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Negotiating Pluralism: Religious Difference between the Secular and the Islamic Stateⁱ

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Introduction

The partition of Sudan, which occurred on July 9, 2011, is often presented in the international press as the drawing of a border between two irretrievably different peoples: the Muslim north versus the Christian and animist South; Arabs versus Africans; theocrats versus secularists. Ignored in such portrayals are not only the cleavages internal to these two new states, but also the fact that these reigning dichotomies too simply depict the basis on which these two countries are divided: both sides of these juxtapositions are alive and well on both sides of the new border, after partition as before. Muslims continue to reside in the South—and, indeed, if they were from Southern ethnic groups, were forced to *return* to the South—and Christians remain in the North. Students at the University of Juba who have recently returned from Khartoum have protested against the university's policy of Anglicization and for the reinstatement of Arabic as a language of instruction, while a rejection of Arab identities among Northern youth in favor of those of pan-Africanism or globalized hip-hop culture prevails in parts of the North. The Christian evangelical movement to crown South Sudan "Kush" occurred at the same time as a resurgence of secular leftism among the disenfranchised in the North. Despite this, widespread acceptance of a dichotomous vision of the two "peoples" served as a justification for their eventual parceling out into two separate nation-states. Internal struggles that have reignited in both countries since southern independence have made it clear, however, that partition did not solve the "problems" of diversity: it merely reorganized them under new political arrangements.

In many ways one could (and many have) written the story of Sudan in the 20th and 21st centuries as a story of the limits of pluralism (Deng 1995, 2010; Lesch 1998). Indeed, it was precisely this narrative that made the partition of South Sudan palatable to both the international community and Southern Sudanese who overwhelmingly embraced it. In particular, the assumption that Islamic political models, such as the one that the Sudanese state tried to establish under the Revolution of National Salvation in 1989, if not much earlier, had no mechanism to govern religious and cultural diversity that could satisfy the rights that minority communities have come to expect within the modern nation state, was predominant in making this particular recognition of national sovereignty

possible. The fact that the Sudanese government was willing to let the south go was seen as further evidence that pluralism, in its Sudanese variety and under the Islamic state, had been a failure. (And it is worth mentioning that the government was likely emboldened by the fact that the right, once the most militant in supporting a civil war with cultural imperialist overtones had now come to accept a position that also embraced the narrative of pluralism and its limits: i.e. that Sudanese could not enjoy the Islamic State in a demographic landscape of such diversity and thus good riddance to the South where the vast majority of non-Muslims live). Pluralism, both parties could agree, was only possible under much less radical conditions of diversity and over much smaller geographic space.

Yet, to accept such a narrative of pluralism and its limits for understanding Sudan's conflicts is not only to pose as immutable an historically constructed landscape of difference (Mamdani 2012), but also fails to explain why no matter how many Sudans we have, no matter how we cut the pie, no matter how many peace agreements we sign, we experience the same sorts of communal violence articulated in the language of difference. That is to say, it is not the particular differences that show us the limits of pluralism (Muslim and Christians, "Arabs" and "Africans") but difference itself as a mode of political organization that has proven intractable in a country such as Sudan (and now South Sudan). There is a painful irony in the fact that after excising the southern third of the country, in order to get rid of the problem of pluralism as Sudanese president Omar al-Bashir once said, in not so many words,ⁱⁱ Sudanese began to refer to the Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan regions of the country, prior to 2011 part of central Sudan, as the "new south." Of course, the statement was not only a recognition of geographical principles (no matter how much of the south of a country you cut off there will always be a southern region), but political ones as well (no matter how much of Sudan we amputate, no matter how much difference we excise, the problems of the South, and thus the problem of pluralism, will remain). The civil war currently raging in independent South Sudan itself, which began in December of 2013, is yet another example of the tragic truth that the production of difference can emerge from much thinner foundations than we might first imagine. Or, to look at it another way, it is evidence that societies are always latently plural, no matter how far you reduce them, and thus it is not plurality that is the sticking point, but the inscription of difference as a political problem, what has come to be known as pluralism.

All of this said, while I think that telling the story of Sudan's conflicts primarily in terms of pluralism and its limits suffers from a kind of historical amnesia (when and why did certain identities come to be politically inscribed as difference and not others? When did they become a problem for pluralism to solve?), I remain, like the organizers of this conference, intrigued by the places where

“religious difference achieves definition and traction,”ⁱⁱⁱ how religious difference is both mediated and constructed in a variety of sites not always associated with the state, as official definitions of religion and diverse publics come to interact. For it is here where we can begin to see both how the strategy of satisfying pluralism becomes a plausible mode of governance in Sudan and how what seems to be its finicky-ness is in fact indicative of a problem not peculiar to Sudan but at the heart of pluralism itself, as it seeks at once both to produce and mediate difference.

To do this, I want to take up the provocation of the conference abstract and discuss three sites where religious difference came to achieve definition and traction in Sudan as it teetered between unity and division and then disintegrated before our eyes. The first two sites are somewhat parallel: conferences organized during the period of Sudanese national unity (2005-2011), following the civil war and prior to partition, that both sought to salvage the Islamic state and to confront the demands of religious minorities for recognition. The first I’ve written on previously, but want to bring into this conversation too. Its intervention is to look at the first principles of how we conceive of and engage difference, arguing against the common practice of the Sudanese government and their allies to accept the categories of international regimes of religious freedom and pluralism and simply try to insert “Islam” within them: Islamic multiculturalism, Islamic liberalism, etc. These scholars argue that the categories that structure our thought matter as much, if not more, than the content, and thus seek to reframe how we understand difference on a model very different than that of the pluralist model the government and its allies supported. The second site is another conference, this time on the topic of unity for Muslims in support of the Islamic state in the face of the demands of religious minorities for secularism as a means of confronting religious diversity. Here Sufi technologies of spiritual rearing are reworked as political strategies for an alternative means of confronting diversity as a series of shaykhs fight for their particular relevance in the project of rethinking the Islamic state that emerged out of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement. The third site concerns the reaction to the Islamic state: the South Sudanese project of state secularism which was posed as a neutral way of managing religious diversity in contradistinction to the methods of the Islamist regime. In all three sites, we will come to see how the imperatives of pluralism are consumed as a problem space in parallel ways in the Sudans before and after partition, forcing us to question the solidity of the divide between the secular and Islamic state that served as a key justification for Sudan’s dismemberment in the first place.

Scene One

On July 4, 2007 on the front lawn of a crumbling building with a makeshift stage, the Sudanese Salafi organization, Ansar al-Sunna al-Muhammadiyya, held a conference in response to a government event earlier in the day. The daytime conference, entitled “The International Conference for Christian-Islamic Dialogue: For the Continuance of Peace and the Strengthening of National Unity,” was one of many events the government staged in its interest in promoting national cohesion and showing that it was serious about addressing the demands of Sudanese Christians for a greater role in the nation. Such efforts came on the heels of the conclusion of Sudan’s 20 year civil war and the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement with its mandate to “make unity attractive” and its establishment of the “Government of National Unity” made up of members of the former rebels (the SPLM) and the National Congress Party, the ruling government in the north.

The evening conference Ansar al-Sunna held at its headquarters in the al-Sajana neighborhood of Khartoum—entitled “The Manner of Treating non-Muslims as Revealed in the Life of the Prophet”^{iv}—addressed the very same question as the government event: how should Muslims and non-Muslims live together in Sudan? Yet the solution posed by the Salafi shaykhs speaking at “The Manner of Treating non-Muslims as Revealed in the Life of the Prophet” event was quite different to that offered in the daytime conference. Here, instead of relying on principles such as “religious-coexistence,” “tolerance,” the “freedom of belief,” and “equality,” as the daytime conference had, Ansar al-Sunna shaykhs mined the life of the prophet Muhammad in order to see what it said about how Sudanese Muslims should confront non-Muslims in their Muslim-majority society. Though Ansar al-Sunna’s critique of the government conference was never explicit, they problematized the notion of religious tolerance put forward by the government as not only incredibly naïve, but also out of sync with the proper way in which a Muslim polity should treat its minorities. It should be stressed that it was neither Ansar al-Sunna’s goal nor its expectation to establish an antagonistic relationship to religious minorities. Indeed, their members pride themselves on positive relations with such minorities under the principle of conducting a gentle proselytization which does not scare off potential adherents.^v Rather, Ansar al-Sunna’s point is that Muslims should envision the relationship between Muslims and non-Muslims using a set of theoretical categories that emerge from Islamic doctrine as derived from the life of the Prophet, rather than the liberal language of human rights upon which the government conference relied. For them, Islamic politics could not be translated, an Islamic filling within a set of epistemological frames derived from the west (“Islamic Human Rights,” “Muslim pluralism,” etc.), rather these frames necessarily distorted the political intervention of Islam.

Thus, interestingly, it was not only the arguments made in the government conversation about regulating religious diversity that posed problems for some of the Salafi speakers that night, but also the very categories used in making them. When one of the speakers that night observed that the organizers of his own event had adopted one of these problematic categories in the very title of the gathering (that is, the term “non-Muslims” as it appeared in the Ansar al-Sunna conference title) he took his brethren to task for such carelessness:

A matter which demands my attention is the technical term “non-Muslim” (*ghayr al-muslimin*) [that dominates the conversation about religious diversity in Muslim states and that appears in the title of this conference]. In my estimation it is a term that is not precise and also it is a term which is not fair, and perhaps it internalizes a kind of defeatist condition. Yes, it is a term that is used by some modern people these days, but it is a term which is new in regards to the terms of Islam which preceded it. So in the insistence on repeating this term, as I see it, there is a kind of pushing forward of concepts such as these which we don’t want to have a place in fora like these, fora of *abl al-sunna wa-l-jama’*.^{vi} So what is required for us is to be specific, to use the terms which are used in the Qur’an and *sunna* in relation to these groups which are now called “non-Muslims.” The Qur’an and *sunna* use clear and frank expressions which carry clear references. God said, in brief:

Those who believe (*aladbin aminu*) and those who are Jews and the Sabeans and Christians and Mageans and those who worship idols, [indeed God will separate them out (to render judgment on who is wrong and who is right) on judgment day. For God is the witness of all things (*surat al-hajj: 17*)].^{vii}

Indeed this is a clear documentation that God gave each of them clear names, for among them are major essential differences. So the term “non-Muslim” is a term [that can be] criticized from this standpoint or vantage...Anyhow, it may be appropriate to say that these words [in this verse from the Qur’an] call your attention to the fact [that we need] more specificity, especially when the matter concerns technical terms which have shadows. Playing with these terms harms the issues of Muslims at the intellectual level, at the theoretical level, and, as we said, the pushing forth of such impressions could even be defeatist...

For this speaker, the entire set of terms of engagement with which the conversation about religious diversity in Muslim lands has been framed is highly inappropriate. Moreover the Prophet himself rejected them. He continues: “The prophet treated the non-believers each according to his particular case [and thus not as non-Muslims tout court]...We have the enemy, the fighter, the one who comes peacefully, the one who makes a contract, the one who wages war, the neutral person that does not support Islam but neither is he against it.” For him, the world is divided into people at peace with the ethical goals of the prophet and those who are not, regardless of their confessional identities (and the Salafis in particular saw professed *Muslims* who interpreted the tradition incorrectly, and not Christians, as their primary adversaries). For Ansar al-Sunna, the term “non-Muslim” imposes a landscape of difference that cannot map on to the strategy Muslims must promote for governing diversity. Instead, the speaker rightly recognizes that “non-Muslim” is a category that is a product of modern Sudanese

identity politics that has little to do with the traditional Muslim taxonomy of men. He contends that it is by adopting the language of human rights norms, the language of “the rights of Non-Muslims,” that Sudanese Muslims have lost what is unique about their own model of dealing with religious difference and entered a situation which he describes as “defeatist.” The issue of terminology is so important, the speaker stresses, because these terms do not just effect how we *talk* about non-Muslims but “have shadows” in Sudanese political practice as well.^{viii}

Thus, in addition to the conclusion at which Salafi shaykhs such as these have arrived—i.e. that there are a whole host of relationships to God (“those who believe,” “Jews,” “Christians,” “Sabians” etc.) and thus that rights should never simply be extended (or withheld) generically to those who don’t accept Islam—it is the Salafi refusal to accept the terms of debate that makes their contribution a unique one within the scheme of Islamic politics in Sudan as it very explicitly refuses to be translated. It begs the question: can we imagine a conversation about interreligious coexistence that does not rely on the liberal categories bequeathed by internationalist human rights discourse, a discourse that we have seen to be so inadequate in furthering peace and stability in Sudan? What might a discourse about coexistence look like that emerged out of other political traditions?

Scene Two

The Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Government of National Unity that emerged out of it produced a unique space for reimagining the nature of political community in Islam. Here, after more than 15 years under the Islamist regime leading to a peace agreement that recognized Sudan’s diversity in the identity of the state and thus seemed to question the very premise of the revolution in the first instance, Muslims across Sudan began to rethink the place of Islam in the national order. Though the 2011 referendum that led to the secession of South Sudan was seen as a foregone conclusion by many Southerners and members of the international community, many in the North understood unity as a real possibility. The possibility of unity, however, if it was to be made attractive to the South, meant a rethinking of the Islamic state in a way that would be acceptable to non-Muslims. Thus, it is important to recognize that for these Islamic organizations at stake in the 2011 referendum was *both* the unity and integrity of the Sudanese state *and* the unity and integrity of the Muslim community as a political entity. The former stakes were raised by, of course, the possibility of the south seceding, while the latter were raised by the opposite possibility, the south remaining part of the union and thus being integrated into the federal government as an equal partner with further legal recognition of the multi-religious and multicultural nature of Sudan as its condition. This later

possibility raised the question of if the Islamic state that emerged as a result of the Revolution of National Salvation in 1989 is merely on hold, or whether as a result of national unity its ideals must be obliterated all together in favor of a state based on multicultural foundations. Though certainly some Muslims did not feel threatened by this latter possibility, and indeed celebrated a Sudanese future in which religion was immaterial to citizenship, many others felt distinctly threatened by the possibility of the construction of multicultural or secular state, and attempts at countering “the end of Islamic politics” that they felt it heralded began in earnest.

On June 22, 2005, a major gathering of Sufi shaykhs, government officials, tribal leaders, and other luminaries took place in the town of Umm Dawan Ban, roughly 45 minutes by car southeast of Khartoum on the east banks of the Blue Nile. Umm Dawan Ban (popularly known by its original name, Umm Dubban)^{ix} is a major Sufi center led by the Badrab family (who subscribe to the Qadriyya *tariqa*, or Sufi order) and houses a large and well-respected *kehalwa* (Quranic School).^x In the history of Sudan, Umm Dawan Ban is remembered as playing an important role in the Mahdist uprising as the place where the Sufi troops of Shaykh al-‘Ibayd wad Badr joined forces with the Mahdi to attack General Gordon’s garrison in Khartoum in January 1885.^{xi} It is clear why the Sufis who organized this event would have chosen Umm Dawan Ban as the place to hold it, since the village played such an important historical role for Sufi collaboration with Islamic revolution.

Referencing the Qur’anic verse *Al ‘imran* 103,^{xii} the Sufi leaders were holding this event in order to establish a new political movement that they called *barakat al-‘itsam al-watani*, “the Movement of National Solidarity (MNS).” Here *‘itsam* meant not the unity of Muslims around key doctrinal principles as a precondition for political action, but rather the gathering together of Muslims around the idea of the Islamic state in order to challenge the threat of its dissolution posed by the potential unity of Sudan and the subsequent recognition of minorities as equal players in the identity of the state that would come as its price.

The purpose of the gathering was to found a new political movement (*baraka*) that would warn the Muslim community in Sudan of the threats it faced due to the concessions made in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which was signed only five months prior to its inauguration. Its promotional material stated that the aim of the movement was “raising awareness in the Muslim *umma* of the political and social reality [that the nation now faced]...[and], in compliance with the will of God, striving to give advice to the *umma*—its leaders and its base—as to what will realize unity and the good life, and giving this *umma* advice that will keep it from the pitfalls of loss or disintegration...” As the CPA states, the governments in the north and the south will work towards making unity

attractive for the 6 years following the signing of the CPA, and in 2011 the South would have the right to vote on secession. For many Muslims with a political orientation grounded in Islam, the CPA represented a lose-lose equation: if unity *does not* become attractive to the South it will secede, i.e. the oil-rich bottom third of the country will break away; but in order for unity *to become* attractive to the primarily non-Muslim south, the Islamic character of the state needs to be compromised.

It seemed clear that the MNS saw the latter threat as more serious than the former and thus sought to unify Muslims against the threat of secularism and the model of pluralism it brought with it. The idea of the Sufi shaykhs as the founders and protectors of a different sort of Sudan, one whose national identity was grounded in Islamic (as well as Arab) culture, was stressed by one speaker:

The Shaykhs who were living in the deserts began to teach people religion and devoted themselves to rearing individuals. If it weren't for these Sufis, we would have become Turkified (*nistatrik*) during the Turkish rule. And our tongue would have become barbarian (*ta'ajjum*) during the rule of the English. But [the Sufi shaykhs] kept for us our identity and our language and religion. And Sudan is now at a very dangerous point, as the people who have spoken before me pointed out.

And thus, he continued, it is now that we need the Sufi shaykhs again to resume their role as protectors of the Sudanese *umma*. It was the Sufis who protected us from becoming Turks, it was the Sufis who protected us from becoming English, and again it must be the Sufis who protect us from becoming yet another secular African state as the SPLM is demanding, the speaker seemed to argue.

Yet it was not only the unique role that Sufism played in the history of Sudan that the leaders of the MNS sought to mobilize for contemporary political purposes. Another speaker articulated what was essentially Sufi about the concept of *al-i'tisam*, or rather why the gathering of Muslims around a unified position should be the work of the Sufis over any other Muslim group. According to this speaker, it is the Sufis more than anyone else who have tools at hand to create the Islamic unity necessary for the continuance of the hegemony of Islam as an organizing principle over state and society. He spoke as follows:

The *wird* (litany) that we gathered for this day is among the greatest of *awrad* (litanies), because Islam will not be successful except with it. It is the *wird* of *wihda* (unity) and *al-i'tisam* (gathering together). There is no group in Sudanese society more appropriate for confronting the problems of Sudan than Sufis...And if the problem in Sudan now is that there has increased between [people] pride and tribal fanaticism (*'asabiyyat*), so there is nothing like Sufism which can be a medicine and a cure for these racisms and tribal fanaticisms. Sufism broke down all boundaries, and all obstacles of blood (*'irqiya*), broke down any relationship between people not based on *la ilaha ila allah* [the profession of the Muslim faith]. So if this putrid racism and tribalism is one of the elements that threaten Sudan, then Sufis alone are the ones who are able to enter among the lines of the people, and to unify the positions of the people, and to gather the people around the word of "togetherness" (*insawa*), not giving the matter of

ethnicity (*‘irq*) importance among the people, but rather giving importance to the path [he takes] in which [to quote a famous aphorism] ‘ the fact of your belief is more important than who came first to it’ (*al-tariq liman sadaq wa laysa liman sabaq*).^{xiii}

The speaker argued here that if ethnicity and fanaticism to the tribe has been one of the causes of strife in Sudan, Sufism could be a perfect solution, trading a Sudanese nationality from one based on tribe to one based on religion. Yet at the same time, he seemed to replace an ethnic problem with a religious one.

The speaker also recognized that it is strife between Muslims on the basis of belief that is pulling apart Sudan, and that for this too Sufism could be a useful salve:

And if Sudan’s problem is [in addition to the racial problems just mentioned] the tearing apart (*tamazzuq*) between the elements of Muslims, and its groups and parties and orders, then Sufism can be the greatest denominator for mutual participation (*qasim mushtarik*), because the Sufis do not give up on any Muslim. All the other [Islamic] groups [distinguish between Muslims] saying: ‘this guy is a worthwhile person and this guy is not worthwhile.’ But the Sufis do not give up on anyone. They fix even the drunks, the confused, and the sinful by their acceptance and wide open program.

Here, the classical Sufi method of rearing a Muslim from sin to salvation—rather denouncing him as a sinner or unbeliever—is mined for its political possibilities as an alternative way of confronting difference to the ones that the government promoted, of tolerance and freedom of belief.

Scene Three

The secession of South Sudan that occurred on July 9 2011, was commonly articulated under the heading of the failure of the Islamic state to deal with religious difference. The establishment of a secular state in the new republic was meant to replace chauvinism with neutrality in regards to religion, a state in which all religious groups would be given equal protection with no favoritism from the state. Yet, the fact that a state attempts religious neutrality by no means indicates that it is blind to or uninterested in religion. In the case of South Sudan, quite the contrary, as the new state has constructed a large apparatus to manage the diverse religious groups in its midst, from a presidential advisor on religious affairs, to a Bureau of Religious Affairs, to organizations such as the Islamic Council for South Sudan. The Bureau of Religious Affairs, for example, registered “faith-based organizations” and, I was told in a lengthy visit there in 2011, often rejected applications, for example, of Christian organizations “if the constitution of a particular group is not lining up with the biblical chapters or verses,” as one inspector employed by the Bureau put it to me. This effort formed part of a program to protect the nation from what he called “cults,” though which groups would qualify as Christian and Muslim and which as “cults” was still in flux during the time I was there.

The new state of South Sudan promised (and in its early days has certainly delivered) a very different approach to the relationship between religion and politics from that of the Sudan southerners had lived under prior to July 9, 2011, a relationship it calls “secularism.” However, the variety of secularism to be instantiated in the new state remains uncertain. Not only where Muslims will figure in the conception of this new nation, but also where all of the “African traditional religions,” will figure in the national image is unclear. The party line seems to be that ATRs should be represented within the state and constituted as distinct faith communities (what were referred to in Arabic as *dins* in my interviews with government officials). Yet, given that Dinka and Nuer modes of prophecy are decidedly pre-secular, that is, representative of a comprehensive way of life, not a differentiable church, I was not surprised to hear government officials complain about not being able to find a set of officials who might represent them (if they could be lumped into one category in the first place). Further, to think of such “traditional” practices as distinct confessions did not seem to represent the reality of those South Sudanese who may identify as Christian and at the same time see no contradiction in maintaining these rites and rituals. One wonders, then, what impact the state’s attempt to constitute such practices as discrete “religions” (and as distinctly not Christian) will have on those engaged in such practices, and whether it will make this kind of lived hybridity between Christianity and other modes of approaching the divine less sustainable, thus rendering Christianity and ATRs much more polar forms of identity than they are currently. Moreover, the preference for group-based religious liberty in contradistinction to individual liberties, begs the question of who gets to determine the boundaries of these groups, the terms of their membership, and even their constitution as a “religion” (and thus deserving of protection) and not some other form of social solidarity.

The Islamic Council for South Sudan, established under the rationale of giving this now minority religion some voice within the affairs of the state (in a charitable readings, at least, others argue that it is simply a means of placing Muslim political activities under a single heading and thus allowing for its careful management by the state), has presented equally tangled dilemmas. This Islamic space the state has created is an extremely toxic one,^{xiv} as not only is there much disagreement over whether the Council is a true outlet or merely an attempt to coopt potential Muslim dissent, but the very notion that Muslims could no longer exist in plurality, but were being told to choose a single roster of leadership, which would then report to the state, caused much consternation. For these Muslims, pluralism was being snuffed out ironically in the name of respecting diversity. Not only did the Council interrupt previous structures of authority within the community, but it forced Muslims to question the nature of their “demographic” in the first place: Are we *a* Muslim community particularly

given our diversity? And even if we can be lumped together as Muslims, who has the authority to represent us in our plurality in the first place? Moreover, providing a new structure of authority within the Muslim community is controversial because it challenges the identity of those Muslims who do not seek recognition on the basis of religion, and who instead desire to be politically engaged solely as “South Sudanese.”

Conclusion

In her contribution to the extremely useful volume *After Pluralism* Janet Jakobsen reflects on the multiple ways in which the temporality of the word “after” in that phrase comes to matter in the world in which we live today. She writes, “We are ‘after’ the moment in which the discourse of pluralism has become part of mainstream political discourse, as have its ethical imperatives, which involve a commitment to democratic engagement across differences. And yet we have also reached a point in which it may be necessary to recognize that the spread of the discourse of pluralism has not produced the realization of its ethical promises (Jakobsen 2010: 31).” And thus that conceptually speaking we may be *after pluralism* too in the sense that in order to address the concerns of the diverse publics to which our nation-states must cater, we need to look beyond pluralism as a means of negotiating difference. The three scenes I have passed through in my paper today demand a reckoning with difference beyond the conceptual limits of pluralism. They both re-engage and then come to displace the forms of difference with which Sudanese pluralism has been saddled, questioning the naturalness of not just the categories of difference themselves (are we a society of Muslims and non-Muslims? Or people at peace with the ethical goals of the prophet and those not, regardless of our confessional identities? Are African traditional practices “religions”? Or must we engage them as something else?), but our strategies of dealing with them too (is law the best way of protecting minorities or might the techniques of spiritual rearing in its embrace of difference offered by Sufis be another way to assuage internecine strife?). The three sites also point to the fact that the problem of governing religious diversity cannot be placed within the binary of the secular and the Islamic state, the logic that led Sudan to disintegration, since and because the problems faced in each discursive domain parallel one another so fully. Finally, an exploration of these three sites reminds us that conceiving of Sudan’s conflicts in terms of the limits of pluralism fails to account for the fact that difference as a political problem *itself* has no limits and that thus no matter how you divide the geographic space, its demands must always be addressed.

ⁱ Please note that portions of this paper appear in two previously published articles “Religion After the State: Secular Soteriologies at the Birth of South Sudan,” *Journal of Law and Religion* 29:3 (Fall 2014) and “The Ruse of Law: Legal Equality and the Problem of Citizenship in a Multi-Religious Sudan,” in *After Secular Law*, edited by Winnifred Fallers Sullivan, Robert A. Yelle, and Mateo Taussig-Rubbo. Stanford: Stanford University Press. 2011. This paper attempts to think across my conclusions in those two papers and to put them in new light. This paper was presented as part of the “Siting Pluralism” Workshop held at the Georg-August-Universität Göttingen, Jan 29-31, 2015. The workshop was organized by Jeremy Walton and Neena Mahadev.

ⁱⁱ If South Sudan secedes, we will change the Constitution, and at that time there will be no time to speak of diversity of culture and ethnicity... We’ll change the Constitution... Shariah and Islam will be the main source for the Constitution, Islam the official religion and Arabic the official language (President Omar al-Bashir in December of 2010, as quoted in the New York Times (<http://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/20/world/africa/20sudan.html>)).

ⁱⁱⁱ From the conference abstract written by Jeremy Walton and Neena Mahadev.

^{iv} “*manhaj mu’amilat ghayr al-muslimin fi-l-sira al-nabawiyya*”

^v Ansar al-Sunna’s approach to religious minorities is a key distinction between their program and that of other contemporary Salafi groups across the Muslim world. Ansar al-Sunna prides itself on a critical distance from the classic Salafi doctrinal principle of *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’* (the principle of loyalty to Muslims and disassociation with non-Muslims or heretical Muslims), arguing that the principle should be put beneath their goal of *da’wa*, proselytization, through which Ansar al-Sunna has been particularly successful at attracting non-Muslims and Sufi Muslims to their cause. Thus while the great bulk of Salafi conversations about relationships between Muslims non-Muslims center on interpretations of the principle of *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’*, at this conference the phrase received only passing mention and no elaboration in the review of Qur’an and Sunna to determine the proper relationship of Muslims to non-believers. For example, nowhere did *ansaar al-sunna* shaykhs employ those verses of the Qur’an which scholars like Ibn Taymiyya use as the foundation for advice to Muslims on how to deal with non-believers, such *surat al-ma’ida: 51*, which discusses Muslim relations with Christians and Jews (“Oh You who believe, do not take Jews and Christians as friends (*awliya*) for they are friends of one another. For he who befriends them is one of them. And God does not guide the people who are wrong-doers”) and *surat al-mumtabina: 4*, which discusses the necessity of true believers distancing themselves from those who are not proper believers (“Indeed, you have had a good example in Abraham and those who followed him, when they said unto their [idolatrous] people: ‘Verily, we are quit of you and of all that you worship instead of God: we deny the truth of whatever you believe; and between us and you there has arisen enmity and hatred, to last until such a time as you come to believe in the One God!’ [Muhammad Asad’s translation]). (See Joas Wagemakers’ discussion of the centrality of these verses in a well-researched history of the term “*al-wala’ wa-l-bara’*” that explores the term from its origins in pre-Islamic Arabia to the writings of present day Salafis who consider it not only legitimate but to be a central matter of doctrine [Joas Wagemakers. 2009. “The Transformation of a Radical Concept: *al-wala’ wa-l-bara’* in the ideology of Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi,” in *Salafism: Islam’s New Global Movement*, edited by Roel Meijer (New York: Columbia University Press)]).

^{vi} Literally, “the people of the *sunna* and the community,” but used by Salafis today to refer to Muslims who uphold the Salafi understanding of Islam.

^{vii} Note that the expectation was that the Qur’an was known so well that quoting merely the first few lines of a verse would indicate the remaining lines which I have put in brackets.

^{viii} Indeed such language has been codified in the establishment of the Council for the Rights of non-Muslims (*mufawidhiyyat huquq ghayr al-muslimin*) that was founded in Sudan as a result of the CPA following its promise to provide such a mechanism to protect the rights of non-Muslims who were living in a capital in which *shari’a* was in force.

^{ix} The story goes that the town, due to the stagnant water that gathers there during the rainy season, used to be full of flies, hence the name “Umm Duban,” “the place of flies.” After becoming a religious center for the study of Qur’an, notables thought the name unfitting and changed it to the similar-sounding (but semantically opposite) “Umm Dawan Ban,” “the place where a light appeared.”

^x The wonderful film by ‘Ali el-Mek and Geoff Dunlop *Ways of Faith* (Falls Church: Landmark Films. 1983) depicts the *kehalwa* of this Sufi town. While in classical Sufi parlance a *kehalwa* refers to a place of retreat (and such places also exist in Sudan: the man-made caves and secluded rooms of ascetic shaykhs, which I visited on occasion) the word denotes a Qura’nic school (*kitab*) in the Sudanese dialect.

^{xi} Despite the fact that a certain variety of Islamist Sufi describes the militancy of the Badrab in this manner, other Sufis more critical of the attempt to pose Sufism as an instigator of violent *jihad* told me that Shaykh al-‘Ibaid wad Badr had second thoughts about this battle after a dream that laid doubt on the authenticity of the Mahdi. He is said to have prayed “*ya qayyum ma asal al-kehurtum!*” (oh God, do not let me reach Khartoum!). His prayers were said to have been met when he died en route to Khartoum. P.M Holt, in his *The Mahdist State in Sudan: 1881-1898, A Study of its Origins, Development and*

Overthrow (Oxford: Clarendon. 1958), recounts the events of the Mahdist overthrow of Khartoum, and the role of Sufis in them (see pp 88-92). While he does not point to the forces of Umm Dawan Ban playing a major role in the siege, one can assume the Badrab were one of the many groups that took part since they had given their allegiance to the *mahdi* as early as 1884.

^{xii} “Hold fast to the rope of God, and do not separate off of it.” (*‘itasamu bi-habl allah jami’an wa la tafarraqu*)

^{xiii} This aphorism echoes the famous hadith *la fadal l-il-‘arabi ‘ala al-‘ajami ila bi-l-taqwa*, “no Arab is better than a non-Arab except through his piety,” that it is belief and not identity that should determine one’s status.

^{xiv} This toxicity is illustrated by the fact that I was picked up and detained by security agents during my last visit to the branch of the Council in Malakal, seemingly out of fear that I was documenting the tensions I have described as well as the tensions between Muslims and the state. Moreover, a vicious exchange between its secretary general and some Muslims in Juba over the former’s letter to the security services (a copy of which I obtained, though I was unable to verify its authenticity) accusing some members of the Muslim community of planning terrorist activities “with the coordination of Islamic extremist groups from Iran, al-Qa’ida, and the Sudanese Islamic Movement” (referencing all potential enemies in one fell swoop), further exhibits how this Council has become the site of considerable struggle.