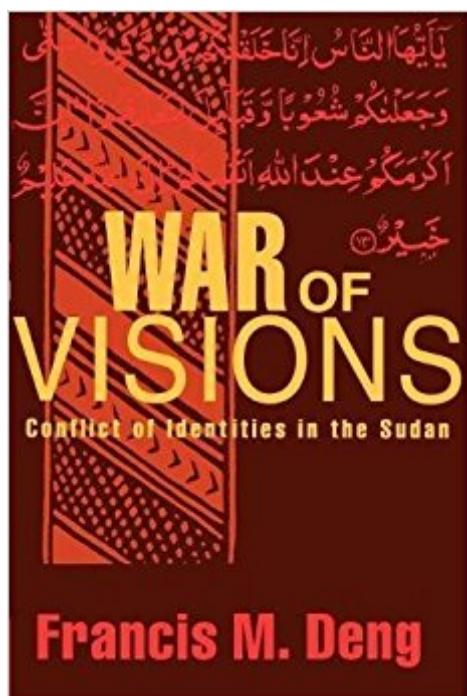


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War Of Visions: Conflict Of Identities In The Sudan



Synopsis

The civil war that has intermittently raged in the Sudan since independence in 1956 is, according to Francis Deng, a conflict of contrasting and seemingly incompatible identities in the Northern and Southern parts of the country. Identity is seen as a function of how people identify themselves and are identified in racial, ethnic, cultural, linguistic, and religious terms. The identity question related to how such concepts determine or influence participation and distribution in the political, economic, social, and cultural life of the country. *War of Visions* aims at shedding light on the anomalies of the identity conflict. The competing models in the Sudan are the Arab-Islamic mold of the North, representing two-thirds of the country in territory and population, and the remaining Southern third, which is indigenously African in race, ethnicity, culture, and religion, with an educated Christianized elite. But although the North is popularly defined as racially Arab, the people are a hybrid of Arab and African elements, with the African physical characteristics predominating in most tribal groups. This configuration is the result of a historical process that stratified races, cultures, and religions, and fostered a "passing" into the Arab-Islamic mold that discriminated against the African race and cultures. The outcome of this process is a polarization that is based more on myth than on the realities of the situation. The identity crisis has been further complicated by the fact that Northerners want to fashion the country on the basis of their Arab- Islamic identity, while the South is decidedly resistant. Francis Deng presents three alternative approaches to the identity crisis. First, he argues that by bringing to the surface the realities of the African elements of identity in the North-- thereby revealing characteristics shared by all Sudanese--a new basis for the creation of a common identity could be established that fosters equitable participation and distribution. Second, if the issues that divide prove insurmountable, Deng argues for a framework of diversified coexistence within a loose federal or confederate arrangement. Third, he concludes that partitioning the country along justified borders may be the only remaining option to end the devastating conflict.

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"An excellent analysis...that actually offers some solutions." —The Economist

The civil war that has raged intermittently in the Sudan since independence in 1956 is a conflict of contrasting and seemingly incompatible identities in the Northern and Southern parts of the country. Identity is seen as a function of how people identify themselves and are identified by others in terms of race, ethnicity, culture, language, and religion. The identity question relates to how such concepts determine or influence participation and distribution in the political, economic, social, and cultural life of the country. War of Visions sheds light on the anomalies of the identity conflict and presents competing models: the Arab-Islamic mold of the North, representing two thirds of the country in territory and population, and the remaining Southern third, which is indigenously African in race, ethnicity, culture, and religion, with an educated Christianized elite. But although the North is popularly defined as racially Arab, the people are a hybrid of Arab and African elements, with the African physical characteristics predominating in most tribal groups. This configuration is the result of a historical process that stratified races, cultures, and religions and fostered a "passing" into the Arab-Islamic mold that discriminated against the African race and cultures. The outcome of this process is a polarization that is based more on myth than on the realities of the situation. The identity crisis has been further complicated by the fact that Northerners want to fashion the country on the basis of their Arab-Islamic identity, while the South is decidedly resistant. —This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

This is perhaps the most detailed and thorough history of Sudan. Is it dated? Yes. Does it still help to set up an understanding for the complexity of the situation in Sudan and now South Sudan. Yes. A must read for those wanting to go deeper into the history of a remarkable nation.

Deng is as good a writer as he is a diplomat. He combines history with poetry, music, and folklore. The writing is clear, and Deng does not assume that his reader is already a scholar of the Horn of Africa. This epic — almost 600-page — book is as valuable for its prose as it is for its analysis of the

civil war in the Sudan. I read this whole thing in less than a week.

After reading Author Deng's book: WAR OF VISIONS: CONFLICTS OF IDENTITIES IN THE SUDAN, I came away with a profound respect for the scholarship and comprehensiveness of this writer's work. WAR OF VISIONS is indeed a tour de force in the discussion of Sudan and its' cultural problems. As an author, myself, of a new book on the Sudan: JIHAD: The Mahdi Rebellion in the Sudan I must pay homage to Ms. Deng. Her clarity of thought and deep understanding of the various cultures in Sudan from North to South have created a fine volume for everyone to read. Islamic Radicalism today has some of its' roots in Sudan going back to the 7th century. But we must remember that it was in the 19th century when the British and French began the colonization of North Africa for the purpose of commercial advantages. The British moved into Egypt and Sudan in the latter part of the 19th century to secure their interests in commerce. When they bought out Khedive Ismail's shares in the Suez Canal(nominal head of Egypt at the time) the British now had access to the riches of East Africa and the Indian sub-continent. Meanwhile, as Deng points out, a new virulent form of Islamic Fundamentalism arose in the Central Sudan under one Mohammed Ahmed ("the Mahdi")that challenged the British, the Turks and the Egyptians. In particular, the Beja tribes of the Red Sea Hills became the key element in defeating British and Allied Forces in the Eastern Sudan. An excellent read! Perhaps, readers of Ms. Deng's book, WAR OF VISIONS might also want to take a look at my new book, JIHAD: THE MAHDI REBELLION IN THE SUDAN. While not a general history, JIHAD encapsulates a short period in time and shows the development of Islamic Fundamentalism in Sudan and its' historical relationship to radical Islamic beliefs today. The terrorism that arose after 2001 in Iraq, Saudi-Arabia, Sudan and other Arab regions that challenged America can be traced back to the forces that germinated and grew over a full century. Please also visit my Online Newspaper: The Iraqi Crisis and Worldwide Jihad at: [...]

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