

# BOOK REVIEW

**Alden Young.** *Transforming Sudan: Decolonization, Economic Development, and State Formation* (African Studies, Series Number 140). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2017; x + 194 pp. Bibliography. Index. \$103.99. Hard-cover. ISBN: 978-1107172494.

Alden Young's *Transforming Sudan* offers an insightful analysis of economic planning in late colonial and early independence-era Sudan. One of the most pleasing aspects of this text is that it challenges two of the most noticeable flaws of modern Sudanese and African history in recent years: first, the imposition of an awkward boundary between the study of colonial and post-colonial history, which, as Young observes, all too often leaves the study of the latter period as a privilege of political scientists (18–19); and second, the refusal of the latter generation of Africanists influenced by the “anthropological turn” (149) to treat the state, its institutions, and the bureaucrats that run them, as subjects worthy of analysis. I wondered if this idea of analyzing the state and its concomitant institutions could have been further developed by synthesizing the perspective of this research with that on other government institutions and departments such as the judiciary, police, ministry of education, and healthcare services, but nevertheless the point is an important one and well made.

The core focus of the book is on the two decades immediately following World War II, from 1945 to 1966. The analysis therefore places the periods immediately before and after the year of official independence in 1956—so often treated as a point of closure—right at the core of the debate. Of course, scrolling through the footnotes reminds one of why producing research that bridges the late colonial and early independence periods is so challenging. Within a couple of years of independence, the archival sources available via the National Record Office in Khartoum or Durham's Sudan Archive start to dry up, and the author has to rely more heavily on published government sources as opposed to internal memoranda. This explains why the lengthiest chapter is the second, covering 1945 to 1951, benefiting as it does from a wealth of correspondence between colonial bureaucrats seeking to flesh out a vision for the late Condominium economy. The intensity of the debate between these officials over the economic models that late colonial Sudan

should follow gives lie to the notions that colonial ideology was monolithic. Young teases out of his sources a variety of tensions between provincial officials, who saw themselves as the guardians of protected local economies in regions in the south and west of the country which were deemed culturally separate and incapable of competing with the riverain center, and Khartoum-based bureaucrats, who conceived of the “economy” as a national phenomenon, in part out of their desire to win the favor of the emergent Sudanese elite. Unsurprisingly, given the difficulty of accessing similar sources for the period which followed, the conflicting views of post-1956 officials are not explored in quite as much depth, but the author does a good job of exploring clashes between state officials and academic economists over government borrowing in the pages of *The Sudanese Economist* (in Chapter Six).

A couple of core arguments are explored consistently throughout the text. First, it masterfully demonstrates that government bureaucrats, fixated upon the notion that the economy must be a measurable entity, sought to measure only those areas of economic activity in Sudan that could be easily measured. This led to a bias toward the export-orientated cotton schemes, which were located in the central riverain areas of the country which the colonial state had made most effort to develop, and in which the Sudanese elites themselves were most heavily invested. The pastoral economies of southern and western Sudan were often marginalized as a result of the state’s limited effort toward developing its transport infrastructure and the cultural biases of the riverain elites.

Secondly, Young does an excellent job of demonstrating how the new territorial economy’s regional biases were reinforced by the perspective of the financial bureaucrats—derived to some extent from contemporary economists such as Kuznets—that short-term wealth creation measured through “Gross Domestic Product,” as opposed to levels of diversification and the evenness of regional development patterns, was the best indicator of a nation’s economic health. The state’s recognition of the perils of a cotton monoculture, and its limited attempts to diversify, are addressed in later chapters.

In summary, Young has produced a well-researched and incisive analysis, that is equally conversant in both economic theory and the literature on Sudan’s modern cultural and political history. It will act as a valuable resource for those interested in Sudanese and African economic history for many generations to come.

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