Multidimensional Change in Sudan (1989–2011)

RESHAPING LIVELIHOODS, CONFLICTS AND IDENTITIES

edited by

Barbara Casciarri, Munzoul Assal and François Ireton

There really is very little published on some of these topics, and genuine field research of the kind that has been conducted by this number of contributors is rare.
Justin Willis, University of Durham

This book brings together sixteen original, detailed field studies . . . which focus on localities across the northerly provinces of the Sudan as it was constituted [in 1989–2011] . . . The events and processes of this 'interim period' following the civil war have deep roots in the past of the whole region, and continuing relevance to 'both Sudans' today.
Wendy James, University of Oxford

Based on fieldwork largely collected during the CPA interim period by Sudanese and European researchers, this volume sheds light on the dynamics of change and the relationship between microscale and macroscale processes that took place in Sudan between the 1980s and the independence of South Sudan in 2011. Contributors' various disciplinary approaches – socio-anthropological, geographical, political, historical, linguistic – focus on the general issue of 'access to resources'. The book analyses major transformations which affected Sudan in the framework of globalization, including land and urban issues; water management; 'new' actors and 'new conflicts'; and language, identity and ideology.
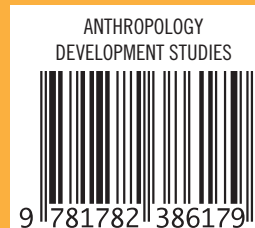
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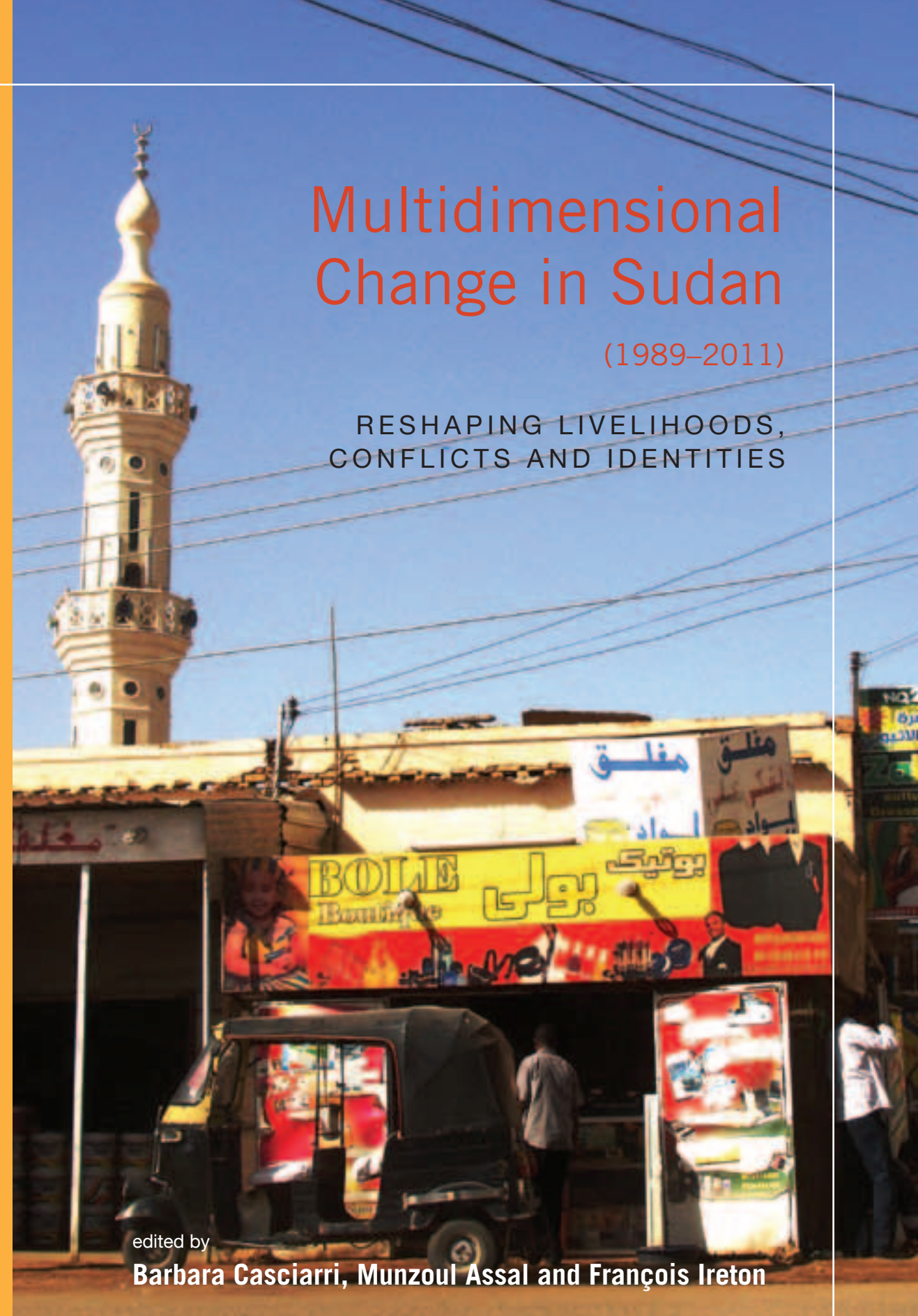
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Barbara Casciarri, Munzoul Assal and François Ireton

Part I

Land Issues and Livelihoods in the Capital Region and Rural Areas

Chapter 1

Old-Timers and Newcomers in Al-Ṣālḥa

Dynamics of Land Allocation in an Urban Periphery

Munzoul A.M. Assal

As a new residential area in the peripheries of Khartoum, Al-Ṣālḥa represents an interesting case of the conversion of otherwise barren lands into high-value areas that attract a variety of land users, including residents, investors and real estate speculators.[1] Such conversion invites fraudulent practices related to transactions over land including, but not limited to, multiple sales and the falsification of documents. Attracting different people to the area resulted in many dynamics that will be adumbrated in the chapter and include local governance, services and, importantly, the dynamics of interaction between original inhabitants (old-timers) and new residents to the area (newcomers). Apart from what is happening in Al-Ṣālḥa as an interesting and perhaps unique case, there is a real demand for urban land, particularly for residential purposes. This demand is fuelled by fast urbanization in Sudan. Population figures show that already by 2005, almost 40 per cent of Sudan's population lived in urban areas. Khartoum's population grew from 250,000 on the eve of independence in 1956 to 2,831,000 in 1993 – a year when Sudan was said to be 25 per cent urbanized. The 2008 population census shows that Khartoum's population stands at 5.27 million (CBS 2009).

Much of Khartoum's population is made up of migrants, and the bulk of these migrants are internally displaced persons (IDPs). In 2004, it was estimated that around 1.8 million IDPs lived in Khartoum (Assal 2004), living either in officially designated camps or in peripheral areas, with relatives or independently, as squatters. Most residential neighbourhoods in

Khartoum developed as a result of the planning of former squatter settlements. The pattern of urban planning is predictable: the government plans for and upgrades squatter settlements into officially recognized residential areas, especially third-class areas (S. Bannaga 2010). In other instances, the authorities plan residential areas prior to the arrival of inhabitants. This is often the case with first- and second-class residential areas like Amarat in Khartoum, but also sometimes third-class residential areas like Al-Shaʿabiya in Khartoum North (M. Bannaga 1987).[2] In any case, urban planning in Sudan does not follow a unified regime apart from classifying residential areas as to whether they are first, second, third (and sometimes fourth) class, which distinguishes whether an area is to be considered a town neighbourhood or a village.[3] The existence of villages within larger towns highlights the ambiguity in classification practices in the categorization and allocation of residential land. Needless to say, such ambiguity is responsible for many of the fraudulent practices that characterize land transactions, as will be shown later. Questions related to land are sensitive in Sudan. Despite the fact that as far back as 1970 the government amended the law in such a way that all unregistered lands would be considered government land, that law has not been enforced with respect to communal lands, especially among ethnic groups. Land, whether urban or rural, is the cause of conflicts of varying scale, but also subject to competing individual interests and communal claims that are the very basis of identity politics in present-day Sudan. Such conflicts, as this chapter will show, are sometimes between old-timers who claim ownership based on precedence and newcomers who invoke government ownership based on the 1970 law.

Patterns of land ownership are no less ambiguous than related issues of categorization. In Sudan generally, two regimes of land ownership are recognized: freehold and leasehold. The former indicates permanent ownership that is not subject to appropriation without just compensation for the title holder, while the latter is a system whereby the government leases lands for specific periods of time, after which the authorities may reappropriate such lands for other purposes without recourse to compensate the leaseholder (El Mahdi 1979). These different types of land titles have implications for land uses and the transaction value for the purchase and sale of land. Needless to say, freehold ownership is more valuable economically and socially and, hence, preferred over leasehold.

This chapter presents an ethnographic study of Al-Ṣālḥa, an area southwest of Omdurman on the west bank of the White Nile. The chapter studies the ethnographic present, although the time frame analysed begins with the end of the 1990s. While the chapter provides an ethnographic snapshot of the area, the main focus is on issues that structure

relationships between so-called old-timers and newcomers – between the Jamūʿiya ethnic group who have inhabited the area for almost two hundred years and claim ownership by right of anteriority and a heterogeneous population of newcomers who began settling in the area in the late 1990s. The ethnography of Al-Ṣālḥa is then used to analyse local dynamics and the centrality of land for old-timers. The situation in Al-Ṣālḥa is mediated by three aspects that are central to this analysis, including processes of land allocation, the role of 'popular committees' and social interactions between old-timers and newcomers. Rapid population growth in the capital is putting pressure on land, creating competition between old-timers and newcomers and creating hybrid governance structures that are both traditional and modern. As it stands today, Al-Ṣālḥa is a suburb in the making with a future that will be largely determined by public investments in the area: a new bridge and the new international airport.

Al-Ṣālḥa: An Ethnographic Snapshot

Located about thirteen kilometres southwest of Khartoum and on the west bank of the White Nile, Al-Ṣālḥa appeared during the late 1990s as a middle-class residential area accessible to public-sector salaried employees. Residential areas in Khartoum are created either expressly as a result of an urban planning process, or spontaneously as extensions of older residential areas resulting from the increase in urban population. Al-Ṣālḥa appeared neither as a result of urban planning nor as a natural extension. It is an amalgam of scattered villages that were far from each but shared an ethnic identity. As we shall see, however, Al-Ṣālḥa is much more than a concretion of overgrown village centres, but an amalgam of villages connected through and incorporated in the residential projects of newcomers of differing ethnic and socioeconomic backgrounds who managed to penetrate the area and constitute its present-day social system.

As described by an old-timer, the life of old-timers in the area looked simple, as it represented typical village life where people practiced rainfed and irrigated agriculture and animal husbandry. Old-timers in Al-Ṣālḥa belong to the Jamūʿiya group, a branch of the Jaʿāliyn of north-central Sudan. The Jamūʿiya are scattered along the west bank of the White Nile, from Abū Seʿīd to Jebel Awlia. They inhabit sixty-four villages, among which Al-Ṣālḥa is best known.[4] Traditional authority is still present and relevant in Al-Ṣālḥa and is combined with a system of governance by popular committee (*lajna shaʿabīa*).[5] Traditional authority rests with the Jamūʿiya, whereby each of the old villages would have a sheikh and the entire area would have an *ʿomda*, currently the head of the Jādaīn-

area popular committee. A delicate balance between traditional authorities and modern ways is ensured at the level of the popular committee.[6]

According to the ʿomda, the Jamūʿiya arrived in Al-Ṣālḥa from northern Omdurman in search of grazing lands some 175 years ago. The Jamūʿiya combined animal husbandry with the cultivation of sorghum and millet and the cultivation of vegetables along the banks of the White Nile. The agrarian practices continued well into the 1980s, by which time the area had been deforested for charcoal. Deforestation made the area unsuitable for livestock and it became increasingly urbanized and residential, with more than 120,000 inhabitants according to local estimates.[7] The Jamūʿiya continue to garden along the west bank of the White Nile, and they continue to cultivate the land for cash crops. With time, as we shall see later, new opportunities appeared with the influx of newcomers and the prospect of the international airport in the area. These new developments provided new avenues for property investment, but also led to property speculation and tensions in the area.

Al-Ṣālḥa villages are administratively part of the Omdurman Southern Rural Council and what was historically called *niṭāg al-rīf al-janūbī*.[8] At present, Al-Ṣālḥa is part of Abū Seʿīd Locality (*maḥalliya*). To the northwest of Al-Ṣālḥa is Umbadda Locality. The villages are located close to the White Nile and extend from north to south. Ṣaryo, Al-Ushara, Al-Giya, Jādaīn, Ḥejleja and Al-Ṣālḥa are the main villages. Of all these villages, Al-Ṣālḥa is the most famous, as a result of its history.

Local topography is flat, permeated by small streams and gently sloping towards the Nile. The soil is sandy in the west and rocky and muddy towards the east and approaching the White Nile. The area climate is characterized as semidesert and is typical of North Kordofan.

According to old-timers, the area was given the name Al-Ṣālḥa by a Sufi leader, Sheikh Abdelmajid Al-Jamūʿiy of Abū Seʿīd, who came to the area while it was still forested. The original village of Al-Ṣālḥa lay at the centre of a large area comprised of sixty-four scattered villages. Because of the centrality of the village and the positive connotations of the village name, the name has been extended by popular usage to cover the greater area.[9]

Some of the original villages in the area retain their traditional structures in terms of ethnic composition and social interaction, but Al-Ṣālḥa[10] has been affected by an influx of newcomers and has thus been the focus of property development to the point where newcomers outnumber old-timers.[11] Newcomers are ethnically, economically and politically heterogeneous, both in terms of livelihood strategies and opportunities – some are government employees, others work in the private sector – but also in terms of lifestyles and residential patterns. Some occupy houses built with permanent materials while others continue to live in traditional

mud houses. There are also many vacant residential plots whose owners are either unable to build or would like to keep them as an investment.

Due to the rapid population influx into the area, many old villages disappeared.[12] One observation worth noting is that Al-Ṣālḥa's community is eclectic and young, with the majority of Al-Ṣālḥa's inhabitants falling within a category loosely described as 'youth', especially the newcomers. These newcomers bought residential land plots from old-timers, the Jamūʿiya, who are becoming a homogeneous minority amid a culturally, politically and socially heterogeneous community. According to one newcomer, 'the old-timers are encapsulated in their own social systems and their way of life. They are not willing to put up with the changes that have taken place in the area, even though they are affected. Some old-timers did not like the new situation and moved further west to the far periphery of the area.'[13] Social interactions are somewhere along the primary-secondary relationship continuum. Neighbourliness is what links people, particularly among the newcomers: 'we know each other as neighbours only, and even this is the case with very close neighbours', as one respondent noted. Social relationships and interactions between old-timers and newcomers are at best ambiguous, since the newcomers are perceived by the old-timers as 'foreigners' or *ajānib*: '[T]hese people are foreigners. They are bringing bad habits to our area. They are getting in the way of our village relationships. We do not know them and we do not like them.'[14] The tensions between the old-timers and the newcomers reached a peak in Al-Ṣālḥa East (formerly Ṣaryo village) when the newcomers wanted to extend electricity to the area. The old-timers refused to pay the fees and argued: '[L]et these foreigners pay the fees.'[15]

The Provision of Services

Being part of the Village Organization Administration (see the next section) has implications for the provision of services. Provision of water, for instance, requires that access be organized and that roads be clearly marked and maintained, conditions that are not always present in most of Al-Ṣālḥa. Despite efforts of those who arrived early in the area (older newcomers), Al-Ṣālḥa looks conspicuously disorganized. Roads and alleys are narrow, something that renders movement in the area less easy. For this reason, the Khartoum State Water Corporation delayed extending water pipes to homes in Al-Ṣālḥa until the planning process had been substantially completed. Even so, in March 2010, some popular committees in planned areas (Al-Giya East, Hejeriya and Sharom) succeeded in convincing the Khartoum State Water Corporation to extend services into

their neighbourhoods. These areas, however, represented only 5 per cent of Al-Ṣālḥa.[16] Town planning and the provision of public services continue apace even if during fieldwork planning marks were observed on walls throughout the district. Water is a perennial problem in Al-Ṣālḥa, since the majority of residents purchase water from vendors with donkey carts for a price-per-barrel ranging between SDG 5 to 8.[17] Ironically, the lack of public water supply provides an opportunity for poor families within the old-timer community to generate income, especially since almost all don-key cart owners are old-timers.

Despite the fact that the planning process is not yet completed, electricity is widely available and was extended to the area in 1999. Power lines may be seen even in areas where roads are rough and narrow.[18] Electricity was extended to the area through popular efforts coordinated by the popu-lar committees, in collaboration with the National Electricity Corporation and financed by the people and a private company.[19] All residents paid in-stalments, an arrangement considered inconvenient by some: '[H]onestly, the instalments were too much for us. We agreed because we used to have electricity before coming here and it is difficult to live in a house without power.'[20] The fact that most newcomer residents are government employ-ees greatly facilitated the extension of electricity to the area. For the most part, electrification has been perceived as necessary and desirable and without serious objection.

The outlook for public health, however, is rather dim. There is only one hospital in the entire area, from Omdurman Islamic University to Jebel Awlia, a distance of fifty-two kilometres, and the hospital is located in Jebel Al-Tina village, which is forty kilometres away from Al-Ṣālḥa. There are several first aid centres along the main asphalt road that divides Al-Ṣālḥa into east and west. There are also a number of scattered private or commercial pharmacies. For the most part, the citizens of Al-Ṣālḥa de-pend on hospitals in Omdurman and Abū Seʿīd for health care, while for more serious matters they go to Khartoum or to Omdurman emergency care facilities.

Al-Ṣālḥa has two main markets. The first one is called Al-Ṣālḥa Market and is located along the asphalt road that links Al-Ṣālḥa with Abū Seʿīd to the north and Jebel Awlia to the south. The market is composed of dif-ferent types of retail shops, restaurants, two pharmacies and a number of building materials shops. All these shops are in fact private homes facing onto the asphalt road. There are also butcheries, bakeries, small canteens that sell various items and a gas station. The other market is located in the western extension of Al-Ṣālḥa and is called Ḥejleja Market. Like the first one, it is composed of a number of small grocers, canteens, work-shops and butcheries and is located in the middle of area. There are many tea-selling women in this market, and there are also many places where

people smoke hookah (*shisha*). During the evenings, the market provides entertainment opportunities, as there are clubs where people watch satellite TV and engage in other entertainment activities.

Al-Ṣālḥa is relatively well connected in terms of transport facilities. The area is linked to Omdurman and other parts of the national capital through the Abū Seʿīd road that traverses the area from north to south, connecting Omdurman with Jebel Awlia to the south of Khartoum. There are two main transport lines that serve Al-Ṣālḥa: the first links Al-Ṣālḥa with Abū Seʿīd and the second with Suq Al-Shaʿabi in Omdurman. Within Al-Ṣālḥa, people use donkey carts and rickshaws as public transport. The area is well covered with telecom services, and there are many telecom towers in different parts of Al-Ṣālḥa.

Despite its size and population of over 120,000 individuals, there are only five public primary schools (for both genders) and one public high school for girls. There is no high school for boys. Primary schools are overcrowded, with 120 pupils per class. The gap is filled through recourse to private schools, which represent lucrative investments. But people are sceptic about private schools: '[T]hese schools are weak. They do not operate in healthy environment and often located in small spaces, and no one knows the capacities of teachers.'[21] Interestingly, the authorities, while acknowledging that a problem exists, have made investment in new public education facilities contingent upon implementing a physical planning programme for the area. Private education is expensive and out of reach for most workers, notably old-timers. On the other hand, newcomers, who are mostly public sector employees, enrol their children in private schools: '[W]e do not have options. I would rather pay a lot of money and enrol my children in a private school than place them in a public school where there are more than 120 pupils in one class', argues an accountant who is a newcomer to Al-Ṣālḥa. Old-timers are sceptical about the feasibility of education and would rather have their children engage in income-generation activities such as casual work.

In terms of security, there are no serious incidents. Traditional leaders (sheikhs and *ʿomda*s) solve problems and mediate between contending parties. Different types of disputes are resolved through the traditional mechanism of *jūdiya*,[22] and despite the dramatic increase in the number of inhabitants, there are no serious incidents reported to the police except for a few insignificant quarrels between people and incidents of theft.

Land Allocation in Al-Ṣālḥa: An Ambiguous Land Grab

Al-Ṣālḥa is part of the so-called Village Organization Administration. This is a system whereby an area is considered a village and therefore does

not undergo the normal planning process. In normal planning, people are provided with residential plots on the basis of certain criteria and upon filing application forms obtained from the Ministry of Physical Planning and Public Utilities. Pantulliano et al. (2011: 19–23) discusses at length the different aspects related to the allocation of residential land in Khartoum, including eligibility criteria, the cost of a residential plot and the difficulties encountered in navigating a cumbersome, costly and entirely opaque application process through official channels. There is much confusion surrounding financial charges and eligibility criteria.

The Village Organization Administration does not follow the normal planning process. Here the eligibility criteria are different, and there is limited government involvement. The process is engaged when a village or group of villages, through their representatives – often popular committee (*lajna shaʿabīa*) members (see below) – approach the Ministry of Physical Planning and Public Utilities with a request for 'planning authority'. The Ministry of Physical Planning and Public Utilities then designates a surveying commission to lay out the village, creating in the process a residential grid with standard plots averaging between five hundred and six hundred square metres. Plots may vary in size depending on the applicant's effective occupancy of a particular plot, such that planning authorities may at times simply confirm an existing occupant's effective homestead. Such deviations from the standard plot size are especially common where plot attributions do not conflict with public service servitudes. Confirmation of ownership is accomplished either through physical presence, that is, the owner is present and inhabits the parcel at the time of subdivision, or the claimant's effective occupation is confirmed by a reliable village source (e.g., the local popular committee or other traditional village authority). This is the process as it happened in the Al-Ṣālḥa village. How land is obtained in such village areas is complex and requires further explanation. Before we attempt such an explanation, we should first consider the nature and role of the popular committee (*lajna shaʿabīa*).

Popular committees have existed in Sudan for a long time. Their presence goes back to the May regime (1969–1985), when local committees were created to marshal support for the ruling party, the Sudan Socialist Union. Part of their function was also to oversee the distribution of subsidized food rations (basically, sugar). Following the 1989 military coup, the nature and roles of the popular committees changed: henceforth they would be used by the government to mobilize people to support the government in its war in southern Sudan and as a means of social control. The instrumentalization of the popular committee as an agency of state security introduced an element of popular mistrust, even if these committees

continued to work for their constituencies, providing and maintaining public services as described in this chapter.

If in theory popular committees are elected, in practice they are more or less government-appointed and reflect the ruling party's political line. It is rare to find a committee whose members are not also members of the ruling party. In Al-Ṣālḥa, for instance, the head of the popular committee is a member of the ruling National Congress Party and a member of parliament. Apart from a more or less explicit political role, the popular committee serves the local community in a variety of ways as described in this chapter.

As mentioned earlier, Al-Ṣālḥa is in a way an amalgamation of older Jamūʿiya villages assembled as a result of development pressures mediated by the arrival of newcomers, who are mostly government employees able to afford a plot of land in the area. The newcomers buy land from the Jamūʿiya old-timers, who are considered the owners of the land. The price for a plot of land (of between five hundred and six hundred square metres) rose from about SDG 1,000 during the early 1990s to SDG 40,000–60,000 at the present time. The prices are even higher in areas already subdivided with municipal services (e.g., the eastern parts of Al-Ṣālḥa), where prices range between SDG 70,000 and 100,000.[23] The popular committee plays a central role in land transactions in Al-Ṣālḥa. When a person buys a piece of land, they must obtain a certificate of assignment from the popular committee. The committee issues a certificate, to whomever it may concern, confirming that a plot belongs to someone or is currently inhabited by a known person. The Department of Rural Planning, which is part of the Village Organization Administration, stamps the certificate, validating it as a legal document. The cost of obtaining such a certificate is not fixed, and there is considerable ambiguity surrounding it. With a popular committee certificate, lawyers may produce an act of sale. Also, based on such contracts, new owners may transfer the land title through the Ministry of Physical Planning and Public Utilities and through the Land Registration Authority, which is an agency of the judiciary. The local administrative unit in Al-Ṣālḥa is responsible for approving the activities of the popular committee as well as the sale of land.[24] Corruption in the process of title transfers appeared as early as 2001, when authorities first detected duplicate land sales in Al-Ṣālḥa, resulting in an order to halt the process of land allocation (Pantulliano et al. 2011: 21).

According to the administrative unit in Al-Ṣālḥa, as of June 2010 there was a backlog of five thousand cases of land transactions pending approval, an indication of how people are scrambling for property in Al-Ṣālḥa.[25] Organizing an area that is categorized as falling within the Village Organization Administration is problematic, as it involves disagreements between

the inhabitants. An example is the village of Ṣaryo mentioned previously, where there was a problem between the newcomers and old-timers over who should pay the fees for extending electricity to the area.

It should be noted that large sections of land belong to the government. The Ministry of Physical Planning and Public Utilities set aside vast areas for government use. The locality that manages this land may use it for a variety of purposes, but mainly as a source of revenue. The head of the administrative unit in Al-Ṣālḥa maintains that the unit rents out and/or leases land as marketplaces and for manufacturers and investors. Using land as a source of revenue is a practice that is not confined to Al-Ṣālḥa, but extends to other areas in Khartoum and the country at large. Assal (2009) alluded to the appropriation of land not only by and for the government, but also for foreign investors either as exploration leases among oil companies or for large-scale agricultural schemes that affect small producers and pastoralists.

The Jamūʿiya ethnic group, the old-timers, claim ownership of the area through customary laws and hence talk about the right to subdivide their own land. In fact, newcomers who bought land in Al-Ṣālḥa did that through the consent of the Jamūʿiya, who were actually the sellers. Of course, it was not long before the newcomers themselves began trading land among themselves and with others. At first, there were no difficulties with ordinary residential land transactions. However, when the government decided to build a new international airport in the Al-Ṣālḥa area, the Jamūʿiya formally claimed the land and demanded compensation. As a result of these developments, Al-Ṣālḥa came to be considered premium property and prices went up accordingly. The government agreed to negotiate with the Jamūʿiya and finally agreed to compensation, the payment of which, according to local authorities, began in 2007 and continues.[26] By agreeing to pay compensation, the government in effect acknowledged that it misappropriated lands traditionally belonging to ethnic groups. Compensation of the Jamūʿiya is cast against a background of serious misappropriations elsewhere, most notably of government expropriations for development projects, for example, for the Merowe Dam, where people felt that they had not been properly or justly compensated.

Socioeconomic Dynamics and the Centrality of Land

Al-Ṣālḥa is, by any standard, a suburb in the making. It is experiencing conspicuous horizontal population mobility, and the influx of newcomers is so great that it is not possible to get an exact population count. For an-

alytical purposes and according to usage, inhabitants classify themselves as old-timers (*aṣḥāb al-arḍ*)[27] and newcomers (*wāfidīn*).[28] The latter categorization is indicative of the centrality of land for old-timers. The Jamūʿiya consider themselves rightful owners by right of antecedence, having been the first to settle and develop the area for livestock grazing and breeding and for cultivating the land, practices that were sustained until such time as these activities became untenable. For them, land has both symbolic and financial value: 'Without land we are nothing. Land means a lot to us. We have been here for hundreds of years through the presence of our forefathers. While I was young, land meant cultivation and grazing, but now I realize how important the land is. At the present time, land is money. If you have land, you are rich.'[29] It is no wonder that when the government decided to build an international airport in the area, the Jamūʿiya successfully lobbied the authorities for compensation. We will shortly discuss how the Jamūʿiya succeeded in privatizing ownership that historically had been communal. Before we do so, however, we will take a closer look at the *wāfidīn*, or the newcomers.

The *wāfidīn* began settling in the area out of necessity in the 1990s, driven by the demographic pressures operating in Khartoum. Constant rural–urban migration and, beginning in the late 1980s, increased settlement (Assal 2011) drove residential land prices and rents up in an inflationary spiral. Rents in the old residential areas in the three cities that constitute the national capital (Khartoum, Khartoum North and Omdurman) became increasingly unaffordable for low-income employees.[30] In addition to high rents, there are problems related to the ownership and transmission of land as inheritance. While these problems have constituted push factors in moving urban populations towards Al-Ṣālḥa, the district does have a number of attractive features, principal among these being larger plot sizes (between five hundred and six hundred square metres) and reasonable prices compared to other areas in Greater Khartoum. The area was attractive long before the decision to build the new international airport there was made, and the establishment of new modern neighbourhoods on the west bank of the White Nile contributed to raising the clout of Al-Ṣālḥa. These new neighbourhoods extend from Al-Inqādh Bridge in the north to Al-Dabbasin Bridge in the south, which connects Al-Ṣālḥa with Al-Azozab in Khartoum. The planned Al-Azozab Bridge is to be completed with the new international airport in Al-Ṣālḥa and is expected to directly link Al-Ṣālḥa with Khartoum.

The newcomers originate in different parts of the country even though they share a socioeconomic profile as salaried employees in the public and private sectors. Some of the newcomers are retired people who have used

their end-of-service benefits to purchase a home in Al-Ṣālḥa, while others have been able to purchase homes in Al-Ṣālḥa as a result of personal inheritance.

A recent significant transformation with regard to land ownership has been a change from community ownership to private ownership, a transition supported by the arrival of newcomers who, anxious to acquire land, provided a ready market for old-timers' lands. Historically, old-timers depended on land for agriculture and animal grazing. As a result of the loss of tree cover, however, the area became barren and the soil eroded. All that remained for cultivation was a narrow strip along the banks of the White Nile, where land is generally owned in freehold (*milk ḥurr)* by a very small number of individuals who cultivate vegetables and cereals. Communal lands no longer suitable for grazing or agriculture were thus distributed in the form of *ḥiyāza*s (holdings) to ethnic Jamūʿiya males who could trace their lineage through the paternal line. The distribution was overseen by village sheikhs, with distributions made to families within the immediate area as well as to nearby Jamūʿiya families.

The process provided a quick source of income for the Jamūʿiya. By transforming communal land to family ownership, the Jamūʿiya were able to capitalize on a substantial investment programme affecting their communal lands. Ownership of Jamūʿiya communal lands was not contested, and the government seemed to have assigned a strategic value to the area, the site of a planned international airport and transit infrastructure.[31] In addition, it could be argued that by encouraging the Jamūʿiya to distribute land, the government was expecting to gain their loyalty and support, an argument that is not far-fetched given the government's similar strategies in other parts of the national capital.[32]

The change in the value of land among the Jamūʿiya indicates an ideational change. From being of nominal value until recently, land for the Jamūʿiya not only represented an obvious economic value, but also an identity issue to the extent that the distribution only targeted those who could prove that they belonged to the Jamūʿiya through the male line. Families then sold land to the newcomers. However, many of the old-timers think they did not benefit from this, since at the beginning land prices were low. For that reason, they believe their livelihoods were not changed, not even their old residential patterns. Some actually complain that due to the increase in the number of newcomers, they feel that they are becoming strangers.

At present Al-Ṣālḥa is an active real estate market reflecting demand for land and the attractiveness of investment in the area. As mentioned earlier, however, this real estate bonanza introduced a number of problems, including fraudulent land transactions, falsified title documents and

fraudulent multiple sales schemes. Informants tell stories about selling a single empty land plot multiple times, with problems appearing when one of the buyers begins construction. In most cases such disputes are settled by court ruling, often giving possession to the first buyer. Subsequent titleholders simply forfeit their equity, especially as the courts are not always able to establish responsibility for the fraudulent sales.

The governance system is a contributory factor to the fraudulent practices described above. Historically, villages were governed by traditional social structures, supervised by sheikhs and ʿ*omda*s. In this system, villages represent extended, homogenous families. With the newcomers, Al-Ṣālḥa was transformed from a social group defined by family ties to a loosely defined and heterogeneous community governed by a popular committee presided over by an ʿ*omda.* While the ʿ*omda* and sheikh continue to be relevant, their personal responsibility is no longer engaged, and their authority is circumscribed by the popular committee. These changes took place in the 1990s with the influx of newcomers. The old-timers came to view themselves as having the right to govern without regard to newcomer demands,[33] while newcomers argued that they were entitled to representation and insisted that the planning process go forward with its promise of improved services to an extended area. The conflict was resolved amicably by conceding the presidency of the popular committee to an old-timer in exchange for newcomer representation on the popular committee, even if the old-timers remained numerically dominant.

To the extent that most of the newcomers are educated young employees of government institutions or the private sector, they often surpass the head of the popular committee when it comes to the question of providing services to the area. They exploit their vertical connections in the state apparatus. Educated and young popular committee members contributed significantly in enumerating residents, giving residential numbers to inhabitants, opening roads and building schools. There is an obvious contrast, then, if not an overt conflict, between old-timers and newcomers. In any case, compared to many other similar and new townships, Al-Ṣālḥa developed in a relatively short time and is on its way to becoming a full-fledged town, even if the authorities still look at it, officially, as a village, something that reflects the awkwardness of urbanization and urban planning in Khartoum.

The material in this chapter gives some sense of the complexity of the land question in Sudan. As mentioned in the introduction, in 1970 the government proclaimed that all hitherto unregistered lands in Sudan would become government property. The proclamation was never enforced, a failure that has proved dysfunctional and created problems for territorial management. Enforcing land laws would produce catastrophic results

and is largely proscribed as a course of action. This is the case with all lands, residential and otherwise. It should be mentioned that in the African context generally, land is a sensitive issue and hardly amenable to the application of law, especially when such application might conceivably result in the denial of a basic right to land.

Conclusion

Al-Ṣālḥa is no longer a village, even if it is still part of the Village Organization Administration. Old-timer authority and ethnic family identities are giving way to a heterogeneous population of government bureaucrats and lower-echelon white-collar workers. The territory is dynamic in terms of local development; land for residential use is in high demand, and public infrastructure projects are transforming the area from a collection of scattered villages to an area of 120,000 inhabitants. Electrification in 1999 and the completion of the north-south asphalt road in 2000–2001 attracted many newcomers even though municipal services are not universally available in the district. But given newcomer zeal and government connections, the planning process is well underway and likely to be completed soon.

Al-Ṣālḥa is an example of an ethnic group being able to capture government attention and assert its ownership of land. When Al-Ṣālḥa began attracting newcomers, the Jamūʿiya group took the initiative of distributing community land to families considered original to the area whose members could prove that they were indeed Jamūʿiya. By not challenging this move, the state approved it, setting a precedent that will likely lead other ethnic groups to claim lands. This precedent was confirmed when the government agreed to compensate the Jamūʿiya for the land that was appropriated for the new international airport. The Jamūʿiya were satisfied with the compensation to the extent that they deemed it generous and just. By standing vis-à-vis the newcomers, the old-timers are in a way asserting an identity that they think is threatened by the newcomers. The struggle to assert such an identity may look like an uphill struggle, especially in that the area is the object of public investment projects, including a new bridge and an international airport. Indeed, the old-timers have already sold much of the land to the newcomers. What remains are the residential plots in which they have the same rights and status as newcomers. Nonetheless, the story of Al-Ṣālḥa is about more than the emergence of a new residential district in the national capital. It is about land claims and the assertion of ethnic rights. In Sudan, entanglements over property rights are well-known, especially in rural areas where ethnic groups

have their homelands, or *dār*s. Ethnic claims on urban land are a recent development, however, and mostly instigated by the government's policy for revitalizing traditional systems in urban areas. This was spearheaded in 1995 when the government convened the Native System Conference. What happened in Al-Ṣālḥa might encourage other ethnic groups to claim land ownership in other urban peripheries, either in the national capital or other cities in Sudan.

Changes are happening fast in Al-Ṣālḥa. Most of the different scattered villages have already been incorporated into Al-Ṣālḥa, and some of these villages lost their names and have completely disappeared. Some, like Ḥejleja, retained their names only to become neighbourhoods in a larger area. Al-Ṣālḥa is a typical example of a rural area being incorporated into an urban system and yet another instance of rural land grabbing by an expanding urban system. While it is fast growing, the available services (especially health and education) do not match the growing need. The number of schools is far below the demand, and there is only one high school for girls in the area. Inhabitants are keen to extend services to the area, and their connections will help achieve that, judging from their success in electrification and efforts underway to extend water service.

As Al-Ṣālḥa is a suburb in the making, its features are not yet well defined. The area is located just north of the new international airport, a facility that will dramatically alter land uses and livelihoods in the area. Such developments, however, may also produce negative consequences, including the misappropriation of public lands, a practice that has already been documented. One aspect that requires further study is the legal dimension of land transfers in Al-Ṣālḥa. Asserting individual rights over communal lands and providing compensation for expropriated lands that were never registered and by law belong to the state is a research area that requires further investigation. The dual nature of urban planning (normal urban planning and the Village Organization Administration) opens the door for many problems, including fraudulent registration of land transactions. An area where the residential plots range between five hundred and six hundred square metres should be considered a first-class area in normal urban planning schemes, yet this is not the case when an area is considered to fall under the Village Organization Administration. Judging by plot sizes, Al-Ṣālḥa should be considered first class, but it is nothing of the sort.

The appearance and development of Al-Ṣālḥa can be seen as a response to the increase in the number of inhabitants in Khartoum. Beneath the apparent relation of cause and effect lie a number of issues that are proper to Sudanese resource conflicts. The ethnography of the area shows clear evidence of conflict between old-timers and newcomers and the inter-

weaving of traditional and modern systems of authority. In this way traditional authority is co-opted as part of the popular committee system of governance, itself a part of a decentralized federal system. Traditional ethnic authorities retain their traditional roles, at the same time acquiring new status as members of a popular committee. Old-timers 'acquire' such status on the basis of a claim of land ownership in the area. In a sense, they successfully leverage their position to convert economic resources into political power. The competition over urban land is likely to grow not least in the context of increasing migration to the national capital. It is also bound to grow in that migration into the national capital is proving to be increasingly sedentary, with temporary migrants becoming permanent city residents.

Notes

1. The fieldwork on which this chapter is based was carried out during different periods in 2008 and 2010. My assistant, Adil Awad Al-Sid, started the work in 2008 through ethnographic fieldwork and initial contacts with informants and officials in Al-Sālḥa. I did additional fieldwork in 2010, when additional informants, including government officials, were interviewed.
2. The classification of residential areas into first-, second-, third- and sometimes fourth-class areas is based on such criteria as size of plot, location and fees paid for obtaining a plot. For instance, in terms of size, first-class areas range between five hundred and six hundred square metres. Second- and third-class plots measure four hundred and three hundred square metres, respectively. First- and second-class residential areas are, for the most part, reserved for the wealthy and include such neighbourhoods as Riyad, Tayef, Amarat and El-Manshiya in Khartoum.
3. As we shall discuss shortly, the Ministry of Physical Planning and Public Utilities maintains a service, the Village Organization Administration, or *idārāt tanẓīm al-qurā*. Old neighbourhoods such as Beit Al-Mal, Abu Rof and Hai Al-Arab in Omdurman are all part of the Village Organization Administration, and organization of the space, size of plots and entitlement to land do not follow the standard system applicable in urban planning. The term 'village' in the urban context has no other connotations than administrative. Such villages are like other neighbourhoods in the city; they are no less developed than other neighbourhoods.
4. Interview, *ʿomda* of Al-Sālḥa village, October 2008.
5. The area has three popular committees: Jādaīn, Al-Sālḥa and Ḥejleja.
6. For instance, the head of the Jādaīn Popular Committee held the position for a very long time and was, in fact, a member of the Khartoum State Legislative Assembly. Many of his relatives are members of other popular committees. In addition to being a political leader, he is also considered a *khalīfa*, a Sufi religious leader.
7. June 2010 interview with Nizar Abdul Hamid, director of the Al-Sālḥa Administrative Unit. The exact number is difficult to get, as the area receives a steady influx of newcomers. As an example, when we started the fieldwork in Al-Sālḥa the first time in 2008, the

authorities estimated the total number of Al-Sālḥa inhabitants to be a little more than fifty thousand individuals. If the current figures are correct, the population has doubled in only two years.

8. This translates into 'southern rural area' (*al-rīf al-janūbī*), which in a way is an amalgamation of the villages south of Omdurman. There is also the 'northern rural area' (*al-rīf al-shimālī*). These names do not have any administrative connotations and they do not represent administrative organs, especially at the present time, when only localities and administrative units are formally recognized as administrative organs.

9. Literally, Al-Sālḥa means 'the pious woman'.

10. The name 'Al-Sālḥa' in this article generally refers to the 'village', not to the area as a whole

11. Interview, executive director, Al-Sālḥa Administrative Unit, October 2008.

12. People spoke about 1998 as the beginning of a conspicuous influx of newcomers to Al-Sālḥa. Since then, the influx of people has continued, as Al-Sālḥa is valued as a residential area for its proximity to the centre of Khartoum, and also due to the fact that land prices are to some extent affordable compared to other areas in the national capital.

13. Interview, popular committee member and newcomer, June 2010.

14. Interview, 65-year-old man from the old Al-Sālḥa village. He has a donkey cart and works in the local market. Interestingly, he is happy working in the market, as his earnings are good: 'Sometimes I make 30–40 pounds [SDG] per day.'

15. Ibid.

16. Interview, representative of the Al-Sālḥa Administrative Unit, June 2010.

17. During 2008–10, SDG 1 = USD 0.4.

18. An official at the local administrative unit argues that approximately 50 per cent of inhabitants in Al-Sālḥa have electricity.

19. The company is called Al-Adiyati Sobhan.

20. Interview, government employee and resident, Al-Sālḥa, October 2008.

21. Interview, head of Education Office, Al-Sālḥa Administrative Unit, June 2010.

22. *Jūdiya* is a traditional arbitration mechanism in which traditional leaders mediate between conflicting parties. The judgement of these leaders is accepted by both parties. The *jūdiya* is a well-known conflict resolution mechanism practiced in different parts of Sudan under different names (El-Amin 2004).

23. Interview, representative of the Al-Sālḥa Administrative Unit, June 2010.

24. This is the smallest administrative unit that is part of Abū Seʿīd Locality, of which Al-Sālḥa is a part.

25. Interestingly, during fieldwork, many informants advised the author to buy a plot of land in Al-Sālḥa. One informant thus laments: 'I think you should really buy a land plot here. I can help if you are interested. Prices are going up, so you better buy now.'

26. The head of the Al-Sālḥa Administrative Unit would not provide compensation figures, even though he mentioned that the last payment he is aware of took place in March 2010. He thought people were paid a lot of money and that the compensation was fair. This confirms findings from earlier studies that showed that residents in Al-Sālḥa considered the compensation they were offered for land expropriated for the new airport generous, although the process of receiving money from the Airport Compensation Committee was delayed (Pantulliano et al. 2011: 21).

27. Meaning 'owners of the land'.

28. Meaning 'migrants'.

29. Interview, sheikh of Ḥejleja, Al-Sālḥa, June 2010 and January 2011.

30. For instance, in third-class residential areas like Al-Sahafa in Khartoum, Banat in Omdurman and Al-Shaʿabiya in Khartoum North, the average rent for a three-room house is SDG 500–700 per month. This is far above the minimum wage and precludes access

for many families who cannot afford high rents. Rents in first- and second-class residential areas are exorbitant.

31. Nonetheless, one informant mentioned that there was a conflict between the Jamūʿiya and the Hawāwīr in a place called Al-Shibeilat, but that conflict was resolved in a short time.

32. For instance, to win the hearts of IDPs around the capital the government embarked on a process of reorganization camps for IDPs during 2003–5. This was done almost fifteen years after the relocation of IDPs to these camps. For more details, see Assal (2008: 148–49).

33. It should be noted that this claim is not far-fetched in the Sudanese context. An ethnic group that has ownership of a piece of land automatically assumes political power in the area. While other resident groups may share that power, the landowners are the ultimate wielders of political power. For more on this, see Harir (1994) and Abdul-Jalil (2009b).