷ De Waal and Abdel Salam, ‘Islamism’: 108.

first century, Islamist parties have come to power in Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Turkey and Palestine via the ballot box. In Iran, the Ayatollah Khomeini established his Islamic Republic in 1979 by riding the wave of a genuine popular revolution encompassing a wide range of social and political forces. His Islamic Republican Party established itself as the dominant force in the Iranian political arena after the downfall of the Shah by harnessing the power of *komiteh*, local revolutionary militias that had entrenched their position by raiding military arsenals during the post-revolutionary chaos.¹⁷⁸ Meanwhile, Khomeini ensured that the armed forces were subjected directly to his own command as supreme jurist.¹⁷⁹ As for the Taliban movement that seized power by force in Afghanistan in the 1990s, this was also an ideologized militia movement. By contrast, it was only after the 1989 coup in Sudan that al-Turabi attempted to implement his strategy of using Islamist militias to replace the regular army. By this time, al-Bashir and the other military Islamists were already firmly entrenched within the state.

Al-Turabi's Islamic project in Sudan was also markedly different from that of Khomeini or of the Taliban in terms of the level of secrecy that surrounded it. The Islamic states in Iran and Afghanistan openly declared their Islamist character but al-Turabi initially attempted to deny the Islamist role in the takeover in Sudan and continued to deny his personal connection to the state even after its Islamist orientation had become clear; this revealed the weakness of his position both regionally and within Sudanese society itself. Those who thought he was acting as the puppet master of the military regime underestimated the extent to which his Faustian pact with the military had forced him to share power with them. While it is true that the officers who took over in 1989 hailed from an NIF cell in the military, many had been bought as much as they had been converted, and they maintained a contempt for civilian politics that was akin to that of their regional peers. Martin has observed that the Iranian Revolution reversed the pattern of military-led state domination in the Middle Eastern region and enabled other social groups to achieve access to the state.¹⁸⁰ Al-Turabi's revolution in Sudan was far less successful in this regard, in

¹⁷⁸ Bakhash, *Reign of the Ayatollahs*: 56.

¹⁷⁹ Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*: 168.

¹⁸⁰ Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*: 161.

spite of his ultimately thwarted designs to use the National Congress to broaden political participation.

Verhoeven has argued that al-Turabi had the ‘real power’ in 1990s Sudan, contending that in spite of avoiding a system of clerical hierarchy, he ‘assumed overall political leadership’ in a way ‘not dissimilar to Ayatollah Khomeini’s focus on grand strategy in Iran’.¹⁸¹ Al-Turabi certainly had great charisma, but there were substantial differences between the nature and extent of the authority of the two Islamists. While Khomeini assumed the role of Supreme Jurist and granted himself and the Council of the Guardians executive powers to overrule the elected civilian president in the name of sharia, al-Turabi’s deliberate resort to dissimulation left him with no official position in the Sudanese state. His authority rested purely on his personal charisma, historic prestige as secretary-general of the recently dissolved Islamic Movement and position within the shadowy Leadership Office, where power was shared with the soldiers. Although Khomeini’s theory of state has been criticized for its vagueness, his theory of the State of the Jurist facilitated his own personal dominance – and that of the Iranian Islamists – in a manner unobtainable via any of al-Turabi’s own political theories. While the latter had published pieces attempting to establish an intellectual and political framework for the Islamic Revival, he did not begin to consider the actual mechanics of Islamist governance in depth until he had been ejected from power. Unlike Khomeini, he claimed no official clerical status, while his liberal positions on *ijtihad*, *ijma* and *tajdid* invited his disciples to contest his authority.

The two Islamists were similar in one regard – both attempted to ‘routinize’ their charisma by empowering legal and government institutions to carry on their personal missions, although Khomeini was far more successful in his pursuit of this end. In 1988, shortly before his death, the Ayatollah revised the Iranian constitution in order to diminish the power of the very institution on which his revolutionary legitimacy had been based – the Council of Guardians – and increase the role of the elected Majlis.¹⁸² Al-Turabi made similar efforts to foster legal-rational authority structures through the National Congress and National Assembly, but found his charismatic authority far harder to

¹⁸¹ Verhoeven, ‘Rise and Fall’: 123.

¹⁸² Brumberg, ‘Khomeini’s Legacy’: 20, 45.

routinize because it was far more contested than Khomeini's. The disciples who should in theory have helped to institutionalize al-Turabi's charisma had been subjected to numerous other experiences that shaped their world view, whether in Libyan training camps or Western universities, and were just as willing as the *Shaikh* to make deals with the military. Al-Turabi's efforts to transfer his personal authority to democratic institutions thus produced conflict rather than negotiation with his subordinates, leading to his refusal to delegate an already frail authority even as he maintained that he was ushering in a new generation. Partly, these same subordinates knew that al-Turabi's alienation of large segments of both Muslim and non-Muslim society would make it difficult for them to use his legacy to build democratic and rational institutions without themselves being overthrown; partly, they knew that even if he were to succeed, his decentralization strategies would help deconstruct the regional power bases they found so comforting. It was for these reasons that the Salvation Revolution ate its father.

4 *Between Liberalism and Totalitarianism*

Al-Turabi's Western Influences

Few commentators dispute the influence on al-Turabi's scholarly reflexes and political outlook of his Western education in colonial Sudan and Europe. Nevertheless, over the specific character and extent of these influences, there is much disagreement. Each label applied to al-Turabi carries its own agendas. Western critics tend to label him, along with the regime with which he was associated, as fascist and more frequently Communist.¹ Sudanese secularist critics of al-Turabi have also tended to label him as a 'totalitarian', although perhaps because of the historic role of the Sudan Communist Party as the pioneer of political secularism in Sudan he tends to be labelled as a fascist more than a Communist. For more recent critics, identifying a symbiotic link between Islamism and the totalitarian ideologies of the twentieth century serves another purpose: it enables a confident prediction of Islamism's imminent demise. Gallab, having drawn on Hannah Arendt's theories to label Islamist ideology 'totalitarian', informs us that it can now be considered, like fascism and Communism, an epochal phenomenon; that is, as 'one of the "isms" that emerged, extinguished itself, and faded away during the last century'.² This is a problematic contention, not just because it ignores the fact that many 'isms', such as nationalism, liberalism, socialism, secularism and feminism have continued to thrive in the late twentieth and twenty-first centuries, but also because it is clear that Islamist parties have thrived in post-Cold War elections – for example in Turkey, Palestine, Tunisia and Egypt – whereas fascist and communist ones have not. Nevertheless, such arguments highlight the political function that terms like 'fascist' and 'Communist' serve. Meanwhile, for al-Turabi, presenting himself to the global media as *Ibn al-Thagafa al-Francia*

¹ See, for example, US Chargé d'Affaires Gerhard Galoshi's comparison of al-Turabi to Trotsky, *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 20 January 2004.

² Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 15.

(the son of French culture)³ and speaking about his interest in the French Revolution, serves the alternative purpose of associating him with the historic events to which many trace the origins of the very Western democracy many accuse him of rejecting. It helps make his brand of Islamism marketable in an era in which non-Western nations are increasingly expected to conform to Western democratic norms.

There is much debate over whether it was the rise of Hobsbawm's 'age of extremes' that helped to spawn Islamism, or whether Islamism merely represents a long established politico-religious tendency reasserting itself following the onslaught of colonial secularism⁴ – one which values existing ideological movements in accordance with their instrumental as opposed to intrinsic merits. For a number of critics, Islamism is intellectually and conceptually dependent on Western ideologies, particularly fascism and Communism. It has been claimed that they shared a common intellectual genesis in the malaise caused by the decline in the early twentieth century of the great empires of the Eurasian world and consequent flight to a utopian alternative to modernity.⁵ Daniel Berman insists that Islamism emerged in the twentieth century as a 'trend of the moment', inspired by fascist utopianism and Nazi racial theory.⁶ Meanwhile, Olivier Roy has suggested that it was the brainchild of the modern university campus, where religiously orientated students 'borrowed' concepts from their Marxist colleagues and 'injected [them] with Quranic terminology';⁷ and a number of Sudanists have also stressed the movement's intellectual genesis within a campus environment dominated by Marxist thinking.⁸ Others have emphasized less the conceptual borrowing than Islamism's tendency to cannibalize the techniques of fascism and Communism, particularly in the realm of propaganda, organization, mobilization and indoctrination.⁹ This tends to be the approach of the Sudanese Islamists themselves, although they are usually more willing to acknowledge their adoption of Marxist-Leninist than fascist methods in pursuit of Islamic goals.¹⁰ This chapter will accept that al-Turabi negotiated with, and borrowed from, the Marxist-Leninist corpus; but

³ For this term, see Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 66.

⁴ For an example of this argument, see Edwards, 'Politics and Religion': 459.

⁵ Mozaffari, 'The Rise of Islamism': 1–13.

⁶ Berman, *Terror and Liberalism*: 60, 77. ⁷ Roy, *Failure of Political Islam*: 3.

⁸ Verhoeven, *Water*: 90. ⁹ Bale, 'Islamism and Totalitarianism': 80.

¹⁰ Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 161.

to regard his ideas as a mere reformulation of communist ideology would be far too Eurocentric. As will be seen, the specifically colonial and postcolonial character of his intellectual upbringing determined the manner in which he ideologized Islam.

Al-Turabi's revolutionary Islamic state, the failure of which was discussed in the Chapter 3, did possess some of the features of the classic totalitarian system as identified by Arendt. The most notable of these was the establishment of a parallel government that drew its power from its clandestine nature.¹¹ But other prominent features of totalitarianism were lacking, among them a cult of personality: as already demonstrated, the extent to which this system was dependent on al-Turabi's cult of personality has been exaggerated. In light of Arendt's pertinent observations on the conditions for the success of totalitarianism, none of this should prompt surprise. Even movements with totalitarian aspirations, she points out, often failed to establish totalitarian regimes when they seized power because they lacked the resources to do so. This was particularly the case where they took over sizeable territories but lacked a sufficiently large population to withstand the destruction that a totalitarian system would inevitably unleash.¹² Given that economically impoverished Sudan in the 1990s was the largest country in Africa and had one of the lowest population densities in the world, it would have been very surprising indeed had it developed into one of the genuinely totalitarian regimes like Stalinist Russia. Thus, while al-Turabi spoke of a 'continuous liberation' akin to Trotsky's 'permanent revolution',¹³ it will be seen here – and in Chapters 5 and 7 – that he frequently compromised with existing intellectual, social and legal structures rather than attempt to sweep them aside.¹⁴

In that it frequently evoked the legacy of an idealized past in order to call for a comprehensive break with the existing socio-political order, al-Turabi's discourse was not dissimilar from that of the fascist ideologues. However, while the latter sought to sweep away the liberal democracies of the post-Enlightenment world, the system from which al-Turabi claimed to be liberating Sudan was that imposed by another totalizing project, Western colonialism. It is true that he often

¹¹ Arendt, *Origins*: 403–404. ¹² Arendt, *Origins*: 310.

¹³ Al-Turabi, *Min Ma'alim*: 28. See also al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 229.

¹⁴ For Arendt's discussion of totalitarianism as a 'permanent revolution' against existing structures, see her *Origins*: 389, 398.

expressed totalitarian aspirations when articulating his desire for a decisive break with the colonial past. However, to label al-Turabi a totalitarian would be to underestimate his intellectual flexibility and willingness to adjust his rhetoric in order to prosper in the diverse range of political environments he encountered in postcolonial Sudan. This chapter will show that where it served his purposes, he was willing to instrumentalize the ideologies and epistemologies with which he became familiar during his colonial education, just as much as he was disposed to use the language of anti-colonialism. At the same time, his willingness to cannibalize Marxist-Leninist discourse and strategy was often dictated by political context.

Al-Turabi, the Anti-colonial Mimic

While a number of scholars have focused on the global context in which Islamism emerged as one of a number of twentieth-century mass ideologies, it is also important to consider the specific colonial context in which both the regional ideology and its Sudanese variant appeared. For Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, Hasan al-Turabi's Islamism was an outright rejection of the invading Manichaean structures imposed upon Sudanese society, structures which had inflicted a 'moral injury' on Muslims by marginalizing their religion. Indeed, al-Turabi proudly evoked the campaigns against both nineteenth-century Turco-Egyptian colonialism and late nineteenth- and twentieth-century British colonialism, claiming that these struggles made Sudan the first nation to fight colonialism and the first to gain independence from it.¹⁵ However, he knew that Sudan's formal independence in 1956 did not remove the entrenched legacies of colonialism. For him, the most pernicious was that 'the imperialist education policy bred a new class of elites who, unlike the traditional scholars (*ulama*) who remained close to the values, interests and social milieus of the masses, were a distinct social superstructure, standing aloof from traditional society, evoking secular, national values and oblivious, if not neglectful, of both religion and umma'.¹⁶ This new secular elite also helped to enforce colonial laws that were, likewise, alien to Muslim society and the Muslim religion.¹⁷ We have already seen (Chapter 1)

¹⁵ Al-Mithaq, 3 December 1965. Ibrahim, *Manichaean Delirium*: 42–43, 340–350.

¹⁶ Al-Turabi, 'Pan-national movement': 612.

¹⁷ Ibrahim, *Manichaean Delirium*: 349–350.

that al-Turabi avoided acknowledging his own membership of this 'effendi' elite of which he was so critical. The likely reason for this is that unlike in, say, Egypt, where the nationalists had a comparatively greater role in shaping education policies in the 1940s and 1950s, at the time in which al-Turabi attended Sudan's senior educational institutions they were still very much 'colonial' institutions. This explains why al-Turabi's anti-'effendi' message has such resonance. It also explains why, in spite of the fact that colonial rule in Sudan had been relatively brief and established only a limited state apparatus,¹⁸ al-Turabi perceived colonialism as a totalizing project – he had been one of the small elite exposed to the colonial education policies of the 1940s, which had attempted to manufacture a new, Anglicized generation that would preserve its links to Britain after independence.¹⁹

Postcolonialism often characterizes colonialism as a totalitarian force, which created a binary opposition between the presumed justice, reason and humanity of the Western world and the perceived backwardness, immorality and savagery of the colonized subject.²⁰ Ironically, al-Turabi reproduced this binary colonial logic in opposing it. Let us take, for instance, this statement on the impact of colonialism in the Islamic world made in his party newspaper, *al-Mithaq*, in 1966: 'the West', he wrote, 'surrounds the Islamic faith with ignorant (*jahili*) materialist concepts and replaced just Islamic government with the government of the secular tyrant'.²¹ The irony was that in his later writings al-Turabi did not recognize the governments replaced by colonialism as particularly satisfactory forms of Islamic government, despite being preferable to British domination. In the Sudanese case, he regarded the Mahdist regime that immediately preceded colonial rule as having been based on a religiously flawed concept of messianism.²² Meanwhile, he believed that the other states that existed in the Islamic world prior to the dawn of colonialism ran on a monarchical basis rather than in accordance with the principles of consultation (*shura*), albeit that the *ulama* were able to use residual respect for *shura* to prevent rulers resorting to absolute tyranny.²³ Nevertheless, the onset of colonial Manichaeism was so traumatic for al-Turabi and his audience that he opposed colonialism using the logic of a dualistic battle

¹⁸ Woodward, *Unstable State*: 1, 231. ¹⁹ See Chapter 1.

²⁰ For instance, the post-colonial theorist Aime Cesaire explicitly likened Nazism to colonialism; see Hiddleston, *Understanding Postcolonialism*: 15.

²¹ *Al-Mithaq*, 22 April 1966. ²² See Chapter 5. ²³ Al-Turabi, *al-Shura*: 27.

between justice and tyranny. It is interesting that it is in this context that he came closest to the Qutbist conception of *al-Jahiliyya* or ‘age of ignorance’, using the term in its adjectival form (*jahili*, or ignorant). According to this logic, the legacy of colonialism must be completely effaced for Muslim society to thrive. It is noteworthy that al-Turabi would blame the British for corrupting Sudanese morals by opening brothels ‘in the centre of every city’, as well encouraging alcohol consumption, without admitting the presence of prostitution and drinking within pre-colonial Sudanese society.²⁴

For al-Turabi, the implementation of the *hudud* penalties during the major phase of ‘Islamization’ in the 1980s was not an expression of religious values so much as a cathartic break with the colonial past. He justified his own draft Penal Code in 1988, which incorporated the *hudud* penalties, on the grounds that it represented ‘a form of national liberation’ from ‘the imperialist legal model which has been in force since the days of Kitchener’s occupation’.²⁵ Most notably, he had remarked prior to the application of over 100 *hudud* by Nimeiri’s instantaneous justice courts in 1984 that the punishments were a declaration of ‘our psychological and cultural independence’, insisting that ‘our affirmation of the principle of cutting the hand of the thief is cutting off all the doubts and cultural defeatism we were suffering from’.²⁶ Al-Turabi was attempting to cleanse Sudanese society of the colonial legacy by advocating a form of penalty that for a number of Islamists represents a symbolic rejection of Western decadence,²⁷ even though – as he had himself previously acknowledged – it was rarely practised even in early Islamic history.²⁸ The postcolonial resonances of al-Turabi’s conceptualization of the *hudud* penalties as a form of emancipatory violence are evident – his statements bear comparison to the Martinican post-colonial theorist Frantz Fanon’s argument that ‘violence is a cleansing force . . . it frees the native of his inferiority complex’.²⁹ While it has been suggested that there are parallels between Fanon’s restorative violence and Qutb’s call to *jihad* against the

²⁴ Al-Turabi, Interview with Ahmad Mansur, *Al-Jazeera Arabic* (Part 3), May 2016.

²⁵ *Modern Sudan Daily Times*, 17 July 1988.

²⁶ Ulaysh, *Awlad al-Turabi*: 193. ²⁷ Ruthven, *Islam*: 16.

²⁸ Speech at the University of Khartoum, reproduced in *al-Mithaq al-Islami*, 24 August 1967.

²⁹ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*: 74.

jahiliyya system,³⁰ this employment of Fanonist discourse by al-Turabi was more explicit. Like al-Turabi, Fanon emphasized the creation of a new order, not a restitution of the historic order erased by colonialism.³¹ When al-Turabi came to power in 1989, his regime pursued a Fanonist logic in attempting to efface the most important institutions inherited from the colonizers, including the army, police and University of Khartoum, aiming to replace them with the Popular Defence Forces, Popular Police and a new series of regional universities. Having been involved in pro-Algerian circles during his time in Paris, it would be very surprising if he had not read, or at least been influenced by Fanon.³² Scholars differ over whether Fanon himself advocated violence or merely described the colonial and postcolonial experience, but with al-Turabi it was clearly the former.

Fanon saw that one of the main aims of colonialism was a ‘cleansing’ of indigenous society, and perceived that the only way for the colonized subject to assert his independence was to usurp the role of the colonizer and perform a similar ‘cleansing’ of the colonial system.³³ Al-Turabi himself employed the same language of ‘cleansing’, expressed in the Arabic term *Tathir* – sometimes also translated as ‘purging’. The term was most notably associated with the public demands for a ‘cleansing’ of the old order following the October Revolution, during which the ICF representative in the transitional government participated in efforts to remove public officials seen as remnants of colonialism.³⁴ Al-Turabi himself transformed it into a key part of the Islamic lexicon. For instance, in his 1991 text *Awlawiyyat al-Tayyar al-Islami li-Thalatha Uqud al-Qadim* (priorities of the Islamic Current in the coming three decades) he argues that one of the most important phases of Islamic regeneration involved ‘the projects of cleansing and liberation and transformation into what is more religiously upright’.³⁵ Significantly, for al-Turabi *Tathir* represented ‘cleansing’ society of both ‘customary and extraneous social evils’.³⁶ In other words, both the colonial and precolonial order required purification.

³⁰ Calvert, *Sayyid Qutb*: 226. ³¹ Gibson, *Fanon*: 28.

³² For the former view see, for instance, Ramone, *Postcolonial Theories*: 38. For the latter see Gibson, *Fanon*: 117–119.

³³ Gibson, *Fanon*: 107, 114. Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*: 74.

³⁴ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 166–167. ³⁵ Al-Turabi, *Awlawiyyat*: 14.

³⁶ Al-Turabi, *Awlawiyyat*: 33.

The emphasis on ‘cleansing’ explains why both his Sudanese and Western critics were quick to label him a fascist, since the rebirth of a purified national order is a common theme in fascist thought. However, the Islamists’ desire for a cathartic new order was usually a product of the psychological impact of colonialism, as Fanon himself anticipated when he observed that postcolonial Arab intellectuals’ obsession with the ‘cultural phenomenon known as the awakening of Islam’ was an instinctive response to the colonizers’ efforts to undermine their history.³⁷ What a study of al-Turabi’s political language illustrates is that it both responded to, and reproduced, the totalizing colonial discourse, a phenomenon rarely acknowledged by proponents of the link between Islamism and fascist or Marxist totalitarianism. As Gallab recognizes, both colonialists and Islamists used ‘particularist violence’ against those they perceived as opponents of their ‘totalist’ state.³⁸ This was one of the definitive ironies of al-Turabi’s postcolonial rhetoric, as highlighted by his justification of the *hudud* penalties cited above. Whereas other Islamist groups advocated violence against oppressive regimes as an act of catharsis,³⁹ the violence supported by al-Turabi in the name of psychological cleansing was targeted at the same marginalized groups treated as ‘other’ by the colonizers themselves.⁴⁰ In this context, his discourse did not so much undo the impact of colonialism and ‘bring back’ pre-Condominium Sudanese society as replace the totalizing colonial vision with an equally idealized Islamist vision that had little to do with the pre-colonial order.

Part of the reason for this paradoxical appropriation of colonial discourse was that, as a perfect example of Homi Bhabha’s counter-colonial mimic, al-Turabi imitated the language and identity of the colonizer so as to deconstruct the logic of difference that justified colonialism.⁴¹ He studied in Western educational institutions in the colony and the metropole, learning the language of the British colonizer and other Western colonial nations to perfection. He remained fascinated by British literary works well after he had been required to study

³⁷ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*: 171. ³⁸ Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 42.

³⁹ See, for example, the discussion of the Palestinian Islamists’ anti-Israeli violence in Strindberg and Wörn, *Islamism*: 57–58.

⁴⁰ The majority of those subject to the amputation penalties were residents of the capital hailing from the country’s western and southern peripheries; see Berridge, ‘Frailties’: 394.

⁴¹ Bhabha, *Location of Culture*: 85–92.

them at Hantoub, and his disciples within the Islamic Movement established a cultural programme in which they studied the works of George Bernard Shaw and Bertrand Russell.⁴² He even kept copies of major British colonial texts on Sudan in his office, such as Churchill's *River War* and J.S.R. Duncan's *The Sudan's Path to Independence*.⁴³ Sharkey contends that many of the *effendiyya* elite who studied at institutions like Hantoub and Gordon College inherited the hubristic self-perception of the British, simply substituting Arabism and Islam for Englishness as a vector for modernity.⁴⁴ Indeed, some of al-Turabi's attitudes towards the 'African' regions of Sudan and the wider African continent chimed remarkably with the ethos of the 'civilising mission'. In 1987, he told the NIF political office that the party's policy in Africa should be to 'focus on economic cooperation between the African states which are united by backwardness and fragmentation and crises, strengthening the developing Islamic presence in Africa so as to liberate African societies, *cleanse* [author's italics] and develop them'.⁴⁵ While it is true that there were many Arab and Muslim discourses that justified the conquest of African societies well before the onset of the Europeans,⁴⁶ al-Turabi's remarks to a journalist in 1999 demeaning the 'primitive nature' of 'Africans' betrayed the influence of colonial evolutionism.⁴⁷ Here, al-Turabi displayed the 'drivelling paternalism' so vehemently condemned by Fanon as an idle parroting of colonial attitudes by intellectuals educated under colonialism.⁴⁸

Through his ideology of *tawhid* or unity, al-Turabi also shared the 'Orientalist' world view of a number of British colonial officials towards Islam, in as much as he preferred to see the Muslim World as an integral whole. In 1991, he lamented that 'Western observers' of Islamic history had 'reached the point of establishing that there were various Islams, which they attribute to manifold customs and circumstances and they all but denied its unity in any form'.⁴⁹ However, the Western viewpoint that al-Turabi scrutinized here was not the 'Orientalist' or colonial viewpoint, so much as the consensus of a new wave of Western scholarship that had emerged in the 1970s influenced by post-structuralist theory and particularly Edward Said's famous

⁴² Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 39. ⁴³ *Al-Mithaq*, 28 April 1965.

⁴⁴ Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism*: 119.

⁴⁵ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 286. ⁴⁶ Idris, *Identity*: 3.

⁴⁷ Khalid, *War and Peace*: 294. ⁴⁸ Fanon, *Wretched of the Earth*: 130.

⁴⁹ Al-Turabi, *Awlawiyyat*: 7.

assault on classical Orientalist scholarship. It was thinkers like al-Turabi that Said had in mind when he lamented that too many ‘grand narratives’ still remained in the postcolonial world.⁵⁰ Ironically, al-Turabi himself reproduced a number of the metanarratives of civilization conflict opposed by Said and associated with neoconservative scholars such as Samuel Huntington. This was typical of politicians who attempt to disseminate simple messages to mass audience, as al-Turabi did at the 1995 PAIC, telling the attendees – with only a slight qualification – that ‘the Western world of today ... has directed its animosity towards Islam’.⁵¹ The pro-government media organs covering the PAIC removed all hints of nuance, arguing that ‘The confrontation between the two civilisations now seems inevitable ... ultimately, the fittest will survive’.⁵²

Al-Turabi’s discourse was subversive of classic Orientalism in that he inverted colonial stereotyping and produced an ‘Occidentalism’ narrative that objectified the West. The irony of this was that in producing what al-Azm terms ‘Orientalism in reverse’, it was dependent on the same outdated Western scholarship, the essentialism of which it failed to transcend.⁵³ Classical colonial tropes were now applied to ‘the West’, which was castigated for its ‘lack of honesty and moral fibre’ by one Sudanese Islamist reporting on the 1995 PAIC.⁵⁴ This ‘imaginative geography’⁵⁵ thus constructed the West and associated it with a variety of moral vices. Al-Turabi himself admitted that ‘People in the West are humans like everyone else, and among humans there are good and evil’, but lamented that ‘The good is often submerged or obscured by the evil’.⁵⁶ American diplomats and journalists ‘Steeled themselves to lectures about the minutiae of their country. He would insist to his [American] interlocutors that he understood America and Americans much better than they did.’⁵⁷ Although this infuriated al-Turabi’s American guests, the Islamist supremo would himself have seen it as a means of subverting the dynamics of subjectification and

⁵⁰ Said, *Orientalism*: 351.

⁵¹ Al-Turabi’s opening address to third PAIC Session, *Sudanow*, May 1995.

⁵² Hamza Sirr al-Khatim, ‘A Conflict Between two Civilisations’, *Sudanow*, May 1995.

⁵³ Al-Azm, ‘Orientalism, Occidentalism and Islamism’: 7.

⁵⁴ Hamza Sirr al-Khatim, ‘A Conflict Between two Civilisations’, *Sudanow*, May 1995.

⁵⁵ Said, *Orientalism*: 55. ⁵⁶ Hamdi, *Making*: 77. ⁵⁷ Randal, *Osama*: 119.

objectification that had defined the West's colonial relationship with the Islamic world. As he told a Jordanian newspaper in 1997, 'the Westerners think that they are the centre of the world, but we are the centre of the world . . . God put us, the Umma, at the centre so we could be witnesses to what is east and north and west and south.'⁵⁸ The irony was that al-Turabi himself, while castigating and 'Occidentalizing' it, had frequently resorted to exploiting legal and political knowledge acquired from his studies in the West.

Recognizing that the early Sudanese postcolonial state was tied to a legal infrastructure bequeathed by the British colonizers, al-Turabi made good use of his Western legal education in his early political battles. This is most visible in his *A dwa 'Ala Mashakil Disturiyya* (A Light on Constitutional Problems), published in 1967 in response to the crisis caused by the standoff between the High Court and the Constituent Assembly over the passing of a constitutional amendment banning the Sudan Communist Party.⁵⁹ The High Court ruled that the amendment, which was a response to the outrage caused when a pro-Communist student had allegedly defamed Islam in a debate at the Teachers' Institute, was unconstitutional.⁶⁰ When the government ignored its ruling, the High Court protested to the Supreme Court, which in turn appointed a panel of attorneys to review the amendment. This panel included al-Turabi, whose ICF had been the most active of all the parties in stirring up religious sentiment against the SCP.⁶¹ It was during his work on this panel, the recommendations of which ultimately led the Supreme Court to rule in favour of the Constituent Assembly, that he produced *'Adwa 'ala Mashakil Disturiyya*.

What is remarkable about the 1967 pamphlet is that al-Turabi marshalled arguments drawn from Western constitutional theory to pursue a battle against the SCP that his own party envisaged as an Islamic struggle. It is unique among al-Turabi's writings in that it explicitly references Western sources, citing a number of British, American and French studies of constitutional law that he would have encountered during his postgraduate studies in Paris and London to support his argument that supreme constitutional authority lay in the Constituent Assembly. He justifies the modification of articles

⁵⁸ Interview with *al-Umma al-Urduniyya*, reproduced in *al-Anbaa*, 30 June 1997.

⁵⁹ Ibrahim, *Manichaeae Delirium*: 175.

⁶⁰ Ibrahim, *Manichaeae Delirium*: 175.

⁶¹ Ibrahim, *Manichaeae Delirium*: 175.

5 and 6 of Sudan's temporary constitution to ban parties which advocate Communism with reference to the power held by American representative bodies to make amendments to the original constitution.⁶² He illustrates the supremacy of the Constituent Assembly over the judiciary with reference to Roosevelt's introduction of the New Deal in 1937 in the face of opposition from the United States Supreme Court, and also with reference to British understandings of parliamentary sovereignty.⁶³ There were no references to Islamic jurisprudence, and – unlike almost all of his later texts – none to the Quran. Indeed, in his critical response to the pamphlet, Mahmud Muhammad Taha wrote that if al-Turabi had not prefixed the text with the standard formula 'in the name of God the most compassionate, the most merciful' and thrown in superficial references to the notions of *shura* and *ahl al-hall wa'l-aqd*, one would not have known that the author was Muslim.⁶⁴ Al-Turabi's writing was typically opportunistic, using Western constitutional rhetoric familiar to an elite schooled in British colonial law to defeat the party that stood in the way of his long term Islamist visions. He was far less concerned with 'cleansing' the colonial past here. Arguably, it was this pamphlet that introduced one of the central contradictions he would spend the rest of his career attempting to overcome – the location of sovereignty within a human institution, parliament, and not within divine authority as understood in the Islamist concept of *hakimiyya*.⁶⁵ In al-Turabi's later writings, the references to Western texts would disappear, but the legacy of Western constitutional theory would not.

Al-Turabi, the French Revolutionary

One difficulty faced by those who seek to label al-Turabi either a fascist or a Communist is that his formative experiences in the West came in the havens of liberal-capitalist democracy – Britain, America and particularly France. Unlike 'Islamic Socialists' such as Sultan Galiev or 'Islamofascists' such as al-Hajj al-Amin al-Husseini, he spent little time in either communist or fascist states, a brief trip to Prague aside. Al-Turabi himself maintained that his PhD at the Sorbonne encouraged him to reconsider his own history and that his identification with the

⁶² Al-Turabi, *'Adwa 'ala'*: 11. ⁶³ Al-Turabi, *'Adwa 'ala'*: 11–12, 29.

⁶⁴ Taha, *Za'im*. ⁶⁵ El-Affendi, *Al-Turabi's Revolution*: 82.

concepts of 'liberté, égalité, fraternité' inspired his speeches concerning democracy during the 1964 October Revolution.⁶⁶ Meanwhile, Abd al-Salam insists that his advocacy of a federal system in Sudan – from the 1965 Round Table conference on the south onwards – was inspired by observation of the French government's strategies for governing a large and predominantly rural country.⁶⁷ To Western observers at least, al-Turabi seems to positively exude Frenchness. He was frequently described by Western scholars and diplomats as being 'smooth, sophisticated, charming and witty',⁶⁸ 'urbane' and 'beguiling'⁶⁹ – adjectives that evoke the individualism of post-Enlightenment French culture.

Al-Turabi's explicit identification with the liberal and democratic values of post-Enlightenment France have led certain commentators to conclude that his Islamist values and later shift towards authoritarianism highlight the essentially paradoxical character both of his intellectual personality and political practice. Peter Kok maintains that he 'finds it hard to believe' that someone whose PhD was underpinned by the principles of Cartesian logic could also be an 'Islamic fundamentalist'.⁷⁰ For Mansour Khalid, al-Turabi's championing of the values of the revolutionary *philosophes* is symptomatic of both intellectual dishonesty and a 'torn soul'. He represents his tendency to 'portray his brand of Islam in endearing philosophical terms' to Western audiences as another example of his political doublespeak.⁷¹

Nevertheless, it is possible to trace al-Turabi's later authoritarian tendencies to his period of intellectual formation in Paris, just as some historians have sought the origins of fascist and communist authoritarianism in the philosophers of the French Revolution. Some have contended that it was the Swiss philosopher, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, a major source of influence for French revolutionary intellectuals, who provided the intellectual groundwork for later totalitarian 'vanguard' ideologies by insisting that whole societies must be 'forced to be free'.⁷² Al-Turabi himself has attempted to justify, or at least explain, his resort to force in 1989 by arguing that the French, English and American revolutions all demonstrated that democracy cannot just

⁶⁶ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 29. ⁶⁷ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 49.

⁶⁸ Khalid, *War and Peace*: 206.

⁶⁹ FOIA, Short biography of 'HASSAN ABDULLAH EL TURABI', attached to Gallagher to Hurr, 28 October 1990, FCO.

⁷⁰ Cited in Ibrahim, *Manichaean Delirium*: 324.

⁷¹ Khalid, *War and Peace*: 206. ⁷² Eatwell, *Fascism*: 5.

evolve naturally.⁷³ Although he never references Rousseau, it is evident that he absorbed some of his principles in his general readings about the Revolution. Indeed, as will be seen, al-Turabi frequently equated public belief in sharia with the Swiss philosopher's concept of the 'general will'.⁷⁴

Just as al-Turabi's later authoritarianism was not entirely inconsistent with his interest in the *philosophes* of the French Revolution, neither was his attraction to religious politics. Claims that he saved the intellectual fruit of his studies at the Sorbonne for discussions with Westerners, while peddling fundamentalism in Sudan, are problematic for a number of reasons. First, they assume a simple dichotomy between Western secular rationalism and irrational Muslim fundamentalism. But, as Roxanne Euben has demonstrated, no such irreconcilable separation exists – both before and after the Enlightenment, Muslim and European intellectuals have debated the merits of reason, tradition and religion, and, as such, contemporary clashes between 'Islam' and 'the West' are as much about 'shared crisis' as binary confrontation.⁷⁵ Second, to assume that al-Turabi rejected the rational values of France when he returned to Sudan is to assume that he arrived in Paris with an intellectual *tabula rasa*. Nevertheless, al-Turabi himself spoke of how his secondary education at Hantoub enabled him to analyse both the Western and Islamic corpus critically, and he had already studied the works of the Muslim intellectual Muhammad Abduh, who drew on the rationalist approach of the classical Mu'tazilite school, before he arrived in France.⁷⁶ Al-Turabi certainly did not believe that the Muslim world had the West to thank for the introduction of reason, either in the classical or in the post-Enlightenment era – he even blamed Greek logic for imposing strict conditions that hindered the practice of analogical reasoning (*qiyas*) in the era of classical jurisprudence.⁷⁷

Second, it is not true that al-Turabi confined to his Western interlocutors discussion of the impact of French history and culture on his ideas; he also treated it in his Arabic language writings and in speeches to Sudanese audiences. For example, in 1967 he informed the University of Khartoum Philosophical Society that the French Revolution was one of a number of 'genuinely religious revolutions'

⁷³ Ali, *Suqut*: 24–25. ⁷⁴ See Chapter 7. ⁷⁵ Euben, 'Counternarrative'.

⁷⁶ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 42. ⁷⁷ Al-Turabi, *Tajdid Usul*: 22.

conducted in Europe not against Christianity, but against the ‘class of men of religion’ (*tabaqa rijal al-din*).⁷⁸ He elaborated on this point further in one of his earliest Arabic language texts, *al-Iman*, published in 1974: in the era of the Enlightenment in Western Europe, he argued, ‘some leaders of religion ... established a movement of national churches and free churches so as to limit papal, clerical authority. And from another front various intellectual leaders attempted to adopt a democratic religion, freed from the priesthood, based on what is rational and not upon ignorance.’⁷⁹ Hasan al-Turabi identified with the struggle of European religious laymen against the established religious classes, and implicitly equated their struggle against an entrenched religious elite with his own battle against the *ulama*, whom he perceived to be monopolizing and traditionalizing religious knowledge. He saw himself, like these European revolutionaries, as a lay religious intellectual.

However, al-Turabi could only identify so far with the ideals of the European Enlightenment. The tragedy of this movement of religious reform, he believed, was that it marginalized the Church but failed to take its role in society for itself, thereby ensuring that ‘the Christian religion surrendered to public life straying from its authority’ with the result that ‘... the new religious innovations died in their cradles’.⁸⁰ His reading of European history illustrates the cogency of Euben’s observation that there is no straightforward dichotomy between Muslim religiosity and Western secular rationalism: to assume his approach towards the West is entirely janus-faced is to mistakenly assume that the West itself represents an undifferentiated whole. He could identify with moments of European history where laymen confronted the Church in the name of religion, but rejected the validity of subsequent developments which he perceived to have led to religion being marginalized from public life altogether. The history al-Turabi strove to create could, in his mind, also have been Western history.

Al-Turabi, the Secret Marxist?

Al-Turabi wrote in 1989 that in the first quarter century of the Sudanese Islamic Movement’s history, ‘anger in God’s cause and

⁷⁸ Reproduced in *al-Mithaq*, 23 August 1967. ⁷⁹ Al-Turabi, *Al-Iman*: 228.

⁸⁰ Al-Turabi, *Al-Iman*: 228.

struggle was known only in opposition to the communists'.⁸¹ Student Communists acted as the intellectual and political nemeses of the Islamists at the major secondary schools and the University of Khartoum, where – from the late 1960s onwards – clashes between the two groups became increasingly violent: they competed for influence in the major labour and professional associations; and it was the ICF that led the campaign to have the SCP banned after it acquired seats in the assembly in 1965. However, the irony was that al-Turabi's relationship with Communism resembled his relationship with colonialism, in that while representing it as a force dialectically opposed to the Islamic Movement he appropriated elements of its discourse and political strategy.

In investigating the influences of left-wing political philosophy on the Sudanese Islamic Movement it is again necessary to remember that, unlike Mawdudi or al-Banna, al-Turabi was not the founder of either the Islamic Movement in Sudan or its initial political manifestation. The man who founded the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood's first political wing, which was based initially at Hantoub and then Gordon College, was a former Communist, Babikir Karrar. Karrar rejected Communism on the grounds that he could not square it with his belief in a divine being, but in crossing the ideological divide he brought some of the logic of the Marxist struggle into his new party, the Islamic Liberation Movement. In 1954, he published a text entitled *The Islamic Group: Call and Method (al-Jama'a al-Islamiyya: Da'wa wa Manhaj)*. This criticized the more traditionalist wing of the Muslim Brotherhood for failing to see that the Islamist fight was essentially a socialist struggle, and advocated the principle of sectoral organization, calling upon the Muslim Brotherhood to set up fronts among students, workers and professionals.⁸² Al-Turabi joined the student wing at Gordon College just before it seized the student union there from the Communists.

The rise of Turabism marked a partial, but not complete break with the quasi-Marxism of the early movement. According to el-Affendi, al-Turabi was one of those associated with a document produced in 1955 by the Muslim Brotherhood after Karrar's group had broken off to form a separate faction, reframing its ideology in less radical language

⁸¹ Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 160.

⁸² Muhammad, *Takhlid Dhikra*: 53–54.

than that of the Islamic Socialists.⁸³ Nevertheless, al-Turabi, who had been a friend of the Syrian Islamic Socialist Mustafa Siba'i since his student days,⁸⁴ built on Karrar's legacy. After al-Turabi's death in 2016, Amin Hassan Omer revealed that he had once asked him whom he considered to have influenced him most, and he named the former ILM leader.⁸⁵ He continued much of al-Karrar's logic of pursuing 'front' tactics within the student, professional and workers' sectors.⁸⁶ Even the name of his new party hinted at the relevance of these methods. Indeed, al-Turabi set out during the second parliamentary period to appeal particularly to the agricultural and industrial labour movement, at that time dominated by the SCP. Speeches in 1966 lambasted the government for persisting with privately owned agricultural schemes and failing to strengthen co-operative projects, and also condemned it for harsh measures against recalcitrant workers in both the Ministry of Communications and the Railway Workers' Union.⁸⁷ He frequently presented himself as supporting the 'centre ground' within organized labour, defending workers' unions' right to strike while demanding that they purge their ranks of 'saboteur and communist elements'.⁸⁸ Meanwhile, in 1965 the ICF established the Patriotic Trade Unionists' Congress to rival the SCP's influence among the trade unions.⁸⁹

Al-Turabi even advocated some of the core principles of socialist economic planning, arguing that the public sector should have hegemony over the economy, although he believed that this should not extend to actual ownership of the means of production, which would 'undermine social justice by giving power to a bureaucratic elite'.⁹⁰ He encouraged private enterprise on the grounds that personal incentives were the key to 'economic renaissance',⁹¹ although he maintained that all money belonged to God and that men merely acted as its guardians.⁹² At times, his views corresponded with those of his

⁸³ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*: 63. The party later formed by Karrar, the Islamic Socialist Party, proved electorally far less successful than al-Turabi's ICF. Abu Shouk and Abd al-Salam, *Intikhabat*.

⁸⁴ Interview with Ghassan Sharbal, *al-Wasat*, 2 February 1999.

⁸⁵ Amin Hassan Omer, Interview with *al-Intibaha*, 27 March 2016.

⁸⁶ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 28. ⁸⁷ *Al-Mithaq*, 13 June 1966.

⁸⁸ *Al-Mithaq*, 13 June 1966.

⁸⁹ Abdelwahid, *Rise of the Islamic Movement in Sudan*: 188.

⁹⁰ *Al-Mithaq*, 26 February 1968. ⁹¹ *Al-Mithaq*, 26 February 1968.

⁹² *Al-Mithaq*, 24 August 1967.

contemporary at the Sorbonne,⁹³ the Iranian sociologist and Islamist thinker Ali Shariati, who absorbed a great deal of Marxist theory without accepting Marx's ultimate principles. Shariati used Marx's dialectical theory of history as a model for his idea of binary opposition between *tawhid* and *shirk*.⁹⁴ He further redefined *shirk* to suit his anti-capitalist message, arguing that it represents man's devotion to material wealth rather than God, which is what has brought about the ruling classes identified in Marx's concept of the superstructure.⁹⁵ Al-Turabi, writing a few years after Shariati's death, adopted a similar application of the *tawhid/shirk* principle, contending that economic *shirk* occurs when 'the link between God and money is cut' so that the individual 'considers that the profit he makes . . . is to be disposed of as his own whims and covetousness dictate'.⁹⁶ Moreover, he established a similar pseudo-Marxist dialectic between *shirk* and *tawhid* in his *Qadaya al-Tajdid*, where he observes that throughout Muslim history there is 'a struggle over the purposes of life' between '*tawhid* [unity] which sees the signs of God in every aspect of the science of creation . . . and *isbrak* [polytheism] through which most of life is cut off from God'.⁹⁷

At the height of his intellectual and political confrontation with the SCP, al-Turabi was highly critical of its ideology. He was even willing to evoke the Qutbist language of *al-Jahiliyya*, or the age of ignorance, in condemning the Communists, insisting that their strategy was to destroy democracy so as to build 'the state (*dawla*) of communist *jahiliyya*' in its stead.⁹⁸ Speaking in 1968, he justified his call for the SCP to be banned with the observation that the Communists caused disunity in the Muslim community through their 'call to divide society into struggling classes'.⁹⁹ Ironically, some of his own language appeared to be rooted in the Marxist theory of base and superstructure, and embraced similar assumptions regarding the oppressive nature of 'feudal' society. He would later write that the dawn of Islam in the seventh century saved society from a world in which 'the peasantry was submissive to the great lords' and the 'luxuriant rich . . . grew wealthy

⁹³ Al-Turabi's period at the Sorbonne extended from 1959 until 1964, whereas Shariati seems to have begun attending the university in 1958. See Chatterjee, '*Ali Shari'ati*': 77.

⁹⁴ Chatterjee, '*Ali Shari'ati*': 89. ⁹⁵ Chatterjee, '*Ali Shari'ati*': 91–93.

⁹⁶ Al-Turabi, *al-Usul al-Fikr al-Siyasi al-Islami* (1984), reproduced in *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 181.

⁹⁷ Al-Turabi, *Qadaya al-Tajdid*: 27. ⁹⁸ *Al-Mithaq*, 3 December 1965.

⁹⁹ *Al-Mithaq*, 26 February 1968.

and multiplied and were subjugating the poor'.¹⁰⁰ His language of *tawhid*, or unity in Islam, appears to offer believers the opportunity to transcend class differences. For instance, he observes with regard to communal prayer that while 'the divisions of [worldly] life may make them into distinct classes, prayer educates Muslims that the rich should not withdraw from the poor'.¹⁰¹ A doctrinaire Marxist-Leninist would no doubt argue that rather than addressing the crises diagnosed by Marx, al-Turabi was instead offering the oppressed solace in religion, the classic 'opium of the people'. Nevertheless, communal prayer would serve an important mobilizing function during the years of the Civilizational Project.

It is significant that although al-Turabi seems never to have been referred to as an 'Islamist Marx', he has instead been labelled the 'Islamist Lenin'.¹⁰² Those who use this term tend to do so in recognition not of his Marxist ideological leanings, so much as of his adoption of the Leninist principle that it was decisive acts by a revolutionary vanguard, and not long term social change, that would achieve revolutionary ends. His decision to seize power in 1989 showed a Lenin-like understanding of revolutionary timing and the exploitation of political crises and, like Russia, Sudan acted as a 'weak link' within the existing network of secular states in the region.¹⁰³ Nevertheless, it was the former Communist, Babikir Karrar, who provided the initial genius behind the Islamist seizure of power. Back in the 1950s, he inculcated into the early pioneers of the Islamic Movement a strategy rooted in the '5 keys to power': economic, military, organizational, popular and foreign relations.¹⁰⁴

Babikir Karrar would never be more than a marginal figure in Sudanese politics (if not Libyan politics) but Hasan al-Turabi and his followers would implement his strategy with a great deal of success in the later years of the twentieth century. His victory over the 'educationalist' faction within the Muslim Brotherhood in the 1960s was later equated by Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim to the Bolshevik victory over the

¹⁰⁰ Al-Turabi, *al-Siyasa*: 40. ¹⁰¹ Al-Turabi, *al-Salat*: 129.

¹⁰² Magdi al-Gizouli, *Still Sudan*, 18 September 2012. De Waal and Abdel-salam, 'Islamism'.

¹⁰³ Ali, *Suqut*: 22.

¹⁰⁴ Hasan Makki Muhammad Ahmad, Interview with *al-Sahafa*, 28 November 2004.

Mensheviks in revolutionary Russia,¹⁰⁵ and can be seen as a victory for intentionalism over structuralism.¹⁰⁶ Al-Turabi explicitly advocated an intentionalist position when he wrote in 1991 ‘that the materialist understanding of history has spread, which is hardly able to understand man’s connection to absolute eternity or his free will to overcome the [present] situation’.¹⁰⁷ This implied criticism of Marx is similar to that posed to the materialists by Leninist strategy. Throughout the 1970s, as seen in previous chapters, al-Turabi’s faction slowly came into possession of the five keys to power: the Islamic banks, the military wing, the reformation of the party’s organizational structure, the party’s development into a mass movement exploiting modern forms of media and propaganda and his faction’s extensive network of relations with foreign Islamic movements.

Al-Turabi’s articulation of the relationship between socialism and Islam frequently changed with shifts in the political context, beginning in the 1970s when he turned towards Islamic private enterprise to bolster his movement. After his post-1977 alliance with Nimeiri, he increasingly distanced himself from the more left-leaning Islamists and supported the regime’s arbitrary action against organized labour in his position as attorney-general.¹⁰⁸ One year after the seizure of power in 1990, he assured the British Ambassador that he was seeking a move towards a private enterprise economy.¹⁰⁹ Ironically, after he fell out with the more conservative members of his own movement in the late 1990s, he criticized the same private enterprise economy, effectively accepting that many of the new economic elite had been just as guilty of *shirk* as their predecessors. In his diagnosis of the regime’s failures, he observed that while many had earnestly pursued the aims of an Islamic economy, ‘some relied upon the failure of the Sudanese socialist experience and went along with the flow of the dominant movement towards global economic freedom originating from the Western materialist philosophy, the purpose of which was worldly pleasure ...’¹¹⁰ Realizing the pitfalls of the rampant neo-liberalism consequent on the

¹⁰⁵ Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, ‘Al-Turabi Bolsheviki ... Awad Abd al-Raziq Mensheviki’ *al-Sahafa*, 20 September 2012.

¹⁰⁶ For the ‘intentionalism’ versus ‘structuralism’ distinction, see Smith, *Oxford Handbook*, 16.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Turabi, *Awlawiyyat*: 6. ¹⁰⁸ See Chapter 2.

¹⁰⁹ FOIA, Ramsay to Hurr, 6 September 1990, FCO.

¹¹⁰ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 329–330.

failure of Sudanese socialism, al-Turabi shifted towards a position further to the left of his original stance of the 1960s. He told an interviewer in 1999 that 'I want to bring the whole Communist experience into Islam, because it is the experience of humanity' noting that he had always wished to employ it to help the Islamic struggle against 'economic injustice, and on behalf of the workers'.¹¹¹

Nothing highlighted the remarkable character of Hasan al-Turabi's turnaround more than his relationship with his former schoolmate, Muhammad Ibrahim Nugd, leader of the SCP from 1971 until 2012. When they were both members of parliament in the 1960s, their relationship was a combustible one. Nugd often refused to respond to al-Turabi on the grounds that he never offered the assembly a 'clear view',¹¹² while al-Turabi named Nugd as one of the members he wanted to expel during the ICF's campaign to ban the godless Communists. Nevertheless, speaking in early 1999, al-Turabi claimed that Nugd had been a close personal friend since the time of their shared imprisonment in Kober in 1989, and that they visited each other often.¹¹³ It would be unsurprising, given the interconnectedness of Sudan's riverain elite, if personal relationships did not exist that belied the official hostility between Communists and Islamists in the public arena. Tayyib Zain al-Abdin recalled that Nugd met with him during the transitional period in 1986 and pleaded that NIF-SCP enmity should not undermine Sudan's fragile democracy, expressing his delight at al-Turabi's practice of *ijtihad* regarding art and the status of women.¹¹⁴ Al-Turabi himself maintained that 'We entered into dialogue and he began to be liberated from his communism, as the Russians were, although he did not say it openly'.¹¹⁵ It was, of course, convenient for al-Turabi to claim that Nugd was learning from him as much as vice versa. Nevertheless, at Nugd's funeral 13 years later, he made an even more remarkable statement, announcing that those who claimed Communists did not believe in God were mistaken and that the merit of Communism was that it had 'advanced the field of human thinking, and [the Sudanese Communists] had come to be liberated from the

¹¹¹ Ghasan Sharbal, Interview with Al-Turabi, *al-Wasat*, 1 February 1999.

¹¹² *Al-Sahafa*, 11 January 2004.

¹¹³ Ghasan Sharbal, Interview with Al-Turabi, *al-Wasat*, 1 February 1999.

¹¹⁴ Tayyib Zain al-Abdin, 'Hiwarat wa dhikrayat ma' rahil Nuqd' *al-Sahafa*, 25 March 2012.

¹¹⁵ Ghasan Sharbal, Interview with Al-Turabi, *al-Wasat*, 1 February 1999.

ancient burden that had restrained Islamic thought'.¹¹⁶ Before Nugd's death, al-Turabi's PCP had even been willing to join with the SCP in the opposition National Consensus Forces, representing the first time that any of his parties had been willing to enter a political grouping with the Communists since the schisms that followed the 1964 October Revolution.¹¹⁷ Both Nugd and al-Turabi claimed to have come to the conclusion, after bitter experiences with the army, that only popular revolution and not military and vanguardist strategies could effect political change in Sudan. Al-Turabi conveniently rewrote the history of his relationship with the SCP to suit this new alliance.

Al-Turabi, the Islamo-Fascist?

Accounts of al-Turabi and the various Islamist groups he has led that label them as 'fascist' tend to fall into one of three categories: first, that which construes them as 'fascists' simply because they have been locked in mortal ideological combat with Sudan's Communists, demonstrating that the Manichaeian duel between left and right that has defined the history of twentieth-century Europe has exported itself to Sudan; second, that which focuses on the structure and practices of the post-1989 Salvation Regime with which al-Turabi was so closely associated; and third, that maintaining that al-Turabi's thought was itself inherently fascist and was thus in and of itself the root cause of the 'totalitarian' character of the Salvation Regime.

The first, and most flawed, discourse is particularly associated with the Sudanese left. Thus, the Sudan Communist Party tends to regard the conflict with al-Turabi's Islamists that climaxed with its banning in 1965 as a 'fascist' counter-revolution against the 'left-wing' revolution of October 1964. For instance, in April 1989 Babikir al-Amin published an article in the SCP organ *al-Midan* declaring that 'enmity towards the spread of communism represents the face of all fascist activity'. He went on to liken the efforts of al-Turabi's ICF to accuse the SCP of atheism following the 1965 incident at the Teachers' Institute to the efforts of the Nazi party to combat the increasing popularity of the German Communists by staging an attack on the

¹¹⁶ *Al-Sahafa*, 26 March 2012.

¹¹⁷ See 'National Consensus Forces', *Sudan Tribune*, www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?mot330&debut_articles=120#pagination_articles, accessed on 16 April 2017

Reichstag and blaming it on a Bulgarian Communist.¹¹⁸ This argument is problematic because it roots the alleged similarity in an analysis not of ideological content but of methods that were highly contextual; in an effort to boost the SCP's own legitimacy, it also makes the mistake of adopting the Eurocentric assumption that Sudanese history is destined to play out the same ideological conflicts that shaped modern Western history.

The charge that the Salvation Regime of the 1990s was 'fascist' in both ideology and practice is less easily dismissed. Khalid Mubarak, prior to his reconciliation with the regime, published a text arguing that a number of similarities could be established between Umar al-Bashir's government and the various fascist dictatorships of Western Europe. Like the Nazis, it used the language of 'salvation' and established secluded locations in which political opponents were tortured; like Salazar's Portugal, it advocated 'self-sufficient poverty'; like Franco's Spain, it used religion to justify conflict; like Mussolini's Italy, it militarized its youth and wove party and state together.¹¹⁹ Some of these arguments, however, are a little tenuous – many ideologies exploit the notion of salvation, both Marxist and fascist regimes had merged party with state and resorted to torture, and some historians characterize Franco's regime as a form of conservative authoritarianism rather than fascism.¹²⁰ Exploitation of religion in conflict certainly predates fascism. Nevertheless, Mubarak's most convincing argument is the one relating the regime's 'advocating a return to a golden past' to Roger Griffin's characterization of fascism as promising a return to a halcyon era that rescues society from one of decadence.¹²¹ Likewise, it seems difficult to deny the force of the comparison Mubarak makes between Ali Uthman Taha's efforts to 'remould society' and fascist social engineering.¹²² It is questionable whether the Salvation Regime was intrinsically fascist, but a number of its policies were certainly analogous to those of fascist governments.

Should the apparently fascist characteristics of the regime he helped to engineer lead us to conclude that al-Turabi was a fascist, or at least

¹¹⁸ Babikir Muhammad Ahmad al-Amin, 'Al-Hizb al-Nazi wa'l-Jabha al-Islamiyya wajhan li-umla wahida', *Al-Midan*, 12 April 1989.

¹¹⁹ Mubarak, *Turabi's 'Islamist' Venture*: 101–103.

¹²⁰ Eatwell, *Fascism*: preface, xx–xvi.

¹²¹ Mubarak, *Turabi's 'Islamist' Venture*: 103.

¹²² Mubarak, *Turabi's 'Islamist' Venture*: 103.

influenced by fascism? His non-Islamist critics have often maintained that his work illustrated his intellectual dependence on fascism. His long term nemesis, Mahmud Muhammad Taha, for instance, assessing *Adwa ala Mashakil Disturiyya*, observed that al-Turabi was a 'student' of Mussolini who had followed him in his error of believing that the state itself was the source of all rights.¹²³ Meanwhile, Ali refers to a passage from his 1992 text in which he calls for 'a rebuilding of society in accordance with a process of *ijtihad* and *jihad* ... each guiding the other without departure from the fundamentals'.¹²⁴ For Ali, al-Turabi's conception of social rebuilding, which inspired Taha's Ministry of Social Planning, is equivalent to that of the Nazis in that it 'fails to recognize any difference or pluralism', and aims to create a purely homogenous society.¹²⁵

Was al-Turabi influenced by fascist ideologies? Unlike Qutb, Mawdudi and al-Banna, he did not begin writing in an era in which fascist literature was in vogue. Nevertheless, Taha claims that al-Turabi's *Adwa 'Ala Mashakil Disturiyya* follows Mussolini, despite the fact that its references are all to British, French and American constitutional theorists. Highlighting the passage in this work in which al-Turabi claims that the unchecked authority of the constituent assembly rests on the constitutional (positive) law doctrine of sovereignty,¹²⁶ Taha argues that this is identical to Mussolini's observation that for the fascist 'everything is within the state ... and the state as an expression of the moral will is the right, and the maker of rights'.¹²⁷ However, the principle of the absolute authority of the constituent assembly, or parliament, is not equivalent to that of the absolute authority of the state as a whole. This was especially the case since the assembly in question has been constituted in elections that followed the downfall of military authoritarianism and were regarded as relatively free and fair. While al-Turabi described the constituent assembly as 'a pillar of the democratic regime',¹²⁸ Mussolini proudly argued in the 1930s that the spreading of fascist principles was leading to a situation where 'there is no longer a parliament but an *état majeur*'.¹²⁹ It is true that al-Turabi attached little value to the emphasis on mutual checks and balances in Western liberal constitutional theory,

¹²³ Taha, *Za'im*. ¹²⁴ Ali, *Suqut*: 47–48. ¹²⁵ Ali, *Suqut*: 47–48.

¹²⁶ Al-Turabi, *Adwa*: 3. ¹²⁷ Taha, *Za'im*. ¹²⁸ Al-Turabi, *Adwa*: 9.

¹²⁹ Benito Mussolini, 'Between two Civilizations', *Il Popolo d'Italia*, 22 August 1933, cited in Griffin, *Fascism*: 72–73.

acknowledging that judiciaries should supervise legislative bodies but claiming that they should not set out to ‘challenge’ them,¹³⁰ and that in this lack of respect for constitutional safeguards he resembled fascist thinkers. However, the system he advocated in his 1967 pamphlet is closer to a form of absolute democracy than to a fascist state.

Having matured as an intellectual in 1960s Paris, al-Turabi showed much more interest in the world of the French revolutionary *philosophes* than he did in that of Hitler’s Germany. At the same time, he derived a number of concepts from Rousseau, who many critics perceived to be a forefather of fascism.¹³¹ All of the ideas that have led Rousseau to be perceived as a proto-fascist – the emphasis on homogeneity, a belief in a ‘general will’ separate from the will of individual citizens and a belief that force should be used to achieve change in society – appear in al-Turabi’s work.¹³² Speaking to a group of Western academics in 1992, he acknowledged the diversity of Rousseau’s thought, but distanced himself from the notion of the ‘general will’, which he described as ‘not the arithmetic will of the people as actually computed in an election, but . . . the collective general will of the people embodied in a party that claims to represent them’, arguing that Nimeiri’s Sudan Socialist Union fell into this error.¹³³ Nevertheless, he frequently fell into the same trap himself, identifying sharia itself with the notion of *al-irada al-aama*, or the ‘general will’.¹³⁴

If al-Turabi is to be labelled a fascist, we need to judge him according to his adherence to core principles of fascism, as opposed to principles and methods that are purely contextual. Eatwell, for instance, defines a ‘fascist minimum’ ideology as one that tries to create a ‘new man’ who will engineer a ‘radical Third Way state’ as well as a nation that is ‘holistic’ in the sense that ‘fascism sought to homogenize the nation, rather than celebrate diversity within it’.¹³⁵ Critics have been quick to identify such elements in al-Turabi’s own thought, particularly his language of *tawhid* or *wahdaniyya*. Gallab, for instance, cites his explanation of the ‘unitarian principle’ to a group of American scholars in 1992 as evidence of the belief that ‘It is not just that God is one, absolutely one, but also the existence is one, life is one; all life is just one programme of worship, whether it’s economics, politics, sex, private,

¹³⁰ Al-Turabi, *Adwa*: 26. ¹³¹ Eatwell, *Fascism*: 5. ¹³² See Chapter 7.

¹³³ Lowrie, *Islam, Democracy*: 27. ¹³⁴ See Chapter 7.

¹³⁵ Eatwell, *Fascism*: xxiv.

public or whatever'.¹³⁶ For Gallab, this is proof of al-Turabi's totalitarian intent. Yet al-Turabi himself did not argue that social unity implied the complete homogeneity of individuals within society. Later on in the same 1992 conference he would argue that 'I avoid the movement's becoming a madhhab or a single school of law. But there is a measure of unity that you have to achieve if you want to co-exist as one polity; there has to be some elements of consensus in society'.¹³⁷ Unlike Mawdudi,¹³⁸ he explicitly denied that the Islamic state should be totalitarian, blaming the emergence of 'totalitarian government' in the Islamic world on twentieth-century secularization.¹³⁹ Elsewhere, he spoke of a balance between responsibilities towards God and the community and recognition of 'one's own individuality'.¹⁴⁰ Moreover, it is difficult to argue that al-Turabi was attempting to model a 'new man', since his efforts to create a pious community were not so much based on the principle of forging a new identity as on calling (*da'wa*) upon the innate character (*fitra*) of each individual believer, which he believed contained a latent capacity for faith (*iman*) and religiosity.¹⁴¹

Another 'core' principle of fascism is the belief that the current generation must escape an age of regression and decadence by allowing the nation to be reborn, an ideology sometimes described as 'palingenetic ultra-nationalism'.¹⁴² As observed above, Mubarak believes that the Salvation Regime's fixation with the initial Islamic community in Medina fits it within this category, and al-Turabi himself has been criticized for likening the 1989 Revolution to the original birth of Islam.¹⁴³ Often this striving for rebirth is inspired by a mythical moment of national origin, although Griffin is keen to observe that palingenesis must incorporate some form of 'revolutionary progress' even if it is based on nostalgia for a prior golden age.¹⁴⁴ As with the model of palingenetic ultra-nationalism, al-Turabi's model of renewal was forward-looking to the extent that he was condemned by ultra-Salafis for maintaining that the original prototype was imperfect enough to be capable of improvement.¹⁴⁵ Since he maintained that it was the responsibility of

¹³⁶ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 105–106. 'Presentation by Dr al-Turabi' in Lowrie, *Islam, Democracy*: 13.

¹³⁷ Lowrie, *Islam, Democracy*: 83. ¹³⁸ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 101.

¹³⁹ Al-Turabi, 'The Islamic State', in Esposito, *Voices*: 247.

¹⁴⁰ Al-Turabi, 'Islam as a Pan-national Movement': 609.

¹⁴¹ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 231. ¹⁴² Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*: 32–36.

¹⁴³ Khalid, *War and Peace*: 210. ¹⁴⁴ Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*: 36.

¹⁴⁵ See Chapter 5.

each generation to renew the Islamic community, one might argue that he emphasizes a continuous progress and not the more abrupt phases of decline and rebirth seen in palingenetic ultra-nationalism. Nevertheless, the continually renewing Islamic community was an ideal for al-Turabi, and the fact that he argued that the post-Rashidi generation had largely failed to achieve this ideal in practice brought him closer to the palingenetic form of nationalism and its emphasis on regression.¹⁴⁶ At the same time, palingenetic ideals are hardly specific to fascism or even Western culture.¹⁴⁷ Although al-Turabi's writings appear to evoke a return to the values, if not the exact form, of the seventh century, not all the values that he claims are embodied in the glorious seventh-century past are those that fascist ideologues would associate with their own mythical communities. Fascist thinkers would be unlikely to associate democratic or multiculturalist principles with their own imagined founding communities, for instance, as al-Turabi does in his discussions of elections in the age of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs and the Constitution of Medina of 622.¹⁴⁸ Indeed, Griffin qualifies his definition of fascism as an ideology built on palingenesis with the caveat that this quest for rebirth must specifically involve the rejection of post-Enlightenment liberal institutions and plural representative democracy.¹⁴⁹ In this sense, al-Turabi pursues a logic analogous to that of fascist ideologies, but reaches different conclusions.

Conclusion

Al-Turabi was not intrinsically a fascist, or intrinsically a Marxist, masking his 'real' ideology with an Islamic veil. It is true that elements of his thought – as of his political strategy – contained echoes of both ideologies. A parallel between al-Turabi and Lenin is logical enough since both embraced an intentionalist as opposed to a structuralist approach to achieving their respective revolutions: al-Turabi certainly made use of vanguardist methods and 'front' tactics. Like a number of fascist thinkers, he also emphasized regeneration and sought to achieve social homogeneity, although at times he stressed the importance of reaching a balance between homogeneity and individuality.

¹⁴⁶ See, for example, Al-Turabi, *Tajdid Usul*: 14–15.

¹⁴⁷ Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*: 33.

¹⁴⁸ Al-Turabi, 'Islam as a Pan-national Movement': 610. See Chapters 7 and 8.

¹⁴⁹ Griffin, *Nature of Fascism*: 33–37.

Nevertheless, while – under the influence of former Marxists such as Babikir Karrar and partly fascist-influenced Islamists such as Mawdudi – al-Turabi adopted some of the techniques employed by other totalitarian ideologues, it is essential to remember that it was his own intellectual fluidity and opportunism that enabled his recourse to these methods. Nowhere was this thorough-going opportunism demonstrated more visibly than in his shifting relationship with Marxism. In the initial phase, between 1965 and 1969, al-Turabi accused the Sudanese Communists of atheism while co-opting elements of socialist economic policy; between 1977 and 1999, with Sudanese Communism on the wane, he allied himself to the monopolistic practices of the Islamic banks; then after 1999, seeking ideological ammunition for his struggle against al-Bashir, he renounced the excesses of private enterprise once more and lauded the communist thinkers he had once deemed atheist.

Nor was it simply the case that al-Turabi was offering a more ‘liberal-democratic’ form of Islam to the West and a more ‘totalitarian’ form within the Muslim world itself. He could relate his Islamist reading of the French Revolution to both Western and Sudanese audiences, in which the battle of the revolutionary philosophes against the clergy was equated to the struggle of the pious Muslim intellectuals against the entrenched scholarly elite. Ironically, it was through the same paligenetic resurgence of seventh-century values that some have characterized as crypto-fascist that he intended to realize the very values he derived from his study of French revolutionary history. This is why he appears to present such a paradox to Western scholars.

Where al-Turabi is at his most ‘totalitarian’, in the sense that he begins to aspire towards a comprehensive purification of Muslim society, this mind-set can perhaps be understood as the product of his own personal experience of another ‘civilizational project’, specifically the colonial civilizing mission in Sudan. His obsession with ‘cleansing’ reflects a Fanonesque desire to achieve the purging of the colonial past, yet at the same time elements of his own political strategy resemble a reformulation of the colonial civilizing mission more than any attempt to reconnect to a pre-colonial past. It is due to his brand of Islamism being tied to the wider struggle of Sudanese society to resolve the traumatic legacy of the colonial past that it is unlikely to fade from prominence as rapidly as the other ‘totalitarian’ ideologies of the twenty-first century.

5 | *Reformer or Radical? Islamic and Islamist Influences*

As seen in the previous chapter, al-Turabi has often been called ‘the son of French culture’, but this is to disregard the Muslim influences on his intellectual formation. These began with the classical education that his father hoped would save him from the impact of a colonial curriculum at Hantoub and continued with the lifelong encounter with contemporary Islamic thought that began when he joined the Muslim Brotherhood at Gordon College. One might contend that observing the influence of contemporary Islamist thinkers on al-Turabi is merely another way of appreciating his indebtedness to modern Western political philosophies, since most Islamists appropriated Western ideologies and forms of political organization. Thus, some might claim that al-Turabi’s engagement with the Islamic Reformism of his fellow Francophile Abduh shows his openness to liberal constitutionalism and rationalism, whereas those who believe that he is parroting Mawdudi’s ideas tend to describe him, as Mawdudi is often described, as an advocate of either fascist or communist principles. Nevertheless, like al-Turabi, none of these thinkers passively absorbed Western thought – rather, they studied Western ideas so as to reconceptualize Islam through the ‘prism of modernity’,¹ just as al-Turabi himself had used both Islamist and European thought to develop the classical corpus of Islamic knowledge he had received from his father.

For a number of al-Turabi observers, the more contentious issue is whether his intellectual endeavours and political strategies are to be identified chiefly with the trend of ‘Islamic Reformism’ that originated in the nineteenth century and was associated with Muhammad Abduh and Jamal al-Din al-Afghani or, instead, with the movement towards ‘Islamic Radicalism’ inaugurated by Mawdudi and Qutb that defined al-Turabi’s own era. Tønnesson argues that in ‘emphasizing the dynamic nature of Islam, [al-Turabi] is thus a bearer of a long tradition

¹ Hartung, *Mawdudi*: 6–7.

within Islamist moderate thinking from Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897) onwards’,² while al-Turabi himself was keen to distance himself from Mawdudi and Qutb.³ However, Gallab suggests that ‘although he never mentioned or quoted him by name, al-Turabi followed al-Mawdudi’s views of “Islamic totalitarianism”’,⁴ whereas Mousalli has argued that there are parallels between his concepts and those of Sayyid Qutb.⁵ One important distinction between reformism and radicalism is that while reformists believed that Islam should adapt itself to the socio-political order inaugurated by the onset of Western modernity in the Islamic world, Islamic radicalism demanded a comprehensive break with the established socio-political order.⁶ As a result of Sudan’s fluid political environment, al-Turabi often veered between rejecting the established socio-political order and trying to accommodate it, and his relationship with the radical and reformist trends varied accordingly. Just as at times he held totalitarian aspirations without being a totalitarian, he often employed Qutbist language without becoming a Qutbist.

Critics who emphasize al-Turabi’s relationship with radical trends argue that this isolated him from broader currents within Muslim society, particularly in Sudan, where Sufism had dominated the social, religious and economic spheres for centuries. Gallab tells us that al-Turabi blamed Sufism for the ‘inexorable discord’ within Muslim society, and that as a result ‘the Islamists’ aggressive offensive against Sufi orders and their leaders and saints has remained fiercely antagonistic and is fuelled by a discourse emphasizing the re-Islamization of the political, social, and economic life of the Sudan’.⁷ Thus al-Turabi only related to Sufism so as to subsume it within his own order of *Wahdaniyya*, or Islamic unity.⁸ Muhieddin argues the opposite, contending that it was the very diversity of al-Turabi’s approach that brought about his downfall. For him, the crises of the ‘Civilizational Project’ were less related to his ideology of *tawhid* (unification) and more to his strategy of *infatih*, or the ‘opening’ of the Islamic

² Tønnesson, *Hasan al-Turabi’s Search*: 2.

³ Hamdi, *Makings*: 90–91. Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 140.

⁴ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 102.

⁵ Moussalli, ‘Hasan al-Turabi’s Islamist Discourse’: 53–55.

⁶ Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*: 38–39, 157.

⁷ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 104. ⁸ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 105.

Movement to society as a whole.⁹ It will be seen here that al-Turabi's relationship with Sufism was pragmatic and nuanced, and that his assault on the *Tariqas* was a selective one. Most theories of totalitarianism posit that one of its core features is the effort to efface established social institutions and absorb society within the revolutionary ideological order.¹⁰ Yet, as has been demonstrated in previous chapters, such were the limitations of al-Turabi's own charismatic and ideological authority that he was often forced to negotiate with the existing socio-political order and transform his programme accordingly. It will be seen here that in attempting to absorb society within the Islamic Movement, he embraced existing religious institutions, such as Mahdism, Salafism, and Sufism to the extent that the Salvation Regime's supposedly monolithic ideological core was rapidly diluted.

One methodological challenge to an analysis of al-Turabi's Islamic reference points is his unwillingness to acknowledge his own sources. Indeed, it is his extremely loose historical methodology that facilitates his constant switching between different religious and ideological trends. While he will refer in general terms to particular thinkers whose books he has read, he tends only – certain earlier texts excepted – to provide footnote references either to the Quran or occasionally his own works. When he cites classical scholars, compilers of *tafsir* or fellow Islamists, his purpose is often to make a negative comparison that highlights his own more sophisticated and religiously sound approach. In some cases, it is easy to identify where he has derived certain arguments from specific authors, such as Abduh. Elsewhere there must be an element of supposition, which will be acknowledged.

In seeking to understand how al-Turabi related to various Islamist trends, we must also be careful to differentiate between the intellectual discourse of his scholarly works and the political discourse exhibited by his public addresses and media interviews. Arguably, the former evinces the reformist approach much more consistently than the latter. Al-Turabi would have had to acknowledge that Mawdudi and Qutb's ideologies were extremely popular in the Sudanese Islamic Movement as well as the global Islamist community at the time of his rise to political prominence in the latter half of the twentieth century, and

⁹ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi wa'l-Inqadh*: 159–161.

¹⁰ See, for instance, Arendt, *Origins*: 460. Gentile, 'Fascism, Totalitarianism and Political Religion': 327.

their forms of political language often served an instrumental purpose for him in the world of mundane politics. This chapter will demonstrate that while Mawdudi and particularly Qutb created binary and conflict-orientated ideologies to justify a vanguard-based and elitist Islamist model, al-Turabi tactically re-engineered them for the world of mass politics. He did not integrate their world views into his own in a holistic manner, but this tactical appropriation of Qutbist and Mawdudist discourse did sporadically feed back into his writings.

The Ulama

Al-Turabi's attitude towards the the *ulama* – the religious scholars who had acted as the principal custodians and interpreters of Islamic law since the eighth century-developed from the position adopted towards this elite by previous and contemporary Islamists such as Abduh and Mawdudi. He criticizes past and present *ulama* for failing to break free from the chains of *taqlid*, or 'tradition', which in this context refers to the transmission of a series of jurisprudential practices and legal opinions from generation to generation without adapting them to the exigencies of each particular age. For al-Turabi, the existing *ulama* establishment has failed to practice *ijtihad*, which, like Abduh, he understands as the use of reason to flesh out a new and more relevant jurisprudence. These failures have contributed to the overall failures of Muslim society to bridge the gap between religion and state, due to the fact that ever since the end of the period of the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs, the *ulama* have concerned themselves with matters of the private sphere such as marriage and prayer, not economics and statecraft.¹¹

In all of this, al-Turabi's outlook did not differ substantially from that of other Islamists. However, while men such as Abduh, Rida and Mawdudi believed that once the *ulama* freed themselves of *taqlid* they could play a role in rejuvenating Islam, al-Turabi attacked not only the practices of the *ulama* but also the entire structure dedicated to the production of religious knowledge. He wished to democratize access to these scholarly epistemologies, making intellectual and religious merit rather than knowledge of formalistic procedures the central criterion when evaluating an *alim*; in his own words, calling for the principles of

¹¹ Al-Turabi, *Tajdid al-Fikr*: 15.

ijtihad to ‘judge the *mujtahidin* according to what they possess in terms of knowledge and piety, and not formalistic and heavily regulated conditions . . .’ that cause society to remain divided ‘between the masses who remain set apart from the burden of thinking about religion and a detached group who monopolize its secrets’.¹² Al-Turabi frequently attempted to explain his assault on the *ulama* with reference to European revolutionary ideas and the delegitimization of the clerical elite during the French Revolution.¹³ In conversation with a Western scholar in the 1960s, he also employed quasi-Marxist language to criticize the *ulama*, describing them as a ‘reactionary’ force ‘to the right’ of his own party.¹⁴

Marginalizing the *ulama* to such a degree, al-Turabi’s model for the Islamic state differed substantially from that proposed by Rida, Mawdudi and Khomeini, in which the *ulama* or *mujtahids* acted as Platonic ‘philosopher-kings’ charged with ensuring the integrity of the new society. He told a student audience in 1967 that the Islamic state was ‘not a theocracy ruled by men of religion [*rijal al-din*].’¹⁵ Many in the scholarly establishment consequently saw al-Turabi as a threat; and, whilst the law’s many opponents in the political arena saw his 1988 Penal Code as a form of reactionary Islamization, a group of Islamic scholars denounced it as a symbol of his corruption by European values – as ‘children of Western culture’, he and his colleagues were not fit to draft a sharia code.¹⁶ It was the need to avert such criticisms that led al-Turabi to bring religiously trained yet modernist scholars into the Islamic Movement. Indeed, it was the Edinburgh-trained Islamist *alim* Ahmad Ali Imam whose Sudan Ulama Organization gave his 1988 sharia code the public support it needed.¹⁷ Nevertheless, Imam, too, would break with al-Turabi in the end: he was one of the ten Islamists who instigated the attack on him within the National Congress later in the 1990s.¹⁸

When the Islamists came to power in 1989, the existing *ulama* establishment and *ifta* council were confined, like their predecessors, to matters of personal affairs, inheritance and civil transactions.¹⁹

¹² Al-Turabi, *Qadaya*: 188.

¹³ See his speech to the University of Khartoum Philosophical Society, *Al-Mithaq*, 23 August 1967.

¹⁴ SAD, Meeting with Richard Hill in December 1964, Richard Hill Papers, 974/9/14.

¹⁵ *Al-Mithaq*, 23 August 1967. ¹⁶ *Modern Sudan Daily Times*, 6 July 1988.

¹⁷ *Modern Sudan Daily Times*, 21 July 1988. ¹⁸ See Chapter 3.

¹⁹ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 138.

As a result, al-Turabi was widely accused of undermining the authority of the existing clerical elite solely in order to establish himself in its place as the sole jurisprudent in a veiled theocracy.²⁰ The ambiguity of his status makes this criticism easy to understand. Officially, he was never an *alim*, or religious scholar. He was successively an academic, secretary-general of the Muslim Brotherhood/Islamic Movement and its various political offshoots, secretary-general of the PAIC, speaker of the National Assembly, secretary-general of the National Congress and then finally secretary-general of another opposition party, the PCP. Yet al-Turabi had gained considerable knowledge of Islamic law from his informal domestic education and prize-winning studies of sharia at the University of Khartoum; and his various statements on social and religious matters have often been described as *fatwas*, although it is unclear whether they actually bear this status. For instance, in responding to a question about an al-Turabi '*fatwa*' on the status of women, his wife Wisal described it as an 'opinion', not a '*fatwa*'.²¹

For a number of critics, this central ambiguity deftly concealed al-Turabi's real belief that he was, like Khomeini, the sole *mujtahid* capable of leading Sudan. For example, al-Haj Warraq, reviewing his *Tajdid Usul al-Fiqh* in 1987, suggested that he employed the following formula: '1. The state is religious. 2. Religion is comprised of *ijtihad*. 3. *Ijtihad* in the final analysis is the opinion of the *mujtahid* with the most knowledge. 4. Therefore the state is to be based on the views of this *mujtahid* which are at the same time the views of religion.' The *mujtahid* in question would, of course, be Hasan al-Turabi himself. However, by arguing that al-Turabi stressed the need for a single *mujtahid* to act as an intellectual *ubermensch* combining knowledge of a vast array of languages and cultures in addition to the social and natural sciences, Warraq perhaps caricatures his position.²² In practice, al-Turabi acknowledged that there would be many *mujtahids* in his renewed Muslim society. Thus he told Voll and Esposito that an *alim* was 'anyone who knows anything well enough to relate it to God. Because all knowledge is divine and religious, a chemist, an engineer, an economist and a jurist are all *ulama*'.²³ As we have seen, within his

²⁰ Ibrahim, 'Theology of Modernity': 213.

²¹ Wisal al-Mahdi, Interview with *al-Sharq al-Aswat*, 8 December 2011.

²² Al-Haj Warraq, 'al-Turabi yusawwirhu nabiiyan wa yada'uu ila dawla diniyya fiha Hizb wahid wa rai wahid'. *al-Midan*, 7 December 1988.

²³ Esposito and Voll, *Makers*: 129.

movement, al-Turabi did not try to monopolize knowledge of the modern sciences. He sent members to higher educational institutions in Britain and America to study subjects such as genetics, clinical biochemistry, sociology and political science.²⁴ While he was the Islamic Movement's pre-eminent intellectual when it seized power, this did not lead to his assumption of a position similar to that of Khomeini in Iran, presiding over a Council of Guardians. Even his secret position was a secular one, as head of the clandestine 'leadership bureau'.²⁵ In short, while some of his behaviour in this period was quite autocratic, he never acquired the legal authority of a 'philosopher-king' jurist and, as we have seen, was cast out of public office following an act of *ijtihad* originating from one of the Salvation Regime's new institutions, the Centre for Strategic Studies.²⁶

For al-Turabi, the ability to appreciate *ilm* was not merely based on an individual's modern scientific and intellectual credentials. The classical religious and linguistic knowledge inherited from his father was relevant to his understanding of what it was to be an *alim* who would 'relate [knowledge] to God'. He maintained that the decline of classical Arabic was synonymous with the decline of religion, claiming for instance that the term *fiqh* (religious jurisprudence) in modern Arabic has a much more restricted meaning than it did originally.²⁷ This decline of language had made it impossible for recent generations to perform an effective *tafsir* (exegesis) of the Quran, since the Arabic language, he said, is the 'key to the Quran' and Muslims have lost the ability to understand the various expressions of the holy book.²⁸ Part of the problem, al-Turabi observes, is that any attempt to revive classical Arabic today is reliant on 'forms of *nahw* (grammar) and *sarf* (inflection) and language that were established hundreds of years ago and have fallen behind the spreading of the concepts associated with global civilization'.²⁹ Clearly, having mastered the classical linguistic arts as a child to the extent that he could embarrass his intermediary school teacher with this skill, al-Turabi thought himself able to elucidate their meaning in a contemporary political context. In 2000, he published a book entitled *al-Mustalahat al-Siyasiyya fi Islam* (Political Terms in

²⁴ Ghazi Salahaddin, for instance, has a PhD in clinical biochemistry from the University of Surrey; see profile on *Aljazeera Forum*, <http://forum.aljazeera.net/speakers/ghazi-salahuddin-atabani>.

²⁵ See Chapter 3. ²⁶ See Chapter 3 ²⁷ Al-Turabi, *al-Mustalahat*: 7–8.

²⁸ Al-Turabi, *al-Tafsir*: 27. ²⁹ Al-Turabi, *Qadaya*: 116.

Islam) for precisely this purpose. In practice, this meant that the majority of his Arabic language works – and to a lesser extent his lectures and speeches – were written in a style so bombastic and classical as to be difficult for his audience to comprehend.³⁰ This is probably why his works have been so hard to emulate and took al-Turabi dangerously close to the Mawdudi position where only '0.001%' of individuals would have sufficient understanding to interpret God's will.³¹ It is true that al-Turabi tried to popularize the use of classical Arabic in order to make his own form of religious knowledge more accessible. Nevertheless, his efforts to use the term *tawali* to provide an Islamic alternative to a multi-party political system in the 1998 constitution illustrate how his usage of classical terminology simply brought about confusion, rather than open new fields of knowledge to the public.³²

Reformism and Neo-Mu'tazilism

While al-Turabi may have condemned the scholarly establishment, he did not eschew engagement with medieval debates about the nature of Islamic knowledge. Indeed, his manner of engagement with these debates bears comparison to that of the influential reformist *'alim* Muhammad Abduh. In the late nineteenth century, Abduh and his patron Jamal al-Din al-Afghani had become the most influential protagonists of a broader reformist (*islahi*) trend within Islam, using their journal *al-Urwa al-Wuthqa* to popularize their condemnation of *taqlid*. In particular, both Abduh and al-Turabi – without actively labeling themselves as Mu'tazilites or 'neo-Mu'talizites' – identified with those elements of Mu'tazilite doctrine that prioritized the use of human reason to interpret scripture.³³ This doctrine had for a brief 30-year period in the ninth century been the official doctrine of the Abbasid Caliphate centred in Baghdad, during which time the Caliph Mamun broke with the existing scholarly establishment and imposed a *mihna* (trial) to enforce adherence to the Mu'tazilite belief that the Quran was

³⁰ De Waal and Abdel Salam, 'Islamism': 83. For the impenetrability of al-Turabi's language, see Jamal Idris al-Kinein, 'Waraga Ihya' al-'Amal al-Islami, 'ta'qib', *al-Sahafa*, 12 May 2005.

³¹ Nasr, *Mawdudi*: 64. ³² See Chapter 8.

³³ For Abduh's relationship with Mu'tazilite doctrine see Sedgwick, *Muhammad Abduh*: 13.

created.³⁴ During the *mihna*, he imprisoned Ahmad Ibn Hanbal, the founder of the Hanbali law school currently followed by the Wahhabi *ulama* of Saudi Arabia. It is this history that gives such resonance to the claims made by Wahhabi *ulama* and their affiliates that al-Turabi was a ‘Mu’tazilite’.³⁵

In his last text on the political applications of *fiqh*, al-Turabi laments that as a result of the ‘closing of the door of *ijtihad*’ and the rise of the *Jabariyya* and *Qadariyya* doctrines emphasizing predestination, ‘the Mu’tazilite school was isolated in its [belief in] the freedom of human learning (*hurriyya kasb al-insan*)’.³⁶ This is where, like Abduh, he makes a crucial break with the more rigid Salafis who emphasize the totality of the decline that ensued following the end of the period of the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs. While he laments the emergent gap between religion and state that marked the Abbasid period, he still believes that Islamic jurisprudence advanced itself further in Baghdad than it did in the Arabian Peninsula, since ‘in the border regions of Islam in Iraq . . . various different nations (*aqwam*) entered the community (*al-milla*) and established a more developed civilization than the civilization of Medina’.³⁷ This perspective is probably derived from Abduh, who makes similar arguments.³⁸ Al-Turabi praises the ‘civilizational environment’ of Iraq for fostering the development of a wide range of views within the school of the *ahl al-ra’i*,³⁹ and for facilitating the use of *aql* (reason) and *qiyas* (analogy) in the interpretation of scripture. He notes that the use of *qiyas* in Iraq at this time was far more extensive than had been sanctioned in Medina, though still not as extensive as it should have been.⁴⁰ For al-Turabi, the problem with the medieval *alims* was not their theological principles *per se*, although he evidently sympathized with those more willing to use reason; it was, instead, the fact that, being restricted to the private sphere, these principles could not be practised to their full extent.⁴¹ He even mentions honourable exceptions, such as Abu Yusuf, a Hanafi *alim* and the Chief Justice of the Abbasid Caliph Harun al-Rashid, whose position

³⁴ Kennedy, ‘The Caliphate’: 62.

³⁵ See, for instance, statement by the leader of the Sudanese Ansar al-Sunna, *al-Sabafa*, 12 September 2012.

³⁶ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh*: 337. ³⁷ Al-Turabi, *Tajdid al-Fikr*: 17.

³⁸ Abduh, *Theology of Unity*: 33–34.

³⁹ Al-Turabi, *Qadaya al-Tajdid*: 215–216. ⁴⁰ *Tajdid al-Fikr*: 17.

⁴¹ *Tajdid al-Fikr*: 17.

enabled him to expand Hanafi jurisprudence by writing a major work on public finance.⁴²

Two complementary concepts that al-Turabi potentially derives from Abduh are *tawhid* (unity) and *shirk* (polytheism). Abduh understands *tawhid* as a theological duty to know God as directly and fully as possible, and to avoid reliance on the *taqlid* of the *ulama* in understanding the deity.⁴³ Meanwhile, he defines *shirk* as the act of exalting any being other than God and of dissociating oneself from the means that God has provided for health, happiness and success in the world.⁴⁴ Al-Turabi reproduces a number of Abduh's arguments concerning the nature of *tawhid*; for instance, his contention that by being united in worship of a single creator man is freed from subjection to all forms of human domination.⁴⁵ Al-Turabi followed Abduh's *tawhidi* theology in his exegesis of the Quran, contending that a failure by previous exegetes to practise full *tawhid* had led to partial readings based on specific passages taken out of context and that a holistic reading founded instead on an appreciation of the inter-relation of specific passages could bestow a comprehensive understanding of the principles of the Holy Book.⁴⁶ Elsewhere, as seen in the previous chapter, his articulation of the principles of *tawhid* may have been guided by more contemporary doctrines such as Islamic Socialism.

Probably al-Turabi's most original extension of Abduh's principles is his interpretation of the concept of *tajdid*, or renewal. Arguing that previous generations had over-emphasized the fixity of Islam, he contended that while certain core principles were eternal, many others, particularly those associated with the merely human endeavours of Islamic jurisprudence (*fiqh*), needed to change.⁴⁷ Indeed, Muslims are required to renew their faith so as to enable them to overcome the trials (*ibtila'at*) of each new era.⁴⁸ As el-Affendi observes, al-Turabi's conception of *tajdid*, 'already tentatively apparent in Abduh', was controversial in that it 'clashes head on with the traditional Muslim belief in the inevitability of continuous regression in the post-Prophetic age'.⁴⁹

⁴² *Tajdid al-Fikr*: 17. See also *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, entry on Abu Yusuf, <http://oxfordindex.oup.com/view/10.1093/acref/9780195125580.013.0040>.

⁴³ Abduh, *Theology of Unity*: 39. ⁴⁴ Abduh, *Theology of Unity*: 63.

⁴⁵ Abduh, *Theology of Unity*: 124–125. El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*: 161.

⁴⁶ Al-Turabi, *al-Tafsir*: 25. ⁴⁷ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*: 170.

⁴⁸ Ibrahim, 'Theology of Modernity': 201–203.

⁴⁹ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*: 179.

It is al-Turabi's understanding of *tajdid* that has allowed him radically to revise classical Islamic concepts such as *shura* and *ijma* in an attempt to facilitate an Islamist democracy, as will be seen in Chapter 8.

One particular legal principle used extensively by Abduh that is likely to have facilitated al-Turabi's *tajdidi* jurisprudence is that of *sad al-zara'i*, or 'blocking the means'. The essence of this principle, which reportedly facilitated over half of all historic Muslim legislation, is that if a particular end is Islamic, then the means to achieve it are also Islamic. In other words, the end justifies the means.⁵⁰ It is in this principle that we can see the roots of al-Turabi's emphasis on *fiqh al-darura*, or the 'jurisprudence of necessity',⁵¹ a concept tied, like *sad al-zara'i*, to an emphasis on *maslaha*, or public interest, but which his opponents have accused him of exploiting for the purposes of political opportunism.⁵² One final tendency of Abduh's developed by Hasan al-Turabi is his universal outlook and desire to transcend narrow scholastic and sectarian disputes.⁵³ For instance, he reiterates Abduh's position that the principle of *tawhid* makes the medieval dispute between the literalist *Zahiriyya* school and that of the *Batiniyya*, with its emphasis on the 'hidden meanings' of religious texts, irrelevant to modern Islam.⁵⁴ His efforts to mediate between Sufi, Salafi and Shia groups will be discussed further below.

If al-Turabi continued and developed Abduh's intellectual and jurisprudential legacy, his strategies for political organization came from the founder of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, Hasan al-Banna. Al-Banna is considered by some as the last proponent of the reformist trend before Abd al-Nasir's persecution of the Muslim Brotherhood provoked the emergence of more radical ideologies,⁵⁵ although others dispute this.⁵⁶ His main achievement was to transform the reformist principles of al-Afghani and Abduh into political activism on the national stage, establishing the Muslim Brotherhood as the first

⁵⁰ Khatab and Bouma, *Democracy in Islam*: 49.

⁵¹ De Waal and Abdel Salam, 'Islamism': 85

⁵² Al-Haj Warraq and Ahmad Muhammad Al-Faki, 'al-'ada l'il-shiyu'yiyya fi adab al-jabha al-qawmiya', *al-Midan*, 6 November 1986. De Waal and Abdel Salam, 'Islamism': 85

⁵³ See Mitchell, *Society of the Muslim Brothers*: 325.

⁵⁴ Al-Turabi, *Qadaya*: 30, and observations in *al-Raya*, 20 July 1985. Abduh, *Theology of Unity*: 37.

⁵⁵ Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*: 58.

⁵⁶ Soage, 'Hasan al-Banna and Sayyid Qutb': 294–311.

modern Islamist political party. He also pioneered the use of modern media and propaganda techniques and the development of party structures to facilitate mass mobilization.⁵⁷ Most importantly, al-Banna, rather than attempting to bypass the modern state, pursued a strategy of Islamizing it as a stepping-stone to the final unification of the *umma*.⁵⁸ Al-Turabi followed a similar strategy, and al-Banna was often cited as a model to emulate by his faction, following the conflict with the 'educationalist' wing of the movement that wished to refrain from involvement in the modern political arena.⁵⁹

Like al-Banna, al-Turabi used the media as a tool of mass mobilization, particularly in the third parliamentary period when *al-Raya* and other NIF-linked newspapers used demagogic language to rally the Sudanese public to campaign in favour of the NIF interpretation of sharia. Although al-Turabi claims that the Islamic Movement eventually overcame its dependence on the organizational techniques of its Egyptian counterpart, the strategy pursued during the mass expansion of the 1970s of establishing small, decentralized local branches known as *usrat* or circles is likely to have been derived from al-Banna's Brotherhood.⁶⁰ Finally, al-Turabi's strategy of opening (*infitaḥ*) the movement up to society might also have been derived from al-Banna, who declared that

We, the Brotherhood, are like an immense hall that can be entered by any Muslim from any door to partake of whatsoever he wishes. Should he seek Sufism, he shall find it. Should he seek comprehension of Islamic jurisprudence, he shall find it.⁶¹

As will be seen in the rest of this chapter, al-Turabi mirrored al-Banna in the flexibility of his approach and his willingness to incorporate a wide range of social and religious groups into his Islamic Movement. As for the differences between them, perhaps the most telling is that al-Banna was a pure activist rather than a scholar, and avoided taking controversial positions on complex jurisprudential and doctrinal issues.⁶² By contrast, al-Turabi was a scholar as well; this led

⁵⁷ Lia, *Society*: 282. ⁵⁸ Mura, 'Genealogical inquiry': 75.

⁵⁹ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 28.

⁶⁰ Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 71, 81. See Munson, 'Islamic Mobilization': 487–510 for the effectiveness of the Brotherhood's decentralized organization structure in Egypt.

⁶¹ Kramer, *Hassan al-Banna*: 43. ⁶² See, for example, Lia, *Society*: 35.

him to broadcast opinions that – as we shall see – alienated factions he was trying to co-opt and accordingly made him comparatively less successful.

Mawdudi

Al-Turabi often criticized Mawdudi and the Jamaat-i-Islami party he founded in Pakistan in 1941, emphasizing their traditionalism in order to highlight his own more sophisticated *tajdidi* values. Speaking to Hamdi in the 1990s, he observed that ‘like many other Islamic movements, the Jama’at became bogged down in a set of traditional issues which are mostly historical and go back to its early days’.⁶³ Indeed, Mawdudi did tend to model his own utopia on a literalistic reification of seventh-century Arabian society shorn of the accretions that followed the age of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, and was incapable of using hermeneutics to relate his Quranic exegesis to contemporary realities.⁶⁴ This distinguishes his approach from al-Turabi’s emphasis on the renewal of Islam to adapt to the *ibtila’at* (trials) of each particular age.

In the same interview, al-Turabi also lambasts the Jama’at for its elitism, lamenting that ‘It is still difficult to join the movement, and after half a century of existence its membership is not more than about ten thousand people’.⁶⁵ His representation of the elitist nature of Mawdudi’s party is fairly accurate, although it is worth considering it in the context of his struggle against the ‘educationalist’ faction within his own movement, from the 1960s onwards. While al-Turabi criticized this faction for wanting to keep the Islamic renaissance restricted to a small, educated elite, they in turn felt that Mawdudi’s Jama’at offered a more principled alternative to al-Turabi, whom they believed placed politics before all else. Malik Badri, a member of this faction, argued that it was soon after visiting Pakistan in the 1960s that he and others resigned from al-Turabi’s ICF, believing that Mawdudi’s model of *Tarbiyya*, or educational reform as a means of preparing society for the Islamic Revolution, was an attractive alternative to the Sudanese leader’s secularization of the movement through direct engagement in politics.⁶⁶

⁶³ Hamdi, *Makings*: 91.

⁶⁴ Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdudi*: 115–117.

⁶⁵ Hamdi, *Makings*: 91.

⁶⁶ Badri, ‘Tribute’.

The distinction between Mawdudi and al-Turabi was, however, only one of degrees. Mawdudi's position on engagement with the political world and on revolution was ambiguous, although he was probably more of a gradualist than al-Turabi – perhaps a Hegel to al-Turabi's Rousseau or Lenin.⁶⁷ He certainly pushed the Jama'at to participate in a number of Pakistani elections, albeit with limited success, and it joined the cabinet of General Zia ul-Haq in 1977, anticipating al-Turabi's alliance with Umar al-Bashir.⁶⁸ What distinguished their positions is that while al-Turabi frequently argued that a pious society must create a pious state, Mawdudi eschewed bottom-up revolution and emphasized the role of the state in providing an education in true Islamic values and enforcing Islamic law.⁶⁹ Here it is significant that Mawdudi was comparatively more influenced by neo-Aristotelian philosophers and Mulla Sidra.⁷⁰ Yet, although the two men had different outlooks on the respective roles of state and society in bringing about the new order, they both viewed it as a utopian revivification of a seventh-century order, the social harmony within which would lead distinctions between state and society to become blurred.⁷¹ This similarly utopian approach, combined with the existing sympathy for Mawdudist ideals in the Sudanese Islamic Movement and al-Turabi's de facto retreat into vanguardism and alliances with the military, was why their apparently divergent approaches came in practice to resemble each other.

Speaking of the Jama'at's contribution to the Zia regime and in particular the general's efforts to establish sharia, al-Turabi opined that 'The Jama'at has contributed much in the field of Islamic government and constitution because it faced a constitution issue, unlike many other Islamic movements that did not have to consider this problem'.⁷² Indeed, a number of Mawdudi's principles would guide al-Turabi and his movement's own efforts at constitution-making even before the Jama'at helped Zia 'Islamize' the Pakistani state, particularly his concept of *hakimiyya*, which declared the sovereignty of God over earthly affairs and the vice-regency (*khilafa*) of man.⁷³ In 1965, soon after the ICF had been founded, al-Turabi declared that one of its principles was that 'man is the successor (*khilafa*) to God on the

⁶⁷ Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdudi*: 146. Hartung, *Mawdudi*: 166.

⁶⁸ Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdudi*: 76–77. ⁶⁹ Nasr, *Mawdudi*: 57.

⁷⁰ Nasr, *Mawdudi*: 24. ⁷¹ See Chapter 7. ⁷² Hamdi, *Makings*: 91.

⁷³ Nasr, *Mawdudi*: 89.

earth',⁷⁴ and the same principles of *hakimiyya* and *khilafa* appeared in the 1998 constitution.⁷⁵ Both Al-Turabi and Mawdudi shared the same tendency to attack secular legislation as a godless form of man-made sovereignty, and they were both inclined to interpret passages of the Quran creatively so as to derive principles concerning governance.

Sayyid Qutb and the Battle against *Jahiliyya*

The Egyptian Muslim Brother, Sayyid Qutb, whose major phase of radicalization from the late 1950s to his death in 1966 coincided with the formative period of al-Turabi's generation of Islamists, took the rejectionist position to its furthest extent. Following imprisonment and torture by the Arab socialist regime of Jamal Abd al-Nasir, he declared that existing states and societies were too mired in pre-Islamic ignorance, or *jahiliyya*, to be saved.⁷⁶ The only way to combat both the godless secular regimes and their non-Muslim allies, he believed, was to form a vanguard (*tali'a*) of believers who would recreate seventh-century society from scratch.⁷⁷ Qutb's execution by al-Nasir in 1966 provided him with the martyr status that would lead to his principles spreading among both militant and non-militant Islamists all over the world. When the ICF led a protest march in the days following the execution, it was al-Turabi who delivered the eulogy,⁷⁸ thereby illustrating the extent to which he was forced to acknowledge the man's heroic status in spite of their ideological differences. The rise of Qutbism represented a considerable challenge to al-Turabi's approach – when he pushed for greater engagement with both society and state during his electoral campaigns and also urged the need for alliances with military regimes, he often found that the 'educationalist' faction employed Qutbist arguments against him.⁷⁹ Yet Mansour Khalid contends that throughout the late 1980s and the 1990s, al-Turabi's NIF 'espoused the ideas of the most radical fringe of the Egyptian Muslim Brothers led by Sayyid Qutb'.⁸⁰

⁷⁴ *Al-Mithaq*, 3 March 1965. ⁷⁵ See Chapter 7.

⁷⁶ Euben, *Enemy in the Mirror*: 60.

⁷⁷ Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*: 164, 182.

⁷⁸ *The Vigilant*, 30 August 1966. ⁷⁹ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*: 87.

⁸⁰ Khalid, *War and Peace*: 201. Khalid, like many others, used the existence of al-Turabi's shadow government to maintain that the National Islamic Front still existed in spite of having been officially dissolved.

Was there a shift towards Qutbist ideology in the late 1980s, or was the allegation that this had occurred simply the smear tactic of political opponents? On the surface, it would appear that there was little correspondence between al-Turabi's core principles and those of Qutb. First, while al-Turabi frequently attempted to work within the existing socio-political order, Qutb had rejected any compromise with the established regimes after his conflict with Abd al-Nasir in the 1950s. Second, al-Turabi believed that each generation of believers had the power to renew and improve the Islamic faith beyond the original seventh-century model; but this would have been anathema to Qutb, who was determined that his small vanguard should re-enact the struggles of the Prophet and early Muslim community.⁸¹ Third, al-Turabi's attitude to the West was ambivalent, as we have seen; but Qutb's experiences in America had led him to an unrelenting hatred of Western civilization. This is a distinction that al-Turabi's Marxist critics have been quick to identify. Commenting in the immediate post-Nimeiri period on al-Turabi's position in the May Regime at a time when it was both economically and politically orientated towards the United States, Warraq and al-Faki observed that 'The Islam of Turabi reached the point that it was an Islam that did not threaten the strategic interests of the West, and the teachings of Sayyid Qutb on destroying *jahiliyya* and tyranny vanished so that in their place appeared a self-interested ideology that distinguishes between itself and the West, but knows how to find shared interests and arrange bargains!'⁸² This kind of criticism was most pertinent in the Cold War era, when Islamist movements were happier to seek the assistance of pro-Western regimes in combatting their Marxist opponents.

It was precisely to avoid this kind of criticism that al-Turabi started tactically to incorporate Qutbist concepts in his political discourse, and the particularly significant one that he appropriated – from Mawdudi as well as Qutb – was the belief that Muslim society is living in an 'age of ignorance', or *jahiliyya*. Historically, *jahiliyya* was merely an epochal term, denoting the 'age of ignorance' in the Arabian Peninsula before the revelations of the Prophet in the seventh century. Nevertheless, across Muslim history scholars such as Ibn Taymiyya,

⁸¹ Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*: 182.

⁸² Al-Haj Warraq and Ahmad Muhammad Al-Faki, 'al-'ada l'il-shiyu'yiyya fi adab al-jabha al-qawmiya', *al-Midan*, 6 November 1986.

Muhammad Ibn abd al-Wahhab, Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida extended the term beyond its original chronological context, criticizing Muslims who were still living in a 'state of *Jabiliyya*'.⁸³ In particular, Mawdudi fleshed out and popularized the concept of *jabiliyya* as a fully typological term, using it to describe, in Hartung's words, 'every course of action which runs counter to the Islamic culture, Islamic morals and conduct, or Islamic mentality'.⁸⁴ Qutb's contribution was to lend a more absolute meaning to the concept, using it to demarcate the boundary between the existing states and societies mired in *kufur*, or unbelief, and his own small vanguard of pious believers. Qutb's radicalization of the concept of *jabiliyya*, which occurred in the context of his own seemingly apocalyptic battle against the Egyptian state, extended its scope in order to embrace all Muslim and non-Muslim societies.⁸⁵

Al-Turabi's *Islamic Movement in Sudan*, first published in 1989, set out his rejection of the Qutbist, and to a lesser extent the Mawdudist concept of *jabiliyya*, without mentioning either by name. He recalls that his project of 'mass expansion' faced criticism from other Islamist movements which feared infiltration, being caught up in 'dominant ideological influences which tended to brand existing Muslim societies as "jahili" or pre-Islamic'. Al-Turabi contrasts the Qutbist obsession with *jabiliyya* with the agenda of his own Islamic Movement, noting that 'in contrast to these over-suspicious approaches which dreaded every tendency towards opening up, the experience of the Sudanese Islamic movement has confirmed the optimistic assessment of the basic goodness of the Muslim masses'.⁸⁶

In spite of his criticism of the Qutbist usage of the term, al-Turabi was not himself afraid of suggesting that Muslims both past and present had been caught up in the age of *jabiliyya*. As we have seen, he reproduced Qutb's argument that Western colonialism had brought about a state of *jabiliyya* in Muslim society, arguing that it had 'surrounded Muslim society with its *jahili* materialist concepts'.⁸⁷ Moussalli has suggested that al-Turabi reproduces Qutb's binary world view, merely substituting the term *ishrak*, or polytheism, for *kufur*, unbelief.⁸⁸ As observed previously, al-Turabi's *Qadaya al-*

⁸³ Hartung, *Mawdudi*: 64. ⁸⁴ Hartung, *Mawdudi*: 64.

⁸⁵ Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*: 162–163.

⁸⁶ Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 140. ⁸⁷ *Al-Mithaq*, 22 April 1966.

⁸⁸ Moussalli, 'Hasan al-Turabi's Islamist Discourse': 53–55.

Tajdid seems to follow pseudo-Marxist Islamists in presuming a *tawhid-shirk* dialectic throughout Islamic history. He goes on to link this directly to the struggle to escape *jahiliyya*, noting that ‘this struggle went on between Islam, which binds itself in loyalty to God and makes governance subject to his law and respect for his *hudud* (fixed penalties), and the *jahiliyya* which uses governing power oppressively ... and continues the fanaticism of tribal solidarity [*asabiyyat*]’.⁸⁹ Like Qutb, therefore, al-Turabi perceives a dualistic struggle between Islam and *jahiliyya*. Unlike Qutb, he does not believe that the existing society has lost the battle. In the same passage, he suggests that there are ‘debates’ (*mujaadalaat*) between *kufr* and *iman* (faith), opting for the reflexive form III conjugation of the verbal noun (of which he is fond) to emphasize the ongoing nature of the struggle.⁹⁰ Al-Turabi’s more fluid use of the term *jahiliyya* would have appealed to some established members of the educated elite in Sudan, for whom the nationalist project required a struggle against the ignorance (*jahiliyya*) of customs deemed un-Islamic.⁹¹

Al-Turabi comes close to Qutb’s emphasis on the vanguard when he suggests that a ‘noble faction (*ta’ifa*)’ has risen up under the influence of the contemporary Islamic resurgence.⁹² Nevertheless, it is evident that the purpose of this faction is to guide society towards *tawhid*, not to make a complete break with it. In 1991, he described the Islamic Movement as acting like ‘a foetus in the womb of traditional society’, indicating that the Islamist vanguard should act within, rather than apart from the existing social system.⁹³ Al-Turabi characteristically ensures that his use of the term *jahiliyya* refers to a specific historic context in order to offer society a chance to escape. For instance, after the struggle to outlaw the SCP in 1965, he observed that the recent phase in which the Communists had grown in political strength represented ‘one of the periods of *jahiliyya* which we must erase from the record of our history’.⁹⁴

Al-Turabi’s fluid and situational understanding of *jahiliyya* would have helped him maintain the support of a generation of Islamists who absorbed Qutb’s writings just as extensively as his own. He evoked Qutb’s spirit, without following his arguments through to their logical

⁸⁹ Al-Turabi, *Qadaya*: 27. ⁹⁰ Al-Turabi, *Qadaya*: 26.

⁹¹ See Sharkey, *Living with Colonialism*: 130. ⁹² Al-Turabi, *Qadaya*: 26.

⁹³ Al-Turabi, *Awlawiyyat*: 14. ⁹⁴ *Al-Mithaq*, 3 December 1965.

conclusion. His formulation of *jabiliyya* was also a tool of mass politics, a choice to be offered rather than a condemnation to be uttered. It could serve as a warning, and a label to use against his political enemies. During his battle against the SCP in the 1960s, he declared that they wished to build a '*jabili* Communist state' upon the remains of the existing political parties.⁹⁵ In July 1985, shortly after Nimeiri's downfall, he issued a warning of a different kind to secularists and other non-NIF Muslims who wished to remove Nimeiri's September Laws, insisting that opposition to sharia would be met with *jihad*, and that 'turning away from the law of God leads to apostasy'.⁹⁶ Critics of the September Laws, al-Turabi maintained, 'do not believe in Islam'.⁹⁷ Al-Turabi was using a religious binary akin to the kind used by Qutb to influence the public will on a very specific set of laws in the world of mundane politics. However, he did not come as close to using *takfiri* discourse as some of his party members, who reacted angrily to the rejection of his draft penal code by the Constituent Assembly in 1989. Ali Uthman Taha, as head of the NIF parliamentary bloc, declared that 'the issue today is whether we are Muslims or not', whereas other members responded by labelling the assembly's decision as a form of 'apostasy and unbelief'.⁹⁸

Sufism

While al-Turabi often presented a stark choice between Islam and unbelief, his own Islam was still capable of accommodating a diverse range of expressions of belief. It might be supposed that a thinker burdened with a binary and exclusivist understanding of Muslim society and Muslim values would marginalize heterodox forms of Islamic expression, particularly the multiple and diverse forms of Sufism that had contributed so significantly to the entry of Islam to Sudan. The Islamists' resentment of the political and economic hegemony of the Ansar and Khatmiyya is often cited, problematically, as evidence of the outright hostility of Islamism towards Sufism.⁹⁹ Nevertheless, al-Turabi's engagement with it was characteristically

⁹⁵ *Al-Mithaq*, 3 December 1965. ⁹⁶ *Al-Raya*, 20 July 1985.

⁹⁷ Al-Turabi interview with al-Tadamon, reproduced in *al-Raya*, 17 April 1986.

⁹⁸ *Al-Midan*, 11 April 1989.

⁹⁹ See, for example, Verhoeven, *Water*: 90–91. Strictly speaking, the Ansar is a neo-revivalist movement not a Sufi *Tariqa*, although it is influenced by Sufism.

pragmatic and discriminating. For example, to the Royal Society of Arts, he represented Sufism as a necessity brought about by the disintegration of the initial *umma*. Along with the *ulama*, it remained to the Sufi orders (*Tariqas*) 'to bring about common allegiance and ensure a measure of organic unity across the Muslim World'.¹⁰⁰ While he laments the circumstances that led to the turn to Sufism, he praises the role of the Sufis in fostering Islamic solidarity and the preservation of faith.¹⁰¹ From an early stage, his attitude towards the Sudanese Sufi orders was a selective one. Speaking to Richard Hill in 1964, he argued that among the major failings of Sufism was the 'blind allegiance to shaikhs' practised by some of its orders,¹⁰² which he would presumably have considered a form of *shirk*, or veneration of a human being above God. However, he acknowledged that the most 'enlightened' of all the Sufi orders in Sudan did not swear loyalty oaths to a shaikh.¹⁰³ Al-Turabi's other major criticism was that a number of Sufi orders tended to confine religious practice to the private sphere and restrict it to meaningless rituals.¹⁰⁴

Al-Turabi tended to value Sufism insofar as it could be mobilized for action in the political arena. As he noted, 'Sufism in its original form preaches asceticism [sic], discipline and renunciation. In this sense it can transform itself into readiness for jihad, as it teaches sacrifice of oneself without regard to worldly attractions, discipline within the ranks of fighters and self-annihilation in the cause of God'.¹⁰⁵ It was this very same asceticism, as a member of the NIF observed at a party conference, that the Mahdi had used to mobilize Sufis for *jihad* against the British and Egyptians.¹⁰⁶ Al-Turabi even acknowledges that his movement was 'indirectly influenced' by Sufism, particularly where its 'tolerance, moderation and peaceful temperament' and orientation towards a practical outlook, as opposed to a theoretical one, are concerned.¹⁰⁷ As we have seen, he was also accused by his Islamist critics of adopting the very hierarchical forms of Sufism of which he was so critical, by turning the Islamic Movement into a *Tariqa* with

¹⁰⁰ Al-Turabi, 'Islam as a Pan-national movement': 613.

¹⁰¹ See, also, for instance, al-Turabi, *Awlawiyyat*: 28.

¹⁰² Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 168.

¹⁰³ SAD, Meeting with Richard Hill in December 1964, Richard Hill Papers, 974/9/15.

¹⁰⁴ Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 168.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 168. ¹⁰⁶ *Al-Raya*, 20 July 1985.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 167.

himself as the shaikh;¹⁰⁸ and it has often been claimed that al-Turabi was actually a Sufi.¹⁰⁹ Members of the Islamic Movement were allowed to maintain allegiances to their own Sufi *tariqas*. One such figure was Ahmad al-Tijani Salih, the grandson of a prominent leader of the West African Tijaniyya Sufi order, al-Haj Abu Sufyan Muhammad.¹¹⁰ Meanwhile, al-Turabi did his best to co-opt established Sufi leaders. One of the representatives who switched to the ICF following the 1965 elections was a Sufi leader,¹¹¹ and in the period before the 1989 coup, the movement had established relationships with the *shaikhs* of a number of *Tariqas* in line with al-Turabi's strategy of dissolving it into society.¹¹²

When the Islamists seized power in 1989, their relationship with the Sufi orders was selective and politically pragmatic. They targeted the Khatmiyya order that provided the financial and religious backing for the Democratic Unionist Party, arresting its leaders and seizing its property.¹¹³ Al-Turabi probably hoped that by cutting the DUP off from its network of religious support, he would be able to prevent them challenging the Islamists in genuinely democratic elections for the National Congress. To achieve this would require a reconfiguration of networks of Sufi affiliation, rather than marginalization of Sufism as a social and political force *per se*. Both al-Bashir and al-Turabi made it a rule to meet publicly with Sufi leaders and praise the role of Sufism in Sudanese history.¹¹⁴ Probably inspired by al-Turabi's emphasis on the role of the younger generation in renewing Islam, the Salvation Regime established a 'League for the Youth of the Sufi orders' (*Rabita Shabab al-Turuq al-Sufiyya*) with the object of 'reviving Sufi culture'.¹¹⁵

The Islamists also persisted with their historic tactic of encouraging members with Sufi connections to forge links to the various *tariqas*. For instance, Ahmad al-Tijani Salih helped to organize a conference in July 1994 on Sufi *dhikr*, which was attended by prominent representatives of his own Tijaniyya order as well as the Sammaniyya.

¹⁰⁸ See, for example, Ahmad Abd al-Rahman interview with al-Tom, *al-Sahafa*, 19 March 2013.

¹⁰⁹ Malik Hussein Interview with *al-Sahafa*, 26 October 2007.

¹¹⁰ Salih, *Al-Haraka*: 76. ¹¹¹ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 71.

¹¹² Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 146.

¹¹³ Lesch, *Sudan*: 142. Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: 90.

¹¹⁴ *Al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 24 September 1993. *Al-Anbaa*, 9 August 1997. *Al-Inqadh al-Watani*, 1 February 1997.

¹¹⁵ Ali Ibrahim Khair, Interview with *al-Inqadh al-Watani*, 11 October 1991.

The conference reiterated al-Turabi's major perspectives on Sufism, condemning the colonial marginalization of Sufis within the private sphere and advocating a 'renewed *fiqh*' to facilitate the engagement of Sufism in everyday life. It even referred to Sufism as a form of *shumuliyya* – an Arabic neologism normally used to translate the English word 'totalitarianism', here used to refer to the 'incorporation of all aspects of life'.¹¹⁶

Thus al-Turabi's *tawhidi* discourse seemed to offer a hint that the Sufis might be assimilated to a homogeneous and monolithic new Islamic order. Yet this never occurred, and the Islamists tended instead to acknowledge the individuality of each specific Sufi order – far more so than the Mahdi, who had abolished all of the *Tariqas*.¹¹⁷ Even the Ministry for Social Planning, the most apparently Orwellian of the regime's institutions, established a cultural programme through which representatives of 28 different Sufi orders participated in the celebration of the Prophet's birthday (*mawlid nabawi*), a festival decried by neo-fundamentalist Salafis.¹¹⁸ Six years after his ejection from power, al-Turabi gave a speech at the consolation (*aza'*) ceremony for his lifelong friend, the Sufi leader Shaikh Hasan al-Fatih. Al-Turabi described him as a renewer (*mutajaddid*), and even evoked the Sufi concept of *baraka* (blessing), observing that the presence of this *baraka* would ensure that his link to the house would never be cut.¹¹⁹

Mahdism

As we have seen, the Mahdist Ansar movement – with its origins in the uprising of Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi against British backed Turco-Egyptian rule in late nineteenth-century Sudan – sponsored the widely supported Umma party of Sadiq al-Mahdi. This party was incorporated into al-Turabi's broad front strategy during the 1960s and early 1970s, and briefly again in the late 1980s, but was decisively excluded from his new Islamist regime when it assumed power in 1989. Between 1990 and 1993, the government confiscated a number of the economic assets of the al-Mahdi family, including properties in Omdurman and at Aba Island on the White Nile.¹²⁰ The motive for

¹¹⁶ Salih, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 76.

¹¹⁷ Warburg, *Islam, Sectarianism*: 41–42.

¹¹⁸ *Al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 15 August 1993. ¹¹⁹ *Al-Sahafa*, 3 July 2005.

¹²⁰ Lesch, *Sudan*: 142.

the targeting of the al-Mahdis was pragmatic as much as ideological – the Umma party possessed the capacity to beat the Islamists in one-man-one vote elections, whereas the much smaller Sufi and Salafi groupings did not. It is worth noting, therefore, that al-Turabi's religious observations concerning Mahdism have tended to be guided by the political context of the period in which they were made. It is, for instance, no accident that it was at the time of the brief 1988–1989 Umma-NIF coalition government that he wrote that the Islamists had 'inherited from Mahdism the spirit of Jihad'.¹²¹

During the more frequent periods of his political conflict with his brother-in-law, Sadiq al-Mahdi, however, al-Turabi was more inclined to dwell on the full extent of his ideological aversion to Mahdism. Thus he contended that belief in the Mahdi had been uncritically derived from the Jewish and Christian traditions rather than the core Islamic texts.¹²² He also maintained that Mahdism necessarily entailed a pessimistic view of religious faith, assuming that Islam deteriorated over time, which contradicted his own emphasis on renewal.¹²³ The regrettable corollary of this, he concluded, was that, instead of acknowledging the capacity of individual believers to renew the *umma* in each generation, Mahdis in effect challenged the status of Muhammad as the last Prophet by claiming to have received further revelations.¹²⁴

Like another Islamic reformer, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, al-Turabi probably viewed Mahdism as a useful instrument of political mobilization rather than an ideology of any intrinsic merit.¹²⁵ Whatever his qualms concerning Mahdist ideology, when the Islamists took power in 1989, his strategy of melting the movement into society dictated that the regime should attempt to incorporate the Ansar movement rather than alienate it. Thus, *Ingazi* politicians and the *Ingazi* media targeted Sadiq al-Mahdi for causing division within Sudan through his engagement in party politics;¹²⁶ they did not attack the beliefs of the Mahdist

¹²¹ Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 167.

¹²² Ibrahim, *Manichaeon Delirium*: 338.

¹²³ Ibrahim, *Manichaeon Delirium*: 339. Ibrahim cites texts and interviews from the 1990s, following al-Turabi's participation in the overthrow of the Umma-led government.

¹²⁴ Ibrahim, *Manichaeon Delirium*: 339.

¹²⁵ For al-Afghani's views on Mahdism, see Kedourie, *Afghani and 'Abdub*: 51.

¹²⁶ For instance, al-Turabi's references to 'the parties of Satan', cited in *al-Khartoum*, 21 September 1998.

movement with which he was associated. Indeed, al-Bashir frequently evoked Mahdist history when mobilizing batches of largely Ansari PDF recruits at the old Mahdist stronghold of Aba Island, telling new recruits in 1996 that the Salvation Regime sought to 'return to the first age of the Mahdist Revolution'.¹²⁷ Prominent Ansaris, including Qutbi al-Mahdi, the Khalifa's grandson Da'ud al-Khalifa, and the former Nimeiri stalwart, Sharif al-Tuhami, served in the regime and, like Nimeiri, the *Ingazis* attempted to use Sadiq's Ansari rivals against him, reviving the former president's plan to have his uncle Ahmad al-Mahdi replace him as Imam of the Ansar.¹²⁸ Meanwhile, pro-government Ansar leaders appeared in the regime-inspired media to cite the famous statement of Sadiq's grandfather Abd al-Rahman al-Mahdi's that in Sudan there should be 'no factions and no sects and no parties'.¹²⁹ Al-Turabi himself adopted the same strategy of instrumentalizing Ansari heritage after he returned to a public role, declaring in the midst of the conflict with Ethiopian and NDA forces on the country's Eastern frontier in 1997 that their battle was a continuation of that waged against the Ethiopians in the nineteenth century by the famous Mahdist warriors, Zaki Tamal and Hamdan Abu Anja.¹³⁰

Shi'ism

Just as al-Turabi followed al-Afghani in his efforts to exploit Mahdism for political ends, so he continued the attempts of his predecessor to engineer a rapprochement between Sunni and Shia Islam so that their unity might fortify the struggle against Western colonialism. In seeking to achieve this, he sought not so much to encourage mutual recognition of their differences as to efface altogether their separate identities. Thus he argues in *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi* that

we were given the idea by political propaganda that we should name ourselves the Sunni sect on one side and another side were made to believe that they should take the slogan of *tashayyu* (partisanship) for the family of

¹²⁷ *Al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 26 July 1996.

¹²⁸ *Al-Anba*, 10 August 1997. *Sudan Democratic Gazette*, February 1991.

¹²⁹ *Al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 17 December 1993. Sayyid Abd al-Rahman's remarks were made in the years immediately preceding Sudanese independence in 1956—see Warburg, *Historical Discord*: 108.

¹³⁰ *Al-Inqadh al-Watani*, 1 April 1997.

the Prophet ... Westerners in their cunning encourage us in this historic partisanship in an effort to preserve the differences that are weakening us.¹³¹

In this regard, al-Turabi accorded Shi'ism less validity than he did Sufism and (at times) Mahdism.

Al-Turabi maintains that, while visiting Iran following the 1979 Revolution, did not conceal his hostility to the Twelver Shia doctrines of awaiting (*Intizar*) the return of the last Shia Imam who had entered into occultation in the ninth century.¹³² He always decried belief in the return of the Twelfth Imam, just as he disapproved of Sunni messianic beliefs: this expectation, he maintained, had deterred Muslims from taking immediate action to restore sharia.¹³³ Nevertheless, he claimed that the clerics he spoke to received his opinions 'without fanaticism'.¹³⁴ Indeed, it is possible that the clerical revolutionaries whom al-Turabi encountered were influenced by Ali Shariati's criticism of *Intizar* as a form of messianism that encouraged political quietism, and his efforts to establish a more metaphorical and less literal reading of this doctrine.¹³⁵ Al-Turabi praised the clerics he encountered for their activism as leaders of the Revolution, praising them for not 'withdrawing into khalwas like our shaykhs'.¹³⁶ In short, his attitudes towards Shi'ism were motivated by a desire to unite various forms of Islamic expression and promote an activist interpretation of faith.

Awed by the Iranian Revolution, in the 1980s small groups of Islamists in Khartoum's universities began to turn to Shi'ism, and al-Turabi held dialogue sessions with them via the NIF student wing;¹³⁷ and in 1988 he was visited by the Iraqi Shia dissident Mehdi al-Hakim, although he was assassinated while staying in Khartoum.¹³⁸ Al-Turabi continued his efforts to heal the Sunni and Shia rift at the Popular Arab and Islamic Conference in the first half of the following decade, inviting representatives of Hizbullah and the Iranian Government to each meeting.¹³⁹ In the event, the Iranians slowly lost interest in the

¹³¹ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 79.

¹³² Al-Turabi, Interview with Dr Abd al-Aziz Qasim for *al-Iilaf*, cited in Musa, *Abadith al-Turabi*: 156.

¹³³ *Al-Rakoba*, 8 August 2012, www.alrakoba.net/news-action-show-id-67387.htm.

¹³⁴ Musa, *Abadith al-Turabi*: 156. ¹³⁵ Chatterjee, 'Ali Shari'ati: 142-143.

¹³⁶ Al-Turabi, Interview with Dr Abd al-Aziz Qasim for *al-Iilaf*, cited in Musa, *Abadith al-Turabi*: 156.

¹³⁷ Ahmad, Uthman Ahmad, interview with *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 20 August 2009.

¹³⁸ *Middle East Contemporary Survey*, vol. 12: 189. ¹³⁹ See Chapter 6.

PAIC,¹⁴⁰ and al-Turabi was never able to achieve his grand vision of unifying the Sunni and the Shia. Yet his efforts to transcend the sectarian divide were also one factor among other in his alienation of the more rigidly Sunni groups he was trying to co-opt, notably the Salafis.¹⁴¹

Salafism

One of the paradoxes of al-Turabi's inclusive 'broad front' strategy was that it led the Islamic Movement to incorporate a number of Salafi groups with a much more exclusive understanding of Islam. Here, 'Salafi' is used in its current sense – an ultra-orthodox form of creed and ideology that demands the purification of Islam of all innovations since the 'golden age' of the *salaf* or pious ancestors, specifically the Prophet and the earliest members of the Islamic community. Contemporary Saudi Wahhabism is the most prominent of these trends, and able to influence a wide range of other Salafi currents because of the prestige gained by the Kingdom's control of the Muslim Holy Places and the oil-derived largesse it can distribute.¹⁴² Compared with Islamism, Salafism is more concerned with doctrine and narrow interpretations of the seventh-century model than the politics of anti-colonial revolution and state capture.¹⁴³ With the global diffusion of its ideology from the Gulf since the 1980s, Salafism has influenced both mainstream Islamism and Radical Islamism, causing respective 'neo-fundamentalist' and 'Salafi-Jihadist' forms of these movements to appear. Neo-fundamentalist Islamism is more political than historic forms of Salafism, but prioritizes theological indoctrination and moral reform to a greater degree than before; 'Salafi-Jihadists' share the global and local visions of many previous radicals, but are influenced more by their own literalist understanding of 'holy war' and less by modern revolutionary doctrines.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴⁰ See Chapter 6.

¹⁴¹ See Hasan Abd al-Hamid interview with Aladdin al-Zaki in *al-Sahafa*, 12 September 2012, for a Salafi criticism of al-Turabi's attitudes towards Shi'ism.

¹⁴² Lauzière, 'The Construction of Salafiyya': 370.

¹⁴³ Denouex, 'The forgotten swamp': 62.

¹⁴⁴ Denouex, 'The forgotten swamp': 64–68. The notion of 'neo-fundamentalism' was first fleshed out by Olivier Roy in *The Failure of Political Islam*.

Although al-Turabi did not label himself a Salafi, he was not shy of identifying with the slogan of Salafism. Nevertheless, his interpretation of the term is radically different from that of the current neo-fundamentalist or jihadist Salafis. The true Salafis, he argues, were men whose ‘attachment to the fundamentals (*usul*)’ came ‘not just in terms of their cultural knowledge of the fundamentals, but in terms of their being inspired by them via reason as they were inspired by them in the first age’.¹⁴⁵ However, he goes on to observe that ‘there are others who are called Salafis, who see that religion is represented in the history of the devout, and they with good intent cling fanatically to that history, and forget that its meaning is in its aims and not in its form’.¹⁴⁶ In associating rationalist values with the age of the *Salaf*, al-Turabi distinguished himself from the majority of contemporary Salafis, a number of whom label him a Mu’tazilite due to his rationalist outlook. Indeed, his understanding of Salafism is akin to the interpretation of the term that originally flourished in the early twentieth century, when both Western and Muslim critics retrospectively labelled Abduh’s reformist school ‘Salafi’ on account of its tendency to base its rationalist approach on the values that it maintained had flourished in the age of the *Salaf*.¹⁴⁷ Henri Lauzière contends that the associated idea of ‘modernist Salafism’ was both conceptually fluid and historically specific in that it largely disappeared in the second half of the twentieth century, while the backing given by Saudi religious institutes to ‘purist’ Salafis enabled their stricter and more anti-rationalist dogma to thrive.¹⁴⁸ Lauzière argues that in the postcolonial era, purist Salafis increasingly distanced themselves from ‘modernist’ Salafis on the grounds that they could no longer overlook ideological differences in the name of a mutual struggle against the imperial powers.¹⁴⁹ Yet in Sudan, where both Salafi-orientated Islamists and reform-orientated Turabists were willing to ally in the struggle against Nimeiri’s secularism, the gap between the two trends was not unbridgeable. Accordingly, al-Turabi appears to have continued propagating a form of ‘modernist’ Salafism – although, to give Lauzière his due, the Sudanese Islamist *Shaikh* did not explicitly describe it as such – in the latter half of the twentieth century, and to have made efforts to build an

¹⁴⁵ Al-Turabi, *Tajdid al-Fikr*: 85. ¹⁴⁶ Al-Turabi, *Tajdid al-Fikr*: 85.

¹⁴⁷ See Lauzière, ‘The Construction of Salafiyya’: 370

¹⁴⁸ Lauzière, *Making of Salafism*: 33–44, 192–197, 235.

¹⁴⁹ Lauzière, *Making of Salafism*: 165.

alliance with the mainstream Salafi movement in the name of his battle against Neo-colonialism. As will be seen in later chapters, this loose form of Salafism may have inspired a number of al-Turabi's articulations of the Islamic state and Islamic democracy, although the drive to establish a revolutionary postcolonial alternative to Western models is likely to have been more influential here than the rigid theology of the purist Salafis.¹⁵⁰

As Gallab observes, one manifestation of the 'web of ironies' that surrounds al-Turabi is the 'love-hate relationship' that the Salafis developed with his Islamist project.¹⁵¹ In trying to develop a consensus in favour of an Islamic constitution, the Islamic Movement and its associated political parties have since the 1960s courted Sudan's various Salafist groups, the most prominent of which is the Saudi-backed Ansar al-Sunna. Al-Turabi maintained that he had been a close friend of the Saudi Grand Mufti Abd al-Aziz ibn Baz since the time when they were both members of the Grand Council of Islamic University in Medina in 1966. He read the medieval theologians favoured by the Salafis, such as Ibn Taymiyya, while claiming that he attempted to moderate the anti-Sufi views of al-Baz and those members of the Ansar al-Sunna who joined his Islamic Charter Front.¹⁵² In 1966, he was one of the most vocal supporters of President Isma'il al-Azhari's plans to establish an 'Islamic Alliance' with Saudi Arabia.¹⁵³ For their part, a number of Salafi groups supported the NIF during the 1986 elections, although one leader would later describe this as only a tactical alliance against secularists.¹⁵⁴

In 1989, when his party's relationship with the Ansar al-Sunna was still strong, al-Turabi wrote that 'the Salafiyya movement all over the Muslim world now grasps more fully the real dimensions of the religious cause within the context of modern society. Its horizons have broadened, and its methods evolved to the extent that its approach now converges with that of the modern Islamic movement and its concerns

¹⁵⁰ See Chapters 4, 7 and 8 for a reading of the impact of postcolonialism on al-Turabi's understanding of the Islamic past.

¹⁵¹ Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 122.

¹⁵² Al-Turabi, Interview with Dr Abd al-Aziz Qasim for the website, *Ilaf* July 2008, discussed in Musa, *Ahadith al-Turabi*: 153–155.

¹⁵³ *Khartoum News Service*, 26 November 1966.

¹⁵⁴ Isma'il Uthman Muhammad al-Mahi interview with *al-Sahafa*, 12 September 2012.

for the unity and renewal of Muslim society.¹⁵⁵ This was more an aspiration than a statement of fact. Yet, there were Salafi scholars in al-Turabi's era who were inspired by Islamists in their drive to ideologize religion, and evoked the era of the *Salaf* to go beyond pure doctrinal purification and strive for a wider purgation of Western cultural influences.¹⁵⁶ In this sense, there was potential for an elision of al-Turabi's postcolonial pseudo-Salafism with the more rigid forms of the doctrine. One distinction between Abduh's evocation of the *Salaf* and that of the contemporary Salafis was that Abduh included rationalist philosophers of the post-Rashidi era in his much looser categorization of the pious ancestors, whereas the doctrinaire Salafis of today tend to limit them to the first generation of Muslims.¹⁵⁷ What is interesting about al-Turabi's pseudo-Salafism is that while, as noted above, a number of his more scholarly pieces praise the post-Rashidi *ahl al-ra'i*, his works on democracy and the Islamic state give primacy to the model provided by the first era of Islam (see Chapters 7 and 8 for a fuller discussion). Although his analysis of democracy and statehood in the era of the *Salaf* was even more methodologically loose than doctrinaire Salafism and rooted in contemporary models of political reform, his willingness to restrict himself in this way highlights his awareness of the widespread popularity of the 'purist' model and consequent willingness to compromise with it.

In practice, al-Turabi often faced extremely hostility from purist Salafis and the Sudanese Islamists they influenced. Uthman Abu Naru, as leader of the anti-Turabist Muslim Brotherhood offshoot of the Islamic Movement, presented the ideological divides that had rocked the movements since the 1960s as a clash between a 'Salafist' current emphasizing the Quran and Sunna, on the one hand, and al-Turabi's own 'developmentalist' (*tatwiri*) current, on the other – the latter, he complained, introducing distorted views on women, equality between religions and apostasy.¹⁵⁸ Indeed, al-Turabi's fiercest opponent in this struggle, Jafa'ar Shaikh Idris, had come under the influence of the Ansar al-Sunna as a teenager.¹⁵⁹ Al-Turabi himself also traced the splits in the 1960s and 1970s to the 'apprehension' of 'conservative

¹⁵⁵ Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 172.

¹⁵⁶ Lauzière, *Making of Salafism*: 219–222.

¹⁵⁷ Griffel, 'What do we mean by "Salafi"?: 197. Hourani, *Arabic Thought*: 149f.

¹⁵⁸ Uthman Abu Naru interview with Kamal Hamid in *al-Wasat*, 8 March 1998.

¹⁵⁹ See Chapter 2.

elements who graduated from puritanical Salafi institutes'.¹⁶⁰ Such statements probably oversimplify the complex series of disputes in the Islamic Movement during this period, but at least underline the extent of the ideological gulf between Turabism and Salafism.

Another prominent Salafi opponent of al-Turabi in the 1980s was Ahmad Bin Malik, a lecturer at Omdurman Islamic University who today leads the Islamic Constitution Front, which has been described as a coalition of 'Salafist groups and individuals as well as far right parties'.¹⁶¹ In 1985, Malik published *al-Sarim al-Maslul fi al-Radd ala Turabi Shatim al-Rasul* (The Sword is Unsheathed in Response to al-Turabi the Blasphemer against the Prophet), a book to which a foreword was written by Muhammad Abdullah Borat, a leading Muslim Brother and critic of al-Turabi since the splits of the 1960s. Among other things, Malik accused al-Turabi of blaspheming against the Prophet and the Companions, depicted his strategy of educating members of the movement in Europe and America as part of a Western conspiracy designed to attack Islam, and condemned his attitudes towards dancing, music and the public mixing of the genders, as well as his belief that the *ijma* of the present day could create a more perfect community than the one existing during the Golden Age of the Prophet and the Rightly-Guided Caliphs.¹⁶²

In spite of the evident ideological differences between al-Turabi and the Salafis, it does seem that these ultraconservatives wielded some influence in politics and society following the Islamist takeover of 1989. For example, the official media often published calls by leaders of the Ansar al-Sunna to support the war effort in the south.¹⁶³ And the Public Order laws in Khartoum banning certain types of music and enforcing gender segregation on public transport reflected the puritanical ethos of the Ansar al-Sunna far more than they did al-Turabi's own principles, whether the Salafis had a role in their drafting or not. The contradiction between al-Turabi's purported liberalism and some of the regime's 'neo-fundamentalist' policies has been identified as one of his many inconsistencies, although it is unclear what role he played in facilitating the influence of the Ansar al-Sunna. Shaikh al-Hidaya,

¹⁶⁰ Hamdi, *Makings*: 22. ¹⁶¹ *Sudan Tribune*, 10 October 2003.

¹⁶² Awad Sidahmed, 'Rasa'il hawla afkar wa tajriba Hasan al-Turabi', *al-Hurriyya*, 26 October 2014.

¹⁶³ *Al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 30 November 1995. *Al-Inqadh al-Watani*, 16 January 1997.

the long-serving president of the Ansar al-Sunna, claimed soon before his death that Ali Uthman Taha was the main architect of his organization's integration into the new regime.¹⁶⁴ A document possessed by the SCP that purports to be a set of leaked RCC minutes from July 1989 shows al-Bashir and the rest of the junta deciding to bring Shaikh Hidaya onto a committee established to liaise between the regime and NIF members, with little reference to the then imprisoned al-Turabi.¹⁶⁵ If the document is genuine, it would highlight the limitations of his ability to define the ideological character of his regime.

Nevertheless, al-Turabi's own drive for an 'open door' policy during the time of the Popular Arab and Islamic Congress was responsible for the migration of a large contingent of Salafi and Salafi-Jihadist preachers and activists to Sudan from Saudi Arabia, including a number of Arab-Afghan militants. Some of the most prominent Salafi-Jihadists were even offered positions in Sudanese universities.¹⁶⁶ However, these Salafis were even more opposed to al-Turabi than their Sudanese equivalents. In 1995, one Salafi-Jihadist group led by Muhammad Abd al-Karim, a former Imam of the Kawthar mosque in Jiddah, began to distribute cassette tapes containing a *fatwa* from Abd al-Karim declaring al-Turabi an unbeliever (*takfir*) and calling for Muslims to 'execute the free-thinker (*zindiq*)'.¹⁶⁷ Another Salafi group led by a Saudi-trained Imam, Aladdin Zaki, broke with the Islamic Movement in 1995 because of what they regarded as al-Turabi's heretical views.¹⁶⁸ It was in fact his beliefs that alienated a number of Salafi groups from the government, and after his ouster in 1999 a number of them started to reconcile themselves to the regime, while continuing to issue *fatwas* condemning al-Turabi's various liberal pronouncements.¹⁶⁹ Given his personal conflict with a number of Salafist ideologues, his uneasy alliance with Salafism should not simply be seen as an example of ideological duplicity – its growing power had more to do with the petrodollar-funded boom in Saudi religious and

¹⁶⁴ Salomon, 'Salafi Critique of Islamism': 149.

¹⁶⁵ Institute for International Social History, Amsterdam, 'The minutes of a meeting of the military junta', July 1989, Hizb al-Shiyu'i al-Sudani Collection 204.

¹⁶⁶ Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 126.

¹⁶⁷ Jamal al-Sharif, 'al-Salafiyya fi al-Sudan', *al-Sahafa*, 20 July 2012.

¹⁶⁸ Hasan Abd al-Hamid interview with Aladdin al-Zaki in *al-Sahafa*, 12 September 2012.

¹⁶⁹ Al-Sharif, 'Salafis in Sudan'. Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 127–128.

economic influence than the *Shaikh*'s personal fickleness.¹⁷⁰ The rise of Salafi neo-fundamentalism signified an evolution within Islamism that he was powerless to reverse. With the Sudanese economy in terminal decline, Salafi charities and NGOs were one of the only agents of Islamization that his state could afford.¹⁷¹ As with Mahdism, Salafism's potential as a mobilizational agency may well have led him to overlook its religiously narrow world view, ultimately to his own cost.

Conclusion

Al-Turabi may have derived much of his theory from previous Islamists, particularly Muhammad Abduh, but in many ways his outlook was original. In particular, his demands for the reconstruction of the existing system of scholarly knowledge and articulation of his signature concept of *tajdid* enabled him to develop the historic reformist trend into a dynamic political approach; this married Abduh's emphasis on *ijtihad* with al-Banna's practical political activism, thereby enabling the Sudanese Islamic Movement to compete in a late twentieth-century political environment. It was unfortunate for al-Turabi, who would first have read Abduh in the early 1950s, that his political career began as reformist in an era when Islamism was thrown into an existential crisis by Abd al-Nasir's persecution of the Muslim Brotherhood. This led Islamist movements to develop a more radicalized and binary perspective on their relationships with both the secular states and existing Muslim societies. Much of al-Turabi's political and intellectual discourse displays a tactical awareness of the need to align himself with certain elements of Radical Islamism, and it is true that he frequently evoked some of the concepts popularized by Qutb and Mawdudi, particularly the notion of the *jahiliyya*, or age of ignorance. He instrumentalized the binary divisions radicals made between *kufir* and *din* during the political periods in which the Islamists were most vulnerable, such as in the 1960s when the SCP held sway over the 'modern forces', and in the late 1980s when the NIF was heavily criticized on account of al-Turabi's association with the recent

¹⁷⁰ See Roy, *Failure of Political Islam*: 25 for an explanation of the factors behind the growth of neo-fundamentalism.

¹⁷¹ See De Waal and Abdel Salam, 'Islamism': 92–94, 103, for the role of Salafist NGOs in the Civilizational Project.

dictatorship, and he needed ideological ammunition with which to retaliate against his opponents.

Nevertheless, al-Turabi never accepted the conclusion of Qutb's prison writings – that the forces of *jahiliyya* had won a total victory over the existing society. He thus avoided compromising his core argument that this society could be saved through *tajdid*. Meanwhile, just as he made tactical concessions to Qutbist discourse, he also understood the need to court Salafi and Mahdist groups as part of his strategy of forming a broad coalition to fight for an Islamic State. Like earlier reformers, he saw these movements as tools of political mobilization rather than religious revival as such. Nevertheless, the ever-present religious differences reached their point of catharsis in the mid-1990s, when a number of Salafi groups broke with his regime. Meanwhile, al-Turabi's simultaneous co-option of various Sudanese Sufi orders further illustrated the fact that his relationship with the radical and neo-fundamentalist trends was more opportunistic than ideological. In this regard, there was a notable continuity between his strategy and that of the earlier Islamic Reformists who prioritized political mobilization over doctrinal conformity.

6 *Between Global and Defensive Jihad*

Al-Turabi's critics usually focus on his interpretation of the Islamic doctrine of *jihad* to make one or both of two claims: first, that his discourse is similar to that of radical militants such as Qutb and Osama Bin Laden;¹ second, that he is Janus-faced, presenting himself as a 'dove' to the West and a 'hawk' to the Islamic world. For instance, Khalid claims that while al-Turabi described *jihad* as a defensive doctrine to his academic interlocutors in America, he did not back up this claim in his 'extensive writings and utterances', and that his 'fatwas (authoritative legal opinions) on jihad were so inflammatory and demagogic that some thought Turabi was desecrating Islam'.² To assess the validity of these competing representations of al-Turabi's jihadism, this chapter will cross-analyse statements on *jihad* that appear in both his English and Arabic language interviews, as well as his written works.

At his political zenith in the 1980s and 1990s, al-Turabi tended to approach the topic of *jihad* on an ad hoc basis, and more in public statements than in his numerous scholarly works. His political appropriation of *jihad* discourse can be seen particularly in the speeches he delivered to the PAIC – the international forum for Islamist movements he convened in Khartoum between 1991 and 1995 – as well as in his statements on the southern conflict and events such as the attempted assassination of Hosni Mubarak in 1995. It was not until he entered his political dotage that he attempted to articulate a jurisprudentially coherent theory of *jihad*: in his texts *al-Siyasa wa'l-Hukm* (2003) and *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi* (2010), and to some extent in the series of articles discussing the 2001 attacks on the World Trade Center, published from prison in 2002. Al-Turabi's discussion of the doctrine of *jihad* in these works is extensive and rooted in lengthy if somewhat flexible Quranic

¹ De Waal and Abdel Salam, 'On the failure and persistence of Jihad': 41; Gunaratna, *Inside al-Qa'eda*: 87; Burr, *Terrorists' Internationale*: 388.

² Khalid, *War and Peace*: 230.

exegesis. Nevertheless, they need to be understood as *ex post facto* efforts to rationalize and justify religious, political and military decisions made earlier, rather than as comprehensive explanations of the language of *jihad* as it evolved during his political career.

Interpretations of the meaning of *jihad* are many and diverse. For a number of scholars, the true definition is the ‘classical’ one, which understands it as an essentially military doctrine designed to assist the propagation of Islam.³ A second theory maintains that military *jihad* is only the ‘lesser’ form, *jihad* itself being more accurately translated not as holy war but as ‘striving’, and the greater *jihad* being the *jihad al-nafs* or struggle to cleanse one’s soul.⁴ For others, a new understanding of *jihad*, influenced by Western concepts of nationalism, has arisen in the modern era; this reinterprets it as a purely defensive reaction to encroachments upon sovereignty. For Peters, this is the logic of ‘modernists’, while ‘fundamentalists’ still stick to the ‘classical’ doctrine of *jihad* as a form of military expansion.⁵ Can Islamists like al-Turabi be ‘modernist’ in their reading of *jihadi* doctrine, or must they be ‘fundamentalists’? It has been argued that one category of Islamists might be understood as ‘defensive realists’ rather than ‘fundamentalists’, in that – unlike more radical Islamists – they advocate the use of force for tactical and largely defensive, rather than idealistic, purposes.⁶ Others have shown that even the militant movements that emerged in the 1980s and 1990s have remained focused on the ‘near’ as opposed to the ‘far’ enemy; that is, rather than advocating an intercontinental war to establish a single Islamic nation in line with Bin Laden’s theory of ‘global’ *jihad*, they have concentrated on defeating their immediate opponents, particularly the civilian or military one-party regimes in countries such as Syria, Algeria, Egypt and Iraq.⁷

It will be seen here that al-Turabi articulates a number of these multiple and overlapping conceptions of *jihad*; he certainly understands it as a more holistic concept than mere military struggle, although he does also advocate it as a form of defensive warfare. His understanding of ‘defensive’ *jihad* is fluid and contains many ambiguities, particularly when applied in the context of the conflict in the south of Sudan. Broadly, he advocates a policy of direct conflict with the

³ Peters, *Jihad*: 3. ⁴ Bonney, *Jihad*: 40–41. ⁵ Peters, *Jihad*: 133.

⁶ Baroudi, ‘Islamic Realism’.

⁷ Hegghammer, *Jihad in Saudi Arabia*: 228–231; Gerges, *Far Enemy*: 14–15.

'near' enemy and dialogue with the West in general and United States in particular, albeit on his own terms. Nevertheless, none of these discourses is entirely coherent. The ideological liminality that accompanied al-Turabi's status as a postcolonial intellectual, as well as the shifting exigencies of a political environment in Sudan in which he was at various times a hawk and a dove – allied to the state and then opposed to it – made his *jihadi* rhetoric thoroughly mutable.

International *jihadi*

It was al-Turabi's role as convener and secretary-general of the Popular Arab and Islamic Conference that secured his reputation as an international *jihadi*. The conference held three meetings between 1991 and 1995 and was touted by al-Turabi as a radical alternative to the more conservative Saudi-led Organization of the Islamic Conference. It built on the credentials he had acquired since his declaration of support for Saddam Hussein's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, which went against the pro-Kuwaiti policy of al-Bashir's government, as well as that of the governments in Cairo and Riyadh.⁸ It may have been the *Shaikh's* hope that his declaration would place him on the right side of history, with popular revolutions subsequently overthrowing the Egyptian and Saudi regimes.⁹

Millard Burr has argued that establishing the PAIC enabled its secretary-general to turn Khartoum into a 'terrorist international', bringing together a wide range of militant groups to plan their actions in both Western and Islamic countries.¹⁰ However, the meetings of the PAIC did not explicitly advocate terrorism and, while it was a significant institution, its importance should not be exaggerated. The state-controlled media reported that the conference in 1995 was attended by 300 delegates from 80 countries – an exaggeration, maintained the British Embassy, but its own estimate of 200 delegates from 50 countries remains an impressive figure.¹¹ Whatever its size, not all of the delegates were as prominent as al-Turabi would have wished. The first PAIC gathering in 1991, which both capitalized upon and sought to further the anti-Western sentiment aroused by the first Gulf

⁸ De Waal, 'Destabilization in the Horn': 190.

⁹ De Waal, 'Destabilization in the Horn': 190.

¹⁰ Burr, *Terrorists' Internationale*.

¹¹ FOIA, FM Khartoum to teletype FCO, Teletype POL 104/3 of April 95, FCO.

War, attracted such luminaries as Imad Mughniyeh, Khalid Meshal, Gulbuddin Hekmatyar and Yasir Arafat.¹² Al-Turabi used it to negotiate an agreement between Iran and Iraq whereby the former ended its blockade of the latter.¹³ Subsequent gatherings were less successful. The plans of the 1993 PAIC to mediate in conflicts in Afghanistan and the Balkans failed to reach fruition because neither the Bosnian government nor the various Afghan groups sent high-ranking representatives.¹⁴ Meanwhile, similar conferences gathering radical groups in the richer capitals of Tehran, Tripoli and Baghdad were attended by over 1,000 delegates, many times more than the number attracted by those of the PAIC.¹⁵

PAIC meetings were certainly attended by a wide range of militant movements, including Hizbullah, the Afghan Hezb i-Islami, Palestinian Islamic Jihad and Hamas.¹⁶ Al-Turabi informed the US House of Representatives in 1992 that Abu Nidal had been denied access to Sudan on account of the Palestinian group's history of involvement in international terrorism,¹⁷ but *al-Quds al-Arabi* identified an Abu Nidal representative speaking at the 1995 PAIC.¹⁸ Having said this, representatives of movements still committed to purely civil politics also turned up, including Mustafa Mashhur of the Egyptian Muslim Brotherhood, the secretary-general of the Pakistani *Jama'at-i-Islamiyya* Qadi Hussein and Ahmad Ubaidat, the former prime minister of Jordan.¹⁹ For el-Affendi, it was precisely this diversity that made it impossible for the PAIC to act as a 'terrorist international'. 'The ineffectual grouping of bickering groups', he observes, '... never amounted to anything'.²⁰

Al-Turabi's supporters have been keen to downplay the *jihadi* element and present the PAIC as a development of their leader's own political philosophies. Its deputy secretary-general, Ibrahim Sanussi, would later portray it as a break with the Muslim scholarly elite that al-Turabi had charged with failing to engage with issues facing Muslims in

¹² Atwan, *Secret History*: 40. ¹³ Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: 62.

¹⁴ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 4 December 1993.

¹⁵ Amir Tahiri, 'Mushakil tuwaajih mu'atamar al-Usuliyin fi Khartoum ghadan', *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 1 December 1993.

¹⁶ Atwan, *Secret History*: 40.

¹⁷ United States Congress, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Africa*: 20–21.

¹⁸ *Al-Quds al-Arabi*, 31 March 1995.

¹⁹ Bruce Maddy-Weitzmann, *Middle East Contemporary Survey*: 107.

²⁰ El-Affendi review: 124–126.

the modern world; by contrast, the PAIC's members were not mere jurists issuing *fatwas*, but Islamic thinkers specializing in economics, strategy and international relations.²¹ Separate evening workshops addressed themes such as human rights, charitable organizations, the role of the youth, labour relations and women.²² The correspondent of *al-Wasat* concluded that its principal aims were to be 'intellectual not political', and to enable al-Turabi to foster dialogue between Islamic movements on matters close to his heart, particularly the emancipation of Muslim women and the expansion of the principle of *shura*. One evening, the Sudanese Islamists even organized a musical concert in which young Sudanese girls and boys sang together, challenging the attitude of some of the more conservative delegates towards art and gender segregation.²³

Counter-terrorism experts have been eager to analyse the broader militant environment created in Khartoum during the PAIC's heyday. While the conference itself was careful not to advocate the line pursued by the most militant factions, by establishing an international haven for Islamist radicals it certainly created an atmosphere in which they could thrive. The Sudanese government declared an 'open door' policy, maintaining that all Muslims were worthy of citizenship in the new Islamist republic, and handed out visas and passports to militants from all over the globe.²⁴ As a result, with the Afghan war by then over and Riyadh unpopular with pious militants because of its decision to allow American troops on Saudi soil during the 1991 Gulf War, the Arab-Afghans eagerly descended on Khartoum. These included Ayman al-Zawahiri and his Egyptian Islamic Jihad movement, as well as al-Turabi's most notorious guest, Osama Bin Laden.²⁵ In short, the environment created by the Islamist takeover in Sudan had effectively facilitated the continuance of the era of pan-Islamic jihadism inaugurated by the Arab-Afghan mujahideen movement against the Soviet Union in Afghanistan in the 1980s.

Al-Turabi's relationship with Bin Laden is often cited as evidence of his own extremism, although in reality their relationship was founded on temporary expediency rather than a shared world view. The *Shaikh*

²¹ Muzammil Abd al-Ghaffar interview with Ibrahim Sanussi, *al-Intibaha*, 30 June 2014.

²² *Sudanow*, May 1995. ²³ *Al-Wasat*, 13 December 1993.

²⁴ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 126–128.

²⁵ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 127–128.

consistently maintained that Osama Bin Laden was only in Sudan as a businessman, and that it was his later venture into Afghanistan that turned him into a global *jihadi*.²⁶ It is true that Bin Laden's official purpose for being in Sudan was business²⁷: he invested heavily in the country's agriculture and arms industry, and helped to construct a major road between Khartoum and Port Sudan.²⁸ While it is claimed that he paid the Sudanese government a large amount to become a member of 'the NIF',²⁹ he had no involvement in the PAIC.³⁰ Furthermore, it was not until Bin Laden's return to Afghanistan in 1996 that al-Qa'ida manifested itself overtly as a militant organization, and not until his famous *fatwa* of 1998 that he officially declared a global *jihad* against the Western world.³¹

Much evidence has, however, since emerged that al-Qa'ida was discreetly operating as a militant organization in Sudan throughout Bin Laden's time in the country. This includes al-Qa'ida's boast of its involvement in the campaign against the Americans in Somalia in 1993;³² the testimony of a former Sudanese employee of Bin Laden's that he had been arming and training a wide variety of militant groups during his time in Sudan, some of whom were responsible for embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania;³³ the direct implication of Bin Laden in a truck bombing in Riyadh in 1995;³⁴ and strong suggestions that he helped train and fund the men responsible for the attempted assassination of Hosni Mubarak in Addis Ababa in the same year.³⁵ Moreover, Bin Laden and al-Qa'ida supported militant activity within Sudan itself, providing funds for 23 training camps for the new government militias.³⁶

The nature of al-Turabi's personal relationship with Bin Laden and influence over his militancy is difficult to establish. Most of Bin Laden's militant activities seem to have been conducted in cooperation with extremist factions in the Sudanese intelligence services,³⁷ not via the PAIC; and it became clear after the 1995 assassination attempt on Mubarak that al-Turabi exercised only a loose form of control over these agencies.³⁸ Nevertheless, his personal relationship with Bin Laden

²⁶ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 23 January 2002. ²⁷ Ulaysh, *Awlad al-Turabi*: 264.

²⁸ Scheuer, *Osama Bin Laden*: 102. De Waal, 'The politics of destabilization': 196.

²⁹ Ulaysh, *Awlad al-Turabi*: 264. ³⁰ *Al-Wasat*, 8 October 2001.

³¹ Bonney, *Jihad*: 357. ³² Gerges, *Far Enemy*: 235.

³³ James Astill, 'Osama: the Sudan Years', *Guardian*, 17 October 2001.

³⁴ De Waal, 'The politics of destabilization': 196.

³⁵ Gunaratna, *Inside al-Qaeda*: 38. ³⁶ Burke, *al-Qa'eda*: 145.

³⁷ Gunaratna, *Inside al-Qaeda*: 32, 158. ³⁸ See Chapter 3.

was, at least initially, close. According to one counter-terrorism expert, he had already approached Bin Laden in Peshawar in 1989, two years before his arrival in Sudan, inviting him to join an alliance of Islamists against American imperialism.³⁹ When he arrived in Sudan, al-Turabi held a party to welcome him, lauding him as a 'great investor'. Osama warmed to al-Turabi's son, Isam, due to their mutual interest in horse racing.⁴⁰ Nevertheless, it did not take long for their contrasting religious and political views to undermine their marriage of convenience. Bin Laden disliked al-Turabi's liberal attitudes towards culture and the arts, as well as towards women's emancipation, and soon began to limit the time he spent at his intellectual *soirées*.⁴¹ Like many others, he regarded al-Turabi as an opportunist, later describing him as a 'Machiavelli'.⁴² Bin Laden's bodyguard Nasir Abdullah al-Bahri would later suggest that he considered him a 'nuisance'.⁴³ Meanwhile, al-Turabi treated Bin Laden with the same patronising attitude that he reserved for all he considered less intelligent than himself, later recalling that 'all Osama could talk about was *jihad, jihad, jihad*'.⁴⁴

Al-Turabi's role in Bin Laden's departure from Sudan in 1996 also illustrated the limits of his commitment to international jihadism. Following the implication of the al-Qa'ida leader in the attacks mentioned above, the Sudanese government insisted that he return to Afghanistan, and some have suggested that this was one of the efforts of pragmatists in the military and intelligence services to restrict al-Turabi's own foreign escapades.⁴⁵ But it is evident that al-Turabi himself actively encouraged Bin Laden's removal. Overcoming the objections of the PAIC deputy secretary-general al-Sanussi and others in the Islamic Movement, he spent over three days strongly pressing Bin Laden to accept that his time in Sudan was over.⁴⁶ Al-Bahri even maintained that it was al-Turabi who responded to Western pressure to expel Bin Laden while al-Bashir held firmly against it, claiming that al-Turabi's education at the Sorbonne influenced his attitude towards Bin Laden's movement.⁴⁷

³⁹ Gunaratna, *Inside al-Qaeda*: 29. ⁴⁰ Burr, *Terrorists' Internationale*: 102.

⁴¹ Wright, *Looming Tower*: 166. ⁴² Wright, *Looming Tower*: 166.

⁴³ Gerges, *Far Enemy*: 235. ⁴⁴ Randal, *Osama*: 125.

⁴⁵ Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: 217–218.

⁴⁶ Burr, *Terrorists' Internationale*: 388. Gerges, *Far Enemy*: 235. Randal, *Osama*: 122–123. Wright, *Looming Tower*: 221.

⁴⁷ Gerges, *Far Enemy*: 235.

Why did al-Turabi turn against a man whom he had initially welcomed so enthusiastically? It is unclear whether he had a principled aversion to Bin Laden's activities, saw him as a threat, or reacted pragmatically to the consequences of international sanctions. In any event, by 1996 al-Turabi had already wound down the PAIC and committed himself to the less ambitious strategy of managing the Islamist revolution within Sudan itself. According to the investigative journalist Richard Minter, he had written to the US Ambassador to Sudan in 1996 offering complete cooperation in the battle against global terrorism, although Minter alleges his letter was conveniently ignored by the senior echelons of the US Government.⁴⁸ Al-Turabi had also, to some extent, come to see Bin Laden as a competitor, fearing that his activities in Saudi Arabia and Somalia would enable him to surpass his own prominence.⁴⁹ Financial opportunism may have been a further motive – Gallab interprets al-Turabi's apparent willingness to hand over Bin Laden to the Americans as evidence of his willingness to establish an 'open market' with Western nations.⁵⁰ Upon his departure for Afghanistan, the Sudanese government immediately seized all of the al-Qa'ida chief's assets, without offering compensation.⁵¹ It seems likely that Bin Laden had been attracted by the opportunities provided by al-Turabi's desire to transcend the parochial ambitions of the region's various militant groups, but the final betrayal in 1996 illustrates the fallacy of Burr's claims about al-Turabi's ideological influence on him. Bin Laden's global *jihadi* world view displayed none of the Sudanese Islamist's ambiguity or his pragmatism.

The West, or the 'Far Enemy'

Al-Turabi's most explicit commentary on the strategies that Islamic *mujahidin* ought to pursue against the 'far enemy' came months after the most infamous act of global jihadism, the attacks on the Twin Towers and the Pentagon by al-Qa'ida on 11 September 2001. Having been able to watch the attacks on CNN and *al-Jazeera* while under house arrest following his dispute with al-Bashir,⁵² he was quick to put his opinions into writing. Different scholars have interpreted his

⁴⁸ Minter, *Losing Bin Laden*: 140–144. ⁴⁹ Gerges, *Far Enemy*: 235.

⁵⁰ Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 131.

⁵¹ Wright, *Looming Tower*: 224. Scheuer, *Osama Bin Laden*: 103.

⁵² *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 23 January 2002.

'*Taqwim al-Fi'l wa Radd li-Waqi'a September* [Evaluation of the act and response to the September Incident]', published in the Arabic newspaper *al-Hayat* in January 2002, in different ways. Thus, De Waal and Abdel Salam highlight what they perceive to be al-Turabi's implicit identification with the arguments of Qutb and al-Qa'ida, admitting the passages were critical of the needless civilian casualties but emphasizing, nevertheless, al-Turabi's insistence that the attackers had just grievances, that military and financial centres were legitimate targets in war, and that the American response was disproportionate to the attack itself.⁵³ Fawaz Gerges, however, argues the precise opposite, citing the articles as evidence for his thesis that even the more militant Muslim thinkers, like al-Turabi, believe the *mujahidin* should emphasize the struggle against the 'near' and not the 'far' enemy.⁵⁴

Although the ambivalent tone of al-Turabi's reaction to the 9/11 attacks invites such conflicting interpretations, it is important to understand that his iteration of the attackers' perspective was more an intellectual conjecture than a direct political statement. It is true that al-Turabi does offer his readers the 'al-Qa'ida' viewpoint, but only in the context of a series of rhetorical questions: 'Were they private individuals attacking a state without the [proper] authority having been entrusted to them . . . or is the world today one arena in which various authorities [*Sultan*] interact, especially America which spreads its hands across the world with no concern as to who is injured . . .'⁵⁵ It is in the context of this rhetorical question that he observes that military and financial centres are justifiable targets in wars. Al-Turabi partly answers this question later in the paragraph, with another rhetorical question:

Would it not have been more wise that the *mujahdin* realize that the state that had been attacked would not be deterred by individuals even if it was struck in a most painful place and, by its nature, its pride and its arrogance belittling today's whole world might be able to strike a blow in every place which no-one can reply to . . . would it not have been better to direct legitimate strivings [*mujaahidat*] through consideration [and] without stupidity, towards the arena of Muslims [*saaha al-Muslimiin*] first of all . . . and return life and determination to their dead and humiliated society and prepare the forces of

⁵³ De Waal and Abdel Salam, 'On the failure and persistence of jihad': 41.

⁵⁴ Gerges, *Far Enemy*: 234.

⁵⁵ Al-Turabi, 'Taqwim al-Fi'l wa Radd li-Waqi'a September', *al-Hayat*, 20 January 2002.

the *umma* and equalize the balance of global forces which is tilted in favour of tyranny so that the sons of Adam may reconcile with one another in harmony, and if there [emerged] amongst them one overwhelming and tyrannical force that inclined towards tyranny they would all react to it and ensure that everything remained upright in the life of the world?

Al-Turabi does not fully confront here the issues he raised earlier, as he effectively responds to a jurisprudential question with a tactical observation. This in itself reflects his own ambiguous identity – part *'alim*, part political thinker. Nevertheless, the rhetorical question appears to show that he disagrees with the methods of the 9/11 terrorists, and his use of the phrase 'legitimate strivings' (*al-mujahidat al-mashroua*) might imply that he does not consider the al-Qa'ida attacks to have been a jurisprudentially valid form of *jihad*. Moreover, he goes on to admit that in spite of the legitimate grievances, 'the act exceeded the bounds of piety and guidance, and came close to terrorism'.⁵⁶ His use of the somewhat ambiguous *qaaraba* (came close to, form III) suggested that he was still ambivalent about offering a conclusive religious or jurisprudential opinion on the matter. Nevertheless, he clearly suggests the potential for reconciliation and harmony, and speaks of a 'balance of global forces' rather than Qutb's 'one nation' theory, with his references to uniting against 'one overwhelming and tyrannical force' moving him close to the UN principle of collective security. Presumably, this equalization would involve the removal of the American-backed 'oppressive dictators' al-Turabi refers to elsewhere in the piece. Moreover, he does not see the al-Qa'ida terrorists as representative of his brand of Islamism, but rather the 'traditional Islamic culture' in which Muslims and non-believers are two warring parties whose conflicts cannot be resolved by dialogue. Al-Turabi presumably had the upbringing of the majority of the attackers in Saudi Arabia in mind here, although he also goes on to blame their education in the United States, further commenting that they were influenced by 'the culture of traditional violence in American society'.⁵⁷

It is worth remarking that al-Turabi articulated this apparently moderate strategy for engagement with the Western world not to

⁵⁶ Al-Turabi, 'Taqwim al-Fi'l wa Radd li-Waqi'a September', *al-Hayat*, 20 January 2002.

⁵⁷ Al-Turabi, 'Taqwim al-Fi'l wa Radd li-Waqi'a September', *al-Hayat*, 20 January 2002.

gratify the Western media, but in an Arabic language piece intended largely for consumption in the Muslim world. Indeed, the piece contained a number of admonitions that Americans must learn to change their attitudes to Muslim society and make a clean break with their colonial past. It is worth bearing in mind that by 2002 al-Turabi had abandoned his most quixotic Islamist projects, including the PAIC, and was writing from a prison cell. His statements need to be considered in the context of his long term track record of ideological flexibility when it came to relations with the West. As secretary-general of the ICF, he had demanded that, following the 1967 Six-Day War, the Sudanese government go beyond merely breaking off relations with the USA and Britain and expel all American and British citizens from Sudan.⁵⁸ Yet by the late 1970s he had joined a regime that supported the Camp David peace negotiations between Israel and Egypt, and was on friendly terms with the British ambassador, whom he was eager to reassure that Sudan was abandoning socialism.⁵⁹

Even at the peak of his ideological self-confidence in the 1990s, al-Turabi advocated dialogue with the West. When addressing the third PAIC conference in 1995, he argued that contemporary Western society as a whole was hostile but that individuals could be approached. While he considered that 'The Western world of today . . . has directed its animosity towards Islam', he still considered that 'In the West, however, there are some exceptions. Some prominent figures are sincere in their pursuance of righteousness and justice'.⁶⁰ In 1994 al-Turabi even produced a pamphlet, *Hiwar ma' al-Gharb (Dialogue with the West)*, in which he lays out how dialogue with the West should occur. Islamists, he argues in this piece, are more capable of mediating with the West than the Sufis or the *ulama*, since they have lived and studied there.⁶¹ Indeed, this was a point he was eager to make to Western audiences, telling the US House of Representatives in 1992 that because 'Modern Islamists are mostly elites educated in the West' they were 'open to the dialogue between different civilizations'.⁶² Nevertheless, in his 1994 pamphlet he argues that the purpose of this dialogue is not to reach an accommodation with Western states and

⁵⁸ *Khartoum News Service*, 17 June 1967. ⁵⁹ See Chapter 2.

⁶⁰ Al-Turabi's opening speech at the third PAIC, 30 March to 2 April 1995, translated into English in *Sudanow* May 1995.

⁶¹ Al-Turabi, *Hiwar*: 15.

⁶² United States Congress, *Islamic Fundamentalism*: 6.

Western societies in their present form. Rather, it is to 'resist its tyrannical and irreligious influence upon us, and then guide it towards religion with us'.⁶³ Part of the purpose of this dialogue, he tells us, is to provide Western society with 'a new message'.⁶⁴ He believed that it is in need of this new message since it has fallen into a state of cultural confusion with the conclusion of the ideological battle against the Soviet Bloc, causing it to become obsessed with 'sex, crime and pleasure-seeking'.⁶⁵ Al-Turabi's process of dialogue, therefore – at least at the height of his ideological hubris in the 1990s – was contingent upon religious revolution in the West itself.

It is worth noting that al-Turabi favoured guiding the West towards religion, not towards Islam specifically. The 'prominent figures' who attended his most publicly feted dialogues with the Western world were often religious leaders. Indeed, he frequently made efforts to reach out to senior Christian clerics, including Pope John Paul II, whom he visited in Rome in 1993.⁶⁶ In the following year, he convened an 'Inter-Religious Dialogue Conference' in Khartoum attended by both Muslim and Christian leaders, including a number of prelates from Europe. Addressing this conference, al-Turabi reportedly called for the 'establishment of a world religious front, based on the unity of the heavenly religions, to combat secularism'.⁶⁷ It is ironic that the religious leaders he courted mostly represented the leaders of the historic church of which he was so critical, but he saw radical religious groups as potential targets for dialogue as well. For example, he received Louis Farrakhan, leader of the American black separatist group Nation of Islam, with enthusiasm, declaring his visit evidence that important sectors in American society supported Sudan,⁶⁸ and appearing unconcerned by his established record of anti-Semitic remarks.⁶⁹ Indeed al-Turabi, who had a long history of equating Israel with 'the Jews',⁷⁰ shared some of Farrakhan's anti-Semitic opinions, and maintained that part of the reason dialogue with Western societies was so challenging

⁶³ Al-Turabi, *Hiwar*: 39. ⁶⁴ Al-Turabi, *Hiwar*: 34.

⁶⁵ Al-Turabi, *Hiwar*: 34. ⁶⁶ *Al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 27 November 1993.

⁶⁷ *Sudanow*, November 1994. ⁶⁸ *Al-Khartoum*, 10 February 1996.

⁶⁹ See, for instance, 'Louis Farrakhan', *Southern Poverty Law Center*, www.splcenter.org/get-informed/intelligence-files/profiles/louis-farrakhan, accessed on 4 April 2017

⁷⁰ See, for example, al-Turabi's statements in *al-Mithaq*, 11 April 1969.

was 'the Jews' ... control over Western media and their use of it to serve their interests'.⁷¹

While his dialogue strategy had ideological and religious limits, al-Turabi was not prepared to condone all-out war against the Western secular regimes. He was willing to support military opposition to Western states when they intervened in the Muslim World, as during the Gulf War when he backed Saddam against the American-led coalition. Nevertheless, he talked constantly to Western governments between 1989 and 1999, frequently meeting ambassadors in Khartoum despite not holding any formal political position for most of this period. On a tour of several Western nations in 1992, he visited the American Congress and addressed the House of Representatives Subcommittee on Africa. This led to a heated exchange with its chairman, the anti-apartheid activist Howard Wolpe, who informed al-Turabi that it was well known he was 'the major power behind President al-Bashir', and lambasted his government's human rights record. Wolpe received a round of applause from the committee members after declaring: 'I am, frankly, very troubled that people who do not have enough background about the Sudan in our own country might take at face value the testimony of this gentleman ... This is not a government that the United States should have much to do with at this point.'⁷²

In spite of his bruising experience at the House of Representatives, al-Turabi continued to maintain that dialogue between the West and Sudan's government was possible. He later informed the US Ambassador, Don Petterson, that, while the State Department was hostile, the White House itself had a more positive attitude towards Sudan.⁷³ In 1993 the *al-Sharq al-Awsat* correspondent, Amir Tahiri, maintained that al-Turabi was developing the PAIC precisely so that he could position himself as an interlocutor between the West and Islamist movements,⁷⁴ and later claimed that he had written to the US government in the same year offering 'unrestricted cooperation' with the global forces of radical Islam.⁷⁵ Whatever the truth of such claims,

⁷¹ Al-Turabi, *Hiwar*: 35.

⁷² United States Congress, *Islamic Fundamentalism in Africa*: 11–17.

⁷³ Petterson, *Inside Sudan*: 124. ⁷⁴ Tahiri, 'Mushakil Tuwajih'.

⁷⁵ Burr, *Terrorists' Internationale*: 385. Mahbub Abd al-Salam acknowledged, when pressed by a journalist, that such a letter was sent, but stressed that he was 'not selling out' the Islamists. See interview in *al-Sahafa*, 30 November 2005.

al-Turabi often tried to contrast his approach with that of the Iranians, criticizing the Tehran government in the French media for having become obsessed with the struggle against the 'Great Satan'.⁷⁶ This may have been the reason why Iranian attendance at the PAIC was so limited in the following year.⁷⁷ If it is true that al-Turabi was genuinely seeking cooperation with the American government, this never materialized. Petterson claims that towards the end of his period as ambassador in Sudan, 'Turabi declared to me that there would be no improvement in US-Sudanese relations while Clinton was president'.⁷⁸ The US Embassy was withdrawn in 1996, soon after Petterson's departure. Meanwhile, the businessman and would-be US-Sudanese interlocutor, Mansoor Ijaz, maintains that in 1996 al-Turabi told him that he had repeatedly attempted to communicate with the US government but that messages were being blocked 'at the lowest level'.⁷⁹

The question of al-Turabi's efforts to negotiate with Western governments leads to a further question – was he practising *taqiyya*, an Islamic doctrine that permits dissimulation for the purpose of deceiving an opponent? Al-Turabi's enemies have frequently accused him of following this doctrine. For instance, Kok describes *taqiyya* as 'a well-known weapon of the NIF',⁸⁰ whereas a columnist in the expatriate newspaper, *al-Khartoum*, argued that al-Turabi's offers of dialogue with the West were evidence that he was more willing to practise *taqiyya* than the Iranian regime.⁸¹ Such narratives should be approached with caution because the meaning of *taqiyya* has been broadened by anti-Muslim and anti-Shia polemic since it emerged as a Shia doctrine permitting adherents of Shi'ism to hide their true religious beliefs until the reappearance of the 12th Imam.⁸² And in Sunnism, the term often features as much in anti-Shia polemic as it does as an actual doctrine, which may explain why al-Turabi's Sunni

⁷⁶ Muhammad al-Hasan Ahmad, 'Hal wira' al-tasa'id Sudani muhaawala li-ihya' al-hilf Irani?', *Al-Khartoum*, 30 October 1994.

⁷⁷ FOIA, FM Khartoum to teletype FCO, Teletype POL 104/3 of April 95, FCO.

⁷⁸ Petterson, *Inside Sudan*: 124. ⁷⁹ Minitier, *Losing Bin Laden*: 140.

⁸⁰ Kok, *Governance and Conflict in Sudan*: 100.

⁸¹ Muhammad al-Hasan Ahmad, 'Hal wira' al-tasa'id Sudani muhaawala li-ihya' al-hilf Irani?', *Al-Khartoum*, 30 October 1994. See also *al-Wasat*, 11 September 1995, for a similar argument about al-Turabi's willingness to practise *taqiyya*.

⁸² Yarden Mariuma, 'Taqiyya as polemic': 104.

opponents have branded him with it.⁸³ Moreover, he does not advocate this doctrine in his writing and criticizes other Islamist movements that pursue the 'absolute creed of *Taqiyya*'.⁸⁴

One might argue, along the lines of Raymond Ibrahim, that al-Turabi practised 'Taqiyya about Taqiyya',⁸⁵ especially since his whole pretence of non-involvement in the Salvation Regime was evidence that he considered a certain amount of dissimulation justifiable. Ibrahim argues that *taqiyya*'s historic status as a Shia doctrine is largely contextual, and that in a modern world in which Sunni Muslims perceived themselves to be dominated by the West, they have been able to use the Quran and Hadith to flesh out their own doctrine of *taqiyya*.⁸⁶ Indeed, al-Turabi's own criticism of other Islamist movements implicitly acknowledges the validity of *taqiyya* in Sunni Islamism. During the 1999 crisis in the Islamic Movement, Hasan Makki acknowledged that to take power the Sudanese Islamists had pursued a 'jurisprudence of dissimulation' (*fiqh al-taqiyya*) as a 'political tactic'.⁸⁷ But does this mean that al-Turabi was really a radical Islamist and that all his entreaties towards the West and ideological meanderings were merely evidence of a tendency to 'practise *taqiyya*'? Not necessarily. First of all, since political theorists within almost every culture, from Sun Tzu to Machiavelli,⁸⁸ have practised some form of ideological dissimulation, there is very little evidence that al-Turabi's resort to deception had a specifically Muslim or Islamist character, beyond the fact that the term *taqiyya* was used to describe it. Machiavelli, with whose writings al-Turabi was evidently familiar, may have been just as much an inspiration as the Quran.⁸⁹ Moreover, it was not just Western governments that al-Turabi was accused of using *taqiyya* to deceive. For instance, one of his Sunni critics cites his letter to the Saudi Grand Mufti, Abdul Aziz ibn Baz, defending himself from accusations of heretical opinions as evidence of his willingness to

⁸³ Mariuma, 'Taqiyya as polemic': 89–108.

⁸⁴ Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 135. For a similar advocacy against *taqiyya*, see al-Turabi, *Awlawiyyat*: 14.

⁸⁵ Raymond Ibrahim, 'Taqiyya about Taqiyya', *RaymondIbrahim.com*, 12 April 2014, www.raymondibrahim.com/2014/04/12/taqiyya-about-taqiyya/.

⁸⁶ Ibrahim, 'How *taqiyya* alters Islam's rules of war': 3–13.

⁸⁷ Hasan Makki, Interview with *al-Ra'i al-'Aam*, 1 October 1999, cited in Ulaysh, *Awlad al-Turabi*: 140.

⁸⁸ As is acknowledged by Ibrahim, 'How *taqiyya* alters Islam's rules of war', 7.

⁸⁹ Al-Turabi refers to Machiavelli in his *al-Shura*: 21.

practise *taqiyya*.⁹⁰ The fact that al-Turabi has been accused of this form of deception by so many different parties highlights his ideological and political liminality.

Al-Turabi had a warmer relationship with France than he did with most Western states. Relations with French government officials remained close even after the 1989 Islamist takeover, and he usually received more favourable press coverage in France than elsewhere. Moreover, France was the only member of the European Community not to back the UN move to investigate abuse of human rights in Sudan in 1993.⁹¹ His most prominent dealing with the French government came in the following year, with Sudan's surrender of Carlos the Jackal, a Venezuelan Marxist revolutionary with a long track record of terrorist acts in Europe.⁹² Al-Turabi always claimed, like other Sudanese government officials, that he was unaware of Carlos' presence in Khartoum as a companion to one of the many Palestinian groups that had exploited the country's 'open border' policy, although the Americans maintained the opposite.⁹³ The Sudanese government was not willing to surrender Carlos officially – rather, it turned a blind eye while French security agents 'kidnapped' him.⁹⁴ Nevertheless, it seems that al-Turabi's personal role in the transfer of Carlos to the French was significant – he travelled to Paris to meet the French minister of interior just weeks before the operation took place.⁹⁵ The French media praised him for his part in the handover, although al-Bashir was swift to issue his usual denial that the PAIC secretary-general played any role in official government business.⁹⁶ Meanwhile, al-Turabi himself made a number of statements condemning the killing of Frenchmen and other foreigners in Algeria, angering his allies in the Front Islamique de Salut.⁹⁷ The Carlos handover was no token concession to the West – even though he was not an Islamist, Carlos had a long history of

⁹⁰ Ibrahim, Abd al-Fattah Mahjub, *al-Duktur*: 24–25.

⁹¹ Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: 155–156.

⁹² Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: 156.

⁹³ See al-Turabi's remarks to *Der Spiegel*, cited in *Al-Khartoum*, 24 May 1998.

Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*, 157.

⁹⁴ Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: 158.

⁹⁵ Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: 158.

⁹⁶ Muhammad al-Hasan Ahmad, 'Hal iktamalat maraahil tawallihu al-Sulta?', *al-Khartoum*, 11 September 1994.

⁹⁷ Muhammad al-Hasan Ahmad, 'Bayna Inhisar za'aama al-Turabi . . . wa kasr Tawq al-'uzla 'an al-Sudan', *al-Khartoum*, 27 August 1994.

fighting in the Palestinian liberation struggle. As a result, al-Turabi was accused of 'treachery' by Palestinian Islamic Jihad, while Hizbollah and the Afghan, Algerian and Iranian militants also protested against Carlos' surrender.⁹⁸ The Palestinian radical author, Abdel Bari Atwan, a keen participant in the PAIC, lists it as the event that caused his previously amicable relationship with al-Turabi to deteriorate.⁹⁹

Al-Turabi's position on terrorist activities against the West was not without its inconsistencies, as was demonstrated by his statements concerning the embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania in 1998, which first brought al-Qa'ida to global media attention. In 1992, he had told a London audience at the Royal Society of Arts that 'criminal targeting of embassies' is 'not allowed by Islam'.¹⁰⁰ However, in the wake of the embassy attacks, the Islamist maestro told a *New York Times* journalist that al-Qa'ida's actions were perfectly legitimate, maintaining that 'you respond as violently as the violence' and that 'when you start fortifying your embassies it becomes very attractive – the Americans have made themselves very attractive targets'.¹⁰¹ Al-Turabi could hardly be accused of attempting to appease the American media on this occasion, although he still denied that Sudan had any role in Bin Laden's militant activities. A possible explanation for his shift in position is the fact that he was riding the wave of public anger in Sudan against the bombing of the pharmaceutical factory at Shifa in Khartoum North just days before the interview. As his conflicts with rivals in the Muslim world would show, his concept of 'defensive warfare' could be highly fluid.

Jihad in the Muslim World

While al-Turabi did not commit himself to *jihadi* activities in the Western world, he made strenuous efforts to rally Islamist and other Muslim movements against regimes in the Islamic world that he regarded as pro-Western and pro-Israeli. One aim of the PAIC was to bring together movements engaged in struggles against particular governments – the Front Islamique de Salut (FIS) against the Algerian

⁹⁸ Muhammad al-Hasan Ahmad, 'Bayna Inhisar za'aama al-Turabi ... wa kasr Tawq al-'uzla 'an al-Sudan', *al-Khartoum*, 27 August 1994.

⁹⁹ Abdel Bari Atwan, 'Hadha Qissati ma' al-Turabi', *al-Nilin*, 7 March 2016.

¹⁰⁰ Al-Turabi, 'Islam as a Pan-national Movement': 617.

¹⁰¹ Interview with *New York Times*, 24 August 1988.

government, al-Nahda against the Tunisian government and so forth – and unite them in a more holistic struggle against Western Neo-colonialism, Western-backed regimes or even just regimes that owed their origins to historic colonialism.

It is true that the PAIC owed a great deal to the internationalization of Islamist activism during the Afghanistan conflict of the 1980s, as also in the Gulf War. It has even been suggested that al-Turabi borrowed the name ‘Popular Arab and Islamic Conference’ from Iraq’s People’s Islamic Conference, in order to benefit from pro-Saddam and anti-American sentiments in the Muslim world.¹⁰² However, even in the mid-1990s the majority of *jihadis* were limiting their goals to the toppling of regimes in their own countries.¹⁰³ Al-Turabi’s attempts to internationalize jihadism through the PAIC thus represented an ambitious project. His plans to use Sudan as a base for supporting Muslim movements struggling against particular regimes went back as far as the 1960s, when his ICF helped to shelter members of the largely Muslim liberation movements fighting pro-Western and Christian regimes in Ethiopia and Chad. Encouraging the Sudanese government to support these movements, which he used the term *mujahidin* to describe, he declared that Sudan should ‘act as a base [*qa’ida*] for movements of liberation [fighting] against oppression and tyranny’.¹⁰⁴ The next year, he explained his support for the Chadian rebels by declaring that Chad was ‘not an independent country’, but was run by a non-Muslim minority oppressing the Muslim majority with the aid of a French-trained army and German, American and Israeli weapons.¹⁰⁵

Al-Turabi continued this theme of condemning Western interference in Africa at the second PAIC conference, lambasting Western nations intervening in the Horn of Africa for ‘openly advocating the revival of Neo-colonialism and the exploitation of the funds and power of the U.N. in order to control the destiny of the peoples of the region, and to prevent the spread of political independence and Islamic fundamentalism’.¹⁰⁶ During the 1990s, he also backed Islamist movements in Africa fighting secular regimes, such as the FIS and Eritrean Islamic Jihad (EIJ), and his regime was accused of supplying arms to

¹⁰² Kepel, *Jihad*: 211. ¹⁰³ Gerges, *Far Enemy*: 52.

¹⁰⁴ *Al-Mithaq*, 7 December 1965. ¹⁰⁵ *Al-Mithaq*, 15 September 1966.

¹⁰⁶ Al-Turabi’s opening address to the second PAIC conference, cited in *Sudanow*, January 1994.

such movements.¹⁰⁷ However, he also sought to employ diplomacy, as was the case in 1994 when he positioned himself as an intermediary between the FIS rebels and the Algerian government – although it seems that many Algerian Islamist factions rejected his involvement, and the French and Algerian governments denied that he had played any significant role in bringing about such reconciliation as was achieved.¹⁰⁸

Although al-Turabi perceived *jihad* within the Muslim world to be a defensive struggle against Neo-colonialism, the concept of defensive warfare that appeared in a number of the statements he made throughout his political career was highly fluid and articulated within his own conception of the Islamic *umma*, rather than the existing international order. For instance, while Gerges has written that a number of *jihadis* chose not to identify Israel as the ‘near enemy’,¹⁰⁹ al-Turabi was clearly not among them; moreover, he refused to recognize it as a legitimate state. In the late 1960s, he had frequently condemned international initiatives to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict as too soft on Israel, attacking countries like Egypt and Jordan for wanting to surrender to it.¹¹⁰ He declared that ‘righteous Arab elements have begun to strive [*tujahid*] in the field of self-sacrificing activity, because it is the one way to remove the Israeli entity from Palestinian land, and the Arabs will not step down from their holy purpose in this regard’.¹¹¹ For al-Turabi, this struggle was legitimate not on secular nationalist grounds but because of the status of Jerusalem as one of the sites most treasured by the Muslim community – the Noble Sanctuary (*Haram al-Sharif*) to which the early Muslims initially directed their prayers. He informed the second session of the PAIC in 1993 that ‘we must . . . aspire for the unity of Muslims and Arabs to liberate Palestine and, in so doing, cleanse Jerusalem, the first Qibla of Muslims’.¹¹²

In spite of his provocative language, the same session of the PAIC also exposed the limits of al-Turabi’s willingness to identify with the radical Islamist groups in Palestine that were beginning to challenge Yasir Arafat’s more secular Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO). As Hamas and other Islamist groups rose to prominence in the

¹⁰⁷ See US *Patterns of Global Terrorism* (1994): 23.

¹⁰⁸ *Al-Khartoum*, 20 September 1994. Also Muhammad al-Hasan Ahmad, ‘Bayna Inhisar za’aama al-Turabi . . . wa kasr Tawq al-‘uzla ’an al-Sudan’, *al-Khartoum*, 27 August 1994.

¹⁰⁹ Gerges, *Far Enemy*: 11, 45. ¹¹⁰ *Al-Mithaq*, 6 January 1969, 3 April 1969.

¹¹¹ *Al-Mithaq*, 6 January 1969. ¹¹² *Sudanow*, January 1994.

Palestinian resistance movement, al-Turabi's longstanding relationship with Yasir Arafat became an embarrassment, particularly after the latter signed the Oslo Accords with Israel in 1993. Al-Turabi had already tried to mediate between the PLO and Hamas in Khartoum in January 1993 but, in spite of his triumphant declarations to the media,¹¹³ these talks were widely believed to have only increased the divisions.¹¹⁴ At the beginning of the December 1993 PAIC, he told Robert Fisk that he would try to persuade the more radical Palestinian factions, including Hamas, that the signing of the Accords by Arafat was a strategic necessity.¹¹⁵ When the radical Palestinians groups rejected al-Turabi's plans to mediate and threatened to withdraw from the conference, Arafat himself cancelled his plans to attend.¹¹⁶ During the conference itself, a number of radical Palestinian factions demanded that the PAIC's final address use strong language in opposition to the signing of the upcoming Gaza-Jericho agreement, but al-Turabi had rejected this clamour and moderated the tone of the concluding statement.¹¹⁷ One bitter Palestinian rebel told Lebanon's *al-Safir* newspaper that 'Dr al-Turabi wishes to keep a line open with the West, and prefers to turn towards them more than the striving Islamic community (*umma mujahida*)'.¹¹⁸ It was the Islamist radicals, as well as the Western diplomats, who perceived al-Turabi to be two-faced.

Al-Turabi's rhetoric following the failed assassination attempt on Mubarak in 1995 also highlighted the flexibility of his concept of defensive *jihad*. Although he probably had no prior knowledge of the attempt on Mubarak's life,¹¹⁹ he felt that his militant stand against the secular Arab autocrats required him to praise it. 'When Mubarak dared to go to Addis Ababa to attend the OAU summit', al-Turabi declared, 'the sons of the prophet Moses, the Muslims, rose up against him, confounded his plans and sent him back to his country'.¹²⁰ He also used the term 'mujahidin' as a term of praise for the would-be assassins.¹²¹ His representation of the incident was certainly creative.

¹¹³ *New Horizon*, 5 January 1993. ¹¹⁴ Hroub, *Hamas*: 91.

¹¹⁵ Robert Fisk, 'Washington's Bogeyman sings Hymn of Moderation', *Independent*, 3 December 1993.

¹¹⁶ Robert Fisk, 'Dialogue is no Longer Enough', *Independent*, 7 December 1993.

¹¹⁷ *Al-Safir*, 3 December 1993. ¹¹⁸ *Al-Safir*, 6 December 1993.

¹¹⁹ See Chapter 3. ¹²⁰ Khalid, *War and Peace*: 225.

¹²¹ Muhammad al-Hasan Ahmad, 'Limadha la yuhasib al-Turabi ala tasrii-hathu?', *Al-Khartoum*, 9 July 1995.

Al-Turabi had previously argued that Islam did not sanction assassinations,¹²² and therefore chose to represent the assault on the president's vehicle as the Muslim community 'rising up' against him. It is hard to understand where the attempted killing of an individual statesman in a predominantly non-Muslim country fitted within al-Turabi's concept of *jihad* as a means to defend the *umma*. Indeed, it appears to be an obvious case of politically opportunistic usage of *jihadi* discourse.

Jihad and Civil War

The irony of al-Turabi's efforts to use religious rhetoric to challenge the existing state system of the postcolonial Muslim world is that, within Sudan itself, he tied his discourse on *jihad* to a language of nationalism rooted in identification with a state that was itself a colonial construction. Since the independence of Sudan in 1956, and throughout the first and second Sudanese Civil Wars (1963–1972 and 1983–2005) southern separatists had argued that there was no logic behind incorporating the largely non-Muslim south of the country into a society in the north that had historically subjected it to slave raiding and economic exploitation.¹²³ Al-Turabi's Salvation Regime came into power during the second of these two conflicts, and he readily endorsed the regime's campaign against the SPLA rebel movement in the south as a *jihad*. He explained in 2010 that part of the purpose of his *jihad* in the South was to spread 'love of nation' (*hubb al-watan*), as well as to defend an assault on the resurgent land of Islam (*dar al-Islam*).¹²⁴ Yet these positions were contradictory. Although the area that forms the contemporary state of South Sudan may have been regarded as an integral part of the Sudanese nation state by both secular and religious nationalists in the North even after its secession in 2011, it was never historically regarded by the inhabitants of today's Sudan or anywhere else as part of the *Dar al-Islam*. Rather, they believed that the non-Muslim character of the region made it an ideal reservoir for human chattel.¹²⁵ Indeed, al-Turabi has been much criticized for his failure to

¹²² Al-Turabi, 'Islam as a Pan-national Movement': 617.

¹²³ Idris, *Identity*: 30, 38. ¹²⁴ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 331, 438.

¹²⁵ Idris, *Identity*: 42, 45, 47. Idris does also note that Muslims in other regions of contemporary Sudan deemed to be of a 'lower social class' could also be enslaved.

acknowledge the long history of Muslim slave raiding in contemporary South Sudan.¹²⁶

Al-Turabi also echoed the argument that *jihad* is necessary when force has been used to prevent the peaceful expansion of Islam, arguing that the British had ‘planted the roots’ of the southern conflict in the colonial era through their efforts to prevent the spreading of Islam further south into Africa.¹²⁷ This was a reference to the ‘southern policy’ pursued by the British colonial regime in the 1930s and 1940s, which sought to prevent the extension of Arab and Islamic culture from north to south and encouraged the development of the south as a culturally autonomous region.¹²⁸ For al-Turabi, the intensification of the southern conflict in the 1990s was a result of similar efforts to prevent the expansion of the land of Islam. ‘[F]orces swoop[ed] to attack the resurgent Dar al-Islam as happened in the previous century to wear down and destroy the Islamic project’, he remarks.¹²⁹

Al-Turabi’s claims regarding the *jihad* in the south have led to many accusations of political and religious double standards. Following his signature in 2001 of a Memorandum of Understanding with John Garang, leader of the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), he seems to have decided no longer to regard the southern conflict as a *jihad*.¹³⁰ Al-Turabi’s alliance with Garang mortified pious Islamists, who had witnessed his participation in the ‘martyr weddings’ (*urs al-shahid*), in which youthful members of the Popular Defence Forces who had perished fighting the SPLA in the 1990s were married to brides in the hereafter. Al-Turabi had attended a number of such ceremonies for deceased members of the Islamic Movement, including his own brother and the brother of Umar al-Bashir, declaring on one such occasion that ‘the path of *jihad* is continuous and direct, and will not end . . . until God grants the land to his pious servants’.¹³¹ There has been much criticism of this apparent hypocrisy.¹³²

¹²⁶ Khalid, *War and Peace*: 239. ¹²⁷ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 438.

¹²⁸ See, for example, Johnson, *Root Causes*: 11–15.

¹²⁹ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 438.

¹³⁰ Magdi el Gizouli, ‘Khartoum’s Jihad Ghosts’, *Sudan Tribune*, 2 November 2011.

¹³¹ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 435. For an example of a fiery speech delivered by al-Turabi to a gathering at another ‘martyr wedding’, see *al-Inqadh al-Watani*, 1 February 1997.

¹³² Magdi el Gizouli, ‘Khartoum’s *jihad* ghosts’, *Still Sudan*, 2 November 2011.

Writing in 2010, al-Turabi produced a narrative of the conflict in the south that sought to rationalize his apparent inconsistencies. The battles pursued in the first age of the Salvation, he contends, genuinely represented a *jihad*, one that pursued a 'just unity' and avoided 'clashing with citizens and alienating them'.¹³³ In this age, the southern demand for decentralization was met, and Islam began to spread to the south through various *da'wa* activities.¹³⁴ He even acknowledges the validity of the martyr weddings, arguing that when their fellows died in combat, the *mujahidin* would 'transform the calamities of death into the joys of celebration, rejoicing at [their] destiny in paradise and their marriage and their pleasure'.¹³⁵ There is an evident inconsistency here, since he told one Khartoum newspaper in 2006 that the term 'martyr weddings' was 'foolish talk' (*kallam sakit*), which led the NCP Islamist Nadhir al-Karuri to point out that 'he was amongst the first who witnessed the urs al-shahid with us'.¹³⁶ It is notable here that al-Karuri recalls him as a 'witness' – al-Turabi did not invent the 'martyr weddings', as the supreme architect of Sudanese Islamism. His inconsistency was a product of his tendency to 'go with the flow'.

In spite of the genuine religious fervour that guided the early campaigns, al-Turabi argues, the war in the south lost its Islamic purpose; this was because 'the spirit of religion grew weaker' among those dealing with the southern issue, who failed to implement decentralization or to rescue the south from poverty, disease and ignorance.¹³⁷ As a result, the war did not fulfil the purposes of a true *jihad*: he and the other Islamists might initially have sanctioned the campaigns in the south under this title, but thereafter 'various officials decided to ride the wave and exploit the word *jihad* however they wished'.¹³⁸ The military were the worst culprits, as was demonstrated by the 'excessive, destructive and blood-shedding campaigns of the army'.¹³⁹ Indeed, for al-Turabi, those who were surprised at his reconciliation with Garang in 2001 had misunderstood the true purpose of *jihad*, believing that its

¹³³ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 331.

¹³⁴ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 331.

¹³⁵ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 439.

¹³⁶ Babikir Abbas al-Amin, 'Fatawi wa Dallalat al-Turabi', *Sudanile*, 1 December 2009, www.sudanile.com/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=8075:22baABc&catid=265&Itemid=55 (accessed 17 April 2017).

¹³⁷ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 331.

¹³⁸ Al-Turabi, Interview with Mu'awiya Yasin, *al-Wasat*, 26 February 2001.

¹³⁹ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 435.

sole aim was to destroy the enemy. They had neglected the Quranic passages in which God informs the Muslims: ‘verily we have granted you a manifest victory’ following Muhammad’s treaty with the Meccans at Hudaibiyya in 628.¹⁴⁰

Once again, al-Turabi was carving out a novel, controversial and ambiguous jurisprudential position, because – as one critic pointed out – the Memorandum of Understanding could not be understood as analogous to the kind of strategic truce with a non-Muslim opponent that occurred at Hudaibiyya. First, Muntassir Zayat observes, al-Turabi’s group did not represent a Muslim government but an opposition party – although al-Turabi himself considered the PCP the illegally ousted legitimate government. Second, the memorandum contained a number of recommendations for political change in Sudan, among them the cancellation of laws restricting freedoms.¹⁴¹

At times, al-Turabi maintained that the Popular Defence Force militias were more capable of conducting a legitimate *jihad* than the regular army, informing an *al-Wasat* reporter in 1994 that their behaviour ‘was the behaviour of he who desires the hereafter and not that of armies, we know what they do’.¹⁴² The formation of the PDF as a ‘citizen army’ fitted into al-Turabi’s wider strategy of spreading Islamist ideals by dissolving the Islamic Movement into society, and he clearly viewed it as a replacement for the regular army. Soon after its formation, he declared that the PDF was ‘seeking to follow the Islamic example where all Muslims are conscripted soldiers, ready for jihad . . . if the call arose for jihad, they all mobilized, and no one remained behind’.¹⁴³ This again implies that al-Turabi considered the war in the south not a war of expansion but a war in defence of the *Dar al-Islam*, which imposed an individual duty (*fard al-ayn*) upon each able-bodied male of fighting age in the Muslim community.

It was not al-Turabi who conceived the strategy of forming a popular militia, or who directed its use. Its origins may well date back to the National Front training camps in Libya, where a number of irregular militias were established that would take on the regime during the failed invasion of 1976. Following the 1985 *Intifada*, al-Turabi called for the removal of all paramilitary forces and for the national army to

¹⁴⁰ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 450.

¹⁴¹ Muntassir Zayat, ‘Tafahum Turabi-Garang’, *al-Hayat*, 12 March 2001.

¹⁴² Al-Turabi, interview with Mu’awiya Yasin, *al-Wasat*, 7 November 1994.

¹⁴³ Cited in Rone, *Behind the Red Line*: 282.

be the only body in the country bearing arms.¹⁴⁴ This was just one year before the veteran of Libya, Ibrahim Sanussi, in his role as a member of parliament, supported the memorandum submitted by members of the Native Administration in South Kordofan demanding that the government arm the local population so as to enable it to combat the activities of the SPLA in the province.¹⁴⁵ A number of the militias formed under Sadiq al-Mahdi's parliamentary government would be incorporated directly into the PDF following the al-Bashir coup, and it was Ibrahim Sanussi who took charge of the PDF once it was established.¹⁴⁶ As secretary-general of the PAIC, al-Turabi agreed with the clandestine leadership bureau that he should take charge of the external *jihad*; but the local *jihad* was to be the responsibility of Ali Uthman Taha.¹⁴⁷

Abd al-Salam contends that there was much debate among the Islamists over the jurisprudential understanding that should guide the activities of the PDF: some maintained that the state should recruit believers by force, while al-Turabi thought they should volunteer for participation.¹⁴⁸ Combined with his claim that 'no-one' should remain behind, this illustrated al-Turabi's hubristic belief that mass mobilization could be achieved on a purely spontaneous basis. In practice, recruits were often coerced to join the PDF. To this end, soon after the takeover, the government moved university enrolment centres from campuses to PDF bases.¹⁴⁹ It also seems that al-Turabi did little to provide the PDF recruits with a set of Islamic guidelines for the conduct of *jihad* – as observed above, his opinions on this subject were not committed to paper until after Umar al-Bashir had ejected him from public office in 1999. Abd al-Salam maintains that there was much research in the Islamic Movement into 'the roots of thoughts underpinning a strategic renaissance', but that these studies did not reach those engaged in combat in the field and, in practice, this research did not begin to affect the conduct of the *jihad* 'until near the end of the first decade of the revolution'.¹⁵⁰ He laments that most of the *mujahidin* of the PDF continued to be influenced by 'Sufi culture', and not enough by

¹⁴⁴ *Al-Raya*, 8 October 1985. ¹⁴⁵ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 254.

¹⁴⁶ Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: 18.

¹⁴⁷ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 120.

¹⁴⁸ *Al-Raya*, 23 July 1985. Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 286.

¹⁴⁹ Abbas, 'The National Islamic Front'.

¹⁵⁰ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 259.

the principles of the Islamic Movement, implicitly questioning al-Turabi's argument that they fought a genuine *jihad* whereas the army did not.¹⁵¹ It also seems unlikely that the PDF were any less guilty than the army of 'excessive, destructive and blood-shedding' behaviour, as many human rights reports attest.¹⁵²

Using *jihadi* rhetoric to sanction the regime's military efforts was relatively straightforward for al-Turabi and his cohorts when their opponents were the largely non-Muslim and secular SPLA leaders of southern Sudan. When the Islamist government's opponents were predominantly Muslim – as were the SPLA fighters who extended the rebellion to the Nuba Mountains in the mid-1980s and 1990s, and the National Democratic Alliance forces who began to confront the regime in eastern Sudan later in the 1990s – a different doctrinal challenge presented itself. The very fact that Muslims would choose to wage war against the Islamist regime undermined al-Turabi's conceit that the 1989 'Revolution' represented the spontaneous resurgence of a unified Muslim community. In the case of the Nuba Mountains conflict, he characteristically chose to deal with this affront to his ideological hubris by leaving it to others to resolve. In 1992, together with the rest of the clandestine leadership, he appointed Zubeir Muhammad Salih to oversee the military campaign in the Nuba Mountains.¹⁵³ In a policy that gave the lie to the universalist pretensions of the regime's *jihad* language, Zubeir mobilized the local population on an ethnic basis, appointing local 'Arab' Baggara chiefs as leaders of the *mujahidin*. Meanwhile, the Governor of Kordofan, Abd al-Karim al-Husseini, coerced a number of local scholars in al-Ubayyid to issue a *fatwa* legitimizing the *jihad* against the Muslim Nuba in the SPLA, overriding the objections of the most senior cleric in the province that a rightful *jihad* could not be fought against other Muslims.¹⁵⁴ The *fatwa* declared that 'an insurgent who was previously a Muslim is now an apostate; and a non-Muslim is a non-believer standing as a bulwark against the spread of Islam, and Islam has granted the freedom of killing of both of them'.¹⁵⁵

Al-Turabi was not directly involved in the production of the now notorious al-Ubayyid *fatwa*. He was on his 1992 tour of the West when

¹⁵¹ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 261.

¹⁵² For example, African Rights, *Facing Genocide*: 153–158.

¹⁵³ De Waal, 'Averting Genocide'.¹⁵⁴ De Waal, 'Averting Genocide'.

¹⁵⁵ De Waal, 'Averting Genocide'.

it was declared, and – as with many of the other arbitrary policies of the Salvation Regime – refrained from giving it his public blessing.¹⁵⁶ Nevertheless, many have been quick to identify him as a potential influence behind the *fatwa* – the *African Rights* report on ethnic cleansing in the Nuba Mountains argued that his declaration of *jihad* against the parliamentary regime prior to the 1989 coup provided it with its context.¹⁵⁷ In that it legitimized *jihad* against a Muslim opponent, this might be accurate. One might also contend that in defining apostasy as fighting against the Muslim community, al-Turabi provided the jurisprudential inspiration for the *fatwa*. According to al-Turabi, apostasy becomes a punishable crime when individuals leave the faith and then fight against the Muslim community (see Chapter 7). However, he was never clear as to what offence was committed by avowed Muslims who waged war against the Muslim community, since at the height of his hubris he could not envisage any such eventuality. His discourse of the 1980s, which offered an increasingly stark choice between Islam and unbelief, probably made possible the binary logic of the al-Ubayyid *fatwa*.

After he returned to domestic political life in 1996, al-Turabi was more willing to advocate *jihad* against the regime's Muslim opponents, specifically the National Democratic Alliance fighters who invaded eastern Sudan from Ethiopia and Eritrea. He denounced the parties that had backed the NDA, including the Umma party and DUP, at a 'martyr wedding' in Khartoum, and on visits to eastern towns.¹⁵⁸ In June 1997, he told the population of Khasm al-Girba, presumably referring to Ansaris who had joined the NDA forces, that 'the grandchildren of the *mujahidin* sheathed the swords of their grandfathers and were happy to give their allegiance [*muwaala*] to Isaias Afwerki and those who plot hostility towards Islam'.¹⁵⁹ As so often, al-Turabi was communicating to the public through emotive rhetoric rather than jurisprudential dogma, and he did not offer any specific *fatwa* justifying fighting against the NDA forces. His attempts to win the allegiance of these same parties as part of his *tawali* project over the next three years would highlight the contingent nature of his condemnation.¹⁶⁰ Nevertheless, he informed the Khasm al-Girba audience in 1997 that

¹⁵⁶ De Waal, 'Averting Genocide'. ¹⁵⁷ African Rights, *Facing Genocide*: 112.

¹⁵⁸ *Al-Inqadh al-Watani*, 1 February 1997; *Al-Anbaa*, 10 June 1997.

¹⁵⁹ *Al-Anbaa*, 10 June 1997. ¹⁶⁰ See Chapter 8.

'there is no strength without fighting and no honour without *jihad*', making it evident that he considered the war against the NDA to have religious legitimation. This speech further indicates al-Turabi's tendency to employ a different rhetoric for public addresses from that he offered to elite audiences. At least by the evidence of this speech, he believed that *jihad* could be conducted against self-professing Muslims, a position probably influenced by the rhetoric of regional militants who advocated *jihad* against entrenched military regimes.

The *Jihad* against Muslim Regimes in Sudan

Following his ouster by al-Bashir in 1999, al-Turabi found himself in a position similar to that of a number of the militant Islamists to whom he had given shelter throughout the 1990s. Together with his new party, the PCP, he had been forcibly barred from participation in the political arena by a military autocrat. And like his fellow Islamists, in May 2000, he openly declared *jihad* against the new, albeit all-too-familiar pharaoh.¹⁶¹ However, he did not clarify the nature of this *jihad*; nor did he extend his declaration to a general exhortation to fight the regime by military means. This was in spite of the fact that there would have been much potential to mobilize the youthful Darfuris and Kordofanians who had joined the PCP en masse precisely to oppose the regime.¹⁶² In 2010, al-Turabi was still being criticized for his failure to issue a 'clear fatwa' to resort to military action against Umar al-Bashir.¹⁶³

It is also true that al-Turabi was willing to adopt in principle the arguments, and the language, used by militant Islamist groups elsewhere in the region to justify the use of force by civilian groups against established Muslim regimes. He condemned the al-Bashir government for acting as a 'pharaonic power', relying on *fatwas* from *ulama* who represented 'traditionalist backwardness', and 'succumb[ing] to external pressure hostile to Islam'.¹⁶⁴ He also argued that, by arming different ethnic groups against each other in Darfur, the regime had spread *fitna*, a heavily loaded term referring to strife within the Islamic community.¹⁶⁵ Al-Turabi was even willing to declare that the Islamic

¹⁶¹ *Al-Khartoum*, 9 May 2000. ¹⁶² Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 395.

¹⁶³ Ali Ahmad Muhammad Dagash, 'Khalil wa'l Inqadh', *al-Sahafa*, 3 March 2010.

¹⁶⁴ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 440. ¹⁶⁵ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 10 November 2003.

Movement's armed struggle against the previous military dictatorship of Jafa'ar Nimeiri was justified on the grounds that Muslims were permitted to form 'fighting groups' to wage *jihad* against a 'campaign of tyranny which targeted the fundamentals of Islam'.¹⁶⁶ Even though he had been in prison at the time of the Islamic Movement's Libyan-backed campaign against Nimeiri, it had his tacit blessing and he was criticized by many within the 'educationalist' camp for creating war between Muslims by attempting to overthrow a Muslim regime by force.¹⁶⁷ Even in 1983, when he had reconciled with Nimeiri, his work on the 'Islamic State' reproduced the pseudo-Taymiyyan argument widespread in militant circles, arguing that 'If government becomes so alien as to transcend sharia, [a Muslim] has the right and obligation to revolt'.¹⁶⁸ Nevertheless, he refused to issue a specific call for military *jihad* against Umar al-Bashir's regime. Instead, he called for a 'popular revolution' and 'civil disobedience' to 'return freedoms'.¹⁶⁹

Why was al-Turabi so reluctant to declare *jihad* against his former ally? The situation in which he found himself in the 2000s was markedly different from that of the 1969–1977 period, or the situation which faced his fellow Islamists in Tunisia, Algeria, Syria and Egypt. The regime he was fighting was not a secularist regime, and contained a number of Islamists who had until shortly prior to this been his ideological brothers. Al-Turabi and his former disciples still attended the same wedding parties, and there were numerous efforts by foreign Islamists to reconcile the two wings of the Sudanese Islamic Movement. Moreover, he probably feared that use of *jihadi* language would have alienated his new allies in the SPLA and undermined his sporadic attempts to court the secularists in the northern opposition. Finally, in spite of his alliance with the SPLA, tactical support for the Justice and Equality Movement in Darfur and long term political commitment to decentralization, al-Turabi was still a member of the northern elite. And this group had long been apprehensive of the instability that might result if its internal conflicts were to empower 'peripheral' factions elsewhere in Sudan, factions already growing stronger in the 2000s.¹⁷⁰ Al-Turabi would probably have feared the anarchic consequences that a declaration of religious war would have had if it gave too

¹⁶⁶ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 432–433.

¹⁶⁷ El-Affendi, *Thaurab*: 226–227. ¹⁶⁸ Al-Turabi, 'Islamic State': 248.

¹⁶⁹ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 10 November 2003. ¹⁷⁰ De Waal, 'Sudan'.

much legitimacy to these peripheral forces. Indeed, in *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi* he warned that the next revolution must be directed by the 'leading and enlightened sectors' of society so that it was not taken over by 'trickery and stealing booty'.¹⁷¹

Theological and Historical Perspectives on *Jihad*

Al-Turabi made no serious efforts to formulate a jurisprudentially rooted doctrine of *jihad* during the 1990s, in spite of his efforts to reassure his interlocutors of his 'defensive' understanding of the doctrine. One partial exception to this rule is his *al-Tafsir al-Tawhidi* of 1998, an exegesis of the first nine Suras of the Quran. While this text does not address Quranic injunctions regarding *jihad* in a systematic manner, his discussion of the so called 'Sword Verse' (9:5) merits attention. This particular verse declares 'but when the forbidden months are past, then fight and slay the pagans [or "polytheists", *al-mushrikin*] wherever ye find them, and seize them, beleaguer them, and lie in wait for them in every strategy (of war); but if they repent, and establish regular prayers and practise regular charity, then open the way for them: for God is often forgiving, Most Merciful'. It has been interpreted by radical *jihadis* as a sanction for aggressive action against 'polytheists', or *mushrikin*. However, al-Turabi is careful to present this passage only in the framework of his 'defensive' interpretation of *jihad*: 'it is necessary', he says, 'that defence against aggression does not lead the believers to strike against them blindly exceeding their right to fight'.¹⁷² His exegesis understands 'polytheists' to refer specifically to groups that have left Islam, and thus links his assessment of the passage to his previous arguments that violence against apostates is only sanctioned if they have taken up arms against the Muslim community – he declares it permissible to fight those 'who have returned (or "apostatized", *irtadda*) to the custom of ignorant (*jahili*) aggression'. The battle against these apostates does not appear to be purely defensive in character, since their apostasy has made it necessary for them 'to be fought wherever you come across them in the insecure areas of the land', although he does consider that fighting may cease when the apostates either repent or choose to make peace.¹⁷³ Thus

¹⁷¹ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 357. ¹⁷² Al-Turabi, *al-Tafsir*: 852.

¹⁷³ Al-Turabi, *al-Tafsir*: 852–853.

al-Turabi does not seem to regard the verse as a model for offensive actions against non-Muslims or ‘polytheists’ who are not apostates.

Al-Turabi’s position on the supposed abrogation of early, more pacific verses by the more militant passages of the ninth Sura of the Quran places him firmly in the moderate camp. According to the more militant of the classical jurists, as well as modern radicals such as Sayyid Qutb, the principle of *naskh*, or ‘abrogation’, may be invoked when a verse of the Quran revealed chronologically later appears to contradict an earlier passage. Thus, the peaceful ‘Meccan’ verses of the Quran, which were revealed during the time of Muhammad’s initial call to Islam, are annulled by the more militant ‘Medinan’ passages which came down in the period that followed Muhammad’s flight from Mecca and conflict with the non-Muslim groups that rejected his message.¹⁷⁴ Al-Turabi accepts the principle of the chronological ordering of the revelation, referring to the ‘Medinan’ and ‘Meccan’ verses,¹⁷⁵ but does not advocate the abrogation of the latter by the former. Rather, in his discussion of 9:36, another passage often cited by militants, he observes that *jihad* represents ‘not an initiative of hostility but a defense against aggression, and in accordance with that balance the whole Quran, both the Meccan and Medinan verses, act as one continuous succession [*yatawaatar*]’.¹⁷⁶ In using another form VI verbal construction (*yatawaatar*), emphasizing mutual reciprocity, al-Turabi utilizes his linguistic skills to enhance his emphasis on the internal balances of the Quran.¹⁷⁷ His exegesis here is rooted in the *tawhidi* methodology discussed in the last chapter, which requires each verse to be studied as part of an integral whole rather than in isolation. To support his point, he cites a number of the ‘Meccan’ verses (42: 39–43, 16: 125–127) to place 9:36’s command to ‘fight against the unbelievers as they fight against you’ in the context of earlier passages that limit such fighting to defensive warfare. Similarly, in his discussion of 9:5, he cites 4:90, which declares that God does not permit offensive action against those who ‘withdraw from you but fight you not’, to support his ‘defensive’ argument.¹⁷⁸

¹⁷⁴ Bonney, *Jihad*: 24–27. Although the most controversial verses occur in the ‘ninth Sura’, this Sura was second from last in terms of actual revelation.

¹⁷⁵ Al-Turabi, *al-Tafsir*: 873. ¹⁷⁶ Al-Turabi, *al-Tafsir*: 873.

¹⁷⁷ Al-Turabi is fond of other reciprocal verbal formations, such as *mujahada* (see earlier in this chapter), and *tawaali* (see Chapter 9).

¹⁷⁸ Al-Turabi, *al-Tafsir*: 853.

Al-Turabi's greatest efforts to elucidate a theological perspective on the doctrine of *jihad* came in the two most substantial pieces he published in the 2000s, *al-Siyasa wa'l-Hukm* and *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*. While the latter attempts to justify a number of decisions made regarding the *jihad* in the southern region in the 1990s, both pieces contain passages that examine the question from an academic and an exegetical perspective, ostensibly free of any political context. In these passages, al-Turabi follows the modernist trend of creatively reinterpreting the classical sources in order to adjust his characterization of *jihad* to fit in with an international political environment in which only defensive war, or warfare which serves a humanitarian purpose, is sanctioned. He outlines the conditions in which *jihad* may be sanctioned in *al-Siyasa wa'l-Hukm*, explaining that

the guidance of religion does not permit striving [*mujahada*] except in the face of a hostile act from an authority [*sultan*] in another land, or some oppressive act from a sect that corrupts the fundamentals [*usul*] of public interest of the people, or departs from the bond of nationality or regime of authority which has been agreed upon, or assisting the oppressed [*mustadafin*] aggressed against by another Sultan, conditional upon any charter then current between him and the Sultan of the Muslims.¹⁷⁹

The third case would seem to permit military intervention outside the *Dar al-Islam*, and al-Turabi supports this with references to al-Hajj 40, in addition to al-Anfal 72, which declares: 'As to those who believed but came not into exile, ye owe no duty of protection to them until they come into exile; but if they seek your aid in religion, it is your duty to help them, except against a people with whom you have a treaty of mutual alliance.'¹⁸⁰ Nevertheless, it is clear that in this case al-Turabi's injunction is situational, and that he is not making a general command to expand the *Dar al-Islam*.

Al-Turabi's concept of defensive warfare is fluid and open to interpretation, as his efforts to put it in historic context illustrate. Unlike a number of other 'Islamic modernists', he sees a fundamental connection between the classical and contemporary periods as far as the purpose of *jihad* is concerned. In *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*, he observes:

And since the story of Islamic *jihad* is that it did nothing more than respond to the deep rooted aggression of the *ancient and modern* [emphasis added]

¹⁷⁹ Al-Turabi, *al-Siyasa*: 363–364. ¹⁸⁰ Al-Turabi, *al-Siyasa*: 363–364.

empires which confronted the Muslims, then the divide between the land of contract, and peace [*dar al-ahd wa'l salam*] and the land of war and striving [*dar al-harb wa'l-jihad*] has a firm origin in Islam.¹⁸¹

Clearly, al-Turabi considers the modern battle against Western colonialism and Neo-colonialism to be analogous to the wars fought by the early Muslim community against the Sassanids and the Byzantines. To support this, he cites Sura al-Baggara 2:193: 'And fight them on until there is no more tumult or oppression, and there prevail justice and faith in God, but if they cease, let there be no hostility except to those who practise oppression.' Put in the historic context and the context of the Quranic passage al-Turabi cites, this seems to make *jihad* more than a defensive reaction to territorial invasion. In the case of the early Muslim community's conflict with the Sassanid and Byzantine empires, the territories of these former powers were incorporated either wholly or partially (in the latter case) to the *Dar al-Islam*. In his 2003 text, al-Turabi also argues that early Islamic expansion was 'in response to the aggressions of the Persians and the Rum', whereas the Ethiopians were not conquered because they wished to enter into peaceful relations with the Muslim community.¹⁸²

At the end of al-Turabi's lecture at the Royal Society of Arts, he was asked: 'Why is Western colonialism bad but Islamic colonialism acceptable?' 'It is important', he replied, 'not to confuse expansion with conquest. Muslims have spread their message but the Muslims never exploited the territories they ruled. They never brought Gold from India to Mecca'.¹⁸³ Al-Turabi's concept of just expansion, therefore, was not so different from that of the Europeans – in both cases the rulers are seen as a people fit for governance, spreading a particular set of ideals and cleansing society of another more negatively construed set of values. However, apart from linking them to the ancient empires in the passages cited above, there is no explicit evidence that al-Turabi considers that the Western nations he finds guilty of similar arrogance (*istikbar*) should be subject to similar treatment. As observed earlier, his post-9/11 article and the references to 'those oppressed by another Sultan' seem to indicate that his position on action against aggressive or expansionist nations was in line with the UN principle of collective security. Nevertheless, in equating modern *jihad* to its medieval

¹⁸¹ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 264. ¹⁸² Al-Turabi, *al-Siyasa*: 367.

¹⁸³ Al-Turabi, 'Islam as a Pan-National Movement', 615.

equivalents without historically contextualizing the phenomenon, al-Turabi leaves open the possibility for a Qutbist interpretation similar to that identified by de Waal and Abdel Salaam, whereby force may be used against foreign governments obstructing the expansion of Islam. This is one of his many ambiguities.

It has been argued that Islamic theology has the capacity to generate a culturally specific ‘defensive realist’ perspective on *jihad* and international relations,¹⁸⁴ but al-Turabi’s ambiguity makes it hard to place him firmly in this slot. He flits between realism and idealism as he flits between capitalism and socialism, and where he adopts a realist perspective, it is never clear whether the inspiration is the Quran or the various non-Muslim political theorists of whom he was cognizant. His political realism may well have been sharpened by his love of playing chess – a game condemned by mainstream Muslim scholars – at school.¹⁸⁵ Al-Turabi acknowledged the realist position that force is a necessity rather than an ideal, arguing in *Awlawiyyat al-Tayyar al-Islami* that the Islamic movement must ‘strengthen itself through the building of economic, media and military force in a world of expedients’.¹⁸⁶ His argument that Muslims must strive to ‘equalize the balance of global forces’ in his commentary on 9/11 is similar to the views of Islamic realists such as Fadlallah and al-Qaradawi that both internal strengthening and alliances with other non-Western nations are necessary to restrain Western aggression.¹⁸⁷ Elsewhere, his politics reflect an idealistic commitment to the humanitarian and civilizational potential of Islam and its role in the dialectical struggle between good and evil.¹⁸⁸

Al-Turabi’s discussion of the conditions in which *jihad* may be conducted by non-state actors against incumbent Muslim rulers shows clear evidence of a modernist position, although he makes no effort to describe it as such. He went far beyond the conservative position of the ‘traditionalist’ Sunni *ulama*, who had historically argued that *jihad* against a Muslim ruler could not be sanctioned unless he abandoned Islam. He argues that

without [legitimate] authority [*sultan*] a group is not allowed to call for striving (*mujahada*), except an organized revolution against a tyranny that

¹⁸⁴ Baroudi, ‘Islamic Realism’. ¹⁸⁵ See Chapter 1.

¹⁸⁶ Al-Turabi, *Awlawiyyat*: 42. ¹⁸⁷ Baroudi, ‘Islamic Realism’: 107–108.

¹⁸⁸ See, for instance, the discussion of his Marxist and colonial tendencies in Chapter 4.

is coercive in its use of authority (*sulta*), and not based upon an agreement [*aqd*] of mutual support and mutual consent between the great lords and the people, which aim[s] to establish a successor authority rooted in consent and consultation.¹⁸⁹

Al-Turabi supports this with reference to *Shura* 39–42, but it is evident that he is applying highly liberal exegetical principles here as the Quranic verses in question are highly abstract discussions of oppression and injustice, and do not examine the same context of unjust rulers, revolution and broken contracts that al-Turabi does. Verse 39 states: ‘And those who, when an oppressive wrong is inflicted on them (are not cowed but) help and defend themselves’; while 42 declares that ‘the blame is only against those who oppress men and [commit] wrongdoing and insolently transgress beyond bounds through the land, defying right and justice: for such there will be a Penalty grievous’. It seems likely that al-Turabi, following the path taken by other nineteenth and twentieth-century reformists,¹⁹⁰ sought a somewhat tenuous Quranic legitimation for an understanding of revolution linked more to his study of the French revolutionary *philosophes* and their interpretations of the social contract.

Conclusion

Was al-Turabi a ‘militant’ *jihadi* in the mould of Bin Laden or Qutb? It was one of the many paradoxes he generated that, in spite of a frequently avowed commitment to a ‘defensive’ interpretation of *jihad*, he associated himself closely with a number of radical, militant groups. Like FIS and EIJ, for example, he endorsed Islamist groups waging *jihad* against Muslim rulers both in Sudan and the wider region, although in his later efforts to justify this he appeared to rely on Western theories of social contract as much as the Mardin *fatwa* of Ibn Taymiyya so frequently cited by the militants of the 1980s. In many ways, his relationship with these militants was guided by the same pragmatic political logic that informed the strategies of reformers like al-Afghani – he saw men like Bin Laden and Zawahiri first and foremost as agents of the mass mobilization of the *umma*.

Did al-Turabi identify with the ‘global’ *jihad* ideology of zealots such as al-Zawahiri and Bin Laden, or did he restrict the struggle to the ‘near

¹⁸⁹ Al-Turabi, *al-Siyasa*: 364. ¹⁹⁰ Akhavi, ‘Sunni Modernist Theories’: 23–49.

enemy' like less ambitious militants? His article on the September 2001 attacks explicitly criticizes the wisdom of the global *jihadi* strategy and suggests a focus on more local opponents, although his opaque style and ambiguous scholarly status make it uncertain as to whether this was a jurisprudential verdict or only tactical advice. Evidently, he considered Israel one of the 'near' enemies and very much a legitimate target, although his efforts to support the Oslo Accord also alienated some of the most militant Palestinian factions. In spite of his protestations that *jihad* was 'defensive', both in his political statements and later theoretical writings al-Turabi explored contexts in which the doctrine could be used to justify military activity outside the *Dar al-Islam*. He never advocated a global 'one nation theory' akin to that attributed to Qutb, although in his conflation of classical and modern *jihad* he implicitly suggested that the doctrine could be used to justify expansion of the Muslim realm. Nevertheless, his view of *jihad* as a form of 'just war' was closer to the colonial belief in civilizing violence that he appropriated (see Chapter 4) than the totalitarian models of revolution attributed to thinkers such as Qutb and Mawdudi. Just as European just war theory evolved through the logic of the colonial civilizing mission towards the internationalist principles of collective security and humanitarian intervention, so did al-Turabi's in his later writings.

Was al-Turabi's language of *jihad* a form of doublespeak? Evidently his discourse on *jihad* was not internally coherent, although the element of conscious deceit was probably not as significant as usually maintained. His statements on the 1995 assassination attempt against Mubarak and 1998 embassy attacks attempted to justify them within the framework of 'defensive' *jihadi* doctrine. Although many would consider his arguments spurious, al-Turabi as a politician often made statements that were defined by their immediate context, and for every declaration justifying an act of aggression there was an act or a statement that distanced him from the most radical *jihadis*. It is significant that *both* Western counter-terrorism experts *and* militant radicals considered that al-Turabi had betrayed them. His Arabic language writings did not simply abandon the protestations about the defensive nature of *jihad* that he had made to Western audiences. Indeed, his post-2000 theoretical elaboration of the doctrine made a serious effort to flesh out a defensive interpretation of it, despite the presence of ambiguities such as the implicit interpretation of *jihad* as

a form of 'just war' theory. He also used his later writings to insist that those who labelled him a political chameleon for his apparent abandonment of the *jihad* in southern Sudan had misinterpreted *jihad* as a purely military doctrine. It is possible to see the logic behind these claims, although al-Turabi never resolved the central contradiction over whether the southern *jihad* was in defence of the 'nation' or *Dar al-Islam* as a whole. Inevitably, the inconsistencies of his *jihadi* doctrine spring from his dual status as both a grand strategist of Islamist resurgence and a political pragmatist operating on both national and international levels. This is why al-Turabi could make tactical deals with the secular governments of Western nations, even though at the level of theory his strategy for dialogue with the West required religious (not necessarily Islamic) revolution in Western countries themselves. It is in this distinction that we can observe the ambiguous character of al-Turabi's postcoloniality. Although elements of his discourse presented an almost Manichaean struggle between a colonized Muslim world and a neo-imperial West, elsewhere he acted as an interlocutor operating in a Bhabha-esque 'third space' between these two worlds.

7

*The Islamic State**Sharia, Nationalism and Non-Muslim Rights*

In the various exculpatory remarks uttered by al-Turabi following the ignominious failure to establish an Islamic State – his ‘Civilizational Project’ – he tended to blame not so much the concept as the men he employed to carry it out. To the extent that he accepted the blame for anything, it was only his decision to rely on military support to consummate his plan.¹ Others have criticized this attempt to pass responsibility, contending that the failures of the Civilizational Project were rooted in the failures of al-Turabi’s own ideas.² By contrast, his Islamist admirers argued not so much that his model was doomed to break down as that he had failed to provide either a fully fleshed out blueprint for the Islamic State or a strategy for its implementation. Abd al-Majid Zindani, heading a delegation to mediate between al-Bashir and al-Turabi in 2001, lamented that there had not been enough study of ‘how to move from the jurisprudence concerning *da’wa* to the jurisprudence concerning the political party to the jurisprudence concerning the state’.³

Al-Turabi’s writing on the Islamic State prior to the Islamist seizure of power in 1989 was in fact rather limited. Where he considered the subject, as in his text on the ‘Islamic State’ published in English in 1983, he highlighted the potential features and advantages of such a state, but rarely went into specifics. Indeed, he began this text with an admission that ‘although I am directly involved in a political process that seeks to establish an Islamic State, I am not going to describe the forms that an Islamic government might take in any particular country. Rather, I will try to describe the universal characteristics of an Islamic State’.⁴ Since he was involved in a very specific Islamist project in Sudan, al-Turabi’s inability to bridge the gap between the universal and the particular was significant.

¹ See remarks quoted in *Sudan Tribune*, 26 March 2012.

² Woodward, ‘Hasan al-Turabi’: 211. ³ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 331.

⁴ Al-Turabi, ‘The Islamic State’.

Another view is that al-Turabi failed to establish an Islamic State because his model was not Islamic at all. As Khalid remarks, his campaign failed to acknowledge that the Quran ‘never defined a systems [sic] of governance’.⁵ Al-Turabi is frequently criticized for projecting post-Enlightenment Western concepts of the state onto the Islamic past; for instance, by claiming that the document that Muhammad signed with the various tribes of Medina in 622 established the principles of multiculturalism and constitutional governance.⁶ One might argue that these criticisms miss the point. As a number of theorists of the Islamic State suggest, since the Quran did not define fixed principles of governance, the Muslim community is free to choose how it should be ruled, whether by democrats, oligarchs or aristocrats. The real obligation – following the Quranic injunction of Muhammad to ‘judge among people by that which Allah hath shown you’ – is that the rulers should ensure the application of sharia, or Islamic law.⁷ Fundamentally, therefore, the Islamic State is a nomocracy, a system based upon the application of a certain set of legal principles. Al-Turabi himself has used the term nomocracy to describe his concept of the Islamic State.⁸ Therefore, the test of whether his state was ‘Islamic’ or not is its success in implementing sharia.

For some, the core point is still that it was al-Turabi’s fundamental deceit in importing a certain set of governing ideologies from the Western world that undermined his efforts to introduce sharia. According to Gallab, al-Turabi’s project ‘failed because of its relationship to totalitarianism’ and not ‘because of its relation to Islam’,⁹ whereas his Islamist critics lambasted him by claiming that he had borrowed his National Congress model from the Soviet Union.¹⁰ In particular, the regime has been condemned for its efforts to impose a uniform identity on a culturally and religiously heterogeneous population.¹¹ In contrast, Tønnesson suggests that al-Turabi’s political philosophy favoured diversity, regarding it as ‘an enriching aspect of life that should not be extirpated in favour of conformity’.¹²

⁵ Khalid, *War and Peace*: 210.

⁶ Magdi Gizouli, ‘Turabi, the fanatical liberal’, *Still Sudan*, 31 July 2011.

⁷ Khatib and Bouma, *Democracy in Islam*: 7, 16–17.

⁸ Al-Turabi, ‘Islam as a Pan-national Movement’: 611.

⁹ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 114.

¹⁰ Jafa’ar Shaikh Idris, cited in *al-Khartoum*, 28 April 1998.

¹¹ For example, Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: chapter 5.

¹² Tønnesson, *Islamist Democracy*: 10.

Any attempt to assess whether al-Turabi's model was 'totalitarian' or 'diverse' faces us with the challenging task of judging how much of a distinction can be made between the Islamic State as al-Turabi conceived it and the specific form taken by the Sudanese Islamist state – both during the 1983–1985 'Imamate' of Jafa'ar Nimeiri and the period between al-Bashir's pro- and anti-Turabi coups of 1989 and 1999. An effort shall be made here to highlight forms and understandings of the Islamic State and Islamic sharia which al-Turabi explicitly, if inconsistently, advocated, and to distinguish them from those with which he was more loosely associated. Examples of the former include forms of the Islamic State advocated in his academic works and media statements – with due consideration given in the latter case to the claim that his position as a 'hostage' in Nimeiri's government forced him to dissimulate – as well as the 1988 Penal Code written up during his time as attorney-general. Examples of the latter include the 1983 September Laws, which al-Turabi supported in spite of having been excluded from any role in their composition, as well as most of the criminal and civil codes passed in the early 1990s and the constitution of 1998.

As will be seen, the fluid and shifting character of the Sudanese political environment forced al-Turabi to reformulate his vision of the Islamic State a number of times in order for it to prosper. His tendency to pursue both global and national Islamist ambitions, as well as to switch between confronting and co-opting military authoritarians, led to contradictions in his discourse, contradictions he attempted to mask by blurring the distinction between the universal and the particular. It was also the specifically postcolonial character of late twentieth-century Sudan that helped to shape the contours of al-Turabi's Islamic State. Like many postcolonial intellectuals, he presented to the public a version of the Islamic State that was defined more by contemporary anti-colonial politics than by its relationship to the pre-colonial past, while in practice he found it necessary to use the very institutions and structures of the state established by the colonizers to aid his Islamization drive. Again, this is where we see the limitations of al-Turabi's 'totalitarian' agenda. For Arendt, the totalitarian system 'destroyed all social, legal and political traditions'¹³ – yet, as will be seen, even the model of sharia that al-Turabi proposed was heavily

¹³ Arendt, *Origins*: 460.

influenced by legal frameworks already established in the context of colonial modernity.

The Medinan Prototype

For a number of critics, al-Turabi's dependence on the model of the seventh-century Islamic community is what makes his thought so atavistic. Khalid Mubarak, for instance, argues that, in condemning post-Rashidi society for its failure to unite religion and state, al-Turabi fails to acknowledge the progress achieved after 661 as well as the contributions of Indian, Greek and Persian culture to the shaping of Islamic civilization.¹⁴ For his part, Mansour Khalid claims that al-Turabi 'has often stated that he wanted to recreate in Sudan the Madina (city) of the Prophet Mohammed', and cites al-Turabi's own observation to the Khartoum media that 'we entered Khartoum the way the Prophet Muhammad entered Madina'.¹⁵ This is probably something of a misrepresentation of al-Turabi's relation to the Medinan prototype – one analogy does not a literalist Salafi make. Indeed, he writes that while the 'prototype community of the prophet offers us an ideal standard . . . we may feel obliged to build a new model which unites the eternal principles with the changing reality'.¹⁶ As we have seen, his *tajdidi* approach was condemned by contemporary Salafis for its implication that the seventh-century model could be improved on.¹⁷ One example of how al-Turabi's twentieth-century model differed from that of the seventh is that while in the Islamic tradition the Prophet relied on the eldest generation of Muslims (*abkar*) to wage his battles and lead the community in Medina, al-Turabi marginalized many of the elders of the Islamic Movement and consistently emphasized the importance of empowering the youth.¹⁸

Nor did al-Turabi entirely neglect the achievements of Islamic civilization after 661. In his *Tajdid al-Fikr al-Islami*, he recognizes that in the eighth century the centre of progress moved from Medina to Baghdad, noting that it was there that 'various different nations [*aqwam*] entered the community [*al-milla*] and established a more developed civilization than the civilization of Medina', which subsequently led to the

¹⁴ Mubarak, *Turabi's 'Islamist' Venture*: 22. ¹⁵ Khalid, *War and Peace*: 210.

¹⁶ Esposito and Voll, *Makers*: 128. ¹⁷ See Chapter 5.

¹⁸ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 397.

crystallization of a more sophisticated form of Islamic jurisprudence.¹⁹ Nevertheless, he does not credit the specific contribution of other cultures, and often bemoans the negative influence of the Greeks and Persians, blaming the latter for the introduction into Islam of oppressive and inegalitarian forms of government.²⁰

While al-Turabi was able to see beyond the seventh-century Arabian Peninsula, his view of the original Islamic community remains highly idealized, which is partly explained by the fact that reliable information concerning the nature of Islamic society at the time of Muhammad and the four Rightly-Guided Caliphs is extremely limited.²¹ For instance, he attempts to employ the seventh-century prototype to demonstrate that there will be no need for coercion in an Islamic State. A text he co-authored in 1995, *Min Ma'alim al-Nizam al-Islami*, informs us that Islam constituted 'a direct speech to the society of believers, and not to those in power'.²² The Islamic society took precedence over the state in that it 'established itself spontaneously, of its own accord'.²³ Through mutual consultation, as well as propagation of virtue and prevention of vice, the early Muslim community was 'nearly able to dispense with the state altogether', and went about the tasks of providing social welfare [*al-ri'aya al-ijtima'iyya*] and spreading knowledge [*ilm*] 'without command or coercion'.²⁴ It is in this context that *Min Ma'alim* sees the Islamic State not as a state in the Weberian sense of the term but as a nomocracy, or rule by a set of laws or principles. In a later work, al-Turabi backs this argument with linguistic analysis of Quranic Arabic, arguing that the classical term *Sultan* should be distinguished from the contemporary usage of *Sulta* and *Sultan*, in that it implies 'an argument and an overwhelming burden of proof' rather than mere force or coercion.²⁵

Although it is true that society in the Arabian Peninsula did not possess the kind of hierarchical state structures that the Muslim

¹⁹ Al-Turabi, *Tajdid*: 16. ²⁰ Al-Turabi, *Tajdid al-Fikr*: 23; and *al-Siyasa*: 40.

²¹ Islamic society had to wait till the paper revolution of the ninth century for the most significant of the works associated with the Islamic tradition, such as the Prophet's lives, narratives of the conquests (*maghazi*), and Quranic commentaries, to be written down. The major compilations of the *hadith*, or sayings of the Prophet, were orally transmitted and produced well after the life of Muhammad, and as such their reliability is often questioned—al-Turabi himself barely used them after his earliest works. See Hawting, 'The Rise of Islam'. Silverstein, *Islamic History*: 81–87.

²² Al-Turabi et al., *Min Ma'alim*: 15. ²³ Al-Turabi et al., *Min Ma'alim*: 15.

²⁴ Al-Turabi et al., *Min Ma'alim*: 15. ²⁵ Al-Turabi, *al-Mustalahat*: 25.

community would later inherit from the Byzantine and Sassanid Empires it conquered,²⁶ this vision of harmonious anarchy inevitably overlooked both the political crises that affected the early Islamic community and the military conflicts that occurred both within the *umma* and between the *umma* and the non-Muslim inhabitants of the Arabian Peninsula. Like many Islamic reformists, al-Turabi also used this idealized community to associate with the Islamic past Enlightenment models of modern state formation that the European philosophers had claimed for themselves. In particular, he described the 622 Covenant of Medina, the document that Muhammad used to define the relationship to the *umma* of both the Muslim and non-Muslim communities within the city, as a form of social contract establishing citizenship rights in the same manner as modern constitutional governance.²⁷ He also argued that, because it had recognized the rights of the existing Jewish communities of Medina, the covenant could act as a basis for modern multi-culturalism.²⁸ The latter point is recognized by one contemporary constitutional theorist, who agrees that the Medina document inspired the multicultural *millet* system of the Ottoman Empire and the granting of political rights to Coptic Christians in Egypt.²⁹ However, al-Turabi's claim that the document signed by Muhammad represented 'a written constitution' and 'a practical expression of the requirements of religion in constitutional government' is more problematic, not least in its subsequent juxtaposition of the constitutionality of the Medina period to the monarchical tyranny of the post-Rashidi era.³⁰ It has been questioned whether the 'Constitution of Medina' can really be called a constitution at all in the modern sense, given the lack of any specific programme of governance or restrictions imposed upon the ruler of the *umma*.³¹ By treating it as the practical embodiment of Islamic constitutionality, rather than its inspiration, al-Turabi undermines his own *tajdidi* emphasis on the adaptation of Islamic political theory to the exigencies of each new age. Strindberg and Wörn have shown that for some Islamists, pursuing a

²⁶ Lapidus, *Islamic Societies*: 76.

²⁷ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: a 1984 paper entitled 'Dirasa shamila li-usul al-fikr al-Islamiyya': 170.

²⁸ Al-Turabi, 'Islam as a Pan-national Movement': 610.

²⁹ Kleidosty, *Concert of Civilizations*: 76–77.

³⁰ 1984 paper entitled, 'Dirasa shamila li-usul al-fikr al-Islamiyya', reproduced in al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 170–172.

³¹ Kleidosty, *Concert of Civilizations*: 79, 86.

Salafi ‘golden age narrative’ that evoked a purified and ahistoric Islam could serve the purpose of inspiring a Fanonesque catharsis of post-colonial tensions.³² Al-Turabi’s arguments are perhaps better understood as representing a form of postcolonial pseudo-Salafism – one that appears, like conventional Salafism, to root its ideology in the age of the pious ancestors, but which lacks its rigid scripturalism and, while appearing to root itself in the past, is more driven by the imperative to establish a culturally valid alternative to the colonial order than by Islamic jurisprudence.

Islam, Nation and State

Al-Turabi’s ideas on the relationship between Islam, nation and state have been among his least consistent, shifting with his political agenda. He began his political career as an arch-protagonist of Sudan’s October Revolution, widely celebrated as a ‘national event’. Even in recent years, Islamists have described the happenings of 1964 as the time al-Turabi first appeared as a ‘national’ (*qawmi*) hero.³³ When he entered politics as leader of the ICF in the subsequent parliamentary period, his understanding of the relationship between Islam and the contemporary nation-state adopted the position Hasan al-Banna had reached by the 1940s – that, given the popularity of nationalism, it was better to Islamize the existing nation-state than try to bypass it and establish the revived Islamic *umma* direct.³⁴ This is why al-Turabi campaigned for *national* laws and a *national* charter defined by sharia during both the 1965–1969 and 1986–1989 parliamentary eras, and during his uneasy alliance with Nimeiri in the 1970s and 1980s. As the latter’s advisor in 1984, he described the president’s Islamization measures as a ‘phase of national liberation’.³⁵ Like al-Banna and Mawdudi,³⁶ he saw the liberation of the nation in this phase as part of a gradual strategy, with the ultimate aim of securing the unification of the *umma* at some unspecified future date. His 1983 article on the ‘Islamic State’ declared that this state would ‘develop institutionalized *international* [emphasis

³² Strindberg and Wörn, *Islamism*: 53.

³³ Hasan Makki Muhammad Ahmad, Interview with *al-Sahafa*, 28 November 2004.

³⁴ Mura, ‘Genealogical inquiry’: 78–80.

³⁵ Interview with *Guardian*, 6 July 1984.

³⁶ Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*: 133.

added] links with other Muslim states and . . . work towards the eventual unity of the *ummah* and beyond'.³⁷

It was during the 1985–1989 period – when he named his party the National Islamic Front – that al-Turabi's relationship with nationalism appears to have become most explicit and most enthusiastic. Political context was central to this direct evocation of nationalism. First, al-Turabi's Islamists faced considerable opprobrium on account of their association with the Nimeiri regime, and needed to compensate for this with a new source of popular appeal. Second, with the outbreak of the Second Sudanese Civil War in 1983, the emergence of John Garang's Sudan People's Liberation Army posed an existential threat to the Islamist project, since – unlike previous southern rebel leaders – Garang was interested less in southern self-determination and more in a 'New Sudan' in which all citizens would be ruled by a single, secular, government. By tying the 'national' military campaign against the SPLA to its drive to establish sharia law, the NIF hoped to polarize the political environment and turn the tables on the political parties that had condemned the Islamists for their association with Nimeiri. The new NIF party organ, *al-Raya* ('the flag'), even resorted to classical nationalist language to denounce those who opposed the NIF version of sharia, labelling them a 'fifth column' (*tabur khamis*) for the SPLA.³⁸ Thus the increasingly binary understandings of Islam and unbelief employed by the NIF in this period were mapped onto conventional nationalist discourse to ensure mass appeal.

With the Islamist coup of 1989 and the advent of the Popular Arab and Islamic Conference in 1991, al-Turabi made a more radical break with the existing nation-state model. His advocacy of pan-Islamism dated back to the 1960s, when, like many Islamists, he had used the defeat of the Arab nationalist regimes by Israel in 1967 to demand that Islam, rather than Arab nationalism, should act as the basis for Arab unity.³⁹ Although his movement was in power by the 1990s, his official disengagement from the domestic political arena after 1989 gave him his first real chance to pursue this broader vision. In 1992, the year after the PAIC was established, he delivered a lecture entitled 'Islam as a Pan-National Movement' to the Royal Society of Arts. In this lecture, al-Turabi bluntly condemned the 'failure of the nation-state model',

³⁷ Al-Turabi, 'Islamic State': 242. ³⁸ Jadin, *Taqyim*: 309.

³⁹ *Khartoum News Service*, 17 June 1967.

arguing that it had done little to benefit Muslim society and that even after the establishment of the modern nation-state ‘the bulk of Muslims remained largely extraterritorial in their associational sympathies’.⁴⁰ He acknowledged that the nation-states of the twentieth century had not replaced a pristine and homogenous Islamic *umma* – the *umma* had been going through a process of long term segmentation and decline as a result of monarchical ambition and ethnic factionalism. However, there was enough Islamic unity remaining to make it expedient for colonial interests to introduce the nation-state model, using arbitrary borders to ‘sever and isolate local societies’ and thereby ‘facilitate safe domination over a society always inclined to rally and wage jihad’.⁴¹ It was in this context that the Sudanese government – presumably at al-Turabi’s instigation – implemented its ‘open border policy’, offering free passports to nationals from Muslim countries who wished to settle in Sudan.⁴²

Al-Turabi’s condemnation of the existing nation-states often caused embarrassment to his regime, which took a more conventional position. In 1997, following his earlier support for Saddam in the Gulf War, he outraged the Kuwaiti government by describing their country as an ‘artificial entity’, mocked them for ‘trying to make a distinction between geography and history’, and then criticized his own government’s efforts to restore diplomatic relations.⁴³ While Umar al-Bashir was busy courting Arab nationalist leaders in Egypt, Libya and elsewhere, in 1992 al-Turabi condemned ‘the emergence of two virulent nationalisms, Turkish and Arab’,⁴⁴ although it was specifically the ethnic forms of Arab nationalism that he criticized. Like other Islamists, such as Sayyid Qutb,⁴⁵ al-Turabi believed that linguistic Arabism and in particular the revival of classical Arabic was vital to the Islamic resurgence and the establishment of the Islamic State.⁴⁶ Speaking to the 1993 Popular Arab and Islamic Conference, he justified

⁴⁰ Al-Turabi, ‘Islam as a Pan-national Movement’: 613.

⁴¹ Al-Turabi, ‘Islam as a Pan-national Movement’: 612.

⁴² See, for example, Riek Machar, ‘South Sudan: A History of Political Domination – A Case for Self Determination’, *University of Pennsylvania-African Studies Center*, 19 November 1995, www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/sd_machar.html.

⁴³ Sadiq Abdul Majid *Ma Qalla wa Dall*: 264–265.

⁴⁴ Al-Turabi, ‘Islam as a Pan-national Movement’: 611.

⁴⁵ Khatab, *Power of Sovereignty*: 126–127.

⁴⁶ See al-Turabi’s arguments in his *al-Tafsir*: 27.

the choice of this name on the grounds that ‘the Arabs were ... the original model of Islamic culture’.⁴⁷ Nevertheless, in his discussion of the Horn of Africa, he was also careful to evoke the memory of Bilal, the Abyssinian ex-slave who acted as the first Muezzin of the early Islamic community.⁴⁸ It was perhaps the more narrow-minded ethnic Arabism of some of his civilian and military allies that would lead to the split of 1999, following which the majority of ‘non-Arab’ Islamists sided with al-Turabi.⁴⁹

In the world of practical politics, al-Turabi’s dreams of a pan-Islamic organization that would sweep aside the existing nation-states were always quixotic. When pressed as to whether he really believed he could re-establish a unified Islamic *umma*, he conceded that although this was his long term goal, ‘we will start with an Islamic Republic being established in each nation’.⁵⁰ He thus retreated towards al-Banna’s strategy of Islamizing the existing nation-state as part of a ‘stepping stone’ strategy with the recreation of the *umma* as its eventual aim.⁵¹ His pan-Islamic dreams effectively ended with the final session of the PAIC in 1995, after which he re-focused his energies on domestic politics. The constitution which al-Turabi was involved in establishing in 1998 declared that ‘every person born to a Sudanese mother or father shall have a non-alienable right to enjoy the country’s nationality’, and returned to the more conventional position that otherwise Sudanese nationality could only be acquired as a result of ‘several years’ of residence.⁵²

In spite of the failure of al-Turabi’s pan-Islamic dreams, his ideological break with conventional nationalism may have had important consequences for the political debate surrounding Sudanese unity. This is because by blaming colonial boundary-making for dividing the Muslim community, he was making an implicit concession to the arguments of Southern Sudanese secessionists, who contended that their territory – never historically regarded as a domain of the *umma* – had been incorporated into the Sudanese state only as a result

⁴⁷ *Sudanow*, January 1994. ⁴⁸ *Sudanow*, January 1994.

⁴⁹ See Chapters 9 and 10.

⁵⁰ Al-Turabi, Interview with *al-Nabar*, reproduced in *al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 14 December 1995.

⁵¹ Mura, ‘Genealogical inquiry’: 77.

⁵² The Constitution of the Republic of Sudan (1998), www.unodc.org/tldb/pdf/Sudan_const_1998.pdf

of nineteenth-century colonial campaigning. Al-Turabi acknowledged this point on a visit to Qatar in 1999, admitting that the south was merely a 'regional extension' to Sudan incorporated by the conquests of Muhammad Ali in the 1830s.⁵³ It was perhaps for this reason that his close confidante, Ali al-Haj, was willing to concede the principle of self-determination to Riek Machar's SPLM/A-Nasir faction at the Frankfurt negotiations of 1992,⁵⁴ in spite of the fact that this faction openly campaigned for independence.⁵⁵

It was significant that the Frankfurt negotiations occurred at the height of al-Turabi's pan-Islamist hubris. While the southern conflict offered him a convenient excuse to rally the population of northern Sudan to the Islamist cause in the late 1980s, by the early 1990s his ambitions were more global. Herman Cohen, the American diplomat who attempted to mediate between the government and the SPLA in the early 1990s, maintains that he had credible information that 'some leading northern Islamists favoured allowing the south to secede'.⁵⁶ The Frankfurt agreement itself stated that 'the people of the South shall exercise their right to freely choose the political and constitutional status that accords with their national aspirations without ruling out any option'.⁵⁷ Many have questioned whether Frankfurt represented a genuine concession of self-determination, claiming that the wording was ambiguous and expressing scepticism over the commitment of the negotiators to the principle.⁵⁸ Nevertheless, the senior Islamist, Ahmad Abd al-Rahman, argued in the early 2000s that the concessions of Frankfurt established the principle of self-determination agreed at Machakos ten years later. He blamed al-Turabi personally for this, arguing that he had by-passed the Islamic Movement and given al-Haj direct orders to deal with the rebel leaders at Frankfurt.⁵⁹ Since these remarks were delivered in an Arabic language interview with a

⁵³ Muhammad al-Hasan Ahmad, 'al-Janub Mujarrad imtidad jigraffi fi fikr al-Turabi', *al-Khartoum*, 24 January 1999.

⁵⁴ Muhammad al-Hasan Ahmad, 'al-Janub Mujarrad imtidad jigraffi fi fikr al-Turabi', *al-Khartoum*, 24 January 1999.

⁵⁵ Johnson, *Root Causes*: 97. ⁵⁶ Cohen, *Intervening in Africa*: 70.

⁵⁷ Lesch, *Sudan*: 159.

⁵⁸ Lesch, *Sudan*: 159. Johnson, *Root Causes*: 112, 174. Lesch also observes (184) that al-Turabi personally intervened to reject the notion of self-determination during the IGAD talks of 1994, but does not provide a reference for this statement.

⁵⁹ Interview with Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 546.

northern Islamist journalist, Abd al-Rahim Muhieddin, they represented not so much an effort to defend the Islamist regime against charges of insincerity at Frankfurt, as a contribution to a post-1999 'blame game' by an Islamist who perceived al-Turabi and his faction to have made too many concessions.

It was the Frankfurt agreement that Muhammad al-Amin Khalifa and Ali al-Haj – both close affiliates of al-Turabi before and after 1999 – used as a basis for the 1997 Khartoum Peace Agreement with Riek Machar. Meanwhile, al-Turabi grew politically close to Riek and continued publicly to support the principle of southern self-determination, while expressing his confidence that southerners would vote for unity by emphasizing the eagerness with which they were converting to Islam,⁶⁰ noting that one of the southern leaders killed alongside the vice-president in a 1998 plane crash had converted to Islam before his death.⁶¹ It was through such optimistic declarations of imminent Islamization that al-Turabi hoped to resolve the contradiction caused by his own tendency to jump between nationalist and pan-Islamist strategies. Nevertheless, his inability to reconcile his nationalism with his pan-Islamism would have important consequences for Sudanese politics, since it was hard to equate the Sudanese nation with the Islamic State when a significant region within it was largely non-Muslim. It was partly in the effort to overcome this dilemma that al-Turabi advocated a strategy of decentralization that would emphasize the autonomous character of each region in the Islamic State (see Chapter 9).

Sharia and Sovereignty

In one of his earliest works, *al-Iman*, al-Turabi explains the necessity of sharia governance by offering it as a solution to the problem raised by Aristotle concerning the inevitability of true democracy leading to rule by a self-interested majority.⁶² 'When society is established on the principles of religious faith', he informs us, 'the worshippers, [both] the governors and the masses, obey the rules established by God not those established by one social class oppressing another and not by a majority

⁶⁰ *Al-Khartoum*, 21 September 1998. ⁶¹ *Al-Khartoum*, 15 February 1998.

⁶² Harrison, *Democracy*: 33.

oppressing a minority'.⁶³ To explain the function that sharia serves, al-Turabi resorts to Rousseau's notion of the 'general will' (*al-irada al-aama*), which appears in a number of his writings.⁶⁴ He explains that 'sharia, with its teachings and with its rules, represents the regime [*al-hukm*] which all the people trust in, and which there is consensus [*ijma*] around, and therefore reflects the general will of the community [*al-umma*]'.⁶⁵ Rousseau's concept helps al-Turabi address the apparently non-democratic nature of sharia governance – the 'general will', according to the Swiss philosopher, was not the sum of the particular wills of individual members of the populace, but was rather a 'common interest' that served society as a whole. This was why the people could be forced to accept the 'general will'.⁶⁶ It is true that al-Turabi has written that the 'general will' can be derived from the 'consensus' of the 'great majority of the people',⁶⁷ but his consistent qualification of this principle and his government's advocacy of the principle of 'silent consensus' in the 1990s (see next chapter) often brought him back to a more abstract understanding of the relationship between 'sharia' and the 'general will'.

Just as Rousseau's writings fail to make clear the ultimate source of the 'general will', al-Turabi is ambiguous as to who should define sharia and whether it genuinely produces a form of popular sovereignty. His proposals for an Islamic Constitution in 1968, which were ultimately rejected by the Constitutional Committee of the second parliamentary regime, appeared to conflate nomocracy with democracy. His first point observed that 'the constitution should represent the will of the people, and since the majority of the people are Muslims their will should prevail'. He later added to this by saying that 'an Islamic constitution would be a rule of sacred law and not a rule of men'.⁶⁸ In other words, popular sovereignty and the sovereignty of sharia were one and the same because Muslims who exercised their popular will would surrender their own sovereignty to sharia simply by virtue of being Muslims. Speaking to the Royal Society of Arts in 1992,

⁶³ Al-Turabi, *al-Iman*: 219. Although *al-irada al-aama* could be translated as 'general will' or 'public will', it is worth noting that al-Turabi uses the term 'general will' in his English language papers, evoking Rousseau's concept directly. See, for example, Al-Turabi, 'Islam as a Pan-national Movement'.

⁶⁴ See, for example, Al-Turabi, *Tajdid Usul*: 10. ⁶⁵ Al-Turabi, *al-Iman*: 219.

⁶⁶ Harrison, *Democracy*: 55. ⁶⁷ Al-Turabi, *Tajdid Usul*: 10.

⁶⁸ Cited in Warburg, *Islam, Sectarianism*: 147.

he produced the following brazenly contradictory statement: 'Ultimate authority, subject to divine authority, belongs to the people'.⁶⁹ Or, as he wrote in his *al-Shura wa'l-Dimuqratiyya*, democracy cannot exist in a purely political sense outside a religious framework since this would constitute 'apostasy and a form of *ishrak* (polytheism), because the will of the people is made an associate with their creator'.⁷⁰ In short, popular sovereignty is only valid in so far as it does not diverge from divine sovereignty.

In the same 1992 paper, al-Turabi produces another remarkable contradiction, declaring that both rulers and laws derive their authority from the consensus of society, and that 'Consensus is the fundamental source of authority in Islam, subject to the sharia'.⁷¹ It appears, therefore, in spite of his democratization of the classic concept of *ijma*, that sharia itself is something more than the consensus of the people. In *al-Iman*, he declares that sharia

in all the various branches of its rulings represents a constitution which establishes the principles of political life and draws up the boundaries of public authority, and what the people decree via consensus guided by the fundamentals of sharia is added to it ... it is sharia with its firmly established articles [*nusus*] and principles, and through its judgements [*ahkam*] which are renewed through *ijtihad* that binds rulers in practice more than they are bound by constitutions.⁷²

This leaves further questions to be answered – if popular consensus can only add to sharia, what is the source of sharia itself? This can hardly be found in the existing scholarly elite, since al-Turabi is so critical of it. Presumably, this is instead where the independent *mujtahid*, responsible for the renewal to which he refers, comes in.

Elsewhere, al-Turabi had placed a considerable emphasis on the necessity for *ijtihad* to make Islamic law relevant to the challenges of the modern world. Yet even during the grand Islamist project of the 1990s, this complex and demanding jurisprudential revolution was still in its infancy. The sharia al-Turabi conceived of was, therefore, an idealized sharia existing only in a visionary future rather than an

⁶⁹ Al-Turabi, 'Islam as a Pan-national Movement': 618.

⁷⁰ Al-Turabi, *al-Shura*: 18.

⁷¹ Al-Turabi, 'Islam as a Pan-national Movement': 618.

⁷² Al-Turabi, *al-Iman*: 218. *Al-Irada al-Aama* could also be translated as 'public will', but the relevance of his concept is nevertheless evident.

historic or present sharia.⁷³ As such, current sharia did not possess firmly established articles and principles – indeed, since al-Turabi invoked the jurisprudence of necessity (*fiqh al-darura*) to achieve this idealized sharia, his *ijtihad* reordered sharia ‘without any institutional regulative principle’.⁷⁴ This makes those who practise *ijtihad* the supreme source of sovereignty, akin to Plato’s philosopher kings – yet as we have seen, al-Turabi never defined their political status either in his writings or his worldly politics. He never created any institution akin to Iran’s Council of Guardians.

Al-Turabi frequently declared that religion should be built on ‘voluntariness and free conscience’.⁷⁵ However, a paper he delivered in 1987 revealed further ambiguity as to whether the Islamic State should be conceived as a direct expression of the popular will.⁷⁶ Initially, he represents it as a voluntarist project, stating that it ‘did not decline and fall except through the decline of the pillars of faith in the mind, and will not be established again except through the uprightness (*istiqama*) of minds and their repentance (*tawba*) to Allah’.⁷⁷ Importantly, he goes on to claim that human consciences ‘will not repent through coercion’. The only answer is *da’wa*, or calling the individual to God, and specifically to his innate character (*fitra*), which will enable him to realize his capacity for *al-Iman*, upon which the Islamic State is built.⁷⁸ However, he goes on to criticize existing *da’wa* groups, arguing that they are too concerned with reforming specific individuals in a private context, and fail to make these individuals ‘a tool of social change through which all people will be reformed’.⁷⁹ This understanding of *da’wa* brings al-Turabi close to a vanguardist strategy once more – part of the purpose of his *da’wa* is to form a ‘cell’ (*khilya*) with the capacity to establish ‘all the features of a complete society’.⁸⁰ Yet al-Turabi continues to argue that the purpose of the Islamic Movement’s *da’wa* is to work through education, popular mobilization and force of example.⁸¹ He comes close to a Qutbist logic when he argues that the ‘movement of change’ may wage *jihad* against ‘the corrupt and materialistic social reality’ which prevents the pious group ‘from freely

⁷³ Moussalli, ‘Hasan al-Turabi’s Islamist Discourse’: 54.

⁷⁴ Moussalli, ‘Hasan al-Turabi’s Islamist Discourse’: 54.

⁷⁵ Press conference by al-Turabi, *al-Raya*, 1 May 1986.

⁷⁶ Reproduced in *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 230. ⁷⁷ *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 230.

⁷⁸ *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 232. ⁷⁹ *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 231.

⁸⁰ *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 231–235. ⁸¹ *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 231–234.

expressing its views [*tawajjuh*].⁸² However, al-Turabi never speaks of a military coup, and limits the role of his vanguard to forcibly removing the obstacles that lie in the path of a spontaneous popular resurgence and providing the public with the necessary inspiration through education and force of example.

His actual approach in the 1990s rested neither on the proposition that ‘the Islamic society creates the Islamic State’, nor that ‘the Islamic State creates the Islamic society’. It reflected instead the idea that ‘the transitional state facilitates the Islamic society, which creates the Islamic State’. He rarely referred to al-Bashir’s ‘Salvation Regime’ as an Islamic State – more often he would refer to an Islamic State being built, or a revolution in process. In *Min Ma’alim al-Nizam al-Islami*, he repeated the claim advanced in his 1987 paper that the Islamic State is not a ‘place with a border which one announces arrival at on the same day’ – in terms of the ‘political regime’, it was better to speak of a process of ‘continuous liberation’ (*tabharur mustamirr*).⁸³ Thus the worldly state of Umar al-Bashir established the Ministry of Social Planning to support the Islamists’ ‘comprehensive call’ or *al-da’wa al-shamila*, intended to awaken the Sudanese population’s inner capacity for faith as outlined above. In practice, the ‘comprehensive call’ was combined with mobilization for the Popular Defence Force militias, and the proselytization in military camps often showed scant respect for the beliefs and practices of the local communities in regions such as Blue Nile and South Kordofan, which were targeted by the Islamists’ Civilizational Project.⁸⁴

The state itself was probably never intended to be the principal agent of change; it has been argued that the purpose of capturing the old ‘gatekeeper’ state was in fact to dismantle it and prevent it being used against the Islamic Movement.⁸⁵ Indeed, given its policy of extreme austerity, which led to taxation revenue dropping to 8 per cent of GDP, the Salvation government was limiting its own capacity to act as an agent of social change – instead, Salafi and Islamist NGOs bankrolled and supported agencies such as the Comprehensive Call and Popular Defence Forces.⁸⁶ In 1991, the government established a ‘Sharia Support Fund’ to help with ‘deepening Islamic faith and practices’ as

⁸² Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 231–235.

⁸³ Al-Turabi, *Min Ma’alim*: 28; and Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 229.

⁸⁴ De Waal and Abdel Salam, ‘Islamism’: 89–100.

⁸⁵ Mann, *Retreat of the State and the Market*: 73, 88.

⁸⁶ De Waal, *Real Politics*: 78–79.

well as recruiting and training the PDF. The government's own contribution to this fund was a nominal one: most of the capital was provided by Islamic Banks such as Faisal and Tadamon. Thus at least in the economic sense, the new order was neither driven by the Sudanese state (either in its covert or public manifestations) nor by Sudanese society – it was funded by banks established with capital from the Gulf, and charities with links to transnational Salafi institutions such as the Saudi-based Muslim World League.⁸⁷ This was, as we have seen, why al-Turabi sought to make so many compromises between his ideology and that of the Salafis. This said, by ring-fencing the defence budget⁸⁸ and appointing senior soldiers to oversee the key institutions of the new system, the government preserved an element of state coercion in the implementation of its new social order.

In spite of having insisted that sharia was superior to a written constitution, in 1998 al-Turabi was willing to assist the Salvation Regime in drawing up a constitution that would embody it. However, the subject of sharia did not even appear until Part IV, which concerned legislation. Article 1 of Part 1, concerning the nature of the state, described Islam not as the religion of state but the religion of 'the majority of the population'.⁸⁹ Nevertheless, Article 4 established the principle of *hakimiyya*, declaring that 'Supremacy in the State is to God the creator of human beings, and sovereignty is to the vice-regent people of Sudan who practise it as worship of God'.⁹⁰ Presumably, al-Turabi had been keen to insert this article, since he objected to its replacement by a reference to 'popular sovereignty' in the 2005 Constitution!⁹¹ Meanwhile, the elected president was to take an oath swearing that he would 'assume the Presidency of the Republic' in the 'worship and obedience of God'. Although these articles evoked classic Islamist language, they could also be seen as references to the God worshipped by the Christian population of the country. However, Part IV Article 1 emphasizes the role of sharia, stating that 'Islamic law and the consensus [*ijma*] of the nation, by referendum, constitution and custom shall be the sources of legislation'. The constitution here moves away from al-Turabi's earlier positions, putting *ijma* on a par with sharia as one of the 'fundamentals' (*usul*) of legislation. Article 1 goes on to state that 'however, the legislation shall be guided by the nation's public opinion, the

⁸⁷ Burr and Collins, *Alms for Jihad*: 108–109. ⁸⁸ De Waal, *Real Politics*: 78.

⁸⁹ The Constitution of the Republic of Sudan (1998), www.unodc.org/tldb/pdf/Sudan_const_1998.pdf

⁹⁰ The Arabic version uses the term *hakimiyya*. ⁹¹ *Al-Sahafa*, 2 July 2005.

learned opinion of scholars and thinkers, and then by the decision of those in charge of public affairs'. This promised a more democratic form of constitution, one that prioritizes *ijma* over the *ijtihad*, or 'learned opinion', of scholars like al-Turabi. Nevertheless, since referendums are a crude and infrequent tool for garnering public opinion, one can imagine that the 'guidance' of public opinion by scholars and 'those in charge of public affairs' would remain significant. In any event, it is not clear what precedence should be given to each of these three categories.

The location of sovereignty in the 1998 Constitution, therefore, was just as ambiguous as in al-Turabi's other writings. As Devji remarks, in refusing to 'recognise or institutionalise sovereignty', Islamists 'tended to manifest it in disavowed, and therefore opportunistic forms of violence'.⁹² While al-Turabi may have given more explicit credence to the principle of human authority than other Islamists, his woolly efforts to locate it and to compromise with the principle of *hakimiyya* led to the same problem of weak institutionalization and ultimately power falling back into the hands of his military and securocrat allies in the name of a sharia-based sovereignty that seemed impossible to define.

Sharia and the Criminal Codes

Islamists who argue that it is the Islamic State that must produce virtuous, believing Muslims, rather than vice versa, tend to lay particular emphasis on the penal aspects of sharia. In particular, they campaign for the return of the *hudud* penalties advocated by the Quran for offenses deemed 'sins against God'. These sins include apostasy and specific types of theft, as well as various forms of *zina* (illicit sexual intercourse), including adultery, fornication and homosexuality.⁹³ In reality, the application of these penalties in post-Rashidi Islamic societies has only been occasional, since the strict evidential requirements established in Mecca and Medina proved difficult to obtain in larger and more complex societies.⁹⁴ 'Discretionary' (*ta'azir*) penalties enacted by temporal rulers tended to take their place.⁹⁵

It is easy to identify particular shifts in al-Turabi's thinking on Islamic criminal penalties, most of which can be traced to the

⁹² Devji, 'ISIS'. ⁹³ Peters, *Crime and Punishment*: 51–52.

⁹⁴ Peters, *Crime and Punishment*: 54.

⁹⁵ Peters, *Crime and Punishment*: 55–56.

circumstances in which Nimeiri re-instated them under the ‘September Laws’ of 1983. Prior to this, al-Turabi, in line with his expressed opinion that the Islamic State could not be built upon coercion, was keen to downplay the significance of these penalties. In a lecture at the University of Khartoum Philosophical Society in 1967, he criticized Western commentators on sharia for focusing exclusively on the *hadd* penalty that prescribed amputation of the hand for particular types of theft, pointing out that most cases of theft were dealt with by other (discretionary) legislation and that in the age of the Prophet only three such penalties were applied, and then only one more in the next 100 years.⁹⁶ He added that such penalties should only be applied in a ‘peaceful Islamic society’, in which the individual would have no need to steal because the state would provide him with all of his wants in terms of shelter, clothing and education.⁹⁷

Following his reconciliation with Nimeiri in 1977, after which the president appointed him head of a committee tasked with seeing that Sudan’s laws conformed with sharia, al-Turabi continued to display a moderate outlook. He reiterated the view that the *hudud* penalties would only be applied in the ‘ideal Islamic society’ brought about by social reform,⁹⁸ and promised in a debate organized by Omdurman Islamic University in 1978 that the application of sharia would be gradual.⁹⁹ When Nimeiri brought the ‘September Laws’ into force in 1983, this moderation was abandoned both by the regime and its Islamist supporters. Rather than take into account the significant burden of proof required, the new Penal and Criminal Codes effectively grafted historic Islamic *hadd* punishments onto a legal system still based on English laws of evidence.¹⁰⁰ This, combined with Nimeiri’s 1984 emergency laws sanctioning ‘Instantaneous Justice Courts’ that short-circuited the regular trial process, ensured that around 100 individuals convicted of theft had their hands amputated by the state.¹⁰¹

It is well established that al-Turabi did not contribute to the final version of the September Laws – Nimeiri had replaced him as

⁹⁶ *Al-Mithaq*, 24 August 1967. ⁹⁷ *Al-Mithaq*, 24 August 1967.

⁹⁸ Esposito and Voll, *Makers*: 132. See also comments at an academic debate on ‘Islam in Sudan’ in November 1982 in Khartoum in Layish and Warburg, *Reinstatement*: 45.

⁹⁹ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 45, fn 19

¹⁰⁰ Peters, *Crime and Punishment*: 166.

¹⁰¹ Peters, *Crime and Punishment*: 167.

attorney-general with two relatively obscure lawyers, and it is they who were responsible for a number of the irregularities in the new legislation.¹⁰² What is remarkable is that even though Nimeiri deliberately kept al-Turabi sidelined while the laws were being finalized, and their provisions were in many regards quite distinct from those proposed by al-Turabi before 1983, he gave them his full backing; he even continued to support them, albeit somewhat more cautiously, after Nimeiri's own removal in April 1985. He told *al-Ayyam* in January 1984 that the Instantaneous Justice Courts were 'the closest thing to Islamic Justice', and argued that 'it is true that we were uncomfortable about the application of *hudud* and particularly the cutting of the hands of thieves, but after we had completed our psychological and cultural independence we overcame this problem completely'.¹⁰³ Al-Turabi invoked the classical juristic principles of deterrence and public interest (*maslaha*), remarking that 'a few hands being cut each year would be a deterrent against any aggression against property or person since it is not possible to guarantee human civilization if these sacred things are not guaranteed'.¹⁰⁴ Admittedly, these statements came before the real excesses of the Instantaneous Justice Courts in the middle of 1984. He observed more cautiously at the end of September 1984 that the time had not yet come to assess sharia because 'the phase of transition in all great civilizational transformations' might be accompanied by 'a great deal of disturbance'. But he insisted that the return of sharia had still brought 'great reassurance to the general public'.¹⁰⁵ Thus sharia was instrumentalized as part of the discourse of 'moral panic' pursued by Nimeiri's regime.¹⁰⁶ What is interesting here is that al-Turabi, like al-Banna before him,¹⁰⁷ was reframing the classic principle of *maslaha* in a manner that implicitly recognized the principle of popular sovereignty. Sharia was not an end in itself as the ultimate expression of divine sovereignty, but had to be justified on the grounds that it preserved 'human civilization', reassured the 'general public' and accompanied 'psychological and cultural independence'.¹⁰⁸ Again, al-Turabi was adapting to the nationalist and postcolonial discourses of the day.

¹⁰² Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 46. ¹⁰³ *Al-Ayyam*, 9 January 1984.

¹⁰⁴ *Al-Ayyam*, 9 January 1984. ¹⁰⁵ *Al-Ayyam*, 30 September 1984.

¹⁰⁶ For Nimeiri's use of a language of 'Moral Panic', see Ibrahim, *Manichaean Delirium*, 222.

¹⁰⁷ Mura, 'Genealogical Inquiry': 78. ¹⁰⁸ *Al-Ayyam*, 9 January 1984.

Following Nimeiri's removal, al-Turabi and his newly founded NIF were quick to emphasize the coercion involved in their marriage to the former dictator and his party; but such was the extent of his commitment to the September Laws that they could only backtrack so far. After Nimeiri's arbitrary laws had forced him to decide whether any form of sharia was better than none at all, al-Turabi persisted with the same zero-sum logic against the parliamentarians who advocated their cancellation. In interviews, he acknowledged that there were a number of flaws in the September Laws, but argued that the most significant problem was with the manner of their implementation by Nimeiri. Before focusing on technical jurisprudential details, al-Turabi contended, Sudan's legislators needed to give priority to moving the law in a direction which 'cancels colonial culture and moves towards Islamic culture'. He argued that critics of the technical failings of the laws 'do not believe in Islam', and that as a result there was no point in debating with them.¹⁰⁹ What is interesting here is that this castigation of his opponents was not rooted in a classic *takfiri* discourse, but in a belief in a Manichaeic divide between a colonial and a postcolonial Islamic world.

Meanwhile, al-Turabi continued to support the flogging and amputation penalties, telling one Western journalist that '... you find these things shocking because you have lost your religion. But corporal punishment is not shocking to Africans'.¹¹⁰ He justified his shift from his previous position that *hudud* penalties should only be applied in an ideal Islamic society by declaring that the Islamists had still been in an era of 'apologetics and defensiveness', and that sharia – by the very fact of its being established – would produce the ideal society.¹¹¹ Here al-Turabi implicitly admitted the acceptability of dissimulation before achieving political power.

When al-Turabi became attorney-general in the NIF-Umma regime of 1988–1989, the draft Penal Code he produced was remarkably similar to the September Laws. This particular draft was rejected by the Constitutional Assembly of the parliamentary regime and thus never became law. But it deserves scrutiny because he was far more directly and publicly involved in producing it than the 1983 and 1991 codes. Many argued that the new laws were worse than the September

¹⁰⁹ Al-Turabi, Interview with *al-Tadamon*, reproduced in *al-Raya*, 17 April 1986.

¹¹⁰ *The Times*, 16 April 1985. ¹¹¹ Esposito and Voll, *Makers*: 132.

Laws due to the addition of provisions dealing with apostasy from Islam. Nevertheless, like the September Laws, his draft seemed to represent something of a short-cut to sharia – the symbolic *hudud* penalties were superimposed upon a code still largely based on colonial legislation.¹¹² In spite of his constant refrain on the need to ‘cancel colonial culture’, this was a further instance of al-Turabi’s tendency to adapt Islamism and sharia itself to the framework of the existing postcolonial nation-state.

The criminal codes of 1983, 1988 and 1991, particularly their various provisions regarding personal conduct and apostasy from Islam, are often cited as evidence of the totalitarian character of al-Turabi’s project; that is to say, its desire to govern every aspect of individuals’ private lives. An early example of the totalitarian potential of his interpretation of *tawhid* can be seen in his statement in 1965 that Muslims should unite ‘even in the manner of private behaviour and in outlooks [*ittijabat*] and emotions [*amzija*] and feelings [*abasis*]’.¹¹³ As we have seen, al-Turabi tended to maintain that such forms of unity should be built on faith, but his emphasis on personal morality was also tied to discourses concerning *tathir*, or the cleansing of society, inspired both by the belief that the colonization of the Muslim consciousness under colonialism had warped individual morality, and the specific individual demands for ‘cleansing’ of corrupt officials that followed the October Revolution. Discussing government corruption in 1967, al-Turabi not only recommended public supervision of the judiciary and administration but also advanced the broader suggestion that it was necessary to ‘cleansing the people of the moral weakness which enables corruption’.¹¹⁴ After the 1983 September Laws and the 1984 Emergency Legislation was passed, his writing began to emphasize that coercion could be involved in encouraging moral behaviour. Critics cited the passages in his *Manhajyyat al-Tashri’i al-Islamiyya* in which he declared that Islamic rulings should govern the whole life of every individual, and that coercion could be justified in ensuring that it did.¹¹⁵ Throughout the 1990s, the Public Order Laws and Public Order Courts attempted to regulate individual behaviour.¹¹⁶

¹¹² One critic reported that only 30 of its articles differed in any way from the British laws, *Al-Midan*, 25 September 1988.

¹¹³ *Al-Mithaq*, 3 December 1965. ¹¹⁴ *Al-Mithaq*, 27 May 1967.

¹¹⁵ Al-Haj Warraq, ‘Dawla Ihata bi’l-Muwatinun’, *al-Midan*, 9 December 1988.

¹¹⁶ Berridge, ‘Ambiguous Role’: 537.

The 1998 Constitution al-Turabi partially authored returned to the subject of public morals, observing that the state ‘shall endeavour by law and directive policies to purge (*tathir*) society from corruption, crime, delinquency, liquor among Muslims and to promote the society as a whole towards good norms, noble customs and virtuous morals’. Although al-Turabi later distanced himself from the regime’s Public Order programme,¹¹⁷ by promoting sharia through a Manichean language of postcolonial moral and psychological purgation he had certainly facilitated its emergence.

Rights and Freedoms in the Islamic State

With his emphasis on achieving the ‘unity’ (*tawhid*) of individuals’ personal behaviour, establishing a notion of individual rights within the Islamic State was certainly a challenge for al-Turabi. In both his English and Arabic language statements, he leaves no doubt that he considers the Western definition of rights to be far too permissive. In an Arabic language paper delivered at an NIF conference in 1987, he declared that ‘there is no good in any right [*haqq*] that calls man towards freedom if he perceives it simply as a permission [*ibaha*] according to which he can do what he wants or leave what he wants’.¹¹⁸ The greatest problem with the term ‘human rights’, he explained, was that it had ‘no religious origin’.¹¹⁹ Outlining his concept of individual freedom to the Royal Society of Arts in 1992, he attempted to strike a balance between individualism and ‘responsibility to God’. However, he warned that the wrong form of individualism led to ‘selfishness and non-conformism’, which he described as ‘not only antithetical to the social nature of man, but also to all religion that teaches one origin and one destiny for man and preaches one God, one way of life, and one community for all believers’.¹²⁰ When asked at the University of Pennsylvania his view on the differences between the Muslim and Western notions of human rights, he responded with unabashed homophobia, asking rhetorically:

¹¹⁷ See Chapter 10.

¹¹⁸ Al-Mujtama al-Islami wa aba’adhu al-siyasi’, 1987 conference in Khartoum, reproduced in *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 220.

¹¹⁹ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 220.

¹²⁰ Al-Turabi, ‘Islam as a Pan-national Movement’.

‘Human rights, to enjoy sex with the same sex, or with the other? Yes, there are differences’.¹²¹

Al-Turabi conceived of an Islamic form of freedom derived from Abduh’s notion of *tawhid*; namely, freedom from submission to all non-divine beings.¹²² This freedom, in Moussalli’s words, constitutes ‘total human submission to *tawhid*’.¹²³ However, for al-Turabi this submission is emancipatory: it requires ‘a self-liberation of man from any worldly authority in order to serve God exclusively’;¹²⁴ he tries to emphasize that there will be a voluntary element to this. While al-Turabi found it easy to criticize Western LGBT rights against the background of widespread refusal to recognize these rights in the African and Middle Eastern regions, he was more careful regarding religious freedoms. In discussing freedom of religion in his *al-Iman*, he observes that ‘the meaning of faith (*Iman*) demands that the individual should have freedom of conscience to choose his religion in life as he wishes and as his social belongings determine, moreover religion is built upon a collection of individual choices’.¹²⁵ Furthermore, his position on apostasy was at least ostensibly more liberal than that of other Islamist thinkers. For example, he said that the Ayatollah Khomeini had been wrong to declare the British Indian author, Salman Rushdie, an apostate.¹²⁶ He told Hamdi in 1994 that the *hadith* from which a number of scholars develop their position on apostasy had often been misinterpreted, arguing that it did not represent a blanket injunction to kill all those who left the Islamic faith, but only those who had joined enemy forces at a time of war.¹²⁷

Al-Turabi’s apparently liberal position on apostasy is cited by his Salafi critics as one of the many reasons they consider him an apostate himself.¹²⁸ However, his attitude needs to be considered in the context of NIF views on sharia and the southern conflict in the 1980s, and the loose interpretation both al-Turabi and his lieutenants have applied to the notion of siding with the enemy. One revealing case is provided by Nimeiri’s execution of al-Turabi’s nemesis, Mahmud Muhammad

¹²¹ Hasan al-Turabi, Interview with University of Pennsylvania African Studies Centre, accessed on www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/horn_sdn.html (accessed on 9 July 2015)

¹²² See Abduh, *Theology of Unity*.

¹²³ Moussalli, ‘Hasan al-Turabi’s Islamist Discourse’: 55.

¹²⁴ Al-Turabi, ‘Islamic State’: 247. ¹²⁵ Al-Turabi, *al-Iman*: 221.

¹²⁶ Ibrahim, ‘Theology of Modernity’: 216. ¹²⁷ Hamdi, *Makings*: 88.

¹²⁸ See Chapter 5.

Taha, following a show trial in January 1985 in which he refused to 'recant' his beliefs. As it happens, the September Laws of 1983, which Taha had denounced, did not provide any legislation covering apostasy although it seems that the judgement against him invoked an article in the 1983 Judgements (Basic Rules) Act decreeing that 'Islamic law' could have been applied where no other legal provisions were applicable.¹²⁹ Although he has frequently been accused of responsibility for Taha's death, al-Turabi had no involvement in his trial. In the context of the divisive conflicts over sharia that followed Nimeiri's ouster, he did not go so far as to declare Taha's execution legitimate, but declared in 1988 that he was guilty of apostasy: 'I do not feel any regret over the killing of Mahmud', he said.¹³⁰ He had earlier told an Egyptian newspaper that Taha was 'an apostate, and became a bastion [*qa'ida*] for the West' by attempting to deprive the Muslims of the principle of *jihad*.¹³¹ Here al-Turabi seems to be stretching his definition of harmful and punishable apostasy to include not just those who fight for the enemy, but also those who provide them with moral support. In this context, it is instructive that al-Turabi's party newspaper, *al-Raya*, frequently described critics of NIF-sponsored sharia as a 'fifth column' for the SPLA.¹³²

Although the 1983 criminal and penal codes via which Taha was tried contained no formal provisions regarding apostasy, al-Turabi went on to introduce a section covering this offence in the draft penal code he submitted to parliament in 1988. Here, apostasy was described not as an individual act of conversion from Islam to another faith, but 'propagandizing for departure from the community of Islam' (*al-tarwiji li-khuruuj 'an millat al-Islam*).¹³³ Hence, his definition of punishable apostates went beyond those who simply fight against the Muslim community in battle; it also included those who use words against it. It is worth considering this definition in the context of his earlier statements concerning the debate over the September Laws: 'turning away from sharia leads to apostasy', and those who criticized the September Laws did not believe in Islam in the first place. Critics of the draft code raised concerns that, were it to be implemented, an NIF-led government would use the articles on apostasy to execute anyone who opposed their own interpretation of sharia.¹³⁴

¹²⁹ Peters, *Crime and Punishment*: 165. ¹³⁰ *Al-Watan*, 30 April 1988.

¹³¹ Ulaysh, *Awlad al-Turabi*: 205. ¹³² *Al-Midan*, 26 May 1989.

¹³³ *Al-Midan*, 20 September 1988. ¹³⁴ *Al-Midan*, 20 September 1988.

Verhoeven suggests that al-Turabi ‘personally vetted’ the 1991 Criminal Code,¹³⁵ and certainly the wording of the article concerning apostasy was very similar to that found in his original draft: ‘Shall be deemed to commit the offense of apostasy every Muslim who propagates for the renunciation of the creed of Islam or publicly declares his renouncement thereof by an express statement or conclusive act’.¹³⁶ When the UN Special Rapporteur on Human Rights, Gaspar Biro, asked for clarification of the circumstances in which this crime would occur, the government’s response followed al-Turabi’s logic of understanding apostasy not as changing religion per se but in fighting the Muslim community in doing so. Again, the latter notion was loosely defined. Biro was told:

The punishment is inflicted in cases in which the apostasy is a cause of harm to the society, while in those cases in which an individual simply changes his religion the punishment is not to be applied. But it must be remembered that upthreating [sic] apostasy is an exceptional case, and the common thing is that apostasy is accompanied by some harmful actions against the society or state.¹³⁷

Non-Muslim Rights in the Islamic State

While al-Turabi’s *tawhidi* model emphasized the conformity of Muslims in the Islamic community, he professed his willingness to treat Sudan’s non-Muslims differently. This population represented the majority in the southern region of Sudan, most of whom adhered either to historic African religions or forms of Christianity brought by Western missionaries since the nineteenth century. There were also pockets of non-Muslims with similar religious identifications in regions bordering the south, such as the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile Province; a considerable number of economic migrants and refugees from the same regions in the major towns of the north, particularly Khartoum; and a small minority of historic adherents to the Coptic Christian faith in the riverain areas of the north. In 1967, al-Turabi promised that all of these groups would have their rights upheld under the Islamic Constitution for which he was campaigning. They would have considerable freedoms, he told the University of Khartoum

¹³⁵ Verhoeven, *Water*: 111. ¹³⁶ Report of the Special Rapporteur: 23.

¹³⁷ Report of the Special Rapporteur: 23.

Philosophical Society, 'even to eat pork and drink alcohol if they choose'.¹³⁸

After Nimeiri's introduction of the September Laws in 1983, however, non-Muslims in Khartoum were subjected to sharia punishments, including flogging for public consumption of alcohol,¹³⁹ although private drinking and extramarital sex involving non-Muslims were exempted from the *hadd* provisions.¹⁴⁰ In principle, the laws also applied to non-Muslims in the south, although the regime found it impossible to enforce them.¹⁴¹ While al-Turabi had little direct role in the production or implementation of these laws, he declared at the time that no-one, including foreigners, would be exempt from the *hudud*.¹⁴² Meanwhile, the 1987 NIF Sudan Charter, al-Turabi's draft criminal law of 1988 and the eventual Penal Code of 1991 all followed the same principle; namely, that sharia punishments could legitimately be imposed on non-Muslims in the northern regions where Muslims were the majority. This amounted to a turnaround from his earlier position that non-Muslims would not be subject to sharia, although the same documents maintained that sharia law would not be implemented in the southern, majority non-Muslim regions. Addressing the rights of non-Muslims more broadly, the 1987 Charter observed that they would be 'entitled freely to express the values of their religion to the full extent of their scope – in private, family, or social matters'. Importantly, not only Christians and Jews, but also adherents of 'African religions' were recognized in this context, establishing the principle that it was not just the 'people of the book' (*ahl al-kitab*) who would be recognized in the Islamic State.¹⁴³

Justifying his position on the non-application of sharia law in the south, al-Turabi cited four verses of the Quran, one of which reads: 'let the people of the gospel judge by what God hath revealed therein' (*al-Ma'ida* 5:47).¹⁴⁴ Explaining his view of relations with non-Muslims in 1992, he further commented that the model for the contemporary Islamic State was the covenant Muhammad drew up with the

¹³⁸ *Al-Mithaq*, 24 August 1967. ¹³⁹ Layish and Warburg, *Reinstatement*.

¹⁴⁰ Peters, *Crime and Punishment*: 165.

¹⁴¹ El-Affendi, 'Discovering the South': 382. ¹⁴² Ulaysh, *Yawmiyyat*: 39.

¹⁴³ For the 1987 Sudan Charter, see Kok, *Governance and Conflict in Sudan*: 234 (Appendix II).

¹⁴⁴ Ibrahim, Abd al-Fattah Mahjub, *al-Duktur*: 30.

Jewish communities of Medina in 622, which established a *dhimmi* relationship. For al-Turabi, the *dhimmi* relationship ‘implies equality of treatment and incorporates a special arrangement of religious, cultural and administrative privileges and immunities’.¹⁴⁵ But in practice the Islamists were administering Muslim and non-Muslim law to separate regions rather than separate communities. The consequence was that while non-Muslims were subject to sharia in the north, al-Turabi acknowledged that Muslims would not have to be subject to it in the south.¹⁴⁶ One critic of the 1988 draft penal code suggested that it was, in effect, attempting to recreate the old distinction between the *Dar al-Islam* and *Dar al-Harb*.¹⁴⁷

Al-Turabi’s position on the status of non-Muslims in the executive hierarchy was marked by a similar ambivalence. In debates over the constitution in the 1960s, he had stated that the position of head of state in an Islamic State could not be taken by a non-Muslim.¹⁴⁸ Later, he changed his position, even boasting to one Western interviewer in 1994 that the Sudanese approach was more liberal than that of several Western countries; among these was Great Britain, where the head of state had to be an Anglican.¹⁴⁹ Indeed, the 1998 constitution did not require Sudan’s president to be a Muslim.¹⁵⁰

Conclusion

There have been a number of marked shifts in Hasan al-Turabi’s discourse concerning the nature of the Islamic State and the laws it should uphold. These changes have tended to have been a result of his adjustment to specific political contexts more than a consequence of his need to sell different messages to different audiences. Before Nimeiri’s implementation of an arbitrary form of sharia law in 1983, al-Turabi maintained that since the basis of religion was voluntary acts of faith,

¹⁴⁵ Al-Turabi, ‘Islam as a Pan-national Movement’: 610.

¹⁴⁶ Hasan al-Turabi, Interview with University of Pennsylvania African Studies Centre, www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/horn_sdn.html (accessed on 9 July 2015)

¹⁴⁷ *Al-Midan*, 20 September 1988. ¹⁴⁸ El-Affendi, *Turabi’s Revolution*: 176.

¹⁴⁹ Hasan al-Turabi, Interview with University of Pennsylvania African Studies Centre, accessed on www.africa.upenn.edu/Hornet/horn_sdn.html (accessed on 9 July 2015)

¹⁵⁰ See conditions in Part III article 37 of the 1998 Constitution, available on www.unodc.org/tldb/pdf/Sudan_const_1998.pdf

only the Islamic society could produce the Islamic State, and never vice versa. After 1983, when he gave his public blessing to a series of laws sanctioning the use of state power to enforce virtuous personal conduct, he left himself intellectually and politically compromised. While he had not contrived the September Laws himself and his main motive for supporting them was tactical, his own writings began to reflect the coercive and arbitrary nature of the legislation. Yet he would never abandon the argument that society should take precedence over the state, partly because he was never able to fully reconcile himself with the particular state leaders with whom he found it expedient to ally. To identify a chronological shift from democratic to authoritarian conceptualizations of the Islamic State would be too easy – at almost every stage of his political career, the fluid and shifting character of the Sudanese political environment encouraged al-Turabi to keep all his ideological options open in order to survive.

Was al-Turabi's inconsistency simply that of a religious liberal compromising with the authoritarian political environment in which he was forced to operate? Or did his thinking on the Islamic State, law and society already contain the seeds of an arbitrary, even 'totalitarian', political agenda? His belief that the conforming, psychologically unified, *tawhidi* society would rise up spontaneously – as it supposedly did in the seventh century – when the Muslim community collectively rediscovered its capacity for faith, was so unrealistic that it always seemed possible that the Islamists would fall back on the coercive capacity of the modern state for the necessary 're-education', which was ultimately what transpired. Moreover, it seems likely that some of al-Turabi's Western influences may have pushed him to conceive of sharia in a manner similar to Rousseau's notion of the 'general will', which the generality of the people could be legitimately coerced into accepting. Although in many regards his concepts of *ijma* and *ijtihad* promised to be highly anti-authoritarian, his articulation of their relationship to the overall corpus of sharia was inconsistent. The inconsistencies of al-Turabi's Islamic State were also a reflection of his ambivalent postcolonial outlook – although he championed the inauguration of a sharia-based state as a cathartic break with the days of British domination, he often relied on legal models and understandings of nationhood that were the legacy of the Condominium regime.

In other regards, al-Turabi's strategy for establishing the Islamic State had been more consistent with the vision he originally fleshed

out in the 1960s. He also steadily advocated recognition of the civil, religious and legal – if not political – rights of non-Muslims, even though he shifted towards recognizing these rights on a regional as opposed to a community basis, as outlined in his theory. He was also relatively consistent in following the strategy that requires the modern nation-state to be Islamized rather than bypassed altogether, although to some extent he abandoned this approach at the height of his ideological self-confidence in the early 1990s. Nevertheless, these strategies led to inconsistencies in his overall state project. And, while the logic of the modern nation-state and the exigencies of modern politics dictated that the Islamists should fight to keep the southern region within Sudan, it was never clear how al-Turabi could rationalize the incorporation of a such a large non-Muslim population – never historically part of the Dar al-Islam – into a society based on the model of social, legal and political *tawhid*.

How does al-Turabi compare with other twentieth-century theorists of the Islamic State, such as Khomeini and Mawdudi? Like both these thinkers, he tended to offer multiple visions of the Islamic State rather than a fixed, coherent model, and was vague about specific institutions.¹⁵¹ In al-Turabi's case, the ambiguity was probably greater in that he frequently dissociated himself from his own efforts to establish such a state. Both Khomeini and Mawdudi aspired to transcend territorial nationalism, and yet ultimately compromised with it, just like al-Turabi.¹⁵² Just like the other two theorists, his model of the state arose from conceptual engagement with Western political theory, although there was less explicit emphasis on the role of the Platonic philosopher-king. In theory, he envisaged an Islamic State that existed in a much more balanced relationship with the society from which it developed. Nevertheless, al-Turabi's Islamic society, just like Khomeini and Mawdudi's state, remained an 'active utopia'¹⁵³ which he hoped would reproduce itself in twentieth-century Sudan. As will be seen in the next chapter, on Islamist democracy, it was this conceit about the spontaneous resurgence of a pious Islamic society that made his vision so difficult to implement, and led to a retreat to the kind of state-driven Islamization advocated by Mawdudi.

¹⁵¹ Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*: 103.

¹⁵² Martin, *Creating an Islamic State*: 169. Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*: 131.

¹⁵³ Jackson, *Mawlana Mawdudi*: 82.

8

Al-Turabi's Islamist Democracy A Valid Blueprint?

Opponents of Hasan al-Turabi have often been quick to question his commitment to democracy. Bona Malwal, for example, called him a 'wolf in democratic clothing',¹ and Mansour Khalid argued that the 'conversion to democracy' that followed his split with Umar al-Bashir in 1999 'was not readily accepted by many Sudanese who continued to believe that the intensity with which he pleaded for democracy today, was inversely proportional to his belief in it'.² However, as is often acknowledged by political theorists, the term 'democracy' is so flexible as to render it meaningless without qualification.³ The democracy Khalid speaks of al-Turabi 'returning' to in 1999 is the principle of the liberal, representative, multiparty democracy characterizing Sudan's parliamentary periods. Yet during the country's history of 'democratic' civilian uprisings and military coups, revolutionary ideologues frequently argued that such a form of 'democracy' was always vulnerable to exploitation by 'reactionary' parties designed to prevent the achievement of 'real' democracy.⁴ It is hard to believe that al-Turabi, who spent years in Nimeiri's jails reading about the history of Western democracy, did not have at least some commitment to the principle of an Islamist democracy, however much it was undermined by political opportunism and ideological hubris.

Tønnesson argues that, in spite of his self-acknowledged failure to bring about an Islamist democracy in practice, al-Turabi 'demonstrates that Islamism in theory is not necessarily inherently incompatible with Western democratic principles'.⁵ This means, she argues, that his theories might well be applied by Islamist democrats elsewhere, such as Rashid Ghannushi in Tunisia.⁶ The main reason the model did not succeed in Sudan, Tønnesson maintains, was its failure to resolve the

¹ *Washington Post*, April 1988. ² Khalid, *War and Peace*: 253.

³ See, for example, Harrison, *Democracy*: 1–4.

⁴ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 200. ⁵ Tønnesson, *Islamist Democracy*: 2.

⁶ Tønnesson, *Islamist Democracy*: 2.

problem of integrating non-Muslims in a multireligious country.⁷ Yet, as will be seen, the flaws of al-Turabi's theory go beyond the issue of the exclusion or inclusion of non-Muslims. It was not just the southerners who acted as the 'others' of his Islamist democracy. As was dramatically demonstrated by the 1989 coup, it also required the exclusion of Muslim political groupings that did not subscribe to his own Islamist precepts. Esposito and Voll argued in the mid-1990s that the attack on the 'sectarian' political parties was necessary to achieve progress, but acknowledged that the failure of the new system was its exclusion of secularist Muslims, as well as non-Muslims.⁸ Another major problem is that al-Turabi went beyond arguing that Islam was compatible with democracy to claiming that Islam was the *source* of democracy. As seen previously, he argued that he accepts Salafism insofar as it aims to reproduce the fundamental principles – if not necessarily the literal model – of the seventh century, although in practice he often pursued a form of methodologically loose pseudo-Salafism driven more by a desire to conceive a purified pre-colonial order than by doctrinal rigidity.⁹ His pursuit of these imagined ideals led him to root his core democratic principles in a specific conception of the seventh century ideal that was increasingly abstracted from Sudanese political reality. It is true that the fluid nature of the late twentieth century Sudanese political environment gave al-Turabi more incentive to democratize his Islamism than radical Islamists such as Qutb elsewhere in North Africa. However, since his Islamist democracy was defined as much by its antithesis to Western democracy and its correspondence with a flexibly conceived and constantly shifting seventh century exemplar than it was by any core principle, it was easy enough for him to remould it to meet the exigencies of each new era. In a political environment that required constant adjustment to new and diverse political as well as religious trends, he switched between no-party, one-party and multiparty democracy, as well as between representative and direct democracy – each as it seemed to him necessary for his movement to prosper.

Shura: Its Precedents in Islamic History

Al-Turabi attempted to legitimize his concept of *shura* by rooting it in Islamic history, as well as in the earliest sources (*usul*) of Islamic

⁷ Tønnesson, *Islamist Democracy*: 14.

⁸ Esposito and Voll, *Islam and Democracy*, 101. ⁹ See Chapters 5 and 7.

religious and legal practice. The most substantial work he produced with this end in mind is his *al-Shura wa'l-Dimuqratiyya*, published in 1987 and subsequently reprinted in 1993 and 2000. Although it first appeared during the third parliamentary democracy (1986–1989), the text derives largely from a lecture given to the Institute of Strategic Studies (*Ma'ahad al-Dirasat al-Istratijiyya*) prior to the discussion of the newly 'Islamized' constitution in Nimeiri's Sudanese People's Assembly.¹⁰ It embodies the overconfidence in the prospect of a resurgence of seventh century values that was the hallmark of Sudan's first and short-lived experience of 'Islamization'.

Outlining his perspective on the origins of *shura* in early Islamic society, al-Turabi cites a number of passages from the Quran in his attempt to show that the core principles of modern *shura*-based democracy can be traced back to the Dawn of Islam.¹¹ He cites passages (*Ghafir*: 29) in which the Creator takes vengeance against the oppressive Pharaoh – a Quranic figure seen by many Islamists as analogous to the modern secular autocrat – to demonstrate that 'God set an example' to those who opposed 'the freedom of the people from enslavement on the earth, and their meeting in freedom (*hurriyya*) and consultation (*shura*) not through coercion'. He goes on to quote the verses of the Quran most well known for their advocacy of *shura* (*Shura*: 36–39), which praise those 'who (conduct) their affairs by mutual consultation'.

Nevertheless, none of the Quranic passages referred to by al-Turabi outline in detail in what exactly *shura* consists, or how it might be comparable to modern democracy. Consequently, he looks to the age of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs in his effort to show that *shura* developed into an advanced form of democratic practice in the early age of Islam. According to al-Turabi, the successions of the first three Rightly-Guided Caliphs, Abu Bakr, Umar and Uthman, were all based on *shura*. Abu Bakr, he explains, was chosen after prominent members of the community gathered in Dar al-Saqifa and, after discussion, decided that 'it should be one of the *muhajirin* [those who fled from Mecca to Medina with the Prophet], then one of these was selected, and Abu Bakr received the *ba'ya* of the great majority, so the first *khilafa* was based on consultation and consensus'. Al-Turabi is more

¹⁰ See Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 135–167, where the text of the original lecture is reproduced.

¹¹ This paragraph and the one following are based on Al-Turabi, *al-Shura*: 15–26.

ambiguous in his discussion of the succession of the second Caliph, Umar, saying only that ‘he also came through consultation although the proceedings took a different form’. As Umar approached his own demise, according to this narrative, he left the matter for consultation among ‘people respected by public opinion’, who – after a number stepped down – reduced the candidates to two, Uthman and Ali Ibn al-Talib. Following this,

the others formed a collective organization for a general election, and they sought the opinion of all the Muslims, without exception, men and women, and presented to them the programme of Ali and the programme of Uthman who announced that he followed the practice (*sunna*) of Umar and Abu Bakr, and the Muslims by a majority preferred Uthman and his method.

Thus, for al-Turabi, the process via which Uthman was chosen was analogous to a modern general election or referendum – to describe the process of consulting the opinion of the *umma* he uses *istifta*, the verbal noun of which is the contemporary Arabic word for referendum. The ‘candidates’ put forward manifestos and the entire community participated via universal suffrage.

Al-Turabi’s account of democratic practice in the age of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs differs substantially from standard Western and Islamic histories, and – unlike them – fails to reference any of the relevant sources. According to the standard accounts, the practice of consultation during the succession of Abu Bakr was severely compromised. The notion that the Qurayshi *muhajirin* constituted the only valid candidates was vigorously contested by the *Ansar*, violence only being prevented by the unilateral intervention of Abu Bakr, who cited the Prophet to enforce the succession of a Qurayshi.¹² After the *Ansar* switched to championing Ali, there was another unilateral intervention, this time by Umar, who nominated Abu Bakr as Caliph.¹³ This was accepted by a group of the *muhajirin*, in addition to a faction of the *Ansar* that accepted the nomination.¹⁴ The accession of Umar, referred to in very ambiguous terms by al-Turabi, involved no *shura* at all: Abu Bakr merely returned Umar’s favour on his deathbed by nominating him as his successor.¹⁵ Meanwhile, Uthman’s selection was hardly analogous to a general election or referendum. After Umar’s death,

¹² Hosain, *Early History*: 282. Madelung, *Succession to Muhammad*: 30–31.

¹³ Hosain, *Early History*: 282–283. Madelung, *Succession to Muhammad*: 31.

¹⁴ Hosain, *Early History*: 282–283. ¹⁵ Hosain, *Early History*: 304.

a council of five was formed to choose a candidate among themselves, one of whom, Abd al-Rahman, forfeited his candidature in exchange for the right to nominate the Caliph.¹⁶ When Abd al-Rahman nominated Ali in front of a gathering of the Muslim community in Medina, two of its prominent members opposed Ali's succession and proposed Uthman instead. At this point, Abd al-Rahman asked both Ali and Uthman whether they intended to govern in accordance with the Quran and the Sunna, and preferred Uthman's answer, following which he swore loyalty to him as Caliph.¹⁷

Al-Turabi, therefore, was guilty of overstating his case. While the senior members of the Quraysh did consult the views of prominent members of the *umma* on the occasion of the first and third Caliphal successions, those to whom they responded were prominent male notables, and the ultimate decision lay with the high ranking Qurayshis. In narrating these historic practices in order to have them encapsulate the twentieth century mass democratic ideal, he is simply fabricating history. Interestingly, the narrative in *al-Shura wa'l-Dimuqratiyya* marks a break with the far more accurate representation of the role of *shura* in early Islamic society he provided to the University of Khartoum Philosophical Society in 1967. On that occasion, he argued that the early Muslim rulers practised *shura* in that they 'sought out the advice of the heads of the tribes and *ulama*'.¹⁸ They lacked the modern communications technology that would have enabled them to implement *shura* in its fullest sense at the time but, by practising *ijtihad*, twentieth century Muslims could adapt the principles of *shura* to guide them towards a modern mass democracy.¹⁹ At some point between 1967 and the appearance of *al-Shura wa'l-Dimuqratiyya*, possibly influenced by the utopian representations of the early period put forward by more radical and Salafi-orientated Islamists, he decided that it was better to use the seventh century past as a more substantive reference point.

Like many Islamists,²⁰ al-Turabi was guilty of projecting contemporary ideals onto the seventh century past. Nevertheless, inasmuch as he believed it to be the responsibility of each generation of Muslims to renew and develop this model, his perception of seventh century

¹⁶ Madelung, *Succession to Muhammad*: 71.

¹⁷ Hosain, *Early History*: 325–326. ¹⁸ *Al-Mithaq al-Islami*, 24 August 1967.

¹⁹ *Al-Mithaq al-Islami*, 24 August 1967.

²⁰ Denouex, 'Forgotten Swamp': 60–63.

democracy was not utopian. He argues that in practice the Muslims of the post-Rashidi age regressed from this original model, starting with the Umayyads, who introduced the principle of hereditary monarchy.²¹ From this point, Islamic rulers were increasingly influenced by Persian monarchical traditions, and as a consequence the jurisprudence of the classical period failed to develop the concept of *shura* as it should have done.²² Al-Turabi contends that this regression was never fully complete, and that elements of the original *shura* survived in certain parts of the Islamic world. Fascinatingly, he argues that it was ‘especially in the regions of the *khawarij*’ that this was the case, and, in particular, that the *khariji* faction that founded the Sultanate of Oman (the Ibadiyya) remained closest to the ‘original’ practice of *shura*. Following the death of each sultan, a group of scholars and justices would survey the most qualified candidates, and select one to present to a ‘conference’ of the local Muslim community, which could choose whether to ratify their selection.²³ The significance of al-Turabi’s identification with the *khariji* model is that, like them, he rejected standard Shia and Sunni doctrine. However, the *khariji* model was not so much a continuation of the original practice of *shura* from the age of the Rightly-Guided Caliphs as a more egalitarian break with it, since they did not restrict candidature for the Caliphate on the basis of membership of the Quraysh.²⁴ Ironically, it appears to have been mainly Western scholars – Marxist historians among them – who have cited these Kharijite principles as a potential future source of inspiration for modern electoral democracy,²⁵ further demonstrating how willing al-Turabi was to break with the Muslim and Islamist consensus of his time. The *kharijis* struggled to gain support for their ideals because they were unable to adapt their egalitarian vision – based as it was on the small nomadic communities of seventh century Arabia – to the complex society of the Abbasid Caliphate.²⁶ Al-Turabi’s model of direct democracy would face a similar challenge.

While al-Turabi laments the failure of the *ulama* to express the values of *shura* in Muslim political life after the seventh century, he qualifies

²¹ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 171–172.

²² Al-Turabi, *al-Shura*: 12; and *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 172.

²³ Al-Turabi, *al-Shura*: 26.

²⁴ Kenney, *Muslim Rebels*: 33. Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*: 57–58.

²⁵ Kenney, *Muslim Rebels*: 15, fn 30, 183–184.

²⁶ Crone, *Medieval Islamic Political Thought*: 59.

this criticism by arguing that they did at least preserve *shura* in the realm of jurisprudential practice by employing the principle of *ijma*, or consensus.²⁷ His own conception of *ijma*, which probably drew on earlier Islamic reformists such as Muhammad Iqbal,²⁸ was nevertheless thoroughly revolutionary. Just as he argues that religious knowledge (*ilm*) itself was no longer the province of a scholarly elite, so he also argues that the public as a whole and not just the *ulama* had to contribute to the generation of consensus.²⁹ In his *Tajdid Usul al-Fiqh al-Islami*, he insists that all public *shura* meetings must be based on the principle of *ijma*, and that their decisions will not be taken forward unless 'the great majority of the Muslims agree upon it'.³⁰

Al-Turabi also maintains that a residual cultural attachment to the notion of *shura* enabled the *ulama* to exercise a degree of restraint over the various sultans, kings and amirs of the Islamic World by advising these rulers and reminding them of the limits imposed on them by sharia.³¹ The total eclipse of *shura* was only a relatively recent phenomenon, brought about by the collapse of the Ottoman Caliphate after the First World War and the emergence of secular nationalist regimes in its stead. These secular autocrats diminished both the *ulama* and the sharia, and as a result 'the Muslims became prey to tyranny, without any principle of *shura* to save them'.³² Thus it is Western colonial modernity and postcolonial nationalism that bears the responsibility for the ultimate decline of *shura*. However, as we have seen, al-Turabi does not return to the descendants of the nineteenth century *ulama* to resurrect it, but harks back to the idealized seventh century society that preceded the first 'cultural assault', and which he aligns with his own future Islamic *umma*. His theories of Islamist democracy were shaped by the specifically postcolonial character of his pseudo-Salafism. This emphasis on the imitation of a mythical past as central to any democratic resurgence enabled the Salvation Regime of the 1990s to prioritize moral renewal and the manufacture of an image of consensus instead of grass roots political change, as will be seen later in this chapter.

²⁷ Al-Turabi, *al-Shura*: 27. ²⁸ Esposito & Voll, *Islam and Democracy*, 29.

²⁹ Al-Turabi made this argument as early as 1967; see talk to University of Khartoum Philosophical Society, reproduced in *al-Mithaq*, 24 August 1967.

³⁰ Al-Turabi, *Tajdid Usul*: 10. ³¹ Al-Turabi, *al-Shura*: 27.

³² Al-Turabi, *al-Shura*: 27.

Critique of Western Democracy

Another specifically postcolonial feature of al-Turabi's model of democracy is that it represents a rejection of Western ideals as much as a revival of those of Islam.³³ Although he often uses the history of Western democracy as a reference point, sometimes citing it to legitimize particular aspects of his own model, on other occasions he aims to demonstrate that a specifically Islamist variant is not only possible but morally superior. He attempts to establish Western democracy's indebtedness to Islam by arguing that Western notions of constitutional governance only arose in the Middle Ages as a result of the influence of Muslim jurisprudence. As we have seen, he argues elsewhere that the document produced by the Prophet at Medina in 622 was the first real democratic constitution.³⁴ Following this, he gives credit to the achievements of post-Enlightenment liberal democracy, arguing that while at first it was nothing more than a contract between a bourgeois elite and the existing political authority, it developed into a form of popular democracy which allowed 'the great mass of the people to practise their rights and freedoms'.³⁵ However, he is careful to contextualize this development by stating that it was the product of 'the extension of methods of communication and mobilization of public opinion', the implicit argument being that similar technological developments can have a comparable effect on Islamist democracy.³⁶

Having credited the achievements of Western democracy, al-Turabi goes on to explain why it is less capable than Islamist democracy of achieving its own aims. First, he says, while the great achievement of the European Enlightenment was that it broke the monopoly of the church over political life, the European revolutionaries failed to reclaim religion for themselves and their democracy thus lacked religious guidance.³⁷ Without moral direction, Machiavellian pragmatism and the logic of financial power came to be the dominant forces in Western politics.³⁸ Because Western democracy provided equality of democratic rights without equality of economic status, a small, financially empowered elite was able to monopolize the media and thus manipulate the public

³³ For Islamism as a rejection of Western values, see, for example, Burgat, *Face to Face*: 49.

³⁴ Al-Turabi, *al-Shura*: 6. ³⁵ Al-Turabi, *al-Shura*: 9.

³⁶ Al-Turabi, *al-Shura*: 9.

³⁷ Al-Turabi, *al-Shura*: 18. See also al-Turabi, *al-Iman*: 227.

³⁸ Al-Turabi, *al-Shura*: 21.

during elections.³⁹ Al-Turabi at no point acknowledges the manner in which his own movement exploited the Islamic banks' emerging monopoly of the Sudanese economy in the late 1980s to create a media empire,⁴⁰ or his own justification of Machiavellian arch-pragmatism in the name of *fiqh al-darura* (the jurisprudence of necessity).⁴¹ Unlike Gaddafi's project of 'direct democracy', which also maintained that the corrupting influence of money was the Achilles heel of representative systems,⁴² al-Turabi's regime in the 1990s did not clamp down on private business. Indeed, the Faisal Islamic Bank, to which the Islamists were tied, invested more heavily in business than any other sector.⁴³ Whereas in Gaddafi's Libya the theory was that 'Popular Committees' should exercise control over the local economy, the institutions of the same name in al-Turabi's Sudan were often funded by private Islamic NGOs.⁴⁴

Multi-Partyism

Al-Turabi also argues that Western democracy is fundamentally undermined by the divisive and factional nature of party politics. Although condemnation of party politics was hardly unusual for an Islamist, he first formulated this criticism after his opportunistic decision to merge his own ICF into Nimeiri's Sudan Socialist Union – another example of how his political allegiances dictated his principles, rather than vice versa. In 1980, he informed a seminar on parliamentary practice convened by Nimeiri's *Majlis al-Sba'ab* that the problem with political parties was that they became a 'go-between' (*wasitan*) between the people and their representatives, both putting candidates forward and controlling them after they were elected.⁴⁵ In the same year, he justified his decision to join the SSU by explaining to a Kuwaiti newspaper that the Sudanese had 'tried pluralism of parties and the struggles that it led to ... and do not want to return once more to party and political

³⁹ Al-Turabi, *al-Shura*: 21.

⁴⁰ For example, El-Battahani, 'Post-Secession State': 31.

⁴¹ Al-Haj Warraq and Ahmad Muhammad Al-Faki, 'al-'ada l'il-shiyu'yiyya fi adab al-jabha al-qawmiya', *al-Midan*, 6 November 1986. De Waal and Abdel Salam, 'Islamism': 85.

⁴² Vandewalle, *Libya*: 102. ⁴³ Jamal, 'Funding Fundamentalism': 14–17.

⁴⁴ De Waal and Abdel Salam, 'Islamism': 92–94, 103.

⁴⁵ Al-Turabi, *Fi al-Fiqh al-Siyasi*: 113.

polarization in this phase of the history of Sudan'.⁴⁶ However, in an English language piece published in the West in 1983 he was more cautious: while an Islamic state should see 'no legal bar to the development of different parties', he said, '... a well-developed Islamic society would probably not be conducive to the growth of rigid parties wherein one stands by one's party whether it is wrong or right'.⁴⁷

One of the reasons for al-Turabi's willingness to embrace a military regime was that the experience of parliamentary democracy had produced such meagre rewards for his party. The ICF did not achieve more than 11 seats in either of the parliamentary elections of the 1960s,⁴⁸ and, although the NIF was relatively more successful in 1986, this was largely due to its performance in the Graduate Seats, which represented the one exception to the 'one man, one vote' principle in the Sudanese parliamentary system. Al-Turabi was humiliated by his failure to be elected in his own constituency in 1968 and 1986.⁴⁹ Nevertheless, in spite of these frustrations he remained willing to accept the principle of party politics. By joining opposition coalitions with the Umma party (Sadiq al-Mahdi wing) and Sudan African National Union under the umbrella of the 'New Forces' in 1967, he was effectively legitimizing political pluralism. At this time he saw a democracy dominated by the Umma party and DUP as far more attractive than the potential Communist alternative. In 1986 the situation was different, not just because the Umma party and DUP were no longer so necessary as bulwarks against a much weakened Sudan Communist Party, but also because he had already condemned multi-partyism during the Nimeiri period. When asked by *al-Tadamon* about his attitude towards party pluralism in 1986, he made an analogy with religious pluralism, arguing that *tawhid* was desirable but that it should not be achieved through coercion; his own party, he added, was attempting to 'unify the political expression' of Sudanese society.⁵⁰ According to this logic, multi-partyism was a necessity of the transitional phase to an Islamic society.

Al-Turabi was more consistent in advocating direct democracy as a means of avoiding some of the failings of multiparty government. In the 1960s, he advocated 'radical direct democracy', though only in

⁴⁶ Interview in *Al-Qabas*, 9 June 1980, reproduced *Al-Midan*, 1 April 1986.

⁴⁷ Al-Turabi, 'Islamic State': 245. ⁴⁸ Layish and Warburg, *Reinstatement*: 16.

⁴⁹ See Chapter 2. ⁵⁰ Reproduced in *al-Raya*, 17 April 1986.

'local and regional government', arguing that such an experience would leave voters better qualified to make informed decisions about candidates during national elections.⁵¹ By the time he wrote *al-Shura wa'l-Dimuqratiyya*, he had come close to arguing that direct democracy should replace representative government altogether. This argument was rooted in his new conviction that sharia and the 'will of the people' were interchangeable. There should be, he said, no need for a governor or representative council because 'sharia represents the will of the people in complete precision', as a result of which 'the will of the people believing in sharia prevails spontaneously and in a direct form'.⁵² At present, he explained, referendums, and particularly referendums over constitutional principles, are a means to consult the will of the people directly. Al-Turabi also expressed the hope that technological improvements would facilitate even more direct consultation of the people in the future, but contended that direct *shura* is not always practical today, just as it was not always practical in the seventh century.⁵³ Therefore, just as the seventh century *umma* chose the 'people who loose and bind' (*ahl al-hall wa'l-aqd*) to represent itself, al-Turabi maintains that this form of *shura* is reproduced today (in Islamist Sudan) by 'legislative bodies and bodies overseeing those in charge of executive matters'.⁵⁴ Having established the principle of direct democracy, therefore, he immediately qualifies it, arguing that representative government is a necessary expedient on the path towards a more perfect society.

Islamist Democracy in Practice: The Islamic Movement as a Prototype

Since al-Turabi conceived of the Islamic Movement as the embryonic form of his revolutionary society, its internal democracy would act as a 'trial run' for democracy in the Islamic order that was intended to manifest itself following the 1989 coup. Indeed, he wrote that the electoral system of the Islamic Movement acted as a 'rehearsal for an effective and clean electoral system in a Muslim society and a Muslim state'.⁵⁵

⁵¹ *Al-Mithaq*, 26 May 1967. ⁵² Al-Turabi, *al-Shura*: 26.

⁵³ Al-Turabi, *al-Shura*: 24. ⁵⁴ Al-Turabi, *al-Shura*: 24.

⁵⁵ Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 115.

Judging the efficacy of the Islamists' internal democracy is challenging. While al-Turabi frequently refers to the movement's Shura Council, Constituent Assembly and Constitution as well as the 'general elections' for the leadership, the secretive nature of the movement prior to 1989 makes it difficult to assess how well institutionalized it really was. During the military dictatorships of 1958–1964 and 1969–1985, the Islamic Movement's activities were clandestine, and even during the parliamentary eras, the Islamist media gave its internal politics only relatively superficial coverage. Kobayashi concludes that these institutions may have been far less formal than suggested by al-Turabi.⁵⁶

Al-Turabi recalled fondly how, unlike other Islamist organizations, the Sudanese Islamic Movement started out with a collective leadership due to its origins in an 'egalitarian student milieu'.⁵⁷ Presumably, in addition to the Medinan prototype, this acted as the original inspiration for him in the same way that the Athenian city states acted as the ideal for contemporary 'direct democrats' elsewhere. The irony is that it was al-Turabi's own charisma that helped establish a tradition of much more hierarchical leadership within the movement. After he had established his political reputation during the October Revolution, the movement – which had originally returned to the principle of collective leadership after experimenting with Rashid al-Tahir as a 'General Guide' – elected him to the newly created position of 'Secretary General'.⁵⁸ Although he briefly lost this post during his struggle against the educationalist faction later on in the 1960s, following his re-election in 1969 he would – subject to periodic re-elections – maintain his hold over this position for 30 years. In the early 1970s, the structure of the movement was somewhat akin to the future 'bottom-up' structure of the National Congress. The Islamic Movement as a whole elected a Congress, which itself elected a Shura Council; this in turn subsequently elected a ten-man Executive Bureau, which itself chose the leader. Al-Turabi modified this structure in the mid-1970s, so that – as leader – he would be elected directly by the base and could thereby appoint the Executive Bureau.⁵⁹ While this represented a more 'direct' form of democracy in some regards, in practice it enabled al-Turabi to use his charisma to mobilize mass support against his intellectual and

⁵⁶ Kobayashi, *Islamist Movement in Sudan*: 66.

⁵⁷ Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 97.

⁵⁸ El-Affendi, *Turabi's Revolution*: 75–76. ⁵⁹ See Chapter 2.

political rivals (such as Jafa'ar Shaikh Idris) in the highest echelons of the Islamic Movement. Salih argues that in effect the Executive Bureau evolved into a 'kitchen cabinet', as al-Turabi began to nominate its members as his advisors.⁶⁰

Even though the movement was becoming increasingly hierarchical, it continued to refer major questions to the Shura Council. Most famously, this voted for the decision to launch the 1989 coup.⁶¹ However, it is unclear how capable of challenging the executive it really was. In his text on the Sudanese Islamic Movement published in 1989, al-Turabi made the following ominous observation regarding the nature of democracy in the movement:

Some have remarked that in the experience of the Sudanese Islamic movement rarely has a proposition been made to the Shura Council from the Executive and not accepted in essence. They deduced from this that this process was a mere sham to justify decisions that had already been made. However, could also [sic] in this a reflection of the fact that a united and an interactive movement does produce a leadership which represents its views and is in tune with the prevailing current of opinion in it.⁶²

This heralded the approach towards democracy that al-Turabi and others in the Salvation Regime would adopt in the 1990s. Lack of debate was to be encouraged on the grounds that it indicated unity and consensus.

Islamist Democracy under the Salvation Regime: The Rise of the National Congress

Al-Turabi maintained that in his ideal Islamic State, the believing community would – via the strength of its own faith – spontaneously establish a form of direct democracy with little involvement from the state. Although, as seen in previous chapters, he argued that a vanguard of believers could use force to remove oppressive systems preventing the people from expressing their inner faith, he preferred to insist that the democratic resurgence should be led by society rather than the state. It is therefore unsurprising that he distanced himself assiduously from the ugly necessities of the first years of the Salvation Regime, in which an Islamist vanguard and its military allies endeavoured to create

⁶⁰ Salih, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 213. ⁶¹ See Chapter 3.

⁶² Al-Turabi, *Islamic Movement*: 119.

a system that would at least resemble that which he had envisaged. While he was 'imprisoned' in Kober during this period, al-Bashir sought assistance from Gaddafi's Libya, another state with a system of 'direct democracy' that was in practice subject to a military hierarchy. With the help of Libyan-trained Sudanese, the new regime established a system of 'Popular Committees' (*lijan sha'abiyya*) to which it granted a number of powers in local government.⁶³ Three years later, the 'National Congress' system was set up, and the Popular Committees were put under the supervision of a series of 'basic conferences' (*mu'tamar assassiyya*). In practice, there was considerable conflict between the two overlapping bodies,⁶⁴ presumably reflecting competition between the pro-Libyans and Turabists. Although some critics claim that the system of popular conferences and committees was a direct copy of the Libyan model,⁶⁵ Abd al-Salam argues that it was rooted in the concept of *ijma* found in al-Turabi's *tajdidi* jurisprudence.⁶⁶

The National Congress represented the incorporation of the institutions and personnel of the Islamic Movement into a new system that embraced the Islamists' military allies and a number of other political forces co-opted by the Salvation Regime. Its first secretary-general was a soldier, Brigadier Hamadain, to whom the Darfuri Islamist, Shafi Muhammad Ahmad, acted as deputy. In spite of the fact that it would later give birth to the National Congress Party of the present day, its founders were careful to distinguish it from one-party systems such as Nimeiri's SSU. In 1992, Brigadier Hamadain declared that it differed from other one-party systems in that it 'allows for dialogue as well as mass participation in decision-making'. Unlike most authoritarian systems, he explained, 'a citizen's view is channelled up to the upper levels (state and federal) through his representatives'. The system, he said, was bottom up in that each layer of 'conferences' would feed into the rung higher up, and that councils would be formed at every level of the system in which citizens could form and execute policies. The Basic Committees would form the Popular Committees, the Council Congresses would form the Local Councils, Province (*Muhafaza*)

⁶³ Muhammad Uthman Muhammad Sa'id, Governor of Khartoum, Interview with *al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 7 September 1993.

⁶⁴ Muhammad Uthman Muhammad Sa'id, Governor of Khartoum, Interview with *al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 7 September 1993.

⁶⁵ Ali, *Suqut*: 500. ⁶⁶ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 142.

Congresses would form Province Councils and State Congresses would form State Assemblies, legislative institutions that would directly oversee the State Governments. The next level up was the National Congress, which would form the National Assembly, another legislative body that was intended to directly supervise the political executive.⁶⁷

On paper this was an impressive system, constituting over 10,000 Basic Congresses in each village and town quarter, and 305 Local Councils throughout Sudan.⁶⁸ In practice, the military-Islamist government was attempting to create a system of direct democracy 'top down' so that it could *appear* to emerge 'bottom up'. Rather than controlling the political executive, the first National Assembly – the 'Transitional National Assembly' – was directly appointed by it, and the various institutions lower down the system were controlled by provincial governors (*Muhafiz*) and state governors (*Walis*) put in place by the president.⁶⁹ Meanwhile, even Shafi Muhammad Ahmad acknowledged that the system was at its most flawed at the level – the 'Basic Congress' – that was intended to act as the foundation of the system. Interviewed in 1993, he lamented that 'due to economic and political circumstances . . . these institutions often do not understand the role entrusted to them'.⁷⁰ He also blamed the media for failing to make citizens sufficiently aware of the new system.⁷¹ Between 1992 and 1995, most representatives of the congress argued that they were still in the phase of building the 'political system' (*nizam siyasi*) and that, as such, 'power has not been surrendered to the people'.⁷²

Elections during 1995 and 1996

During 1995 and 1996, the regime began its efforts to implement al-Turabi's Islamist democracy, announcing that it was 'surrendering power to the people' through a series of elections at both national and regional levels. In total, four significant sets of polls were conducted:

⁶⁷ Brigadier Hamadain, Interview with *Sudanow*, February 1992.

⁶⁸ Shafi Muhammad Ahmad, Interview in *al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 8 August 1993.

⁶⁹ Ahmad, Interview in *al-Sudan al-Hadith*.

⁷⁰ Ahmad, Interview in *al-Sudan al-Hadith*.

⁷¹ Ahmad, Interview in *al-Sudan al-Hadith*.

⁷² See, for example, Mustafa Muhammad Hasan, head of the Popular Committee in East/Central Khartoum, interview with *al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 7 September 1993.

direct state-level elections of popular representatives to the National Congress's State Councils (*majalis al-wilayat*) from February to April 1995; indirect elections within the National Congress for both the General Secretariat and the 125 individuals who would represent the Congress in the National Assembly, held in January 1996; direct elections held within geographical constituencies for the remaining seats in the National Assembly in March 1996; and a presidential election in the same month.

Since al-Turabi preferred to depict Islamic elections as a spontaneous expression of popular belief, rather than the product of a 'surrender to the people' by a military vanguard, he avoided a significant role in propagandizing these elections. As the polls for the State Councils were reaching their conclusion at the beginning of April 1995, he was busy convening the third session of the PAIC, which largely overshadowed the former event in the state-run media.⁷³ He was not involved in the internal National Congress elections, and came into the National Assembly by standing for a seat in one of the geographical constituencies. This was ironic, since the decision to fill the majority of seats in the National Assembly via direct elections in geographical constituencies gave the lie to the notion that the National Congress, which was intended to create 60 per cent of the positions in the National Assembly according to the plan laid down in 1992,⁷⁴ represented a spontaneous resurgence of Islamic democracy. The most notable effort to provide an 'Islamic perspective on elections' was a seminar jointly organized by Omdurman Islamic University (OIU) and a Khartoum publishing house, covered in some depth in the official media.⁷⁵ Drawing on the *hadith* literature so regularly eschewed by al-Turabi, the scholars of OIU compared the representatives being elected to the National Assembly to the *Ahl al-Hall wa'l-Aqd* of the early Islamic period, arguing that the lack of historic consensus on their role left scope for contemporary scholars to practise *ijtihad* so as to define their function in a modern democracy. For instance, they went on to explain that non-Muslims could join the *Ahl al-Hall wa'l-Aqd*.

Although al-Turabi kept a relatively low profile during these elections, they were underpinned by the concepts he had associated closely

⁷³ See *al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 31 March–3 April, 1995.

⁷⁴ Brigadier Hamadain, Interview with *Sudanow*, February 1992.

⁷⁵ 'Al-Ru'ya al-Islamiyya fi al-Intikhabat', *al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 6 March 1996.

with his model of Islamist democracy – *tawhid*, consensus and notions of moral virtue. The state media broadcast the process as an experience in building national consensus and unity, more than as an opportunity for voters to choose between candidates who offered different solutions to social and economic issues. Before the 1995 State Council elections, one piece in *al-Sudan al-Hadith* informed the electorate that the coming round of polls would be the first in Sudan without ‘political propaganda’, and in which candidature would be rooted in expression of ‘morals and virtues’;⁷⁶ in other words, the campaign would be based on personalities, not on issues. This appears to recall al-Turabi’s statement in 1983 that in an Islamic State ‘the prevailing criteria of political merit for the purposes of candidature for any political office revolves on moral integrity as well as other relevant considerations’.⁷⁷ He had also argued in 1983 that a ‘neutral institution’ would ‘explain to the people the options offered in policies and personalities,’ but debates over policy do not appear to have been a major feature of the 1995–1996 elections.

Meanwhile, the state media did its best to present the elections as a successful effort to construct a unified, consensus-based political order. It focused far more on reporting levels of voter registration and voter turnout than it did on competition between particular candidates. The highly suspicious claims made by official statisticians that levels of registration and turnout had reached between 80 and 100 per cent in both state and national elections were taken as evidence by electoral officials that ‘the current level of participation exceeds all previous elections’.⁷⁸ Once the polls were complete, statistics were compiled to demonstrate the high level of attendance of the new representatives at National Assembly meetings, again to highlight the commitment of the public to the new order.⁷⁹ Non-government commentators offered a substantially different assessment. For instance, independent observers suggested that only between 7 and 15 per cent of the Khartoum public voted in the 1996 presidential elections.⁸⁰

Paradoxically, the fact that the new order was effectively a no-party, rather than single party, system made it hard for the government to oblige the candidates to subscribe to Islamist notions of consensus and

⁷⁶ Hasan Muhammad Hamad, ‘Thawra al-Inqadh islamat uslub al-intikhabat’, *al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 10 March 1995.

⁷⁷ Al-Turabi, ‘Islamic State’, 248. ⁷⁸ *Al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 17 March 1996.

⁷⁹ *Al-Anbaa*, 28 July 1997. ⁸⁰ Lesch, *Sudan*: 125.

unity. It was probably for this reason that the Electoral Commission under retired judge Abd al-Muni'im Nahhas established 'Compromise Committees' (*lijan al-wifaq*), the official purpose of which was to reduce the number of candidates in over-contested seats and persuade less qualified individuals to stand down. However, there were claims that it was only non-Islamist candidates who were pressured to surrender their seats by these committees. Such men included Sadiq's al-Mahdi's former intelligence chief, Abd al-Rahman Farah, who withdrew from the presidential elections; and Abd al-Rahman Salawi, who had originally intended to stand against al-Turabi in the seat he had famously failed to obtain in 1986.⁸¹

As seen above, al-Turabi typically viewed lack of debate as a virtue in its own right, indicative of the consensus of the Islamic community. This possibly inspired the emergence of the notion of 'silent consensus' (*ijma sukuti*) as a significant mechanism during the Islamist democracy of the late 1990s. For instance, the election of 48 candidates to the National Assembly without competition in the geographic constituencies was described in the media as occurring through this process.⁸² Indeed, al-Turabi's own election as Speaker of the National Assembly directly following the March 1996 elections was orchestrated in this manner: the assembly accepted Muhammad al-Amin Khalifa's nomination of him 'by consensus'.⁸³ Al-Turabi had argued that in an Islamic State 'people can deliberate and openly argue and consult to ultimately reach a consensus'.⁸⁴ Here, though, it appeared that his regime had arrived at the 'consensus' without the debate.

In spite of the limitations of the elections, the structure and composition of the bodies they formed illustrated the regime's determination to pursue al-Turabi's strategy of mobilizing the youthful, educated and professional classes. Within the National Congress and its leading institutions, 30 per cent of the seats were filled via sectoral representation of Sudan's various professional groups.⁸⁵ Meanwhile, after becoming Speaker of the National Assembly, al-Turabi boasted proudly that 70 per cent its members were under the age of 50 and 65 per cent of

⁸¹ See discussion in Abd al-Muni'im Nahhas, Interview with *al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 16 December 1996.

⁸² *Al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 25 February 1996.

⁸³ *Al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 2 April 1996. ⁸⁴ Al-Turabi, 'Islamic State': 244.

⁸⁵ *Al-Khartoum*, 9 October 1999.

them had enjoyed higher education.⁸⁶ This illustrated the fruition of his efforts since the 1960s to target Sudan's universities as a recruitment centre for educated and upwardly mobile Islamists, although the partial reliance on sectoral representation also demonstrated that the regime was still balancing his philosophy of 'dissolving the movement into society' with elements of a vanguardist strategy. The principle of sectoral representation also applied in the 1995 elections for the state councils, with around one-third of the seats in each state being filled by either the 'economic sector', the 'social and cultural sector', or the 'women's sector'.⁸⁷ Again, this probably represented an effort to balance the influence of the educated Islamist vanguard against that of the more local forces co-opted by the Islamic Movement, such as the Native Administration, which often performed well in the State Councils' geographic constituencies.⁸⁸

***Tawali* and the Ambiguous Return to Multi-partyism**

Senior Islamist intellectuals represented the 1996 elections as a triumph that had demonstrated once and for all that the age of multi-partyism was over. Al-Turabi himself repeatedly informed political gatherings throughout 1997 and early 1998 that there would be no return to multi-partyism, declaring that 'Sudan knows only one party, the party of God'.⁸⁹ This language was typical of radical Islamists, who believed that political pluralism could never be reconciled with the principle of *tawhid*.⁹⁰ And yet, by the beginning of 1999, al-Turabi and the National Assembly had introduced a '*tawali*' law which sanctioned the re-establishment of a number of political parties, and even transformed the National Congress itself into one.

Why did al-Turabi perform this remarkable U-turn? It might have represented an attempt to divide the National Democratic Alliance, after the loss of Kurmuk and Qeissan in 1997 had shown how threatening cooperation between the NDA and the 'traditional' northern

⁸⁶ Al-Turabi, Interview with *al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 2 October 1996.

⁸⁷ Such as in the elections in Kassala and Khartoum State. *Al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 19 February 1995, 21 February 1995.

⁸⁸ For instance, a local *Shartai* won the highest number of votes in any of the geographical constituencies for the South Darfur State Council elections, *al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 30 March 1995.

⁸⁹ Ali, *Suqut*: 52.

⁹⁰ See, for example, Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*: 141–146.

parties could be. The escalation of the conflict with the NDA was helping to entrench the position of his increasingly estranged military allies in the state, and bringing the northern parties to Khartoum might have enabled the reappearance of a more civil form of politics. Moreover, it has been suggested that al-Turabi genuinely believed that, having broken the grip of the historic northern parties through force and via the entrenchment of Islamist ideology, he might be able to compete against them in genuinely democratic elections.⁹¹ As he told one gathering in September 1998, ‘now that we have established our faith firmly in society we must open the door to those who refuse to join us ... when they emerge they shall find themselves facing a united country’.⁹² As seen above, al-Turabi had argued during the previous parliamentary period that parties could be accepted since *tawhid* was an ideal that could not be achieved through coercion. At this point, he seems to have considered that his Islamist and military allies had used just enough force to make the attainment of *tawhid* possible without the application of any more.

Why did al-Turabi choose to use his talent for linguistic invention to coin the term *tawali* for the system he would use to re-engage the old and new political parties, rather than simply refer to ‘party pluralism’ (*ta’addud al-abzab*)? The majority of Islamists disliked the Arabic word for ‘party’, *hizb*, which in its classical equivalent connoted factionalism or internecine strife.⁹³ As al-Turabi and the National Assembly were debating the relevant passages of the draft constitution, and the subsequent ‘Tawali’ law, a number of civilian and military Islamists opposed to the ‘return of the parties’ mobilized the militias who had fought in the war against the SPLA and NDA, even organizing protests directly outside the Assembly building.⁹⁴ The term *tawali* allowed al-Turabi to mask his inconsistencies, offering an olive branch to the parties while reassuring his radical Islamist followers that the new measures would not constitute a return to ‘party’ politics in the classical sense.

It has been argued that the term *tawali* was an invention with no roots in historic Islamic jurisprudence, merely being a derivative of the verb that means to ‘join’ or ‘to follow’.⁹⁵ However, this fails to

⁹¹ De Waal and Abdel Salam, ‘Islamism’. ⁹² Ali, *Suqut*: 52.

⁹³ Ayubi, *Over-stating*: 397–398. ⁹⁴ *Al-Khartoum*, 21 March 1998.

⁹⁵ Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: 265.

appreciate the nature of al-Turabi's linguistic flexibility. While it is true that the verb *waliya* has no meaning in Islamic jurisprudence, the *masdar* (verbal noun) of its derived form III, *muwala*, can refer to a contract of clientage common in Islamic law.⁹⁶ Al-Turabi often used this form of the verb to explain the concept in public speeches.⁹⁷ The term *tawali* itself is a form VI *masdar*, which implies a more collective interpretation of the concept than the form III that represents an engagement between two individuals. It was defined by al-Turabi as a form of 'mutual support and assistance in the struggles of public, political life'.⁹⁸ At the same time, this did not necessarily mean that the new political organizations would have to pledge allegiance to the National Congress – al-Turabi explained in September 1998 that 'we must open the arena for those who do not want to give their allegiance (*yuwali*) to us to give their allegiance to whom they will'.⁹⁹ The problem, therefore, was not so much that the term failed to make sense on jurisprudential or other grounds, but that a combination of political factors and al-Turabi's own inability to explain the relevance of his sophisticated concepts, in addition to his somewhat ambivalent commitment to them, led it to be nonsensical in practice.

Part of the reason for the failure of al-Turabi's *tawali* stratagem was that the military regime never allowed him to implement it as he wished. The original draft of the 1998 constitution, produced by the National Constitutional Committee with some guidance from him, included a reference to the right of citizens to form 'cultural and political organizations'.¹⁰⁰ The draft that appeared before the National Assembly had, however, already been modified in the presidential palace by Umar al-Bashir and his advisors, and the passage in question replaced by a more ambiguous one stating that citizens could form institutions for 'social and economic and cultural and political purposes'.¹⁰¹ This was badly received in the Assembly, with members from the eastern, western and southern blocs demanding that the passage be replaced with wording confirming that the constitution

⁹⁶ Wehr, *Dictionary*: 1290. See also Al-Turabi, *al-Mustalahat*: 59.

⁹⁷ *Al-Khartoum*, 21 September 1998. ⁹⁸ Al-Turabi, *al-Mustalahat*: 59.

⁹⁹ *Al-Khartoum*, 21 September 1998.

¹⁰⁰ Uthman Ahmad Hasan 'al-rakd li-tazyif al-distour istabaq aradhu ala al-majlis,' *Al-Khartoum*, 15 March 1998.

¹⁰¹ Uthman Ahmad Hasan 'al-rakd li-tazyif al-distour istabaq aradhu ala al-majlis,' *Al-Khartoum*, 15 March 1998.

sanctioned political pluralism.¹⁰² Nevertheless, the draft constitution was ratified by both parliament and popular referendum, and the subsequent *tawali* law that came into effect at the beginning of 1999 contained similar obscurities; this deterred parties from returning to the political fray.¹⁰³

Although his hands were to some extent tied by his military allies, the extent of al-Turabi's own commitment to facilitating multi-partyism in an Islamist context is questionable. He spoke of the former parties in exclusionary terms even as he made plans to include them, telling Islamist audiences that 'we want the parties of Satan, when they return, to find that the country has united'.¹⁰⁴ This was scripting the plot of the future multiparty elections in advance. The return of the parties was intended to legitimize the Civilizational Project by illustrating that the Islamists could now defeat their Satanic rivals in free and fair elections, but one wonders if al-Turabi would have remained committed to multi-partyism if there had been a danger of the National Congress actually losing. The largest factions of the DUP and Umma within the NDA did not return, and the Umma party condemned al-Turabi's rejection of their proposals for a Constitutional Conference to discuss the return to multi-partyism.¹⁰⁵ Al-Turabi blamed the NDA parties for the failure to reach an agreement, maintaining that the opposition had 'left God'.¹⁰⁶

As al-Turabi's power struggle with the military intensified, he began – like al-Bashir – to see Sadiq's Umma, in particular, as a potential ally, and abandoned his exclusionary attitude towards it. In early 2000, he even praised the 'traditional parties', arguing that given their 'religious background' they might be able to resolve the political crisis.¹⁰⁷ In his *al-Siyasa wa'l-Hukm*, published in 2003, he made the relationship between his *tawali* model and party pluralism less ambiguous, stating in a section on 'the guidance of Islam regarding party allegiances (*muwala hizbiyya*)' that Islam had directed that 'public life should be open to, and tolerant of various parties (*ahzab*)'.¹⁰⁸ Indeed, he argued here that Medina in the age of the Prophet was an open field for individuals to 'take up different opinions and give their support (*yatawalun*) to them voluntarily'.¹⁰⁹ In the post-Rashidi age, these public debates became confined to the private sphere dominated

¹⁰² *Al-Khartoum*, 15 March 1998. ¹⁰³ *Al-Khartoum*, 6 January 1999.

¹⁰⁴ *Al-Khartoum*, 21 September 1998. ¹⁰⁵ *Al-Khartoum*, 17 April 1999.

¹⁰⁶ *Al-Khartoum*, 18 April 1999. ¹⁰⁷ *Al-Khartoum*, 12 February 2000.

¹⁰⁸ Al-Turabi, *al-Siyasa*: 210. ¹⁰⁹ Al-Turabi, *al-Siyasa*: 205.

by the *ulama* and the Sufi orders, and therefore political pluralism was lost.¹¹⁰ Just as in *al-Shura wa'l-Dimuqratiyya*, al-Turabi provides no references of any kind to support this characterization of the early period. Even in his most 'liberal' phase, his political model required recourse to an imagined past.

Al-Turabi maintains in *al-Siyasa wa'l-Hukm* that the reason that 'the Islamic Movement'¹¹¹ had refused to support multi-partyism until 2003 was that previously its various nationalist and leftist opponents 'did not believe in democracy' and the Islamists had been forced to respond in kind. However, he continues, the 'Islamic Movement' could now advocate political pluralism and freedom of opinion, especially since these opposing schools of thought – such as Westernization, (secular) nationalism and socialism – have 'dissolved' and 'the majority of the people have begun to turn towards Islam'.¹¹² Al-Turabi thus implicitly admits to the conditionality of his belief in pluralism – it still requires the hegemony of Islam, as he defines it. It is ironic that in this era he would go on to ally himself to secular parties, including Garang's SPLA and Nugd's SCP. Meanwhile, after al-Bashir abolished the *tawali* law and replaced it with more straightforward legislation, al-Turabi abandoned the term in his public discourse, merely advocating a more genuine return to multiparty politics.¹¹³ The *tawali* experiment was jettisoned as the no-party experiment had been before. Once more, these inconsistencies were probably more a product of blatant opportunism than of al-Turabi's renewal of his Islamic orientation.

Conclusion

Al-Turabi's intellectual openness left him far better placed to forge a successful model of Islamist democracy than the majority either of his Islamist predecessors or contemporaries. Unlike Qutb,¹¹⁴ he did not believe that democracy as a principle was too humanist to be reconciled with Islamism. The Islamic community did not need to be shut off from the democratic *jabiliyya* to nurture itself in isolation – rather, it could take the existing political order, whether democratic or not, and absorb

¹¹⁰ Al-Turabi, *al-Siyasa*: 205.

¹¹¹ Al-Turabi uses the term loosely here, reflecting his tendency to equate the outlook of Sudanese Islamism with his personal perspective.

¹¹² Al-Turabi, *al-Siyasa*: 206. ¹¹³ See Chapter 8.

¹¹⁴ Choueiri, *Islamic Fundamentalism*: 145–146.

it into a revitalized political system based on the principle of Islamist democracy. Moreover, his revolutionary approach towards the concept of *ijma* meant that he could, at least in theory, go beyond the elitist models provided by Rida, Mawdudi and al-Banna and produce an Islamist system relevant to the age of mass democracy. The problem was that al-Turabi's inconsistencies – partly the product of opportunism and partly of his attempts to compromise with the views of those more attached to the radical Islamist principles of Qutb, Mawdudi and the neo-fundamentalist Salafis – make it difficult to draw a clear line between his attitude towards democracy and that of other Islamists. His use of such language as 'the party of God' and the 'party of Satan', for instance, was clearly evocative of Qutb and Mawdudi.

Al-Turabi's theory of Islamist democracy has a number of serious flaws, deriving from both its core tenets and his frequent efforts to restructure his model to suit different political contexts. One central problem was that throughout the 1980s and 1990s his writings and public declarations on Islamist democracy became increasingly rooted in a palingenetic ideal; in this, a homogenous, believing Muslim community would spontaneously rise up and practise a form of electoral democracy based on universal suffrage supposedly existing in the seventh century. This ideal was problematic not just because it eschewed a serious analysis of early Muslim history, but also because it was impossible to relate it to the mundane realities of Sudanese politics. Its emphasis on homogeneity failed to explain how he would accommodate Muslim political organizations that failed to accept Islamist consensus and the Islamist *tawhidi* order, not to mention those of non-Muslims. His experiment with using the concept of *tawali* to do so was ultimately abortive. It is worth questioning whether al-Turabi really had a coherent theory of 'Islamist democracy' at all. At different times, he argued that Sudanese democracy required no parties, a single party or multiple parties. He argued that Islamist democracy must be 'direct democracy' and bottom up, and yet in both his writings and his politics he conceded the need for the *ahl al-hall wa'l-aqd* to act as representatives.

The efforts of al-Turabi and his subordinates to realize his ideals in the Sudanese political arena exposed their failings. He struggled to reconcile his claims that the Islamic resurgence was producing a spontaneous, direct democracy with the reality in which his subordinates attempted to construct the democratic utopia he championed

top-down. Elections and political practice often attempted to produce homogeneity and 'silent' consensus rather than consensus as the product of open debate. Although al-Turabi attempted to differentiate Islamist democracy from Western democracy on the grounds that the former would not be subject to the corrupting influence of money and Machiavellianism, his own political practice and that of his associates before and after 1989 discredited this argument.

These flaws do not demonstrate the impossibility of reconciling Islam with democracy, merely that Hasan al-Turabi failed to do so. He had no fixed concept of democracy but engaged in a continuous process of experimentation with various of its forms, the measure of their success being only their political serviceability. However, his revolutionary attitude towards *ijma* might continue to be of tremendous future significance for other Islamic democrats, despite his failure to apply it in his own time. It would also be rash to overlook the impact of experimentation with Islamist democracy and in particular a 'no-party' system on Sudanese politics. As will be seen in the next chapter, al-Turabi's efforts to detach the western, eastern and southern peripheries from the control of the historic parties indirectly facilitated the emergence of political groupings in Khartoum that demanded a resolution of the divide between Sudan's centre and peripheries, a process which he attempted to manipulate but could not control.

9 | *Champion of the Marginalized? The Decentralization Strategy*

In February 2001, al-Turabi completed what appeared to be a remarkable political turnaround. He signed a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ with his nemesis, John Garang, thereby making himself the number one enemy of the Islamist regime that had been his own progeny. One historian of Sudan, Robert Collins, described al-Turabi’s volte face as ‘bizarre’, arguing that it represented a ‘desperate, if not cynical last hurrah from a disillusioned old man seeking a place in history’.¹ This highlights one of the major questions still hovering over the post-1999 al-Turabi – how radical and how genuine a break with his past Islamist politics was his re-emergence as a ‘champion of the marginalized’? Johnson interprets his deal with Garang as a knee-jerk decision to seek out new political allies in the wake of his split with al-Bashir,² while Khalid seems unsure as to whether his period in power made him ‘see reality’ or merely adopt ‘a tactical gambit . . . to reduce his battlefronts’ while he had Bashir to cope with.³

While it is certainly reasonable to highlight the short-term, pragmatic factors that led to al-Turabi’s apparently spontaneous alliance with Garang, this relationship also needs to be understood in the context of the *Shaikh*’s efforts to manipulate the ‘near periphery’ through a strategy of decentralization dating back to the 1960s. For sympathetic authors such as Mahbub Abd al-Salam, this is evidence of his commitment to a strategy of bottom-up Islamization that inevitably led him to clash with al-Bashir and Taha, the aim of both being to preserve the power of the central state.⁴ Other commentators, by contrast, interpret the decentralization policies pursued in the 1990s by al-Turabi and his allies in the Chamber of Federal Government as an effort to co-opt ‘intermediate

¹ Collins, *History*: 227. ² Johnson, *Root Causes*: 108.

³ Khalid, *War and Peace*: 204.

⁴ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 148, 205–228.

elites'.⁵ Indeed, his policy of *dhauban*, or 'melting' the movement into society, might be better understood as an effort to buy the allegiance of local Native Administration leaders and regional governors in De Waal's 'political marketplace'.⁶ This chapter will explore the functioning of this strategy. What, in particular, was its significance for the dynamics of the conflict in Darfur and – in spite of the 2001 Memorandum of Understanding with Garang – the ultimate failure to prevent the secession of Southern Sudan in 2011?

Decentralization, 1964–1989

One feature of the Islamic State that al-Turabi was more consistent in advocating, if perhaps less consistent in putting into practice, is decentralized governance. Abd al-Salam contends that it was his experience of the *canton*-based system in France that led him to view this model favourably.⁷ And it was, in fact, in the speech that marked his return from France and entry into the Sudanese political arena during the 1964 October Revolution that he advocated this as a solution to the 'Southern Problem'.⁸ However, his commitment to decentralization in the south would wax and wane in the years that followed. Thus in 1965, he gave public support to the army's ruthless campaign in the region and admitted that, while he had condemned the Abboud regime for treating the 'Southern Question' purely as a 'security' problem, the parliamentary regime had become too focused on finding a political solution and neglected its 'security' aspects.⁹ In the next year, he was lauded by southern politicians after lambasting the government for failing to move towards a political solution!¹⁰ But as Nimeiri's attorney-general, he would later alienate southerners once more by helping to draft the provisions of the controversial decree that in 1983 re-divided the south into three politically emasculated regions.¹¹

⁵ For an exploration of the relevance of this concept in Sudanese and North East African politics, see De Waal, *Real Politics*: 30–31. Verhoeven advances a similar argument in *Water*.

⁶ See De Waal, *Real Politics*: Chapter 2.

⁷ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 194.

⁸ Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 61.

⁹ *The Vigilant*, 30 June 1965. See also al-Turabi's interview with *The Vigilant*, 9 June 1965.

¹⁰ *The Vigilant*, 13 March 1966. ¹¹ *Sudan Democratic Gazette*, April 1991.

Al-Turabi advocated decentralization with a greater degree of consistency in the north, where he knew that co-opting regionalist sentiment might enable him to outmanoeuvre Khartoum-based parties such as the Umma party and NUP that had relied complacently on historic patronage networks for their support in the provinces. In the same parliamentary speech of 1965 in which he advocated tougher security measures in the south, he criticized the attitude of the government towards the other regionalist groups that had emerged during the parliamentary period, observing that they had appeared as a result of the regions' legitimate concerns.¹² Indeed, one of his Darfuri protégés, Ali al-Haj, played a substantial role in one of these groupings, becoming deputy president of the Darfur Renaissance Front (DRF), a bloc of 24 Darfuri politicians from different political parties that campaigned for greater autonomy for the region. Al-Haj maintains that when he attended the Front's first conference in al-Fashir in May 1965, he brought with him a copy of a working plan for regional and federal government drawn up by al-Turabi.¹³ In parliament, al-Turabi proposed a new model of federal governance as an alternative to the existing system of Native Administration introduced by the British, which he believed colonial, military and 'sectarian' regimes had all used to perpetuate hereditary and patrimonial systems of local governance.¹⁴ In particular, he blamed the influence of the Native Administration for the inability of 'modern' parties such as his own to gain regional support. In Darfur, where the system of Native Administration was firmly entrenched, the former ICF parliamentary representative for Kutum West, Sulayman Mustafa Abbakr, was briefly arrested for participating in a committee demanding that the local *Umda* be elected in a more democratic fashion. Upon his release, al-Turabi travelled to Darfur to congratulate him, and declared that the people of the province were 'suffering tyranny and injustice from the Native Administration', which was responsible for maintaining the status quo and perpetuating the state of neglect which the region experienced.¹⁵ Nevertheless, and in spite of al-Turabi's own prominent role in local electioneering, Abbakr's original election victory had been dependent on the support of the Native

¹² *The Vigilant*, 30 June 1965. ¹³ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 196.

¹⁴ TNA, Griffith to Hartland-Swann, 30 June 1966, attaching *Sudan News Agency English Daily Bulletin*, 28 June 1966, FO 371/190420.

¹⁵ *Al-Mithaq*, 21 June 1968.

Administration chief of North Kutum, Ali Muhammadain.¹⁶ Even in the 1960s, al-Turabi recognized that the Native Administration had to be co-opted as much as challenged.

Al-Turabi had a further opportunity to pursue the politics of decentralization following his reconciliation with the May Regime in 1977, soon after which Nimeiri announced his own strategy of decentralization. The 1980 Regional Government Act divided the north of Sudan into five regions – Eastern, Western, Central, Kordofan and Darfur, granting each region an Assembly in which two-thirds of the seats were filled by popular vote.¹⁷ Al-Turabi was appointed as a ‘political supervisor’ over the region of Darfur, but it seems that he was unable to achieve much beyond gathering local support for the Islamic Movement.¹⁸ Driven by *realpolitik*, Nimeiri’s push for regionalization not only enabled him to sideline the core institutions of the state, such as the police, civil service and judiciary; but, by giving extensive powers to regional governors appointed directly from among his own supporters, also made it possible for him to exert control over the regional assemblies.¹⁹ In line with this strategy, he appointed his Free Officer colleague, Tayyib al-Mardi, as governor of Darfur. The population of the region was angered by the appointment of a non-Darfuri as its governor, and this culminated in the Darfur *Intifada* of 1981, which forced Nimeiri to replace al-Mardi with the former leader of the DRF, Ahmad Diraige.²⁰ Although Diraige was a member of the Umma party, a number of Darfuri Islamists participated prominently in the *Intifada*; these included the future National Congress leader, Shafi Muhammad Ahmad.²¹

Decentralization after the 1989 Coup

After the 1989 coup, al-Turabi had more licence to implement his decentralization strategy, with the support of what he hoped would

¹⁶ El-Din, ‘Islam and Islamism in Darfur’.

¹⁷ Daly, *Darfur’s Sorrow*: 223. Fegley, *Beyond Khartoum*: 58.

¹⁸ Interviewed by Siddiq Zeili in *al-Midan* in 1988, Ali al-Haj responded to the charge that al-Turabi in his role as political supervisor neglected the people of Darfur and focused purely on building up his movement by responding that Nimeiri never gave him any power and that one might hardly expect an Islamist of al-Turabi’s status to avoid preaching his political message.

¹⁹ Daly, *Darfur’s Sorrow*: 224. ²⁰ Daly, *Darfur’s Sorrow*: 225.

²¹ Daly, *Darfur’s Sorrow*: 225. For Ahmad’s role, see Abd Jabar Dosa, *Interview with Sudanjem*, 18 May 2011, www.sudanjem.org/2011/05/;

be a more pliant military regime. Abd al-Salam regards this as one arena of domestic politics in which al-Turabi intervened more directly than in others, since most of his Islamist colleagues in the administration and legal services were more familiar with the English system of local government, and less with the French system from which he drew inspiration.²² The system was established by a number of constitutional decrees, beginning with the fourth Constitutional Decree of 4 February 1991 announcing the formation of a federal government (*hukm ittihadi*). This established nine states with their own assemblies, although these were subject to a governor (*wali*) appointed by the president.²³ The system was expanded by the creation of a Chamber of Federal Government (*diwan al-hukm al-ittihadi*) in January 1993, followed by the Twelfth Constitutional Decree of August 1995, which altered the number of states (*wilayat*) in Sudan from 9 to 26 and further sub-divided these into districts (*muhafazat*), each led by a *muhafiz*, or district governor.²⁴ Finally, a Thirteenth Constitutional Decree was issued to legislate for gubernatorial elections in each state.²⁵

It seems that the process of decentralization was influenced by some of the narrower ethnic and political agendas of the Salvation Regime. Many have criticized the federal dispensation for acting as a patronage system to incorporate local elites, rather than expand access to public services.²⁶ Ali al-Haj, appointed as the minister for local government, was accused of altering a number of state boundaries in order to transfer agricultural and mineral resources from southern to northern states.²⁷ Meanwhile, it has been claimed that the ministry also exploited the re-division of 1994 to make the Fur a minority in each of the new Darfuri states,²⁸ and – by taking the opportunity to create a separate district for Shaikh Ali Bitai's faction of the Hadendoa in Kassala State – to 'reward' it for supporting the Islamic Movement.²⁹ Al-Haj would later deny the claims that he had intended to 'divide the Fur', maintaining that the re-division had been modelled on the Nigerian federal system, which had a similarly large number of states.³⁰

²² Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 206.

²³ Lesch, *Sudan*: 126. Fegley, *Beyond Khartoum*: 172.

²⁴ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 206. ²⁵ *Al-Anbaa*, 10 August 1997.

²⁶ Atta el-Battahani, 'The Post-secession State': 34. ²⁷ Lesch, *Sudan*: 127.

²⁸ Daly, *Darfur's Sorrow*: 262. ²⁹ Lesch, *Sudan*: 127.

³⁰ *Al-Sahafa*, 5 February 2008.

In spite of al-Turabi's long-standing criticism of the Native Administration, the new regime was willing to re-engineer it to suit its own purposes. In 1994, the government announced the establishment of a 'Council of Native Administration' in each state, giving the Native Administration official recognition for the first time since its dissolution by Nimeiri in 1971.³¹ In 1995, the Ministry of Social Planning organized a 21-day 'Native Regime Conference' (*Mu'atamar al-Nizam al-Ahali*) at which chiefs, nazirs and other Native Administrators were provided with military and technical training.³² Native Administrators were granted a number of economic and judicial powers, but remained subject to the local governor. For instance, in South Kordofan the three nazirs of the Missiriyya, who had historically supported the Umma Party, were replaced by 16 paramount chiefs reporting directly to the *wali*.³³ It was al-Bashir who made the most passionate speeches in favour of the Native Administration, to the extent that chiefs in the south often referred to him in fond terms.³⁴ Al-Turabi's own declarations were more cautious, reflecting his trademark pragmatism. He warned the 1995 conference that 'Islam does not know sects and partisans',³⁵ and asserted during a 1998 visit to South Darfur that 'The Native Administration is tribalism. In the city it has no influence . . . we should not forget the old but we should not kneel before it'.³⁶ Al-Turabi's use of the pejorative word 'tribalism' to characterize the Native Administration suggests that it had little role in his idealized Islamist modernity. However, the political pragmatist in him recognized its short term utility as a vector for his Islamist ideals and, towards the end of the 1990s, developing a close relationship with the grandees of the Native Administration helped his plans to mobilize the regions against his opponents in the riverain centre. Soon after the frictions caused by the Memorandum of the Ten in 1998, a group of 'tribal leaders' led by the Humr nazir, Abd al-Qadir Munim Mansur, signed a memorandum pleading with al-Turabi not to resign from the National Assembly,³⁷ and one of his allies in that body during the struggles of 1999 was the Ma'alia Nazir, Salah Ghali.³⁸ As with the

³¹ Lesch, *Sudan*: 127. ³² *Al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 9 January 1995.

³³ International Crisis Group, 'Sudan's Southern Kordofan Problem'.

³⁴ Leonardi, *Dealing with Government*: 172.

³⁵ *Al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 18 January 1995. ³⁶ *Al-Anbaa*, 14 September 1998.

³⁷ *Al-Anbaa*, 21 December 1998.

³⁸ Faisal Muhammad Salih, 'kaifa inqalab al-sihr ala al-sahir?', *Al-Khartoum*, 18 December 1999.

Sufis and the Salafis, so the ‘melting’ of the Islamic Movement into society could also incorporate shaikhs, nazirs and chiefs.

The decentralization project was also undermined by splits in the Islamic Movement, and between the Islamic Movement and the military. The new district governors, or *muhafizin*, mostly came from the ranks of the Islamic Movement, reporting directly to the Chamber of Federal Government and thus the Minister for Local Government; since 1993, this was the close al-Turabi associate, Ali al-Haj.³⁹ Part of their purpose was to liaise with the local Popular Committees and carry out al-Turabi’s plan to ‘dissolve’ the movement into society. Meanwhile, the state-level governor, or *wali*, was usually a military figure appointed directly by al-Bashir, and his prerogatives often clashed with those granted to the *muhafiz* under the new federal government laws.⁴⁰ This was in itself a by-product of the struggle between the two parallel governments, the official military government under al-Bashir and the embryonic Islamist government that al-Turabi was attempting to establish.⁴¹

According to Mahbub Abd al-Salam, the struggle was also regional and ethnic – neither the army, nor Islamists such as Ali Uthman Taha who were close to the military regime, wanted to concede power to regional governments headed by the representatives of Sudan’s peripheries who had begun to rise through the ranks of the Islamic Movement over the previous 30 years. It seems that both Taha and Abd al-Rahim Muhammad Hussein were unhappy about the role of former DRF deputy president, al-Haj, and attempted to restrict the influence of his ministry.⁴² Later, al-Haj would acquire a colleague from southern Sudan when al-Turabi suggested that the non-Islamist second vice-president, George Kongor, be appointed President of the Chamber of Federal Government as a replacement for Zubeir Muhammad Salih.⁴³ This was particularly significant since, previously, riverain northerners had tended to by-pass al-Haj and raise their problems with Zubeir Salih directly.⁴⁴ According to Abd al-Salam, the presence of a southerner and

³⁹ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 207, fn 10.

⁴⁰ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 212–213.

⁴¹ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 212–213.

⁴² Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 210.

⁴³ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 211. See also Ali al-Haj, Interview with *al-Sahafa*, 5 February 2008.

⁴⁴ See also Ali al-Haj, Interview with *al-Sahafa*, 5 February 2008.

a westerner in these positions opened up ‘racial struggle’ within the Islamic Movement.⁴⁵

The dynamics of the decentralization policy of the 1990s were in many regards the fruit of al-Turabi’s long term efforts to bargain with potential southern secessionists. As seen in Chapter 7, in the 1980s he had attempted to make his vision of the Islamic State acceptable to southerners by maintaining that sharia would not be imposed on majority non-Muslim regions such as the south. There is some evidence that the government’s concession of the right to self-determination in the 1992 Frankfurt agreement reflected the willingness of al-Turabi, distracted by his wider pan-Islamist visions, to let the south go. However, by 1996 his more global Islamist strategy had been frustrated and he had returned to the domestic Sudanese political arena, with the southern region once more destined to serve an important role in his political strategy. Soon after his return, the government signed the 1997 Khartoum Peace Agreement with a breakaway faction of the SPLA, making its leader, Riek Machar, head of a ‘Co-ordinating Council for Southern Sudan’.⁴⁶ Al-Turabi then appeared determined once more to prevent secession, by offering a southern rebel leader a stake in the Islamist ‘political marketplace’. Yet bringing Riek Machar into the National Assembly also raised the prospect that the dynamics of the relationship between the centre and the regions in the north might change. Following concessions to the principle of regional autonomy in the 1997 Peace Agreement, the government was obliged to sanction gubernatorial elections in the north.⁴⁷

Since it was the state governors who had enabled the military to maintain a firm hand on the regions, the move towards elections for this position in 1997 was crucial to the progress of al-Turabi’s decentralization drive. The form the elections would take was contested – the central government wanted to prepare a list of nominees for the State Council (*Majlis al-Wilaya*) to choose from, whereas there were calls in the National Assembly for the State Councils to have the power to nominate three individuals who came from their respective states.⁴⁸ According to Abd al-Salam, ethnic and regional tensions were once more at the fore here, with the northern-dominated central government

⁴⁵ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 212.

⁴⁶ Johnson, *Root Causes*: 122–123. ⁴⁷ *Al-Anbaa*, 10 August 1997.

⁴⁸ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 218. *Al-Anbaa*, 12 August 1997.

fearing that if each of the western and southern states voted for a local candidate they could form a bloc controlling 16 out of 26 governorships, thereby enabling them to pose a serious challenge to the riverain centre.⁴⁹ Eventually, a compromise was reached whereby the State Councils would choose between three individuals, including military officers favoured by al-Bashir as well as more regional candidates.⁵⁰ Abd al-Salam credits al-Turabi with achieving this compromise,⁵¹ which in the majority of eastern, western and central states led to a crushing victory for the regional Islamic Movement over the central military government.⁵² For instance, in one of the eastern States the former Nimeiri stalwart, Abu'l Qasim Muhammad Ibrahim, lost to a candidate from the Bani Amir, one of the regional groups assiduously cultivated by al-Turabi's movement.⁵³ These elections also led to each of the three Darfur states acquiring governors from the region for the first time since they were established.⁵⁴ The fact that governors were elected by the councils themselves, and not the general public, would seem to confirm the argument that the main purpose of al-Turabi's decentralization strategy was to co-opt local elites. Nevertheless, it showed that he was more capable of reaching out to this 'near periphery' than some of his military allies.

From this point onwards, al-Turabi used the newly elected bloc of regional governors to challenge the policies of the central government, particularly over Darfur and the 1998 Constitution. In 1997, as the government declared a State of Emergency in Darfur and continued its policy of arming militias on an ethnic basis, al-Turabi's future comrade

⁴⁹ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 218.

⁵⁰ There is some conflict between Abd al-Salam's narrative and the narrative reported in the official media here. While Abd al-Salam contends that the agreement was that one individual would be nominated by the State Council and one by the President, the official media reported that al-Bashir nominated three (not two) candidates and the State Council chose between them. It may be that an unofficial compromise was reached that was not reported in the official newspapers. Nevertheless, it is clear from the official media that candidates did include a mix of military officers of central/northern origin and those who hailed from the states themselves. See Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 218 and *Al-Anbaa*, 15 August, 16 August 1997.

⁵¹ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 218.

⁵² *Al-Khartoum*, 16 August 1997.

⁵³ Abd al-Salam, *al-Haraka al-Islamiyya*: 219, fn 24.

⁵⁴ See list of state governors in the Black Book, reproduced in el-Tom, *Darfur, JEM*: 299–307.

in the PCP and governor of North Kordofan, Ibrahim Sanussi, condemned ‘political groups plotting against the people of Darfur’ and began to call for the establishment of a ‘united political bloc’ comprising the six states of Darfur and Kordofan.⁵⁵ In 1998 he established a Co-ordinating Congress of the States of West Sudan (*Mu’atamar al-Tanasuqqi li-Wilayat Gharb al-Sudan*), which came to be known as *Al-Kiyan al-Gharb*.⁵⁶ *Al-Kiyan al-Gharb* translates as ‘Western Entity’, and the name perhaps reflects resentment of the *Kiyan al-Shamili* (‘Northern Entity’), the term used by the marginalized groups to describe the informal networks of power and patronage through which the inhabitants of northern riverain Sudan monopolized the key positions in government and society.⁵⁷ In 1998, Sanussi, who would later claim that he was ‘strongly encouraged’ to form the *Kiyan al-Gharb* by al-Turabi,⁵⁸ put forward that it should act as a ‘co-ordinating apparatus’ on the basis of the Co-ordinating Council for the Southern States established under the 1997 Khartoum Peace Agreement, implicitly proposing that the west might eventually achieve the same level of self-government as the south.⁵⁹ As if this would not have been threatening enough to the guardians of the *status quo* in Khartoum, the *Kiyan*’s 1999 conference drew up plans to incorporate a number of the southern states.⁶⁰

The *Kiyan al-Gharb* enabled al-Turabi to mobilize ‘intermediate elites’ against his opponents in the centre and potentially carve out new arenas of financial influence. His supporters in the Islamic banks had been losing out in the battle for control of Sudan’s ‘political marketplace’ to al-Bashir’s partisans in the state-backed Central Bank.⁶¹ The decentralization strategy enabled al-Turabi to open up a new such marketplace outside the historic centres of riverain financial power. The various proposals put forward by the *Kiyan al-Gharb* included allowing state governments to encourage investment in their regions on their own initiative, and increasing both the states’ share of oil receipts as well as the amount of taxation they could impose on

⁵⁵ *Al-Midan*, January/February 1998. Al-Rashid, *Inshiqaq*: 66.

⁵⁶ *Al-Khartoum*, 12 September 1999, 12 October 1998.

⁵⁷ El-Tom, ‘Darfur People’: 95–96.

⁵⁸ Ibrahim Sanussi, statements cited by *al-Taghyeer*, 26 April 2015 www.altaghyeer.info/2015/04/26/ (accessed 1 September 2016)

⁵⁹ *Al-Khartoum*, 18 August 1998. ⁶⁰ *Al-Khartoum*, 7 July 1999.

⁶¹ De Waal, *Real Politics*: 81.

national corporations – all measures that would have increased the financial power of key al-Turabi backers such as Ibrahim Sanussi.⁶²

It was probably the threat of governors forming regionalist blocs to challenge the central government that led the presidency to attempt to use the 1998 Constitution to reassert control over the provinces. While the initial draft prepared by the Constitutional Committee deprived the president of any role in gubernatorial elections, one of the draft's modifications made by the palace before its submission to the National Assembly permitted the head of state to choose three candidates from a list of six nominated by the state council before elections could take place.⁶³ A grouping of around 300 members from the eastern, southern and western states announced its rejection of this modification when the draft constitution was reviewed in the National Assembly,⁶⁴ while a Darfuri Islamist, al-Haj Adam Yusuf, headed a coalition of state governors to campaign on similar grounds.⁶⁵ Although the modified draft of the Constitution was passed, al-Turabi continued to use the issue to mobilize regional support against his competitors in the central government, and the regional governors played a significant role in the reversal of the moves to restrict his powers within the National Congress in 1998 and 1999.⁶⁶ Indeed, the tension between the centre and the regions, and al-Turabi's efforts to employ it in his power struggles, would be one of the defining features of his brief experiment with Islamist democracy between 1996 and 1999.

The Regionalization of Islamist Democracy

As seen in the previous chapter, al-Turabi shifted to advocacy of a 'no-party' system after the Islamist seizure of power in 1989. A consequence of this manoeuvre, which perhaps he had not foreseen, was that it facilitated the emergence of regional blocs. Regional parties or groupings such as the Beja Congress, DRF and various southern political groups, had a long pedigree in Sudanese politics. In the 1950s, the Beja Congress of eastern Sudan had combined with southern, eastern and western

⁶² *Al-Anbaa*, 14 September 1998. ⁶³ *Al-Khartoum*, 14 March 1998.

⁶⁴ *Al-Khartoum*, 15 March 1998.

⁶⁵ Interview with al-Haj Adam Yusuf by *al-Raya*, reproduced by JEM website, 24 July 2009, www.sudanjem.org/2009/04/.

⁶⁶ See Chapter 3.

representatives to demand a federal system, but found themselves thwarted by the regional hegemony of the Ansar and Khatmiyya-backed parties, as well as by the impact of civil war and military coups.⁶⁷ While historic regionalist parties such as the Beja Congress were outlawed in the 'no-party democracy' of the 1990s, the new system also removed the old Khartoum-centric parties such as the Umma and DUP, which had historically been able to exploit the regional popularity of the Ansar and Khatmiyya religious orders to control the population of eastern and western Sudan. It is in this context that Esposito and Voll are persuasive in claiming that the removal of the 'sectarian' parties facilitated political transformation in Sudan.⁶⁸ With these parties banned, and in the absence of any over-arching one-party structure to replace them, the representatives from Sudan's marginalized regions soon began to see their common interest in challenging riverain dominance. The emergence of regional blocs, and the role they played in both leadership elections and major constitutional debates within the National Congress and National Assembly, became defining features of the 1995–1999 experiment in Islamist democracy.

These groupings first emerged during the contest for the General Secretariat of the National Congress in 1996. According to later narratives by the JEM and the PCP, the southerners and westerners formed a voting coalition to ensure the election of the Darfuri candidate, Shafi Muhammad Ahmad, but the northern riverain leadership rigged the election in favour of Ghazi Salahaddin.⁶⁹ The facts remain murky, but it is clear even from the official media that the largely northern leadership engaged in considerable manoeuvring to prevent Shafi's victory. Although the official deadline for nominations had passed, Muhammad al-Hasan al-Amin sponsored a southern politician, Michael Mario, presumably in order to split the vote of the 'marginalized' groups.⁷⁰ Zubeir Muhammad Salih, overseeing the elections, sanctioned this nomination in spite of the objection of a southern representative,⁷¹ and the four northern candidates other than Ghazi promptly withdrew.⁷² Whether it was this manoeuvre, or outright cheating, that secured Ghazi's victory is unclear, but the heated contest set a pattern in which members of both the Assembly

⁶⁷ Bassil, *Postcolonial State*: 102–103.

⁶⁸ Voll & Esposito, *Islam and Democracy*, 101. ⁶⁹ El-Tom, *Darfur, JEM*: 207.

⁷⁰ *Al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 4 January 1996.

⁷¹ *Al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 4 January 1996. ⁷² *Sudanow*, February 1996.

and the Congress would play politics as northerners, easterners, southerners and westerners.

Whether al-Turabi anticipated this phenomenon or not, he soon adapted to it. His priorities in the late 1990s were to give the regional groupings sufficient oxygen to thrive without allowing their demands to become too radical, and also to bring them to his assistance in his internal struggle against the al-Bashir and Taha faction. In 1998, the *Kiyan al-Gharb*, led by al-Turabi's ally, Ibrahim Sanussi, announced the formation of a 'pressure group' comprised of western representatives in the National Assembly to campaign for a fairer share of the country's resources.⁷³ In light of Sanussi's role and the fact that al-Turabi as speaker had sanctioned the presence of this regionalist bloc, these activities must at the very least have had his tacit blessing. A number of western representatives complained that the 'entity' represented an attempt by Khartoum to manipulate and limit the agenda of the western regionalists.⁷⁴ Nevertheless, a number of the local elites representing the 'marginalized' regions within the assembly saw that with the northern power bloc likely to bar the accession of a southerner or westerner to any leadership position, al-Turabi was their best bet. It was a Darfuri, the former officer of the Revolutionary Command Council for National Salvation, General Muhammad al-Amin Khalifa, who nominated him in 1996 for the position of speaker of the National Assembly,⁷⁵ and the southern rebel leader, Riek Machar, who proposed him in 1998 as secretary-general of the National Congress to replace Ghazi.⁷⁶ Later in 1998 and in the wake of the Memorandum of the Ten, the National Assembly refused to accept al-Turabi's resignation as speaker after rumours that the northern bloc would thwart efforts by a southern, western and eastern coalition to elect the Nuba politician, Makki Balayela, in his place.⁷⁷ While the elections of 1996 did not represent the spontaneous resurgence of a pious and democratic *umma*, al-Turabi had created a new, albeit restricted, political environment in which representatives of the marginalized regions could challenge the hegemony of the riverain centre.

⁷³ *Al-Khartoum*, 13 September 1998.

⁷⁴ Hussein Dosa, comments referred to in *al-Khartoum*, 27 September 1998.

⁷⁵ *Al-Sudan al-Hadith*, 2 April 1996. ⁷⁶ *Al-Khartoum*, 23 February 1998.

⁷⁷ *Al-Khartoum*, 26 December 1998.

The Darfur Conflict and the PCP-JEM Link

The outbreak of the conflict in Darfur in 2003 might be understood as the unfolding of the tensions generated by al-Turabi's efforts to co-opt the 'intermediate elites' from the regions into the National Assembly and the National Congress between 1996 and 1999. There are two main, if far from mutually exclusive, interpretations of the origins of the Darfur conflict. One sees its source in Khartoum: it was a proxy conflict between the partisans of al-Turabi and those of al-Bashir that emerged following the 1999 split; this tends to find most favour in the Khartoum media and among Middle Eastern analysts.⁷⁸ The other interpretation understands the war in Darfur in the context of a 'centre-periphery' dynamic, emphasizing that – like the conflict in southern Sudan – it is the product of the festering resentment of the population of Sudan's regions at economic marginalization by the riverain centre; this is backed in Western academic circles and by the rebel leaders themselves.⁷⁹

Without discounting such factors as the economic neglect of the region, environmental crisis, the growth of racialist ideology and the spill over of the Libya-Chad conflict,⁸⁰ one of the short term causes of the outbreak of the rebellion was probably frustration at the thwarting by the political centre of the aspirations that al-Turabi's decentralization strategy of the 1990s had brought about. After 2003, he was unable to control all of the activities of his 'allies' in the region, but pursued his usual strategy of offering sufficient support for the regionalists to be able to serve as a useful tool in his political battles at the centre, while distancing himself from their most militant activities.

As we have seen, al-Turabi has long argued that centralization of political and economic power is the root of a number of Sudan's problems, and – from the 1965 Round Table Conference until the new regional government policies of the 1990s – has consistently advocated a federal, decentralized model of governance. It is true that he and his supporters often implemented this strategy more in accordance with Islamist *realpolitik* than with the interests of the local

⁷⁸ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 461. Al-Rashid, *Inshiqaq*: 92–93.

⁷⁹ The most prominent example of this argument is Johnson, *Root Causes*: preface, xvi and 130–131. See also el-Tom, 'Darfur People': 92–95.

⁸⁰ For a useful summary of the causes of the conflict, see Battahani, 'Ideological expansionist movements': 50–56.

populations in mind. Nevertheless, the regional policies of the 1990s certainly provided an opportunity to local politicians who wished to challenge the dominance of the riverain centre, and, as seen previously, al-Turabi's key lieutenants played substantial roles in campaigning for the rights of western Sudan through institutions such as the *Kiyan al-Gharb*. After the 1999 split, four of the six western governors – including Ibrahim Yahya and soon-to-be PCP members Ibrahim Sanussi and al-Haj Adam Yusuf – who had come to power in the 1997 elections and helped form the *Kiyan al-Gharb*, were dismissed by al-Bashir and replaced mainly by individuals from outside their states.⁸¹ Tellingly, rather than attempting to challenge al-Bashir during the elections of December 2000, al-Turabi made plans to travel to al-Fashir, only for his flight to be blocked by the authorities.⁸² The ethnic, political and economic conflicts that culminated in the outbreak of the Darfur Rebellion were firmly entwined with the working out of his decentralization strategy.

In the 1990s, the state of West Darfur, one of the centres of the later Darfur conflict, witnessed increasing competition for land between two groups, the predominant 'non-Arab' Masalit and the 'Arabs', the latter swollen in numbers by immigration from Chad.⁸³ The Masalit group was one of the many 'non-Arab' groups successfully targeted by the Islamic Movement as a constituency in its phase of mass expansion during the 1980s.⁸⁴ However, in the following decade the central government, led by al-Bashir, began to favour the 'Arab' groups, awarding them a number of 'emirates' within the state.⁸⁵ In 1997 West Darfur voted into office a Masalit governor, Ibrahim Yahya, after al-Turabi had persuaded al-Bashir to allow gubernatorial elections in the northern states. Yahya was one of the many Darfuris who had entered the government via the new Chamber of Federal Government al-Turabi had supported, having worked as a *muhafiz*, first in Metemma and then Dongola in Northern State.⁸⁶ When he became governor, he was one of the six *walis* in western Sudan who joined the *Kiyan al-Gharb* headed by the key al-Turabi lieutenant, Ibrahim Sanussi. Yahya proudly advocated decentralization and

⁸¹ See list of state governors in the Black Book, reproduced in el-Tom, *Darfur, JEM*: 299–307.

⁸² *Al-Khartoum*, 18 December 2000. ⁸³ Flint and De Waal, *Darfur*: 57.

⁸⁴ Jok, *Sudan*: 118, 140. ⁸⁵ Flint and De Waal, *Darfur*: 58.

⁸⁶ *Sudan.Jem*, 1 December 2014, www.sudanjem.org/2014/12/.

defended the new institution against charges of racism and regional factionalism made by the Khartoum media.⁸⁷

In early 1999, Ibrahim Yahya's status as governor of West Darfur became a focus for political attention following the outbreak of ethnic clashes near Geneina between Masalit farmers and 'Arab' Rizayqat pastoralists. In late January, an institution in Khartoum called the 'Consultative Council for the Rizayqat Tribe' issued a statement condemning Yahya's conduct during the clashes, blaming him for the killing of a number of senior Rizayqat leaders sent to negotiate, and claiming that it was his intention to dispose of the 'Arab' population of the state.⁸⁸ The statement urged al-Bashir to intervene, which he promptly did, issuing an emergency decree suspending all of the West Darfur governor's security-related powers and appointing a senior general, Mustafa Dabi, to head a committee charged with 'preserving security' in the state.⁸⁹ Yahya and many others have claimed that Mustafa Dabi effectively started the *Janjawid* phenomenon in Darfur by arming 'Arab' militias to loot and destroy Masalit villages which the regular army had disarmed.⁹⁰ It was in this context that a bloc of Darfuri representatives, who were already protesting at the president's increased role in the appointment of governors under the 1998 Constitution, also began to demand constitutional changes to end his ability to suspend the powers of governors.⁹¹

Although the emergence of the Justice and Equality Movement as one of the major rebel factions in 2003 was to some extent defined by the 'African vs Arab' ethnic dynamic growing in Darfur since the 1980s, it was also to some degree a by-product of al-Turabi's strategy of Islamist decentralization. Ibrahim Yahya himself took up a senior position in the JEM, although he would later leave and form his own faction.⁹² A number of JEM founders were Islamists who had played significant roles under Ali al-Haj's Chamber of Federal Government in the 1990s. The JEM leader, Khalil Ibrahim, an Islamist since the 1980s, had carried a number of state-level ministerial portfolios in the 1990s,⁹³ while its spokesman, Ahmad Hussein, had been the secretary of Ibrahim Sanussi during his time as deputy-secretary general of the

⁸⁷ Ibrahim Yahya, Interview with *al-Anbaa*, 14 October 1998.

⁸⁸ *Al-Khartoum*, 31 January 1999, 2 February 1999.

⁸⁹ *Al-Khartoum*, 3 February 1999. ⁹⁰ Flint and De Waal, *Darfur*: 61.

⁹¹ *Al-Watan*, 2 July 2014. ⁹² Flint and De Waal, *Darfur*: 111–112.

⁹³ Flint and De Waal, *Darfur*: 107.

PAIC and governor of North Kordofan.⁹⁴ The JEM even developed a similar structure to al-Turabi's NCP and PCP – a 'general conference', in addition to a Consultative Council embracing a Legislative Council and Executive Bureau, along with separate sectors for students and women.⁹⁵

In 2011, JEM relief co-ordinator Sulaiman Jamus, an Islamist since he joined the ICF in 1964,⁹⁶ claimed that Khalil often read al-Turabi's books and wanted to realise his ideal of the Islamic State.⁹⁷ Indeed, the imprint of Turabism upon the JEM's foundational ideological text is evident. Published anonymously in 2000, the *Black Book* castigated the Khartoum-based regime for its racist ideology and monopolization of the country's resources. While it denounced the Salvation Regime for using 'the slogans of Islam and Islamization' to mask policies that facilitated the domination of the central riverain region, it proposed its own model for an Islamic State which adopted a number of Turabist formulas. Like al-Turabi, the book's authors adopted a form of liberal Salafism, citing the sayings of Caliph Abu Bakr al-Siddiq Radiullah to establish that an Islamic State would guarantee freedom of opinion. They similarly follow al-Turabi in proposing that while man possesses only vice-regency (*khilafa*) on earth, his innate capacities (*fitra*) and usage of analogical reasoning (*qiyas*) enable him to take the initiative in matters of governance. In the *Black Book*, consultation (*shura*) is made obligatory for rulers, and the community (*jama'a*) has the right to force a ruler out of power.⁹⁸ Although al-Turabi did not possess a monopoly on these ideas, he had certainly helped to popularize them.

In light of the previous links of many senior JEM figures to al-Turabi and the Chamber of Federal Government, the government was quick to allege that the Darfuri rebel movement was the armed wing of the PCP. As a result, in 2004 it arrested a large number of PCP members, most of whom were either Darfuri or party members responsible for 'decentralization affairs'.⁹⁹ Both parties have denied any link between the

⁹⁴ Al-Rashid, *Inshiqaq*: 89–92. ⁹⁵ Al-Rashid, *Inshiqaq*: 93.

⁹⁶ Isma'il Adam, 'Hakim al-Mutamarridin', *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 31 August 2007.

⁹⁷ Muhammad Muhammad Uthman, 'Sirr al-Alaqa bayna al-Turabi wa'l Khalil', *al-Sahafa*, December 2011.

⁹⁸ *Al-Kitab al-Aswad*, Chapter 5 'Al-Ru'ya al-Mustaqbaliyya', available at *Sudanjem.com*, www.sudanjem.com/sudan-alt/arabic/books/black_book/black_book_first/f5.htm. (accessed 4 April 2017)

⁹⁹ Al-Turabi, Interview with *Al-Hayat*, reproduced on *Sudan Tribune*, 26 June 2004.

PCP and the JEM military campaign, and al-Turabi remained officially committed to purely civil struggle – while Khalil spoke publicly of the PCP leader as ‘our first enemy’.¹⁰⁰ Although a number of JEM members were former Turabists, many protested that their movement had its origins in the mid-1990s, well before the split, and was galvanised by issues such as poverty and the suppression of local culture in Darfur that were of little interest to riverain politicians like al-Turabi.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, the JEM was willing to approach Ali al-Haj, and although the latter was not prepared to join the JEM he did align himself with Khalil in a body called the Union of the Marginalized Majority.¹⁰² Meanwhile, Khalil’s brother, Jibril Ibrahim, openly praised al-Turabi, and was expelled from Dubai at the request of the Sudan government, which claimed that Ali al-Haj was using him to transfer money to the rebel movement.¹⁰³ The aftermath of Khalil’s killing by government forces in North Kordofan in 2011, following which Jibril succeeded him as leader, seemed to further corroborate the JEM-al-Turabi link. Al-Turabi was the first Sudanese politician to visit Jibril Ibrahim’s house to console him on his loss,¹⁰⁴ and subsequently informed his party newspaper, *al-Ra’y al-Sha’ab*, that Khalil was ‘a pivotal figure, in terms of his piety and his nationalism’.¹⁰⁵ *Al-Ray al-Sha’ab* and another Turabist newspaper, *al-Alwan*, were both closed down for publishing sympathetic obituaries of the rebel leader.¹⁰⁶ Nevertheless, al-Turabi continued to maintain that while at one point he had met Khalil in Eritrea, he had advised him against the destructive course of armed struggle.¹⁰⁷

While al-Turabi shied away from a formal alliance with the rebel movements, he was prepared to declare his solidarity with the ‘people of Darfur’ in a general sense and condemned the al-Bashir regime for the atrocities it perpetrated in the region. Most notably, in 2008 he

¹⁰⁰ Flint and De Waal, *Darfur*: 106.

¹⁰¹ Abu Bakr Hamid Nur, Interview, *al-Sahafa*, 4 December 2004; also Flint and De Waal, *Darfur*: 102.

¹⁰² Flint and De Waal, *Darfur*: 110. ¹⁰³ Flint and De Waal, *Darfur*: 104.

¹⁰⁴ Muhammad Muhammad Uthman, ‘Sirr al-Alaqa bayna al-Turabi wa’l Khalil’, *al-Sahafa*, December 2011.

¹⁰⁵ Al-Turabi, Interview with *Ray al-Sha’ab*, 28 December 2011, reproduced at www.facebook.com/popularcongress/posts/296774197026416:0 (accessed 18 November 2015).

¹⁰⁶ *Sudan Tribune*, 17 January 2012.

¹⁰⁷ Al-Turabi, Interview with *Ray al-Sha’ab*, 28 December 2011

demanded that al-Bashir surrender himself to the International Criminal Court following the arrest warrant issued by its prosecutor, Luis Moreno-Ocampo, and he maintained this position even after a year of imprisonment.¹⁰⁸ This was another classic political U-turn by al-Turabi – an advocate of a global Islamic State in the 1990s, in order to achieve his ends he then proposed abandoning the principle of absolute Sudanese judicial sovereignty and turning to an institution labelled by many as a tool of Western Neo-colonialism, arguing that if there were no justice in Sudan ‘we can benefit from the justice of other countries’.¹⁰⁹ In 2010, he further attempted to rouse public opinion against al-Bashir by claiming to have been told that, during a meeting of the Sudanese National Commission of Enquiry into crimes committed in Darfur, the president had belittled the suffering of the conflict’s rape victims.¹¹⁰ At the same time, al-Turabi occasionally betrayed his own patronising attitude to the people of Darfur; for instance, telling one interviewer that the reason the conflict was so difficult to control was that the majority of the fighters are ‘wild people’.¹¹¹

From Comprehensive Peace Agreement to Secession

At the peak of his struggle with the political centralizers of the al-Bashir faction, al-Turabi addressed the October 1999 conference of the National Congress and outlined his view of the successes of his *tawhidi* model of Islamic Sudanese society. Originally Sudan had been a country of over 200 languages, as a result of which, he declared, ‘we did not know one another’. Now, he announced, the movement of one-third of the people of the south to the north, as well as the movements of the eastern and western populations, had ‘liberated Sudan from the age of tribalism and localism’, and in consequence the people had ‘begun to unite in one nation’; ‘we do not’, he concluded, ‘know the Westerners (*awlad al-gharb*) and riverains (*awlad al-bahr*), or the northerners and southerners’. To reinforce al-Turabi’s point, a southerner read out verses of the Quran to mark the opening of the conference.¹¹²

¹⁰⁸ Al-Turabi, Interview with *al-Majalla*, 27 April 2009.

¹⁰⁹ Al-Turabi, Interview with *al-Majalla*, 27 April 2009.

¹¹⁰ *Sudan Tribune*, 31 March 2010.

¹¹¹ Al-Turabi, Interview, *al-Jazeera*, 3 September 2007, available on Youtube www.youtube.com/watch?v=gdWfK5rJ42o.

¹¹² *Al-Khartoum*, 8 October 1998.

This address illustrated the paradox of al-Turabi's relationship with the people of the margins. On the one hand, it stimulated resentment of the prospect that his *tawhidi* discourse would obliterate their particular cultural identities; on the other, it held out the hope of transcending the racist categories that had brought about so much inequality in Sudanese society. His assault on ethnic particularism might be the reason why many elite southerners, as with the westerners, experimented with political alliances with the *Shaikh*; but his emphasis on homogeneity may also explain why he was ultimately unable to prevent the secession of the south in 2011.

In the 1980s and early 1990s, the secularist militants in southern Sudan had represented a threat to al-Turabi's Islamist vision; but, as the rift with al-Bashir began to open, the deposed *Shaikh* of the Islamic Movement grew keen to keep the southerners within Sudan in order that they might serve as another regional ally against his opponents at the centre. As a result, the first eleven years of the twenty-first century witnessed the pursuit of an inventive, although ultimately ineffective, range of strategies by al-Turabi to prevent the secession of South Sudan. Although his 2001 Memorandum of Understanding with the SPLA recognized the southerners' right to self-determination conceded at Frankfurt in 1992, his decision to move away from the pro-secessionist faction of Riek Machar towards the Garang pro-unity camp marked a distinct change of political strategy. Part of the reason the Memorandum had caused such widespread shock and, in many quarters, condemnation in Khartoum was that while the alignment with Machar could have been justified by the government as an effort to play 'divide and rule' within the SPLA, Garang had always been the most dangerous enemy for the Islamists because of his 'New Sudan' vision. While the less ambitious southern politicians had campaigned for regional autonomy or self-determination, as well as the right of southerners not to be governed by sharia, the 'New Sudan' model proposed secular governance for the whole country, in addition to addressing the disparity of wealth and developmental resources between the centre and the marginalized regions.¹¹³ It is true that the contents of the Memorandum of Understanding were unremarkable,¹¹⁴ but the very

¹¹³ For a discussion of the impact of Garang's 'New Sudan' vision, see Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 185–186.

¹¹⁴ Flint and De Waal, *Darfur*: 103.

recognition of Garang as a legitimate political force by an Islamist as prominent as al-Turabi seriously disturbed the Khartoum establishment. In a series of leaked exchanges with al-Turabi, Ghazi Salahaddin described it as one of the two main reasons they could not come to terms, and senior NCP members told international Islamist mediators that al-Turabi had put the security of Khartoum itself in danger because of its sizeable southern population, many of whom were pro-Garang.¹¹⁵

Al-Turabi's strategy of allying with peripheral factions against his opponents in the centre was undermined when the NCP-led regime itself moved towards a rapprochement with Garang, signing the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). This produced a Government of National Unity and decreed the holding of nationwide elections to be followed by a referendum on southern secession, which would ultimately be held in 2010 and 2011 respectively. Al-Turabi was released from his second imprisonment shortly after the signing of this agreement, but soon found himself dealing with the pro-secessionist Salva Kiir, following Garang's death in a helicopter crash in July 2005. Although Kiir proposed that al-Turabi should join the new government,¹¹⁶ he stayed in the opposition and remained a firm critic of the CPA and the manner of its implementation. The worst failing of the Government of National Unity, in al-Turabi's view, was that its actions belied its name: southerners played no role in the northern government, he argued, whereas the 'national' minister effectively left the running of the south to the SPLA.¹¹⁷ He also believed that the agreement neglected southern Muslims, complaining that the interim constitution failed to list Islam as a source of legislation in the south.¹¹⁸ The irony here is that it was al-Turabi and the NIF that, since the 1980s, had advocated applying sharia on a regional, rather than a religious basis.

Like many others, al-Turabi thought the failure of the CPA was that it allowed Khartoum to resolve the crisis of one periphery while neglecting that of others. At one stage, he proposed that the transitional regime should tackle this problem by transforming the presidency into a ruling council, with vice-presidents representing the east and west as well as the north.¹¹⁹ In this regard, his agenda was compatible with

¹¹⁵ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 474, 589. ¹¹⁶ *Al-Sahafa*, 20 August 2005.

¹¹⁷ Al-Turabi, Interview, *al-Sahafa*, 14 December 2006.

¹¹⁸ *Al-Sahafa*, 2 July 2005. ¹¹⁹ *Al-Sahafa*, 17 October 2006.

Garang's 'New Sudan' vision, although it is unclear how they would have resolved the issue of religion and state had Garang lived. Al-Turabi had also complained about the removal from the post-CPA constitution of an article describing government as worship of God, referring to it as an 'irreligious (*la-dini*) constitution'.¹²⁰

Al-Turabi's final gambit to prevent southern secession was to appoint a southerner, Abdullah Deng Nhial, as the PCP candidate for the 2010 presidential election. Nhial's selection reinforced his point that southerners should serve in the north as well as the south, as he had served as governor of White Nile State in the 1990s.¹²¹ Nevertheless, the selection was somewhat disingenuous as al-Turabi probably knew the elections would have been unlikely to return his party to power, having previously announced his intention to boycott them on the grounds that they would be manipulated by the government.¹²² Nhial had not appeared as a potential PCP leader before this manoeuvre, and al-Turabi remained as secretary-general in spite of the southerner's nomination. Nhial only obtained 2.9 per cent of the vote in the 2010 elections, although these polls were criticized for failing to meet international standards.¹²³ He achieved his highest share of the vote (18 per cent) in South Darfur State, one of the regions where social, cultural and economic interchange between north and south was greatest.¹²⁴ Nevertheless, following these elections, in January 2011 the population of South Sudan voted overwhelmingly for independence.

Al-Turabi used the secession of the south to condemn the NCP-led regime, blaming it for the deterioration of relations with the new nation and claiming that he was striving for a peaceful reunification of north and south.¹²⁵ Unlike al-Bashir, he did not take secession as an opportunity to reassert a uniform Arabic and Islamic identity for the rump Sudan,¹²⁶ and he maintained his ties to the south. Acting as the *ma'dhun* (licensed official) overseeing in Omdurman the marriage contract of the southern PCP member, Musa Makk Korr, he said

¹²⁰ *Al-Sahafa*, 2 July 2005. ¹²¹ *Sudan Tribune*, 3 January 2010.

¹²² Al-Turabi, Interview with *al-Jazeera*, reproduced in *Al-Sahafa*, 1 February 2008.

¹²³ European Union Election Observation Mission to Sudan, *Sudan*: 7, 99. Willis, 'Voting For Authoritarians': 58.

¹²⁴ European Union Election Observation Mission to Sudan, *Sudan*: Annex 5.1.

¹²⁵ Al-Turabi, Interview with Muhammad al-Makki Ahmad, *al-Hayat*, 13 June 2013.

¹²⁶ See, for instance, statements cited in *New York Times*, 19 December 2010.

that, in spite of the secession of the southerners, marriage could act as ‘the real source of social and psychological stability’.¹²⁷ It is possible that there are still members of South Sudan’s Muslim and non-Muslim populations, particularly in the border regions, who share al-Turabi’s vision. It is also true that his status as an opposition figure enabled him to make important criticisms of the CPA and its implementation. Nevertheless, however genuine al-Turabi’s move towards the margins, it seems likely that his long term track record and lingering commitment to a number of the Islamist principles that had alienated southerners would have prevented him preserving the unity of the country even had al-Bashir not kept him out of the government.

Conclusion

Can the 2001 Memorandum, which had catastrophic consequences for al-Turabi’s relations with Sudanese Islamists and standing as an international Islamist revolutionary (see next chapter), really have been a mere ‘tactical’ or ‘cynical’ gambit? Can his Darfur policy be interpreted as merely a manifestation of the internecine struggles of Khartoum’s political elite, especially when his denunciations of the regime’s racism and barbarity led him to be subject to repeated incarcerations far less comfortable than those of previous years? Could it be that al-Turabi for once cast aside opportunism, and came to conclude that his form of Islamism could only persist if it remained true to its commitment to transcend the country’s ethnic and regional divisions? His mobilization of the ‘African’ regions against the political centre in the late 1990s and 2000s perhaps represents a genuine effort by a determined albeit flawed thinker to address this challenge. Nevertheless, there remained a serious tension between the ideological impulse to transcend the divide between Sudan’s ‘centres’ and ‘peripheries’ and the conservative instincts that came with his membership of a riverain elite that for centuries had dominated the politics of the Nile Valley and its surrounds. This tension had not yet fully resolved itself by the time of his death in 2016.

Al-Turabi’s emergence as a seeming ‘champion of the margins’ subsequent to his 1999 split with Umar al-Bashir also needs to be understood in the context of the long term strategy of decentralization

¹²⁷ *Akhir Labza*, 18 March 2012.

pursued by the Islamist *Shaikh*. The purpose of this strategy was to empower the Islamic Movement by incorporating regional elites, and – by means of limited tactical concessions to the demands of regionalists – to prevent the ‘near periphery’ being sucked into the politics of a hostile ‘far periphery’. Since the mid-1990s, al-Turabi had also sought to use his decentralization strategy to acquire allies with which to wage his battles against opponents in the riverain elite. Native Administration chiefs, regional governors and ultimately rebel leaders like Khalil Ibrahim, Riek Machar and John Garang himself were all figures whom al-Turabi attempted to bargain with in this manner. It remains uncertain whether this strategy would have been able to prevent the secession of the south in 2011 had it not been for Garang’s fatal plane crash – for all al-Turabi’s pragmatism, the ideological differences between the two men would have been difficult to overcome. Nevertheless, it has remained of considerable relevance to the unfolding of the Darfur conflict since 2003, since al-Turabi’s desire to see Khalil weaken his opponents in the centre competed with his fears concerning the impact that violent rebellion might have on the country’s unity. Although it is possible to be cynical about al-Turabi’s motives, the various regional elites co-opted by the *Shaikh* were far from being his pliant tools. As the violent political upheavals of the 1990s threatened to undermine the internal consensus of the riverain elite, regionalists sought to exploit al-Turabi’s ouster of the historic Khartoum-centred parties and the need of competing factions at the centre for regional allies so as to push their agendas in the National Assembly. It is in the ultimate thwarting of these aspirations that the origins of the political schisms of the post-Turabi era are to be found.

10

Legacy

Turabism, Post-Islamism and Neo-Fundamentalism

Since the political downfall of Sudanese Islamism's most symbolic leader in 1999, scholars have cautiously begun to explore the contention that Sudan is transitioning into a 'post-Islamist' state.¹ One sense of this term commonly employed is that it is a state in which Islamism has been *abandoned* as a political movement and the Islamists have retreated to the private sphere;² an alternative reading proposes that it merely signifies a moderation of Islamism's methods and a willingness to accept pluralism, and a concept of rights as opposed to duties.³ The better to capture the second of these senses, which includes the discounting of pan-Islamism in favour of nationalism and adoption of a pragmatic approach to the West, instead of 'post-Islamist state' one scholar has suggested the term 'neo-Islamism'.⁴ But can either of these models be applied in the Sudanese context? Since the Sudanese Islamic Movement has been cleft in two since 1999, to ask whether Sudanese politics is now 'post-Islamist' in either sense is really to ask two questions. First, has the post-Turabi state under al-Bashir abandoned or transformed its Islamism; and second, have al-Turabi and the Islamists who went into opposition with him abandoned or transformed their own?

To take the second question first, Hasan al-Turabi certainly displayed some of the characteristics of a 'post-Islamist' thinker of the 'neo-Islamist' variety following the divisions of 1999, at times advocating political pluralism and eschewing violent revolution. But he displayed similar

¹ Fluehr-Lobban, 'Is Sudan Transitioning?'. While Lobban expresses a degree of ambivalence over the applicability of this term in the Sudanese context, Verhoeven, 'Rise and Fall': 118–119 argues that the post-1999 regime is '(post) revolutionary' and 'without its Islamic soul'.

² The term itself, albeit only with this sense in mind, was coined by scholars working primarily on Asia (particularly in Iran) in the 1980s. See especially Roy, *Failure of Political Islam*: 25, 75–76; Browsers, 'Rethinking Post-Islamism': 16–19.

³ Cavatorta and Merone, 'Post-Islamism': 27–42. ⁴ Chamkhi, 'Neo-Islamism'.

traits well before his movement acquired political power a decade earlier. He was a leading protagonist in a pro-democratic civilian uprising, entered into alliances with multiple political parties and took up a senior position in a pro-Western regime. This criticism relates to broader debates about whether the phenomenon that has been labelled ‘post-Islamism’ represents genuine ideological evolution or mere tactical adaptation on the part of Islamists.⁵ Throughout his career al-Turabi adjusted not just to intellectual and political transformations within Islamism but also to the more mundane realities of the Sudanese political environment. As such, it might be better to speak of the ongoing mutability of his ideology rather than its linear evolution. The ideological mutability of his Islamism was one of its inherent features and not specific to a particular ‘post-Islamist’ era.

As for the post-Turabi regime, numerous sources appear to suggest that it has become more pragmatic and open to cooperation with the West after the *Shaikh*’s ouster.⁶ It has also been claimed that al-Bashir’s National Congress Party has transitioned into a regular one-party state on the model of Nimeiri’s SSU.⁷ Nevertheless, other commentators have been quick to stress that the post-Turabi state has retained an ‘Islamist’ character.⁸ While it is true that the regime has kept its Islamic ideology, this is now certainly something other than Turabism, if there ever was a coherent ‘Turabism’. To assume that al-Turabi’s ouster would lead to the decline of religious ideology would be to assume that he had a monopoly on Sudanese Islamism, which as seen in previous chapters is patently not the case.

Gallab has chosen to apply to Sudan the first sense of ‘post-Islamism’ mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, emphasizing the ‘disintegration’ and then the ‘oblivion’ of the Sudanese Islamic Movement rather than its ideological transition.⁹ But he has also acknowledged the significance of the rise of one Islamist, Ali Uthman Taha, in the post-Turabi era and his growing relationship with Salafism.¹⁰ Taha’s Salafism highlights one particularly significant aspect of ‘post-Islamism’ identified

⁵ For an example of the former position, see Ahmad, *Islamism and Democracy in India*: 8. For an example of the latter position, see Chamki, ‘Neo-Islamism’.

⁶ Cockett, *Sudan*: 137; Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: 309–311, 316.

⁷ Magdi Gizouli, ‘Bashir, the ICC, and Jirtig’, *Sudan Tribune*, 21 June 2015.

Gallab also refers to ‘Authoritarianism without Nimairi’, *First Republic*, 149.

⁸ Johnson, *Root Causes*: 108.

⁹ Gallab, ‘The Islamism Debate’. Gallab, *Their Second Republic*.

¹⁰ Gallab, *Their Second Republic*: 128.

by Olivier Roy – the shift from an ‘Islamist’ concern with politics and revolution to a ‘neo-fundamentalist’ concern with private morality.¹¹ In some regards, this process had already been underway in the 1990s, when a cash-strapped Islamist regime relied heavily on private Salafist charities.¹² It will be seen that the post-1999 era witnessed a shift from Turabist Islamism to state neo-fundamentalism, as Salafist and ‘neo-fundamentalist’ trends further asserted themselves – trends al-Turabi had been eager to manipulate but had never controlled.¹³ The irony is that whereas elsewhere neo-fundamentalist Islamism has retreated from the state, in the Sudanese case it is state-driven.

The Split Widens

The upshot of al-Turabi’s efforts in response to al-Bashir’s declaration of a state of emergency and dissolution of the National Assembly on 12 December 1999 demonstrated that while the *Shaikh* retained the respect of many within the National Congress, the higher echelons of the state apparatus would not do his bidding. He issued a decree via the Leadership Office (*ha’ia qiyadiyya*) of the National Congress – in the absence of a number of its members – announcing the dismissal both of al-Bashir and Ali Uthman Taha from the ruling party, and issuing a call to all ministers, state governors and holders of other government positions to resign in protest at al-Bashir’s violation of the constitution.¹⁴ This move proved to be humiliatingly ineffective. Even as al-Turabi informed the foreign media that Mustafa Uthman Isma’il would resign as foreign minister, Isma’il issued a declaration denying that he had any intention of doing so.¹⁵ Less than a week later, the Leadership Office issued another message to government officials, effectively reversing its previous decree: it told them not to resign.¹⁶

This humbling experience seemed to confirm to al-Turabi the difficulty of challenging the man upon whom he had relied as the guardian of his Islamist project. In the following months, it was not the Field

¹¹ Roy, *Failure of Political Islam*: 25, 75–76.

¹² See, for example, De Waal and Abdel Salam, ‘Islamism’.

¹³ Ahmed, ‘Political Islam’: 190, 200–201.

¹⁴ *Al-Khartoum*, 15 December 1999. Ahmad Abd al-Rahman interviewed in Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 544.

¹⁵ Abdelwahab El-Affendi, ‘Khiyar al-Unf Ghayra Madmoun wa qad Yudammir al-Hizb wa Nizamhu’, *al-Wasat*, 20 December 1999.

¹⁶ *Al-Khartoum*, 19 December 1999.

Marshal against whom al-Turabi retaliated most vehemently. When he was asked by the correspondent of *al-Wasat* whether he thought al-Bashir was the head of the group opposing him, al-Turabi replied that ‘al-Bashir is head of state and he does not have any personal ambitions unlike some groups that are working in secret and putting their interests above all other considerations.’¹⁷ Specifically, he mentioned the signatories of the Memorandum of the Ten, arguing that they blamed him for the loss of their jobs. He also claimed that al-Bashir had fallen under the malign influence of the United States. The logic behind this ‘evil counsellors’ argument was probably that al-Turabi’s opponents in the Islamic Movement were easier to remove than al-Bashir himself. Nevertheless, this strategy proved ineffective and al-Turabi was unable to reverse al-Bashir’s actions. On 9 March 2000, the Constitutional Court rejected his petition against the dissolution of the National Assembly on the grounds that it was not within its jurisdiction to intervene in an essentially ‘political’ dispute.¹⁸ Al-Turabi also proposed that both he and al-Bashir step down from their respective positions in the National Congress, thereby allowing the advancement of a generation of leaders not associated with the web of enmities generated by the split.¹⁹ However, in May al-Bashir declared that he was dissolving the secretariat-general of the National Congress, relieving al-Turabi of his last position and appointing a new secretary-general in his place.²⁰ A delegation of prominent international Islamists visited Sudan later in the month and attempted to persuade al-Bashir to reverse this decision – and others – but with little success.²¹

Al-Turabi responded to his ouster from the National Congress by forming his own party. He called this the ‘Popular Congress Party’, a choice of name suggesting that he considered it to be the only legitimate version of the National Congress and that he was not trying to engineer a return to multi-partyism in the Western sense.²² Indeed, as soon as the PCP was formed, its officials announced that they had not informed the official registrar of the formation of a new party, but rather that they were ‘renewing’ the National Congress under a new name!²³ And in its early days, the PCP would be referred to as the

¹⁷ Muhammad Taha Tawakkal, Interview with Turabi, *al-Wasat*, 21 February 2000.

¹⁸ De Waal and Abdel Salam, ‘Islamism’: 108. ¹⁹ *Al-Khartoum*, 6 May 2000.

²⁰ *Al-Wasat*, 15 May 2005. ²¹ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 333–336.

²² BBC News, 4 June 2000. ²³ *Al-Khartoum*, 1 July 2000.

'Popular National Congress Party'.²⁴ Al-Turabi's return to the principle of political pluralism, therefore, was not immediate.

Although the departure of al-Turabi's faction effectively split the ruling group in two, a number of distinct patterns was noticeable. First, the majority of military Islamists and senior intelligence officers sided with al-Bashir. The latter category included Islamists who had entered the intelligence services, such as Salah Gosh, Nafi Ali Nafi and Qutbi al-Mahdi.²⁵ Most of the factions brought into the National Congress under al-Turabi's slogan of *infithab*,²⁶ including the Ansar al-Sunna, the Ba'athists and former partisans of the May Regime such as Isma'il al-Haj Musa and al-Fatih Irwa, also aligned themselves with al-Bashir. Second, although many historic members of the Islamic Movement also sided with the Field Marshal, most of those who sided with al-Turabi were with the NIF prior to 1989. The most notable category was those who had been involved in his decentralization policy, including the former minister for federal government, Ali al-Haj, and a number of regional governors including Ibrahim Sanussi and al-Haj Adam Yusuf. Muhammad al-Amin Khalifa, who had been charged with overseeing implementation of the southern peace deal with Riek Machar, was the one former RCC member to side with al-Turabi.²⁷ These four all came from the western provinces, which were heavily represented in the PCP.²⁸ Meanwhile, two southern Islamists, Abdullah Deng Nhial and Musa Makk Korr, were among the eight figures who stood on a platform with al-Turabi as he announced the formation of the new party.²⁹ Al-Turabi also continued to appeal to the rebellious youth of the universities. Through the latter half of 2000, there were violent protests by PCP supporters in all the major universities of Khartoum as well as Port Sudan and South Darfur, and student union elections at Nilain were cancelled after an apparent PCP victory.³⁰

There was considerable speculation in the regional media that al-Turabi's removal from the government would lead to a military confrontation between the two competing wings of the Islamic Movement. This included suggestions that the PDF and Dabbabin militias might

²⁴ *Al-Khartoum*, 9 July 2000. ²⁵ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 150–151.

²⁶ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 158. ²⁷ *Al-Khartoum*, 29 June 2000.

²⁸ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 156. ²⁹ *Al-Khartoum*, 29 June 2000.

³⁰ *Al-Khartoum*, 15 and 19 August, 17, 21 and 28 September, 2000.

side with him against the regular army.³¹ However, such an eventuality was always improbable, for many of the Islamist militias, including the Dabbabin, were placed under the supervision of close military confidants of al-Bashir such as Ibrahim Shams al-Din; and the Islamist coordinator (*munassiq*) of the Popular Defence Forces, Ali Karti, also rallied to al-Bashir.³² Al-Turabi himself downplayed the potential for such a conflict, claiming that these two forces ‘complement each other’.³³ However, although most of the intelligence establishment joined al-Bashir, a number of the Islamists who had enjoyed privileged access to the inner workings of the security apparatus, including Umar Abd al-Ma’arouf, al-Safi Nur al-Din and Siddiq Abd al-Wahid Wad Ahmar, went into the PCP.³⁴ Muhieddin reports that al-Safi Nur al-Din told him personally that ‘the blood will reach the knees,’ after he had witnessed him giving a fiery speech in the Khartoum University mosque condemning the al-Bashir faction and invoking the struggle of Moses against the Pharaoh.³⁵ It seems that al-Turabi himself played a role in restraining his more confrontational supporters, and no direct physical conflict occurred. Nevertheless, by signing a ‘Memorandum of Understanding’ with Garang and the SPLA in February 2001, it was al-Turabi who provoked the regime to crack down on the PCP.³⁶ Al-Bashir’s government immediately used the Memorandum as a pretext to target it, arresting al-Turabi and many other members of the leadership.³⁷

The arrest that followed the Memorandum of Understanding was the first of five detentions to which al-Turabi was subjected by his erstwhile colleagues. The first lasted from February 2001 to October 2003;³⁸ he was then reimprisoned in March 2004 on charges of planning to overthrow the state, and not released until June 2005 after the signing of the

³¹ See, for example, claims made by Mu’awiya Yasin in *al-Wasat*, 15 May 2000 and questions posed to al-Turabi by Muhammad Taha Tawakkal, *al-Wasat*, 21 February 2000.

³² Faisal Muhammad Salih, ‘kaifa inqalab al-sihr ala al-saahir?’, *al-Khartoum*, 18 December 1999. Sidahmed Khalifa, ‘Ba’ad Zuhuur al-Dababin’, *al-Khartoum*, 19 October 1999.

³³ Muhammad Taha Tawakkal, Interview with Turabi, *al-Wasat*, 21 February 2000.

³⁴ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 394. ³⁵ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 394.

³⁶ Gallab, *First Islamist Republic*: 159–160.

³⁷ *Al-Khartoum*, 22 February 2002.

³⁸ *Al-Jazeera*, 13 October 2003. www.aljazeera.com/archive/2003/10/200841092759200595.html.

Comprehensive Peace Agreement;³⁹ he was interned again between March 2008 and March 2009 following his declaration that al-Bashir should surrender himself to the International Criminal Court; and twice more in the year following May 2010, in both cases reportedly due to government suspicion that his party had links to the rebel Justice and Equality Movement.⁴⁰ Meanwhile, from September 2000, the government was also responsible for successive waves of arrests of PCP members in urban areas throughout Sudan.⁴¹

Al-Turabi's novel status as an opposition figure created a serious dilemma for the post-1999 regime, not least because it was reliant on a new web of local and international allegiances within which there were conflicting ideological tendencies. During the split with al-Turabi, al-Bashir engineered a rapprochement with the Egyptian regime, which was not straightforward despite the fact that Cairo held the *Shaikh* personally responsible for the attempt on Hosni Mubarak's life in 1995. Indeed, soon after the declaration of the state of emergency, the Egyptian intelligence chief, Umar Sulayman, warned a visiting NCP delegation that by allowing their former leader to remain at liberty they were making it easy for him to topple the regime.⁴² The problem for al-Bashir had been that his legitimacy continued to depend on the support of Islamists in Sudan, among whom al-Turabi remained popular. Furthermore, when he imprisoned the *Shaikh* in 2001, there was a strong reaction from his global Islamist allies, as a delegation of prominent international Islamists led by Yusuf al-Qaradawi arrived in Khartoum to protest against the decision.⁴³ Meanwhile, the arrest caused considerable embarrassment within the Sudanese Islamic Movement itself. Ahmad Abd al-Rahman was reportedly furious that, as head of the political sector in the National Congress, he had only learned of al-Turabi's first arrest from the television.⁴⁴ There was considerable division in the government over what precisely to do with the troublesome *Shaikh*, for it was clear he could not be imprisoned indefinitely. Muhieddin reports that at a meeting he attended following al-Turabi's first arrest, a number of NCP members proposed executing him, while Muhieddin himself

³⁹ *BBC News*, 30 June 2005, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/africa/4637069.stm>.

⁴⁰ *Sudan Tribune*, 3 May 2011. *Al-Arabiya*, 1 July 2010, www.alarabiya.net/articles/2010/07/01/112749.html.

⁴¹ *Al-Khartoum*, 21 September 2000. ⁴² Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 414–415.

⁴³ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 465–468. ⁴⁴ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 446.

warned against this and others acknowledged that he had done nothing illegal.⁴⁵ Following his second arrest, the PCP claimed the security services were hatching a plot to assassinate him in Kober prison.⁴⁶ There also seems to have been some desire on the part of the regime to put al-Turabi on trial as al-Bashir warned that he would be happy to ‘cut off his head’,⁴⁷ although such plans appeared to stall when the attorney-general publicly acknowledged that there was no direct evidence of his involvement in a campaign to overthrow the state.⁴⁸

The increasing bitterness of the split manifested itself in the diminishing comfort of al-Turabi’s internment. His first imprisonment did not appear to have been a particular hardship. He was allowed access to television and writing materials, and during its course wrote the greater part of his epic 500-page *al-Siyasa wa’l-Hukm*, which was smuggled out of Sudan and published abroad in 2003. But relations between the prison authorities and the al-Turabi family soon grew tense and, in August 2003, prison guards opened fired on the car of his brother, Abd al-Halim, as it approached the prison, claiming he had failed to obey orders to slow down.⁴⁹ When al-Turabi was reimprisoned in 2004, Wisal claimed that the conditions inside were the worst the *Shaikh* had experienced since 1969, and that he had been bitten by a rat.⁵⁰ He even went on a hunger strike, eating only dates for two weeks in protest at the prison authorities’ treatment of another of his brothers, Dafa’allah.⁵¹ In 2011, the PCP accused the security services of attempting to poison the Islamist leader after his health grew so bad that he had to be transferred to the police hospital.⁵²

A Sudanese ‘Arab Spring,’ or Reconciliation?

The year 2011 was significant for Sudanese politics not only because the eventual resolution of the ‘Southern Problem’ allowed politicians

⁴⁵ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 446. ⁴⁶ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 620–635.

⁴⁷ *Al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 20 September 2004.

⁴⁸ Hasan Sati, ‘Al-Turabi . . . Machiavelli al-Sharq’, *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 31 December, 2004.

⁴⁹ *Al-Sahafa*, 31 August 2003.

⁵⁰ Wisal al-Mahdi, Interview with *al-Sahafa*, 2 February 2005. *Sudan Tribune*, 13 July 2004.

⁵¹ *Sudan Tribune*, 13 July 2004.

⁵² *The Globe Newspaper*, 12 April 2011, <http://theglobenewspaper.blogspot.co.uk/2011/04/sudanese-opposition-party-says-turabi.html>.

and activists to focus on changing the regime within the rump 'Sudan', but also because the overthrow of the authoritarian governments in Tunisia, Egypt and Libya seemed to offer them the inspiration to do so. Al-Turabi had been calling for a civilian uprising since al-Bashir ousted him in 1999, but had often found his sincerity challenged because of his admission of personal involvement in the coup that brought his erstwhile ally to power. Although he maintained that he would never again attempt to bring about a revolution via military coup, he was often asked to explain why he might be trusted to support a purely pacific change in the twenty-first century when he had resorted to force in the twentieth. His explanations were sometimes inconsistent. Appearing on *al-Jazeera* in 2008, he maintained that in 1989 it was his feeling that while the Iranians had achieved a popular Islamist Revolution, Sudan was 'a country of various tribes and neighbours so a popular revolution might come to be mixed up with tribal factionalisms (*asabiyyat*) and [foreign] intruders might enter and complicate the situation, so I said there must be a military regime to overturn [the existing] state of affairs but then after that we will spread freedoms'.⁵³ Nevertheless, it is unclear how the situation was different this time. Before 2011, he warned against an 'anarchic' revolution on the grounds that it would lead to the secession of the south,⁵⁴ and after secession cautioned that unless a revolution were to be carefully controlled it might further empower centrifugal forces in Sudan, especially with neighbouring countries willing to arm them.⁵⁵ But it is impossible to know how al-Turabi would prevent these centrifugal or anarchic forces taking over a civilian uprising without appealing to factions within the military or other security forces.

In spite of his anxiety about the potential consequences of civilian uprisings, al-Turabi was not afraid to invoke the legacy of the 1964 October Revolution in his various public addresses throughout the country. At Port Sudan in 2008, he called for a 'spontaneous popular revolution', reminding the crowds that 'you all saw what the people did to change the Abboud regime in October'.⁵⁶ He frequently invoked the memory of the October Revolution rather than the 1985 April *Intifada* since he was one of the foremost protagonists in the first uprising but

⁵³ Al-Turabi, Interview, *Al-Jazeera*, reproduced in *al-Sahafa*, 1 February 2008.

⁵⁴ *Al-Sahafa*, 1 May 2007. ⁵⁵ Berridge, *Civil Uprisings*: 210.

⁵⁶ *Al-Sahafa*, 14 January 2008.

part of the regime overthrown until two weeks before the second. This was a significant problem for al-Turabi's relations with the civilian opposition in the later years of his life. The National Consensus Forces are descended from both the National Alliance – that opposed him during the *Intifada* and subsequent democratic transition – and the National Democratic Alliance, that was formed in 1989 by the same political forces to challenge the military regime he had created. In spite of this, he dropped his hostility to party politics in the context of his alliance with the NCF, telling reporters in 2011 that he hoped the forthcoming popular movement 'will be a peaceful revolution so that we can get a real multi-party parliamentary system'.⁵⁷ Al-Turabi was probably to some extent inspired by the transformation of Turkey's Justice and Development Party (AKP), which managed to establish itself as the governing party via a pluralistic electoral system by abandoning calls for sharia and adopting strategies similar to centre-right parties in the West.⁵⁸

Al-Turabi's dalliance with the National Consensus Forces ended in 2014 when the PCP was ejected from the opposition on account of its decision to participate in national dialogue with the al-Bashir regime.⁵⁹ Again, his rapprochement with another apparently intractable nemesis was a testament to his limitless opportunism. Asked about his relations with al-Bashir in 2013, he said that at social gatherings 'he greets me and says "ya *Shaikhna* [oh, our *Shaikh*]" in a high voice', but that behind 'you can hear him say something else'.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, al-Bashir's removal of Ali Uthman Taha and Nafi Ali Nafi, figures who many in the PCP believed to be the real force behind the split, may have created the opportunity for a potential reconciliation between the two men.⁶¹ In July 2015, al-Turabi declared confidently that the Islamic Movement would soon be reunited, and held a meeting with al-Bashir during which

⁵⁷ *Reuters*, 5 January 2012.

⁵⁸ Ozbudun and Hale, *Islamism, Liberalism and Democracy*: xvi, 148.

⁵⁹ *Sudan Tribune*, 17 April 2014. Ahmed Kadouda, 'Sudan's Islamist Resurrection: al-Turabi and the Successor Regime', *African Arguments* 24 February 2016. <http://africanarguments.org/2016/02/24/sudans-islamist-resurrection-al-turabi-and-the-successor-regime/>

⁶⁰ Al-Turabi, Interview, *Africa al Youm*, 16 April 2013, www.africaalyom.com/web/Details/6176-2/.

⁶¹ Abdullah Hussein al-Attar, 'Al-Nizam al-Khalif . . . Utruha al-Turabi al-Jadida li-hall mashakil al-Sudan', *Al-Rakoba*, 26 April 2015, <https://www.alrakoba.net/news-action-show-id-191962.htm>.

he presented his proposals for a 'successor regime' in which Islamists, Sufis, Salafis, leftists and Arab nationalists would all participate.⁶² Rather than facilitating a return to multi-partyism, this new regime would establish one great party that would incorporate separate ideological and religious strands. But exactly how he intended to incorporate representatives of Sudan's regionalist movements is not apparent. This new endeavour does not appear quite as ambitious as the 'Civilizational Project' of the 1990s, envisaging only a 'tiny government' in light of the economic decline caused by the loss of oil revenues to South Sudan.⁶³

The Legacy within Sudan: End of Ideology, or End of Turabism?

Has al-Turabi left a genuine legacy to Islamism in Sudan? For many, the failure of the Civilizational Project undermined his political and intellectual legacy by exposing his ruthless pragmatism and the incoherence at the centre of his political thought. Until 1999, the central contradiction challenging his legitimacy was that

Politics in [the Islamists'] imagination is a form of worship too even though it requires and necessitates trickery and deceit and betrayal and much of what all religions forbid. Al-Turabi knew all this very well but his disciples believed every statement he made, that he did not believe himself.⁶⁴

When al-Turabi later acknowledged the deceit in which he had engaged to hide his role in the 1989 coup, and also admitted to the Islamists' involvement in torture and electoral malpractice, this central contradiction was laid bare for all to see.⁶⁵ It is true that he offered a qualified apology, stating that he would 'seek the forgiveness of God' for the 'mistakes' made during his 'presence' in the government.⁶⁶ But in light of the failure of Sudan to conduct any transparent elections since 1999, it is difficult to judge whether this apology has been accepted.

For a number of the Turabists who joined al-Bashir after the split, the solution to the problems concerning their estranged leader's legacy is to denounce al-Turabi the politician, while praising al-Turabi the intellectual. Most NCP Islamists will acknowledge they

⁶² *Sudan Tribune*, 14 July 2015. ⁶³ al-Attar, 'Al-Nizam al-Khalif'

⁶⁴ Ulaysh, *Awlad al-Turabi*: 85.

⁶⁵ De Waal and Abdel Salam, 'Islamism': 108. ⁶⁶ *Al-Sahafa*, 20 October 2005.

were 'his students'.⁶⁷ Bahr Idris Abu Garda, for example, argues that while al-Turabi 'committed many mistakes from an organizational perspective ... as a thinker there is no equivalent to him on many issues, his thinking is very advanced'.⁶⁸ It is a common view that his real success was as a scholar and intellectual, and that it would have been better for him to have stuck to this vocation.⁶⁹ But this argument misses the point. Al-Turabi began his career in politics before he began publishing, and his first work, *al-Iman*, argued – like most of those that followed it – that religious, intellectual and political endeavours should all be inseparably linked. While the National Congress was al-Turabi's own invention and his 'former students' in the NCP have continued to respect him as a thinker, no single member of the party has acquired an intellectual status anywhere near to his. In this regard, the experience of the NCP after al-Turabi – at least so far – is noticeably different from that of the Muslim Brotherhood after al-Banna, or the Jama'at i-Islami after Mawdudi.

While al-Turabi's innovative interpretations of *ijtihad*, *ijma* and *shura* were used to challenge him during the split, they no longer feature as prominently in the language of the National Congress. Moreover, in order to bolster its religious legitimacy, the government now resorts more frequently to the support of the *ulama* al-Turabi so decried.⁷⁰ In 1999, al-Bashir appointed Ahmad Ali Imam, a Quranic Scholar, former leader of Sudan's Board of Religious Scholars (*ha'ia al-ulum*) and signatory of the 1998 Memorandum of the Ten, as head of a new 'Islamic Jurisprudence Complex'.⁷¹ Praising a similarly named institution in Mecca, he declared that the complex would 'lead to promotion of all fields of life in the Sudan',⁷² and it did indeed begin to develop jurisprudence concerning matters such as economic development, Christian-Muslim relations, drugs, the environment and the

⁶⁷ Amin Hasan Umar, Interview, *al-Sahafa*, 19 February 2013.

⁶⁸ Bahr Idriss Abu Garda, Interview, *al-Sahafa*, 12 December 2012.

⁶⁹ Muhammad Khair Awad, 'Shaksiyyat al-Turabi al-thalath!' *al-Sahafa*, 27 July 2005.

⁷⁰ For instance, a 'committee of Muslim scholars' pronounced a *fatwa* supporting al-Bashir subsequent to the issue of the international arrest warrant against him, *Al-Arabiya*, 22 March 2009.

⁷¹ *Al-Anbaa* weekly review, 10 January 1999. For details of Dr Ahmad Ali Imam's career, see 'Wifa'a Dr Ahmad Ali Imam', *AlNilin*, 30 October 2012, www.alnilin.com/507661.htm.

⁷² *Al-Anbaa* weekly review, 10 January 1999.

status of women in Islam.⁷³ The Complex thus followed the principle advocated by Al-Turabi, amongst other Islamists, of applying Islamic jurisprudence to all fields of modern life; but effectively it reversed his policy of breaking the conventional scholarly elite's monopoly on religious knowledge.

While many have argued that the ouster of al-Turabi in 1999 signalled the intention of al-Bashir and other pragmatists in the regime to abandon the religious ideology of the 1990s,⁷⁴ in reality it is only the Turabist element that has disappeared. The shift that occurred at the end of the 1990s should be understood as a completion of the transition from an Islamist to a neo-fundamentalist ideology. Roy argues that Islamists turn 'neo-fundamentalist' when they perceive that their ambitious political projects have proved to be quixotic, and begin to focus instead on regulating the morality of the individual believer.⁷⁵ The difference in Sudan is that an Islamic movement with access to state power has turned towards neo-fundamentalism, using the machinery of the modern state to deploy a wide range of 'Public Order' organs to regulate individual morality. Since 1999, the regime has expanded the various branches of the 'morality' police, establishing a new 'Society Police' (*amn al-mujtama*) under a 'Committee for the Purification of Society' (*lajna tazkiyya al-mujtama*). In 2000 it also established a new version of Khartoum State's Public Order Law, the Morality and Social Guidance Law, to apply to the whole country.⁷⁶ The new and old public order organs confronted alcohol drinkers as well as women perceived to be wearing 'immoral' clothing with considerable vigour, and in 2011 al-Bashir responded to critics of the laws by questioning whether they were actually Muslims.⁷⁷ Ali Uthman himself has also been a key instigator of the shift to a neo-fundamentalist and Salafi approach.⁷⁸ Meanwhile, a number of prominent Salafis have entered the government, in addition to forming their own pressure group, the Just Peace Forum.⁷⁹ The Sudanese government now appears to have changed into precisely the

⁷³ See news page on the Complex's website, items dated 3 October 2013, 25 October 2011, 10 March 2007, 27 February 2007.

⁷⁴ Burr and Collins, *Sudan in Turmoil*: 316.

⁷⁵ Roy, *Failure of Political Islam*: 75. ⁷⁶ Berridge, 'Ambiguous Role': 528.

⁷⁷ Berridge, 'Ambiguous Role': 539.

⁷⁸ In 2004, he convened an Islamic *Da'wa* conference attended by representatives of numerous Salafists in what Gallab describes as an 'alternative' PAIC, *Their Second Republic*: 128.

⁷⁹ Ahmed, 'Political Islam': 200–201.

kind of movement Roy claimed the neo-fundamentalist FIS would evolve into if it gained power over the Algerian state – one that ‘will alter mores, but not the economy or the functioning of politics’.⁸⁰ Multiple analyses of the Sudanese regime’s retreat to economic and political pragmatism would appear to confirm this conclusion.⁸¹ Indeed, in 2011 al-Turabi condemned al-Bashir for making sharia an empty slogan, and failing to recognize that ‘the most important element in sharia [concerns] public life, which is far more important than private life and women’s dress’.⁸²

There remain many who believe that al-Turabi’s achievements constitute a significant legacy. The PCP continues to venerate him as the godfather of Sudanese Islamism, while Muhieddin – a more balanced commentator – attempts to salvage four successes from the wreckage of the Civilizational Project: first, the Islamization of the economy; second, the democratization of the Islamic Movement (as opposed, presumably, to the democratization of Sudan itself); third, making the belief that religion and state are inseparable a centre ground, as opposed to a radical position within Sudanese politics; and fourth, revolutionizing Sudanese Islamism’s position on the political participation of women.⁸³ There is some truth in all of these points, although al-Turabi’s leftist and secularist critics would hardly regard the first and third as ‘achievements’. It can fairly be said that within the context of Sudanese Islamism his advancement of women’s issues was genuinely ground-breaking, although in practice the number of women in the senior echelons of party leadership after 1989 remained small. Meanwhile, although there was probably some element of democratic procedure in his running of the Islamic Movement before 1989, his legacy has been defined by his failures to transform democracy at the party level to democracy at the state level.

The International Legacy

Al-Turabi’s international legacy was built principally on his political, as opposed to his intellectual, achievements. As seen previously, his Popular Arab and Islamic Conference hosted high-ranking delegates

⁸⁰ Roy, *Failure of Political Islam*: 76.

⁸¹ For example, De Waal, *Real Politics*: chapter 5.

⁸² Cited in *al-Hurriya*, 10 May 2011. ⁸³ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 511–512.

from Islamist movements in a wide range of countries. The prominence that accrued to him in consequence, in spite of the failure of the PAIC to meet after 1995, was demonstrated by the wide support he received from prominent Islamists after his split with al-Bashir in 1999. After he was arrested in 2001, a letter protesting against his internment was sent to the Sudanese government by a collection of senior foreign Islamists; these included Ahmad Yassin of Hamas, Rashid Ghannushi of al-Nahda and the leaders of the Pakistani and Bangladeshi Islamist movements.⁸⁴ Islamist delegations arrived in Sudan in 2000 and 2001 in a bid to persuade the government to make its peace with al-Turabi, numbering among them the prominent Egyptian Islamist, Yusuf al-Qaradawi, and the leader of the Yemeni Muslim Brotherhood, Abd al-Majid Zindani, as well as Hasan Huweida, the deputy guide of the International Organization of the Muslim Brotherhood.⁸⁵

In many regards, al-Turabi's prominence was contingent and ephemeral, based purely on the fact that he created an Islamist safe haven at a particularly significant historical juncture – just after the 1991 Gulf War. Even though they protested against his subsequent arrest by al-Bashir, a number of the Islamists who went to Khartoum in an effort to negotiate his release were alienated by his courting of John Garang in 2001 and expressed their mortification at his signature of the Memorandum with a man 'who had fought against Islam and Sudan'.⁸⁶ The Memorandum was also condemned in the international media by the Egyptian Islamist, Muntassir Zayat.⁸⁷ Moreover, with his efforts to forge an international alliance of Islamists by then abandoned, a number of the controversial opinions al-Turabi had played down at the time of the PAIC resurfaced. For instance, Zindani's response to his declaration that women should have the right to lead Muslims in prayer and various remarks about the descent of Jesus illustrate that the more jurisprudentially rigid Islamists valued him for his political as opposed to his scholarly achievements. Zindani remarked that while al-Turabi's greatest achievement was in acquiring a state for the Islamic Movement, 'he is not a specialist in *fiqh*, as demonstrated by both these

⁸⁴ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 466. ⁸⁵ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 330, 468.

⁸⁶ Muhieddin, *al-Turabi*: 471.

⁸⁷ Zayat, Muntassir, 'Tafahum Turabi-Garang: Qira'a Aba'ad min al-Sudan', *al-Hayat*, 12 March 2001.

matters'.⁸⁸ While al-Qaradawi was relatively supportive of his statement that women could lead the Muslim community in prayer, he strongly criticized al-Turabi's view that Muslim women should be permitted to marry 'people of the book', arguing that this was against the consensus of all the schools of Islamic law, both Sunni and Shia.⁸⁹ Thus, many of those who were attracted to al-Turabi's pan-Islamic political agenda were unwilling to support his efforts to revolutionize the existing system of Islamic jurisprudence. What this criticism of al-Turabi by historic allies shows is that, in tying his ideology to a quest for cultural authenticity, he left himself open to attack by those more concerned with genuinely 'Islamic' interpretations of scripture than anti-colonial revolution.

The one figure who some claim has carried al-Turabi's legacy into the twenty-first century is Rashid Ghannushi, the leader of Tunisia's Islamist al-Nahda party. Ghannushi rose to the summit of political power following post-Arab spring elections in his country, which is now identified as one of the most successful examples of a 'post-Islamist' state.⁹⁰ The Tunisian Islamist comes from a similar background to al-Turabi – both men combined a semi-religious domestic education with a stint at the Sorbonne and, like his Sudanese counterpart, Ghannushi rose to prominence in his own movement after overcoming a faction that eschewed direct involvement in politics.⁹¹ He had been prominently involved in the PAIC in the 1990s, having first linked up with al-Turabi's Islamists in 1979.⁹² In 1995 he co-wrote *Min Ma'alim al-Nizam al-Islami* with al-Turabi and the Egyptian Islamist Muhammad Salim al-Awwa, a text stressing that the Islamic society must create the Islamic State and not vice versa. Following this, al-Turabi and Ghannushi remained close political and intellectual confidantes. The latter tried to facilitate a number of attempts to achieve a reconciliation between al-Turabi and his erstwhile pupils, and even broke down crying at the PCP headquarters during one visit to Sudan in 2011 over the conflict between the

⁸⁸ Abd al-Majid Zindani, Interview, *al-Manarat*, February 2006, reproduced at <http://sudaneseonline.com/cgi-bin/sdb/2bb.cgi?seq=msg&board=183&msg=1199260643&rn=1>, 28 February 2006.

⁸⁹ Cited on *Mettransparent*, 15 April 2006, www.mettransparent.com/old/texts/qardawi_vs_turabi_on_muslim_women_marrige.htm

⁹⁰ Francesco and Merone, 'Post-Islamism'.

⁹¹ Esposito and Voll, *Makers*: 94–100. ⁹² Ahmad, *al-Haraka*: 112.

Sudanese Islamists.⁹³ In public discussions of al-Turabi's *al-Siyasa wa'l-Hukm*, Ghannushi continued to emphasize the volitional element in the relationship between Islamic state and Islamic society in the *Shaikh's* writings.⁹⁴ Although the latter often failed to achieve this principle as a statesman, it is one of the many ironies associated with him that his numerous inconsistencies have made his legacy useful to his followers. They have been able to pick and choose those elements of his writings they find most suitable to the situation in which they find themselves.

Some have claimed that it is through Ghannushi that al-Turabi's ideas of Islamist democracy have come to influence political debates in the wider Middle East and North Africa region. However, although he has referred to himself as one of al-Turabi's 'pupils',⁹⁵ Ghannushi's thinking is in many regards *sui generis*. Unlike his 'teacher', he had throughout his entire political career advocated multi-party politics and fought against military authoritarianism in Tunisia. In contrast to al-Turabi, his career was not defined by bittersweet experiences of parliamentary democracy or pragmatic alliances with the military. Nor, unlike al-Turabi, was he repeatedly frustrated at the polls: his al-Nahda party immediately came to power in the first legitimate democratic elections in the country, in 2011. As such, Ghannushi's advocacy of multiparty democracy has been more consistent than that of al-Turabi, who experimented with forms of no-party democracy, direct democracy and *tawali*-based democracy as he adjusted to shifting political contexts. There is no evidence that Ghannushi has tried to implement any of these transient models of Islamist democracy in Tunisia. If anything, al-Turabi's party has learned from al-Nahda, acknowledging in the wake of the post-2011 Islamist electoral victories that it would have been better to wait for more popular support than attempt to generate revolution through a military coup. Ghannushi's compromise with multi-party democracy and decision not to insist on a sharia-based constitution might be understood as part of a broader

⁹³ *Al-Nilin*, 11 March 2013, www.alnilin.com/285541.htm al-Nilin, 11 March 2011.

⁹⁴ Khaled Hroub, Interview with Muhammad Arkoun and Rashid Ghannushi, 20 September 2010, accessed via Facebook of Hasan al-Turabi www.facebook.com/154464101246040/photos/a.205521292806987.63289.154464101246040/995715873787521/ (entry dated 11 November 2014).

⁹⁵ See Amir Tahiri's review of *al-Siyasa wa'l-Hukm* in *al-Sharq al-Awsat*, 25 May 2003.

shift towards a 'post-Islamist' political environment since the 1990s,⁹⁶ rather than as the product of the influence of al-Turabi specifically. Perhaps the latter's contribution to a constitution in 1998 that failed to mention sharia might be regarded as one 'post-Islamist' experience upon which Ghannushi drew, but he learned from his supposed teacher's mistakes as much as he did from his example.

Conclusion

It remains uncertain whether al-Turabi's long term legacy will be as significant as that of Qutb or Mawdudi. Neither of these men was discredited by failures in power, and al-Turabi did not die a martyr like Qutb. Neither Mawdudi nor Qutb made compromises with their secularist opponents as al-Turabi did with Garang in 2001, and this reconciliation had a significant impact on al-Turabi's standing in the community of international Islamists. Since al-Turabi was willing to sacrifice his standing as an international Islamist and endure terms of imprisonment that were more and more exacting, could it be that his ideological evolution was genuine after all? This is possible; yet he was always compromised by a political history that made it difficult for both Islamists and secularists in Sudan and elsewhere to trust him. While he could boast many of the same 'post-Islamist' credentials as Ghannushi, the latter's record of opposition to authoritarianism was far more consistent, and his ideological position evolved more on the basis of steady reflection as opposed to knee-jerk reactions to the exigencies of a particular situation. In recent years, al-Turabi's constant flitting between the advocates of multi-partyism in the National Consensus Forces and the authoritarian regime to which he gave birth in 1989 leaves his status as an 'Islamic democrat' as ambiguous as ever.

The 1999 split did not mark the implosion of Sudanese Islamism, but it certainly represented a catharsis of certain tensions within it – between marginalized Darfuris and more affluent riverains, and between Turabist/Islamist and Salafist/neo-fundamentalist trends. The existence of these fissures within the movement reminds us that al-Turabi was never the only intellectual and religious force defining Sudanese Islamism, and his departure from government in 1999 did not simply

⁹⁶ Cavatorta and Merone, 'Post-Islamism': 27–42.

lead to ‘Turabism without Turabi’. Indeed, the new regime abandoned many of the trademark principles of al-Turabi Islamism, such as its hostility to the existing scholarly establishment, and prioritized ‘neo-fundamentalist’ concerns regarding individual morality rather than social and political transformation. In some regards, this situation is perfectly *sui generis*, as the Sudanese Islamic Movement has morphed into the only ‘neo-fundamentalist’ movement with access to state power.

Is al-Turabi’s modernist, rationalist and crypto-Leninist brand of Islamism still relevant in an era when the politics of international Islamic revolution appears to be driven by narrowly scripturalist movements such as Daesh? The re-emergence of intense Sunni-Shia sectarianism in the twenty-first century Middle East appears to mark an end to the aspirations of al-Turabi’s PAIC, which sought to unite Sunni and Shia revolutionaries in the name of pan-Islamism. Al-Turabi expressed his distaste for Daesh’s anti-Shia politics, yet his PCP were unable to prevent al-Bashir’s regime shutting down Khartoum’s Iranian cultural centre in 2014 and increasingly aligning itself with a pro-Saudi and anti-Shia axis.⁹⁷ Whereas the original Islamic reformists, Abduh and al-Afghani, were able to advocate a neo-Mu’tazilite rationalism derived from al-Afghani’s training in Shia seminaries in the nineteenth century (albeit that al-Afghani concealed his Shia background),⁹⁸ today the rise of sectarian conflict in Iraq and elsewhere has noticeably sharpened the parameters of authentic Sunnism and made al-Turabi’s own rationalist theology a tool in the hands of his Sunni and particularly Salafi critics.

Nevertheless, al-Turabi’s Islamism, ambiguous as it remains, has not yet been consigned to ‘oblivion’.⁹⁹ His long term emphasis on the transformative potential of youth politics has ensured that his party retains its popularity amongst student milieus. While his revolutionism has lost some of its relevance in an era in which Islamist radicals are driven more by neo-fundamentalist scripturalism than third-worldist ideology, pseudo-Leninism was never the only tool in his intellectual armoury: he attempted to carve out a new political space as a ‘moderate’ Islamist. Adaptable as ever, he adjusted the language of decentralization to an era

⁹⁷ International Crisis Group, ‘Sudan’s Islamists: From Salvation to Survival’ *Sudan Tribune* 2 September 2014.

⁹⁸ For Afghani’s philosophical training in Iran and its influence on Abduh see Keddie, *Islamic Response*, 7–10 and Sedgwick, *Abduh* 11.

⁹⁹ For this claim, see the introduction and conclusion to Gallab, *Their Second Republic*.

in which the centres and peripheries of Sudanese politics are more polarized than ever, and rode the wave of post-Cold War democracy in Africa that his own coup had attempted to stem in 1989. It may be that his very ambiguity provides the key to his future legacy. In his 50-year long career, al-Turabi encountered a far more diverse range of political circumstances than most Islamists and constantly redefined his Islamism to meet the exigencies of each new situation. It is thus likely that future Islamists willing to take a judicious approach to the overall corpus of al-Turabi's political, religious and intellectual thought, and embrace his highly flexible attitude towards *ijtihad*, will find that his writings help them develop new strategies to engage with their own circumstances.



Conclusion

Al-Turabi is often portrayed as an intellectual and political chameleon. However, this study has argued the need to go beyond his personal attributes and understand the rise of his model of Islamist politics in the context of the intellectual crisis that was a common experience of postcolonial African and Muslim elites attempting to reconcile their own cultural heritage with an externally imposed colonial modernity. Of all the explicit criticisms made of al-Turabi, it is only Khalid's observation that he has a 'torn soul' that comes close to recognizing the duality of thinking imposed on him by the colonial trauma. Nevertheless, to interpret al-Turabi's political shapeshifting merely as a function of this postcolonial identity crisis would be overly reductionist. He was a calculating and determined political opportunist who was not afraid of offering different messages to different audiences in order to maximize his influence. The reason his somewhat inconsistent brand of Islamism was so successful is that it appealed to a youthful urban audience attempting to resolve the same externally induced identity crisis.

Al-Turabi is also frequently presented as a two-faced Machiavelli, offering one version of Islam to the West and another to the Muslim World. It cannot be denied that, as a ruthless political pragmatist, he frequently resorted to deceit, notably in the case of his denial that he had helped to arrange the 1989 coup and then run the country 'behind the scenes', which, once exposed in 1999, caused some loss of personal credibility. Does political deceit require intellectual deceit as well? To some degree, yes. By denying any role in the government between 1989 and 1996, he could maintain that his Islamist resurgence was spontaneous and voluntarist while distancing himself from the efforts of his own authoritarian government to engineer that resurgence. This would imply that al-Turabi never really believed in his own concept of Islamic Revival. Yet still he maintained that this deceit was forced on him by the necessity of participating in a political environment where

coups and military governance were the norm. As this study has shown, it was Islamists other than al-Turabi himself who drove the military strategy, although he eagerly supported it in the build-up to 1989.

One problem with assuming that al-Turabi offered separate Islams to 'the West' and 'the Muslim World' is that these are not discrete entities surrounded by impermeable barriers. They are certainly less discrete today than in the days when Jamal al-Din al-Afghani and Muhammad Abduh decided to prevent al-Afghani's debate with the French philosopher Renan being translated and made accessible to the Muslim world. Al-Turabi's remarks to the American, British and French media have been translated and made available in Sudan, just as his Arabic language interviews and writings have been studied by academics and intelligence officers in the West. As such, although one can still identify shifts in his discourse as he addressed separate audiences, they are often quite subtle. For instance, he might emphasize specific interpretations of 'defensive' *jihad* in his own writings that he does not discuss in his interviews in the West. Nevertheless, he continued to characterize *jihad* as 'defensive' in his Arabic language writings and addresses to Muslim audiences, however tenuous that description appears. At times, he was perfectly frank with his Western interlocutors about his aggressive interpretation of 'defensive' *jihad*. It is significant that whilst Western diplomats accused al-Turabi of trickery, extremist *jihadis* and neo-fundamentalist Salafis portrayed him as a pro-Western traitor and apostate from Islam. In attempting to act as an interlocutor – albeit one who preferred to negotiate from a position of strength – he appeared as a hypocrite to many.

Al-Turabi's political activities, particularly in the period between 1989 and 1999, have often been understood as a rejection of the Western liberal values with which he had identified since his period of study in London and Paris. However, a number of his beliefs were already formed before he travelled to Europe, and, in spite of his admiration for the French revolutionary *philosophes*, he developed his own reading of the French Revolution and its relevance for Muslim intellectuals. Moreover, his engagement with Rousseau's philosophy reminds us that his resort to authoritarian strategies was not necessarily a rejection of Western values so much as the exploitation of a specific interpretation of Western history. He also instrumentalized a number of elements of Marxist political strategy and political discourse. At the same time, his retreat from liberalism cannot merely be

understood as a consequence of the importation of Marxist-Leninist ideology to Sudan. Al-Turabi's rejection of the British system of parliamentary democracy that flourished briefly in Sudan in the 1950s, 1960s and later the 1980s marks a break with the liberal British culture he would have observed during his brief stay in London, but it also represents a continuity with the authoritarianism that he witnessed under British colonialism. The 'Civilizational Project' of the 1990s was in many regards a reformulation of the logic of the colonial 'civilizing mission'.

Al-Turabi might be seen not just as deceiving the West but also the Sudanese public at large. His use of a poetic and quasi-Quranic writing style devoid of rigorous academic analysis or referencing has been understood by many as an attempt to empower himself by selling flawed arguments to a mass audience. It is in fact undeniable that, in presenting Islamist democracy as the direct rebirth of a system of direct electoral democracy that existed in the age of the Prophet and the Rightly-Guided Caliphs, he has wilfully distorted history. Al-Turabi might have rationalized this manipulation of the historical record on the grounds that it is the only way to make democracy accessible to a religiously dogmatic public. However, by attempting to connect modern liberal and democratic ideals to the seventh-century past in the style of reformist 'Salafis' such as Abduh and al-Afghani, he not only empowered those with a more contemporary and conservative Salafi outlook but also made the principle of democracy itself conditional. Successful Islamist democracy requires adherence to the other nebulously defined principles of al-Turabi's seventh-century Islam. Western democrats might consider his position a betrayal of their own principles, while today's Salafis might condemn it for introducing alien and secular principles to the Islamic foundation. His intellectual liminality is such that one is never quite sure whether it is 'the West' or 'the Muslim world' that he is deceiving. Given this liminality, it is an unfortunate irony that he still depicted the conflict between 'Islam' and 'the West' in accordance with grand meta-narratives.

What can be said about al-Turabi is that his politics guided his scholarly output more than the other way round. Unlike Qutb or Mawdudi, he began his political career in 1964 before committing any of his own ideas to paper. This highlights the significance of political context to the evolution of Islamist movements in particular countries. In Sudan, numerous regime changes facilitated a political

environment in which flexibility was a prerequisite of success. For instance, the repeated changes to al-Turabi's position on multi-partyism had more to do with pragmatic adaptation to the frequently changing status quo than to the rethinking of his political theory. He supported a one-party system under Nimeiri, a 'no-party' system under al-Bashir and multi-partyism during Sudan's periods of parliamentary democracy as well as during his opposition to the post-1999 regime. In principle, al-Turabi's *al-Shura wa'l-Dimuqratiyya* advocates a 'no-party' system and it might be argued that all his experimentation with political parties was an expedient on the way to achieving a perfect Islamic society, but even in the 2000s, he advocated a return to multi-partyism in the face of the system that was his own creation. Another evident inconsistency can be observed in his relationship with Marxist thought. Al-Turabi was a moderate socialist in the 1960s, a right-wing neo-liberal in the 1980s and 1990s and a champion of Islamized Communism in the 2000s. Again, this was as much a product of shifts in the political landscape as of independent ideological evolution. Probably his worst sin, for many, was his decision to support Nimeiri's September Laws in spite of their incorporation of the same *hudud* penalties that he had previously maintained should only be applied in a perfect Islamic society.

One reason for al-Turabi's inconsistencies is that he frequently switched, with considerable ambiguity, between describing Islamic democracy as it should operate in a perfect Islamic society and as it should be conducted in a transitional one. Even in the 1990s, he would switch from arguing that Sudan had established a new Islamic society to claiming that it was on the path to achieving this sublime condition. It is perhaps inevitable that such degrees of ideological hubris would lead to intellectual inconsistency, especially since the only test of society's proximity to perfection is the degree of political influence achieved by the Islamic Movement itself. Another source of inconsistency was the very ambiguity of al-Turabi's understanding of sovereignty. Like many other Islamists,¹ by challenging human sovereignty and yet falling back on it *de facto* he never had to institutionalize it, and thus his attempt to equate nomocratic sharia governance with popular rule was always loosely conceived.

¹ Devji, 'ISIS'

Nevertheless, while there were certain political and economic principles al-Turabi believed could be sacrificed in the name of achieving this more perfect Islamic society, there were a number of 'core' beliefs he never abandoned. One, or even several, acts of political hypocrisy do not invalidate the entire corpus of his thought. A number of his positions have been more consistent than others. For instance, since the Round Table conference on the south in 1965, he never abandoned his public commitment to decentralization, although a number of the regimes with which he was associated were less than committed to implementing it in practice. He remained committed to challenging the scholarly elite's monopolization of religious knowledge and never reconciled himself with the existing *ulama* establishment, although he did so with other political and religious leaders. He never abandoned his liberal position on the role that human reason must play in *ijtihad* and *tajdid*, in spite of being frequently condemned as an unbeliever by neo-fundamentalists and Salafis.

The risk of attributing too much significance to al-Turabi's inconsistencies is that it reduces the crisis of the Sudanese Islamist experiment and the Sudanese postcolonial state as a whole to being seen as the product of the personal inadequacies of one individual – a 'failed man of history', rather than a 'great man of history'. His inconsistencies were often a result of his frequent efforts to adapt to political circumstances that were beyond his control, including ideological shifts within both the Sudanese and global Islamic movements. It is often argued that al-Turabi's charisma was the source of authority within the Sudanese Islamic Movement. This was to a degree true, but his charismatic authority was created as much by his immediate lieutenants as by himself, and they did not adhere to their leader's beliefs as rigidly as is often assumed. Most members of the movement probably read Qutb, Mawdudi and various Salafi scholars before they read al-Turabi's own works, and these authors were often employed to challenge al-Turabi during his conflict with 'educationalist' and Salafist factions within the movement. Although his own charisma grew considerably following his prominent role in the 1964 October Revolution and helped him survive the 'educationalist' challenge of the later 1960s, these counter-vailing trends remained strong in the movement, particularly in the phase between 1969 and 1976 during which his repeated incarcerations limited his influence. While al-Turabi was writing books in Kober prison, a much more militant faction of the movement had developed

as a result of the armed struggle against Nimeiri, and it is in this faction that the genesis of the Islamist security services and Popular Defence Force militias of the 1990s of today is to be found. Although al-Turabi used this faction to help him gain control of the state in 1989, he never fully controlled it. The very fact that he frequently reformulated his own ideology to suit the particular individuals and groups he sought to co-opt – whether factions within his own movement, different religious orders, parliamentary allies or military dictators – highlighted the limits of his charismatic authority.

When the Islamist security cabal linked up with the military Islamists who became the public face of the regime after 1989, it became even harder for al-Turabi to get his civilian agenda across. Whether it was the military-security alliance or his own opportunism that led to the betrayal of his liberal principles after 1989 depends on how much credit is given to the accounts produced by writers from his Popular Congress Party after 1999. While it seems that his more liberal and democratic agenda of the later 1990s contributed to the rift with the military, the regime earlier in the decade was so lacking in transparency that it may never be known whether this period of liberalization was part of his long term strategy or just another spontaneous change of direction. What does seem likely is that al-Turabi's influence in the regime, even in the period beginning as far back as 1989, was more contested than is often assumed. Moreover, his intellectual status among the movement's civilians was far from hegemonic. While there was no Sudanese Islamist intellectual of the same weight as al-Turabi, many were just as closely attached to Qutbist or Mawdudist principles as they were to those of the movement's leader. The crisis that emerged in the movement in 1998 was not merely a spontaneous power struggle but also a product of the failure of al-Turabi's plan to routinize his own charisma by raising a generation of Western educated Islamists to continue his legacy and expand the field of religious knowledge beyond the narrow boundaries imposed by the historic scholarly elite. Ironically, members of this generation would often use his own principles against him, describing the 'Memorandum of the Ten' that challenged his leadership in 1998 as a form of *ijtihad*. Al-Turabi saw money and power as means to an end, the Islamic State. Unfortunately, this led him to empower many through the Islamic Movement for whom money and power were ends in themselves.

For many of al-Turabi's supporters, it was the betrayal by his ambitious military and civilian allies that prevented the realization of the

‘Civilizational Project’. For his critics, the core of the problem always lay in his thought, and specifically his efforts to impose a uniform vision of Islam on a heterogeneous population. Yet, part of the reason the Islamic Movement achieved the success it did was that his open-minded understanding of *tajdid* and *ijtihad* enabled him to make the movement accessible to a wide range of social groups. His development of the reformist trend within Islamism begun by Al-Afghani, Abduh and al-Banna, with its emphasis on adapting Islam to the conditions of the modern world, was what made possible participation in the political arena and ultimately access to the centres of power. It is true that he also embraced to some degree the ‘radical’ strand in Islamism of Sayyid Qutb, which condemned existing societies for living in a state of *jahiliyya*, or ignorance. However, he used Qutb’s terms far more flexibly and tactically than Qutb himself. While the latter labelled entire societies as *jahili*, al-Turabi instrumentalized the term in specific political battles, using it to demonize particular opponents. His ideology was therefore divisive not because of his definition of who *was* a Muslim, but because of his definition of who was *not* a Muslim. Specifically, this category included political secularists, and more broadly all of those who did not support the particular form of sharia law he advocated in the 1980s; in other words, apostasy and unbelief were defined in political as opposed to religious terms. Al-Turabi’s refusal to compromise or negotiate over his plans to retain Nimeiri’s September Laws transformed Sudanese politics into a zero-sum game, leading to the confrontation between the military government and the National Democratic Alliance in the 1990s. The exclusivist language he promoted helped to facilitate the environment in which secularists and human rights activists were tortured in ghost houses, and the Salvation Regime perpetrated atrocities against ‘apostates’ in the Nuba Mountains, as much as he attempted to distance himself from these abuses after 1999.

Al-Turabi’s definition of who *was* a Muslim was, however, flexible enough for him to develop a sizeable support base when the Islamists did achieve power. His concept of *tawhid* emphasized the creation of a holistic moral, legal and political order but emphasized unity more than sameness. Within this order it was still able to accommodate a diverse range of expressions of Sufi, Salafi or neo-Mahdist Islam. While the post-1989 government targeted one specific Sufi order, the Khatmiyya, which acted as a patron to a major political rival,

elsewhere it attempted to mobilize the support of the *Tariqas*. It certainly did not challenge the Sufi way of life as directly as Saudi Wahhabism. Meanwhile, al-Turabi and the regime also made it their policy to attempt to win over the neo-Mahdist Ansar order to the regime, attacking only those individuals most closely associated with the rival Umma party. Thus, although al-Turabi may at times have flirted with totalitarian rhetoric and ideas, his 'Civilizational Project' fell short of seeking to establish a fully blown totalitarian system. Ironically, one reason that the regime became associated with neo-fundamentalist excesses was that his 'broad church' approach led the Islamic Movement to incorporate a number of the Salafi factions that were opposed to his own *tajdidi* principles. Thus, it was the very inclusiveness of his approach that led to the emergence of some of the most exclusive interpretations of Islam within the new Islamist order. It was this same policy of *infitah*, or opening up to society, that distinguished al-Turabi's approach from that of his Qutbist rivals. Divisive as it was, therefore, while the regime retained the support of the military, the Civilizational Project was not bound to fail. It was the international backlash caused by some of al-Turabi's more ambitious foreign ventures, in addition to the power struggles within the government, that brought it down.

Was al-Turabi's *infitah* strategy genuinely intended to open up the Islamic Movement to society, or was it just another gambit by a member of the riverain *effendiyya* elite seeking to control the state at its core? On the face of it, he appeared to be advocating that society must recapture the state, so that the pious Muslim community would create the pious Muslim government and not vice versa. This, of course, was the central conceit at the heart of his ideology. It was rooted in the belief that the governance of sharia (as the Islamic Movement defined it) was synonymous with popular governance, so a revolution that brought about sharia was a popular revolution by definition. Naturally, this neglected the fact that sharia law had evolved historically, and that there were diverse interpretations of what exactly it constituted. Moreover, by equating contemporary Islamist resurgence with a supposed seventh-century popular revolution, al-Turabi focused less on grass roots political change and more on empowering those who believed they had the knowledge of how the original society might be emulated. This was how a theoretically 'bottom up' resurgence turned into a vanguardist movement in practice.

The irony was that in spite of his emphasis on the Islamic State creating the Islamic society, al-Turabi distanced himself from the 'educationalist' approach, which emphasized moral preparation of the Muslim community rather than direct engagement in the political arena. Al-Turabi perceived this faction to be too narrow in that it summoned individuals to Islam in a private context; thus he proposed a 'comprehensive call' instead. When this was launched in the 1990s, it was with the support of a state apparatus he had captured via military coup, admittedly with further support from the private sector and Islamic NGOs. It is probable that he perceived the capture of the state as necessary simply to prevent it being used against the Islamists – as it had been used against the communists in 1971 – and not because the state should be a tool of ideological mobilization in its own right. This is why it is significant that so many members of his movement adhered to Mawdudist principles before Turabist principles, although it was easy enough for the latter ideology to merge into the former. By pursuing a policy of state capture, al-Turabi empowered those who believed that the pious state must make pious citizens, rather than vice versa. The legacy of this is the continuing vigour with which the various branches of the morality police pursue the Public Order Laws today. This is not to argue that al-Turabi's regime was completely isolated from society – as seen above, this was not the case – or that its message entirely lacked popular appeal. Nevertheless, rather than bringing about a spontaneous popular resurgence, the Islamist vanguard captured the relatively weak state apparatus and used it not just in a number of limited efforts to mobilize the Sudanese public in line with its own ideology, but also to co-opt a number of existing social groups while alienating others.

In many regards, al-Turabi was the quintessential riverain effendi. Although the previous generation of his family had inhabited the 'near periphery' of the colonial state, his ethnic origins were similar to those of the generation of elite politicians that dominated the Sudanese state in the years following independence. He graduated from, and then worked within, the elite educational institutions of the colonial state, and held a number of the prejudices towards the marginalized peoples of Sudan prevalent within that elite. He was an Arabist in a cultural and religious sense, but was not directly responsible for the rise of ethnic Arabism that played such a significant role in the outbreak of the conflict in Darfur. While it is certainly questionable whether he

genuinely sympathized with the demands of the marginalized populations, his intellectual and political ambition led him to challenge the status quo; and thus politicians from the east, south and west saw him as a potential ally within the riverain elite, particularly during the late 1990s. The outbreak of the Darfur conflict in the twenty-first century was in some regards a 'working out' of the decentralization strategy of the 1990s, although al-Turabi himself would never have planned that the non-riverain Islamists such as Khalil Ibrahim or Ibrahim Yahya he had empowered within the state government would challenge the central state as vigorously as they did.

This study of al-Turabi's life and political career suggests a number of judgements about the origins, nature and broader functioning of Islamism as a global ideological phenomenon. For one thing, analysts of Islamism need to beware conclusions that attribute too much influence to particular individuals, whether it be al-Banna, Bin Laden – or al-Turabi. It is tempting to stress the ability of a demagogue to manipulate great numbers of gullible followers, but al-Turabi's authority in the Sudanese Islamic Movement was always contested and never all-defining. Another important point is that although Islamism is a modern phenomenon, it cannot simply be labelled as a reformulation of other twentieth-century ideologies such as fascism and communism, much though it has selectively borrowed from them. It is an effort to resolve an identity crisis caused by European colonialism. Like Abduh, al-Banna, Mawdudi and Qutb, al-Turabi grew up in a colonial environment, and his emphasis on a holistic 'cleansing' of society can be understood as a form of postcolonial purgation. It is one of his supreme ironies that in many regards his Islamist discourse is a mirror image of colonial discourse, reproducing the same binary oppositions between tradition and progress, civilization and backwardness. It is because this postcolonial crisis has not yet resolved itself that Islamist ideology is likely to remain popular into the twenty-first century.

What the failure of al-Turabi's experiment with Islamist democracy reveals is not that Islam is incompatible with democracy, but that Islamism is less likely to be compatible with it when it treats seventh-century Islam as its defining source, and when it attempts to impose an Islamic order top down. In spite of this, a study of al-Turabi's intellectual and political career illustrates just how flexible modern Islamism can be in adapting to mass democracy. While a number of his models of Islamist statehood and Islamist democracy were built on fundamentally

flawed religious and historical foundations, he was still able to use them to appeal to broad sections of Sudanese society. Al-Turabi's political practice also demonstrated the extent to which Islamism has been capable of compromising with its own emphasis on homogeneity in order to achieve mass appeal. Admittedly, his almost endless religious flexibility has led a number of the Islamists who saw him as a political ally to disown his religious views. In other regards, his ambiguity may provide the key to a continuing legacy, as 'moderate' Islamists such as al-Ghannushi who are willing to overlook his inability to transform theory into practice in the 1990s selectively recall his most 'liberal' ideas whilst overlooking the intellectual and religious support he gave to arbitrary forms of sharia and vanguardist governance. Thus, it is likely that his brand of Islamism will retain a certain currency, less so in the Salafi mosques where 'cathedral' Islam is at its strongest, but more so in liminal environments such as postcolonial university campuses in Sudan and perhaps abroad. Any effort to resolve Sudan's continuing political crisis will have to accommodate the advocates of the brand of thought of Hasan al-Turabi.

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