

Gabriel R. Warburg

Religion and State in the Sudan: 1881-1985



Born in Berlin in 1927, I emigrated with my family to Haifa, Palestine (later Israel) in 1933, and have lived there ever since. As a member of Kibbutz Yehi'am for twenty years (1946-1965) I started university studies late, first at the Hebrew University in Jerusalem and then at the School of Oriental and African Studies, London University, where I received my Ph.D. in 1968. Since then I have been at the Department of Middle Eastern History, University of Haifa. I was Rector of the University, 1974-77; member of Universities Grants Committee of Israel's Council of Higher Learning, 1981—84; Director of the Israeli Academic Center in Cairo, 1984-87. Research Fellowships at Columbia University; Berkeley (Fulbright); Annenberg Research Center; and St. Antony's College, Oxford. Major books: *The Sudan Under Wingate* (London 1971), *Islam, Nationalism and Communism in a Traditional Society* (London 1978), *Egypt and Sudan Studies in History and Politics* (London 1985), *Historical Discord in the Nile Valley*, (London 1992). Editor (since 1981) of *Asian and African Studies*. – Address: Department of Middle Eastern History, University of Haifa, Mount Carmel, Haifa 31999, Israel.

My original intention when coming to Berlin was to complete my book on "Religion and State in Sudan", on which I had begun work in 1990. This however did not happen due to a number of reasons. First, during my stay at St. Antony's College in Oxford in 1991, my research interests were somewhat diverted and I completed a manuscript of another book dealing with nineteenth and twentieth century historiography of the Nile Valley. Hence I spent the first few months of my stay in Berlin proof-reading and indexing this book, which has now appeared, and I am eagerly expecting responses from my peers, since it is rather provocative. In addition I have completed three articles which were also published recently. Secondly, during the current year I discovered a considerable amount of relevant new sources for my study which I had to digest before completing it. Last

but not least, Germany, and especially Berlin, proved to be of such interest, that I found myself attempting to come to grips with what was going on. I also devoted some time to visiting the new *Bundesländer* and to lecturing and discussing my research with colleagues from Centers of Middle Eastern Studies. I would like to mention especially my contacts with Professors Fritz Steppat and Baber Johansen from the Islamic Studies center of the *Freie Universität* as well as with the Research Fellows of the new Institute on the Modern Middle East, consisting of previous members of the East German Academy of Sciences, especially with Professor Gerhard Hopp and Dr. Wolfgang Schwanitz. Among those who helped me to obtain relevant source materials for my research, I have to mention with special gratitude Professor Rex S. O'Fahey, from the University of Bergen in Norway.

My book on Religion and State will thus have to wait a little longer, which may — in the end — be an advantage, as I shall explain later. It will cover the period starting with the appearance of Muhammad Ahmad, the Sudanese Mandi, in 1881 and ending with the re-emergence of Islamic Fundamentalism and the implementation of the *shari'a* laws in the Sudan, since 1983. My choice of Sudan was of course prompted primarily by my knowledge of its history. But there are additional aspects which make its study as an Islamic state of particular interest. First, the Mandist state in Sudan (1881-1898) became one of the first states in the modern era in which Islam played a predominant role in its everyday life. This state survived for some fifteen years when it was destroyed by the Anglo-Egyptian army. Hence secularization became synonymous with colonialism while Islamic statehood was regarded by many as a natural by-product of independence. Secondly, the Sudan is both religiously and ethnically an extremely diverse society. The southern Sudan, encompassing one third of its area and population, is by-and-large non-Arab and non-Muslim. Hence Islamicization seemed to many northerners a holy mission, while southerners viewed it as a discriminating act, seeking to turn them into second-class citizens, unless they embraced Islam. This conflict has led to prolonged civil war which, under the present Fundamentalist-Military rulers, seems to have no end in sight.

It is within this context that my present study is set. It seeks to examine the specific circumstances in the Sudan which have led to this phenomenon, and to assess possible broader repercussions. I have completed my examination of the role of Sufism in the nineteenth and twentieth century Sudan, and am thus in a position to analyze its impact on both the Mahdiyya and on twentieth century developments. I have also completed my research on the neo-Mandist Ansar and the Muslim Brothers, during the first half of the twentieth century. There are two major areas in which I

want to carry on further research. First, some important new additions have been made to the source materials of the Mandiyya, through the work of the famous Sudanese scholar, Muhammad Ibrahim Abu Salim. I had some difficulty in obtaining his new books, since they were not available in Europe, and it was only in May of this year that I finally received them. Secondly, as mentioned above I intend to examine in depth the problems of Islamic statehood since 1956, when the Sudan became independent. This entails the following central issues: Whether or not the Sudan's constitution should be Islamic? If it should, as those promoting it suggest, will an Islamic constitution be implemented democratically or by military force? Present trends suggest that force is the more likely method, but a clear answer may depend on the potency and durability of the present fundamentalist regime. Next is the question as to the impact of the implementation of Islamic laws (*shari'a*) on the country's unity. Finally, since religion and ethnicity seem to have gained considerable relevance not only in the Sudan but also in other Muslim societies, I would like to examine whether these developments are of broader relevance, especially in Tunisia and Algeria. This, I hope, may shed some light on the realities of this region and enable us to better comprehend the religious-ethnic conflicts with which many of the states within it are afflicted.

As stated, I have not yet completed my work but am satisfied with my progress during my year at the Wissenschaftskolleg. Several publishers (C. Hurst and F. Cass in London, and Oxford University Press in New York), have expressed interest in my book but I do not, at present, want to commit myself. I shall have to see what progress I make during the next academic year, when, in addition to teaching, I have been asked to become involved in academic administration. I do hope, however, to be able to complete the first draft of my manuscript by the end of the summer of 1993 which I could then submit for publication in 1994.

Finally, I would like to express my sincere gratitude to all those in the Wissenschaftskolleg who helped me with my work, both in the administration and the library. On a more personal note, I would like to add that for me and my wife Rachel this has been a most enjoyable and memorable year. We have made many new friends both among the fellows and the staff of the Kolleg, as well as among our new German acquaintances. We have enjoyed the hospitality of many Berliners, and have learnt to appreciate the richness of life that this wonderful city affords. For me the experience of being the sole Middle Eastern Historian among the wide range of interests represented by my fellow colleagues, was both unique and enriching. The insight provided by authors, philosophers and many others, on my field of research, was a new and most beneficial experience for which I shall always remain grateful.