FROM FAKI TO DUKTÖR

Changing attitudes towards tradition
among Sudanese rural intellectuals

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"They have killed the Qur'ān!" — thus the son and heir of a religious notable1 summarised his assessment of a process of educational change initiated by the British in the 1920s2 with the introduction of 'regulated', state supervised Qur'ānic schools. At the beginning of the Condominium, British religious policy had aimed at establishing a body of loyal Muslim jurists ("ulamā") centred on urban schools and courts, to counter any remnants of Mahdist ideology. But fears of too much Egyptian influence and the realisation that these "ulamā" had little influence over the Sudanese population led the British, around 1912, to start to rely more on traditional religious leaders. In the course of this policy, the Qur'ānic schools (khalwas) were thought to be a suitable institutional basis which could be used to provide an elementary education such as was necessary to create a pool of people who had received just enough training so that they could be employed as subordinate clerks in the administration. The required changes in the curriculum were, however, resisted by the khalwa teachers (the fakās), and after much debate over educational policy, the idea of regulated khalwa was judged a failure. After 1937 emphasis was firmly put on secular schools, and by the 1940s they had eclipsed the khalwa in the number of students enrolled.

As the importance of the Qur'ānic schools declined, so did the status of the fakās who operated them. Their relative marginalisation explains why they often see the modern world as one dominated by alien forces. This perception constructs a binary opposition between the present and a past where the "Qur'ān was alive", so to speak. "Objectively", this picture is quite questionable. The Mahdiyya probably disrupted khalwa education more than the Condominium, and the Turkiyya had preceded the British in trying to influence religious education.3 But both of them had, to a large extent, worked through the fakās. The British, on the other hand,

1 Muḥammad Mubārak al-Majdūḥ, son of Majdūḥ Jalāl al-Dīn, and imām of his father's mosque in al-Damār.
2 The first fakī training course was held in 1918 (Martin Daly, Empire on the Nile, Cambridge 1986, p 381); however, it was only in the mid-1920s that the numbers of subsidised khalwas grew substantially.
3 Ja'far Maẓḥar, governor-general of the Sudan 1866-71, introduced a system of financial subsidies and regulated government control (tanzīm) of the khalwas which previously had only occasionally received financial support il-вахiji Allāh. When Khedive Ismā'īl's (r 1863-79) government ran into financial difficulties and was forced to cut down spending this had a noticeable effect on the material situation of the "ulamā" and other religious teachers; government-sponsored education was concentrated in a few places whereas before it had been available all over the country. (Yaḥyā Muḥammad Ibrāhīm, MA thesis, 294-9).
supplanted them by a new class of "secular" intellectuals, who became carriers of new, nationalist ideas. In order to survive, the rural religious families had to adapt themselves to these changing conditions. Reflecting and reinterpreting their tradition, they upheld and defended their identity. The following four examples of leading "intellectuals" from the Majdhubi tradition of al-Dhamar shall help to indicate the great diversity and complexity of these strategies. While I do see an overall line of development — an increasing integration of tradition into "modern" patterns and institutions — I think it is important to be attentive to the details, the differences, the fractions of individual approaches. It is by a description of these that I want to illustrate how they responded to the challenges of the encroaching nation state.

1

Majdhub Jalal al-Din (1887-1976) is often portrayed as the last inspiring religious figure whose competence was universally recognised by the Majdhub; no one, after his death, was able to follow in his footsteps. Born in 1887, Majdhub was raised by his maternal uncle, a very pious Moroccan Qur'an teacher. He memorised the Qur'an at the age of seven, and was later one of the first generation of Sudanese to be exposed to secular education. His account of the way he was recruited to Gordon Memorial College is interesting: After the school had opened in Nov 1902, the Egyptian district commissioner (ma'mur) of al-Dhamar urged its people to send their sons to Khartoum to benefit from the modern education which would guarantee them high positions and thereby maintain their well known status. The Majdhub, however, were afraid that secular education would lead to unbelief (kufr) and even Christianisation; they argued that they wanted to stick to the Qur'an and to their awrād. The ma'mur warned that the Government would interpret their refusal as stubborn persistence in their former Mahdist faith leading to unwelcome consequences; he advised them to send at least one of their sons. A council was held to discuss the ma'mur's recommendation, but while they agreed in principle no one wanted to send his own son. In the end, they chose an orphan, Majdhub. His paternal uncle (the spiritual leader of the Naqarab lineage) first was angry about this decision but was eventually convinced that there might be some good for his ward at the college. The ma'mur was then told that the selected one was a son of the shaykh himself, and his name was changed accordingly!

4 Al-Shaykh al-Bashir 10/12/87, 1.
6 Cf Martin Daly, Empire 240-49: a call went out to provincial governors "to ascertain the names of the principal inhabitants of their various provinces" who wanted their sons to be trained for a Government career. Students entered aged about 12, for 4 years.
7 On the local population's initial apprehensions about government education of Mohamed Omer Beshir, Educational Development in the Sudan 1898-1956, Oxford 1969, p 35. — The reluctance of the rural population to send their children to state schools had eased by the 1920s due to the material benefits of a government service career.
After graduation, Majdhub taught in various primary and intermediate schools before joining the staff of Gordon College in 1921 as a teacher of Arabic and Islamic religion. After his retirement in 1944 he stayed in the capital for a while, teaching at the Omdurman Islamic Institute (Ma'had Umm Durman al-Ilmi). But when the government stopped supporting the khalwa of al-Damar in favour of secular education [c. 1948/9], Majdhub returned to his home town to try to carry it on as an independent khalwa. However, due to some differences with the rest of his lineage (who were afraid to lose their position as imams) he eventually decided to build his own mosque and school (Ma'had al-Damar al-Ilmi, modeled on the Omdurman Institute) (1950/1). When the school building became too small, he managed to get a grant of land from the government to construct a larger building, the foundation stone of which was laid by General Abdulg in 1959/60.

This to-ing and fro-ing between drawing on government institutions and distancing oneself from government control is characteristic of Majdhub. He knew quite well that the traditional system of education as practised in the khalwa had passed its zenith and would not stand the competition from secular state schools. Someone who believed in the values of his tradition and thought they should be imparted to future generations could easily perceive the schools established by the foreign coloniser as a threat to local identity. Knowing the power of the colonial government and the attraction their system had for many of his compatriots, he felt the need to work towards a preservation of the Islamic heritage under the new circumstances. Whether as a teacher of Arabic and religion at Gordon College, or as head of his own religious institute, he adopted the forms of a modern education (separate classes, classrooms, exams, graduation &c), but tried to emphasise religious over secular subjects. He made efforts to guard his independence, but integrated his Institute into a larger, formal educational system leading on to the Omdurman Islamic Institute and eventually to al-Azhar University. He condemned government educational policy as initiated by Babikr Badri, but accepted government help for the establishment of his own school. This school, towards the end of his life, was turned into a regular government intermediate school.

8 Abdallah al-Tayiib, Min Haqibat 67 mentions tajwid (Qur'anic recitation), calligraphy and Malik fiqh (jurisprudence) as the subjects he taught.
9 The Ma'had Umm Durman al-Ilmi emerged when informal teaching in the Omdurman mosque was gradually brought under government control by teaching regulations, salaries for the teachers &c. The Sudanese 'ulama viewed it as an institution to defend the teaching of Muslim theology and law which they felt was being neglected in the modern schools. The British authorities, on their part, preferred a local Muslim college which they could control to sending Sudanese students to al-Azhar where they would be exposed to Egyptian and Arab nationalist ideas (cf M O Beshir, Educational Development 48-9).
10 Since 1941 the Graduates Congress had encouraged private initiative to further education. In this context, not only secular schools were established, but also local religious ma'had: 1943 at Nari, 1945 Karima, 1947 Kusti, 1949 Halff, 1950 Masho & Argoo, 1951 Shandil, 1955 Tangast (M O Beshir, Educational Development 171). M O Beshir says the al-Damar Institute was founded in 1953, but documents I photographed (V ms 3) show that it existed already in 1951.
11 Madrasat al-Shaykh al-Majdhub al-thinawiyya al-`Amma li'I-banin. The school was apparently established in 1973, judging from several letters in V ms 3 (one from the school headmaster, al-'Ibeyd Idris Muhammad,
Some of my informants viewed in this development a replacement of the Qur'anic school by a "Western" type of education. The khalwas of al-Dāmar today have little more than 20 students, all of whom come from the Western Sudan, none from the town itself (in the late 1930s, there were an estimated 130, compared to about 70 pupils in the elementary school). It was, however, *not* an exact reproduction of an English school that emerged in 20th century Sudan but something that combines elements from both traditions, formally as well as materially.

The other area Majdūb was interested in was his family's Sufi tradition. His activities in this field contributed to a shift of focus from the clan's ancestor, al-Faki Ḥamad, to its foremost religious representative, Shaykh al-Majdūb. Three undertakings can be cited as examples: (1) the institutionalisation of the shaykh's anniversary celebration (*ḥawliyya*, first celebrated in around 1915) for which Majdūb wrote a *mūlid*; (2) an effort to recover and print the writings of the shaykh; (3) the collection of the shaykh's prayers and litanies (*awrād*) and their distribution in book form after 1962. With this collection Majdūb tried to give his *tariqa* something it had not had before, a prayer book as a focus for religious identity like those possessed by other *tariqas*, especially those that were under the jurisdiction of the Egyptian Supreme Sufi Council. He thereby broke with classical Sufi practice which demanded that the *awrād* should rather not be disclosed to outsiders, since permission of the *shaykh* was necessary to properly recite them. The overall impression — strengthened by a look at his correspondence — is that he tried to turn a rather loose, *fakī* centred religious orientation into a more strictly organised form of religiosity modeled on the Egyptian brotherhoods and their “orthodoxy” (that is, the stressing of *ʿilm* in their teachings).

While in the end he failed to create a centralised “*Tariqa Majdūbīyya*”, he was instrumental in shifting the symbolic centre of the Majdūb community of al-Dāmar from al-Faki Ḥamad to Shaykh al-Majdūb. *Dāmar Ḥamad* — the old designation of the town — is now thanking Majdūb to have lent the school 20 desks from his private stock pending the arrival of the desks ordered by the school, dated 18 Sep 1973; one from the Minister of Education, Sirr al-Khatim al-Khalīfa, a former student of Majdūb, in which he promises to handle favourably Majdūb's request to “lease” (*jār*) the Institute, and says he has entrusted another of Majdūb's students, Dirar Ṣāliḥ Dirar, with the matter (dated 15 Oct 1973).

12 In 1937.
13 In 1939.
14. NRO, NPR 1/14/80. The average number of khalwa students in al-Dāmar during the 1930s was 115. — The ratio 130 - 70 corresponds quite closely to that given for the northern Sudan in 1936: subsidised khalwas 22,400; elementary school boys 12,402 (M O Beshir, *Educational Development 208*).
15 A standardised curriculum, centralised exams, hierarchical organisation, classes; strong emphasis on religious values, memorisation of texts.
16 J S Tringham, *The Sufi Orders in Islam*, Oxford 1971, p 192. But cf ib 216: "Order-heads disapproved of their *mārāds* [using *awrād*] without authority because they were following a course, but did not object to their general use."
mostly referred to as Dāmar al-Majdhūb. The tomb of Fakī Ḥamad has fallen into oblivion; that of Shaykh al-Majdhūb — whose memory was previously kept alive primarily in the Eastern Sudan — is now a colourful landmark of the town. Religious legitimacy is emphasised above kinship ties.

2

Majdhūb’s son Muḥammad al-Mahdī al-Majdhūb (1919-82) is one of the most celebrated poets of modern Sudan. This is not the place to enter into a literary discussion. I just want briefly to point out the constant tension that emerges in his work between a romanticised, nostalgic image of his childhood world and the exacting life in the new towns.

This image includes many descriptions of life in and around the khalwa, descriptions that are in startling contrast with those given by the British inspectors of education, who continuously complained about the absence of what they saw as real education (ie, literacy, arithmetic &c), and about low sanitary standards:

Village children were taught a little reading, less writing and the repetition of the Koran and the Mahdī’s prayers by teachers who were ignorant of the very rudiments of the art of instruction, utterly incompetent, illiterate to a degree and consumed by a spirit of the wildest fanaticism … buildings mere hovels, children huddled together under the most insanitary conditions and instruction carried on in the midst of a deafening babel.17

To sit for 7 to 9 hours out of the twenty-four — some of them at night — in a dark and dirty hovel, flies buzzing round one’s gummed eyelids, to learn double-Dutch by heart and be beaten at intervals by a lazy and stupid assistant — it is hard for a child of six to ten years old, even though he be a Sudanese.18

M al-Mahdī, on the other hand,19 evokes quite a different atmosphere. The “deafening babel”20 of everyday learning is recalled less than other aspects of khalwa life like the sharāfa (the honouring of the child who has completed a certain section of the Qurān), or the gathering of firewood on Wednesdays, the cooking of bafla &c:

Together with the other pupils (ḥerān) I went out for the “fazz’ā” to collect firewood. In my little hand I had a hatchet (farrār) and water from the Nile in a green bottle. Our feet sank deep into the brown sandy ground, our eyes were fixed on the blueness of the Nile, the tops of the dōm and palm trees. We rested our childhood in the shady lotus trees, and returned to the Fire with Sodom

19 As well as ʿAbdallāh al-Tayyib, Min ḥaqībat pp 46-60, 68-77 & passim.
apple and salam wood, and the Fire nourished us, every Wednesday evening, with a feast meal (karāma) of blessed bean halīla, and well-earned country bread.

The Fire referred to is the tuqāba, the fire lighting the place where the Qurʾān and ṣilm are studied at night. “I saw my early childhood in the light of this blessed fire. I looked towards it and listened to its speech, and I became intoxicated and started to sing.” Thus M al-Mahdī introduces his first diwān, which he named, accordingly, Nūr al-Majādhib.

“The Fire] throws its golden locks over the pupils who have gathered round it embracing their tablets and chanting the Qurʾān. Around them, knights, fuqahā and miracle-workers keep guard, praising God and singing hymns, [a sign of] tolerance between people, of security and munificence for centuries long until this very hour.”

From this “pure, benevolent life” the young pupil “emigrated” (ḥājar) to Khartoum, “the capital of the Turks” where he attended one of the “schools of the Turks” of which people used to say that they distort the character of those who enter them and alienate them from their community. However, in spite of all these warnings he graduated from Gordon College to become a government employee, an efendi, who enjoyed all the amenities of urban life. This resulted very early in a constant tension between the nostalgia for his romanticised rural origins as described above and the attractions of modernity. Some of his poems reveal a rebellious attitude against the strictly pious world of his father, for example when he evokes the drinking of alcohol and sexual pleasure, or when he describes his Arabness as a fetter, praising instead the pure, free life in the Southern Sudan, or indeed when he accuses the pious of being hypocrites and says he is worthier than them because he does not try to hide his sins and when he bitterly denounces the wickedness of his relatives in al-Dāmar and calls himself a rebel backed by law. At other times he regrets his “sins” and feels utterly despairing, although his repentance is never absolute and definitive, and he returns to sensual pleasures as the only consolation in an aggressive and destructive world, where traditions no longer help the individual but have turned into an oppressive burden. In the towns, he sings for political

21 A fair-sized, thorny shrub.
23 This name was suggested to him by his friend, ʿAbdallāh al-Ṭayyib (ʿAbdallāh al-Ṭayyib, 10/4/91).
25 The following references to al-Mahdī’s poetry are much indebted to Muḥammad Muṣṭafā Haddāra, Tāyyārāt al-shiʿr al-ʿArabī al-muʿāṣir fī ʾI-Sūdān, Beirut 1972, pp 323-375.
27 Ṣināʿa (Wau 1954) (ib 20).
28 Ḥazīma (Port Sudan 1952) (ib 363).
29 Bayn al-māliḥ wa-Baḥr al-Ghazāl (Wau 1954) (ib 115).
30 Bayn bayn (Omdurman 1947) (ib 199).
31 Naḥdā (Port Sudan 1952) (ib 353).
32 Al-Salām (Port Sudan 1953) (ib 288).
freedom\textsuperscript{33} and social justice,\textsuperscript{34} but then again he complains of the demands of urban life and returns to yearn for the peace of origins, of nature\textsuperscript{35} and of simple country life.\textsuperscript{36}

M al-Mahdī was a romantic rebel against the restrictions imposed upon his wish for individual freedom by the austere, pious world of his father. He consciously chose the life of the urban \textit{efendiyya}, and would not renounce it, despite all its troublesome complexity. But while he was upholding individual freedom, he was at the same time, throughout his life, suffering from a feeling of alienation from his origins, his home community. His poems convey the overall impression of someone who has been driven out of paradise and is now trying to come to grips emotionally with the challenge of modernity. “The perpetual dialogue” between these two worlds, he says, “between his painful yearning for the first sharāfa presentation with its innocent, wholesome beauty, and between the arduous path of emigration to the dangerous, choked city”\textsuperscript{37} unfolds in his poetic work. He definitely sees an opposition between these two worlds; and the words, the adjectives, the emotions attached to them show clearly that reflecting upon his basic position he finds that he might have moved to the city to live there, but that his mind is still very much attached to romanticised images taken from his “traditional” home.\textsuperscript{38}

After all, romanticism is a modern phenomenon...

Half a generation later, Majdhub al-Naqar (1933-1987) was born, whose formative years immediately after World War II fell within the period of increased politicisation of students in

\textsuperscript{33} \textit{Al-Muntaqar} (1946) (ib 27-9); \textit{al-Mujahid} (Omdurman 1947) (ib 214-8) (both poems are dedicated to his friend Mahmūd Muhammad Tāhā, leader of the reformist Republican Brothers, who was in prison at the time); \textit{Filastīn} (1948) (ib 56-60); 
\textit{Mōtwā} (Port Sudan 1951) (ib 354-9) (bloodshed in Marrakech); \textit{al-Kaṭābīh} (1951) (ib 207-212) (for the Suez Canal fighters); Fārūq al-khallī (Port Sudan 1952) (ib 133-5) (on King Fārūq’s abdication); \textit{Saḥum} (Port Sudan 1953) (ib 22-25); \textit{Fajr Kadhūb} (Port Sudan 1953) (ib 219-22) (on the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement on self-determination); \textit{al-Muṭa’āwirinūn} (“The collaborators”, undated) (ib 213); \textit{al-Rāḥil} (ib 340-1) (on the British retreat from Sudan 1956); \textit{Namūt wa-l-tahyā Miṣr} (Omdurman 1956) (on the tripartite aggression against Egypt); \textit{4Id al-ḥurrīyya} (ib 156-160) (first independence day); \textit{Baghdādī} (1958) (ib 205) (on the ‘Irāqī revolution); \textit{al-Jarīda al-dāmmiyya} (Khartoum 1958) (ib 130-2); \textit{Ṭālib ilā al-Anṣār} (1964) (ib 365) (both against the sectarianism of the Anṣār).

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Ghāba} (Khartoum 1959) (ib 44-9); \textit{Ḫayāl} (Khartoum 1959) (ib 69-74) (for the children of the poor); \textit{al-Rāḥa} (Khartoum 1961) (ib 141-9).

\textsuperscript{35} \textit{Bustūn wa-iinsān} (1945) (ib 74).

\textsuperscript{36} \textit{Kallūn wa-qaryā} (Wād Madani 1957) (ib 35-40). — Cf also \textit{al-Mawlid} (Khartoum 1957) (ib 89-99), one of his most successful poems, which paints a very “mystical” picture of the community of Sufis.

\textsuperscript{37} \textit{Al-Sharāfā wa-l-hijrā}.

\textsuperscript{38} Cf also \textit{Nār al-Majāliḥib} 10, where he says these childhood images form the essence of his poetry. — Consider also his statement, “If it were not Lord Kitchener who corrupted our life, I could have been one of the Sufists.” (Abdulrahim Abu-Dhikrah, “A Document of Dialogue with the Poet, Muhammad al-Mahdi Magdhoub”, in: \textit{Adwāʾ, the Ninth Literary Supplement}. Washington: The Sudan Cultural Attache Office, 1982, pp 2-13 (in Arabic) (quoted in Ahmed Osman, \textit{Folklore as Mood of Expression in the Poetic Experience of the Sudanese Poet: Muhammad al-Mahdi Magdhoub}, paper presented to the 1988 Meeting of the Sudan Studies Association, Williamsburg, VA).
the fight for national self-assertion and independence, a politicisation that brought to the fore non-
*jāmi‘a*-based parties such as the Muslim Brotherhood and especially the Communists. This
politicisation strongly influenced Majdhub al-Naqqar. As a child, he was more devoutly religious
than his peers; his co-students at the intermediate school in Berber consulted him when they had
religious questions. But as a secondary student in Wadi Sayyidna, he joined the communists
and became so active in party politics that he was expelled in 1949. For a time, he found refuge
in Egypt, where he continued his political activities and was influenced by the prominent
Egyptian Marxist Mahmoud Amin al-Alim. His friends recognised him as an authority on
Marxist theory. They nicknamed him “al-Jāhiq” because of his sharp wit and tongue.

After his deportation from Egypt in 1955, Majdhub at first refused to visit his family.
However, when he was finally persuaded to do so, an encounter with his uncle, who had a
special reputation for *baraka*, left a deep impression on him. He decided to stay, and retreated
into a life of asceticism, praying and fasting, sleeping at the Shaykh’s tomb, and reading books
on Sufism. His family started to worry about this excessive asceticism, but attempts to persuade
him to complete his studies and get an ordinary job failed. His communist friends continued to
visit him and discuss with him, but they did not succeed to bring him back into their fold, even
though he continued to acknowledge for a while that in regard to economic analysis they were
right, and that it was only their atheism that he rejected.

In 1958, Majdhub met his spiritual master, Shaykh MAhir, a former Shaykh of the
Dayfiyya who had abandoned all *silas* and acknowledged only the authority of Qur’ān and
hadith. From then on, Majdhub’s situation stabilised. He started to teach English and geography
at a secondary school, and gradually became the local leader of a group of like-minded men who
all were followers of Shaykh MAhir, and who showed signs of a certain elitist attitude. They
gathered for special weekly lectures and prayers, and held that Majdhub al-Naqqar was the true
spiritual successor to Shaykh al-Majdhub in his time. The observer might be forgiven when he
thinks of ideas on the “avant-garde” espoused by certain communist movements...

The “commissar” turned Sufi was gradually acknowledged by many as al-Dāmar’s
leading local intellectual. By the early 1970s, academic researchers and journalists were directed
to him when they enquired about local history. Among others, a 1977 M.A. thesis is based
mainly on his accounts;39 college students and Sufi journalists come to record interviews with
him;40, and he spread his views via the local radio station. When I was doing my fieldwork

39 Awad al-Sid al-SAeed Mustafa [al-Karsani], *The Majdhubiya Tariqa: its Doctrine, Organization and Politics.*
M.Sc., Department of Political Sciences, University of Khartoum; an abridged version was published in: *Al
Majdhubiya and Al Mikashifiyya: Two Sufi Tariqs in the Sudan*, ed. Martin W. Daly. Khartoum: Graduate

‘an al-khalwa, ed Jam‘iyat al-Manāhij wa-‘Turq al-‘Tdhris, Faculty of Education, University of Khartoum, Oct
1976).*
there was almost no one who did not acknowledge the superior authority of Majdhub al-Naqar in matters of history.

It is therefore all the more interesting to see that Majdhub's version of this history is quite "streamlined", if I may use the expression. Time allows for only one example, which is, however, quite central to Majdhub's thinking.\(^{41}\) He views all the history of al-Damar as one of the implantation and spread of knowledge ('ilm), as a centre of light in the African darkness. The Majjādhib, contrary to other Sufis, were proponents of what he terms al-taṣawwuf al-ilmī, which I am tempted to translate as "scientific Sufism".\(^{42}\) Their "scientific method" (manhaj ilmī)\(^{43}\) lead them to organise their schools into a three level system with a standardised curriculum, final exams and graduation certificates. Again, I think, parallels of this view with the modern, state-controlled education system are not accidental — traditional education was not nearly as neatly organised as Majdhub al-Naqar would have it.

In a way, M al-Mahdi, the poet, and Majdhub al-Naqar resemble each other. Both suffered consciously and more intensely perhaps than their contemporaries the tension between two widely differing worlds, and made it their task to reflect on this tension. But while the poet continues to yearn for "merry old" al-Damar, Majdhub al-Naqar brings his home town into the modern world by reformulating its history along patterns clearly reminiscent of modern examples. It is highly interesting to see — and important for the researcher to realise — that for the younger generation this "modernised" version\(^{44}\) of history has meanwhile started to replace — via state-controlled media and education — the "living" tradition of the family which was originally transmitted mainly by story-telling grandmothers.\(^{45}\)

4

Finally, I briefly want to mention a man who in the 1970s was responsible for the revitalisation of Shaykh al-Majdhub's anniversary celebration. The ḥawliyya had seen many ups and downs in the course of the century, due partly to a lack of interest and partly to rivalry between sections of the Majjādhib family organised around the Old Mosque and the Government Mosque, respectively. One day, Dr Ṭuhmān ʿAbdallāh (b ca 1935), a successful paediatrician from

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\(^{41}\) Majdhub al-Naqar's view of history is most concisely expressed in an interview broadcast by Radio ʿAthbara on 17 Nov 1986.

\(^{42}\) Such a translation, in preference to "intellectual" or "learned" Sufism, tries to catch the "modern" meaning of the term 'ilm, which has given an additional dimension to the more traditional scholastic usage — a reference to modern science. Cf the school of Qurān interpretation known as al-tafsīr al-ilmī, or the very influential Egyptian TV intellectual Muṣṭafā Muḥammad Ṭāhā, who lectures the public on al-Islām waʾl-ʾilm (science).

\(^{43}\) Jurgen Rogalski points out parallels of this term with the ideas expressed by Muḥammad Muḥammad Ṭāhā.

\(^{44}\) "Majdhub al-Naqar knew more about history than anyone else in al-Damar. He collected oral tradition and interpreted it according to his own understanding" (yajmaʾ oral tradition bifassirhā al-ʾilmūma al-khāṣṣ). — This statement was ascribed by ʿAlī ʿAbd al-Rahmān Muḥammad al-Makki, who works at the Markaz al-Islāmī in Khartoum (Bergen, 11/3/90).

\(^{45}\) Cf M al-Mahdi's memories of his grandmother's story-telling (Nār al-Majjādhib 10).
Wād Madani with remote links to the family showed up in al-Dāmar and urged the Majādhib leaders to reunite and hold the ḥawliyya at Shaykh al-Majdhub’s tomb; for that purpose, he put forward a substantial amount of money in order to enlarge buildings there and cater for the guests.

The reason given for this initiative was that before an operation he was about to undergo in London Shaykh al-Majdhub appeared to him in a vision and took away his pain, so that the operation was no longer necessary. In return, the Shaykh asked him to go to al-Dāmar and repair his tomb which had fallen into neglect. He did so, and with the help of the more influential section of the family succeeded in establishing a ḥawliyya celebration at the tomb. While this was perceived as a rival event by the “Old” section of the Majādhib, it has today become the most important festival of al-Dāmar which attracts large numbers of people from Northern and Eastern Sudan.

Dr ‘Uthmān constantly refers to visions of the Shaykh or the Prophet, tells miracles (karāmāt) he has himself witnessed, and interprets quite ordinary events such as the successful reservation of a train ticket as a sign of intervention by the Shaykh.46 This attitude is striking in someone who has so successfully made his way in the “modern” world, who has studied abroad, has been a member of parliament, and is about to open his own private hospital. Many other urban professionals have espoused fundamentalist Islam. He, on the contrary, openly and somewhat aggressively turned to quite the opposite, to a Sufism stressing the miraculous side of religion.47 This Sufism he supports by actions like the revitalisation of the ḥawliyya, and he gives it a modern touch and attractiveness by, for example, installing a ring of electric light on the wall surrounding the Shaykh’s tomb. Others have carried such methods further: The Burhāniyya at the Prophet’s mawlid in al-Dāmar showed videos from their Khartoum headquarters, and danced so excitedly in a splendidly lit and perfumed place that the town’s youth crowded to see the “Burhāni disco” as they called it. — The elders whom Dr ‘Uthmān visits in the afternoon to have tea and cream caramel and recount some of the Shaykh’s miracles listen with a mixture of curiosity, awe, amusement and deference. They know how much they owe him, but they cannot completely hide their feeling that fundamentally he remains an outsider. The funds he poured forth have been very welcome indeed. But perhaps the Majādhib are a little jealous that it is an outsider who has now taken the initiative in representing and defending their way.

46 Cf Gilsenan, Recognizing Islam 83: Many events regarded as quite ordinary by outsiders are interpreted as karāmāt by those who constantly expect them to happen.
47 This recourse to a mystical tradition in the face of the mounting Islamicist wave is a phenomenon that can also be observed elsewhere in the Muslim world; cf Michel Chodkiewicz’ observation on al-Nabhānī (1849/8-1931), author of the famous Jāmi‘ karāmāt al-awliyyā, whose “books have always been widely read in circles hostile to the salafīyya and the wahhābites.” (The diffusion of Ibn ‘Arabi’s doctrine, paper presented to the 1990 meeting of the Muhyiddin Ibn ‘Arabi Society, Oxford, n 39).
Dr 'Uthmān's effort to resist the onslaught of fundamentalism by confidently stressing the mystical side of his tradition shows that in Sufism as well as elsewhere in the Islamic sphere, it is now often young urban professionals who have taken the lead in organisation and propaganda.48

In responding to the challenges of a modern world, the rural religious families adopted various strategies. Refusal and retreat were quickly recognised to be a blind alley. Fighting what to them was a serious threat, they learned to use the enemy's weapons. They absorbed and internalised many of his ways, they made the graduates of the new schools their spokesmen. The result of this interaction between two "semantic fields" is obviously influenced by the unequal distribution of material power. But this is only one factor. The imagination of living individuals in concrete situations acts like a prism which integrates and bundles various influences and gives them a new direction and orientation. This process of change is going on.

48 R S O'Fahey was told by F de Jong of similar developments in Egypt, e.g. with the Dandarāwiyya (private communication).