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History and Literature/Domination and Resistance: Re-Reading the British-Sudan

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History is what happened; literature is what could have happened

Aristotle

Abstract

This article is hinged on the assumption that the history, and indeed the historiography, of the violent domination of Africa in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century has been written from and therefore could be situated, tentatively, in-between two discordant perspectives: that of the perpetrator and the victim. Whereas it is true that these histories, particularly those of North African States (Egypt and Sudan) have largely been preserved in, and are accessible both in English and Arabic, recent findings have shown that there still exist a third and an un-explored perspective – the experiential-literary-historical. In trying to explore the latter – that in which the Sudanese writer, Muhammad Miftâh al-Faytûrî attempts not only to ‘tell’ but also ‘show’ how and why the themes of domination and resistance in African history should be reread – this study relies on a combination of Western, Eastern and Afro-Arabic historical-theoretical styles, including those of al-Jabartî, Ibn Khaldûn, Ali Mazrui, Friedrich Nietzsche and Nawal Saadawi. The article subsequently finds the following questions highly imperative: Exactly how many histories of the domination of and resistance to oppression in Africa are in existence? In other words, what is the difference between *Afranj*, *Africanist* and *African* histories of domination and resistance? What exactly is the philosophy upon which the ‘perpetrator’ premises his ‘history’ of Africa and how is his perspective subverted by that of the ‘victim’? How might the attempt to re-read the history of domination and resistance in Africa benefit from the methods and insights of literary writers and critics? How has the literature of the colonial era functioned in writing/telling the hi/story behind the hi/story, and in filling the gaps in Africa’s memory and dignity?

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Résumé

Ce texte se base sur l'hypothèse selon laquelle l'histoire et, bien entendu, l'historiographie de la domination violente de l'Afrique à la fin des 19^{ième} et XX^e siècles ont été écrites et situées entre deux perspectives discordantes : celle du coupable et celle de la victime. Même s'il est vrai que ces histoires, plus particulièrement celle des Etats de l'Afrique du nord (Egypte, Soudan), ont été préservées en grande partie en Anglais et en Arabe, de nouvelles découvertes ont montré qu'il existe bel et bien une 3^e perspective encore non explorée : celle dite expérimentale-littéraire-historique. En tentant d'explorer cette perspective, l'article explore trois poèmes de Muhammad Miftâh al-Faytûrî (*Aghânî Ifrîqiyah* 1967) qui tire son style théorique des travaux d'al-Jabarti, Ibn Khaldun, Ali Mazrûi, Friedrich Nietzsche, et Nawal Saadawi parmi d'autres.

L'article pose des questions essentielles, à savoir : combien d'histoires de la domination sur l'Afrique et sa résistance contre l'oppression existe-t-il exactement ? Qu'est ce que la différence entre les histoires de domination et de résistance *Afranjes*, *Africanistes* and *Africaines* ? Comment la tentative de relire l'histoire de domination et de la résistance en Afrique peut-elle bénéficier des méthodes et enseignements des narrateurs et critiques littéraires ? Comment la littérature de la période coloniale a fonctionné dans l'écriture/narration de l'histoire derrière l'histoire et dans la restauration de la mémoire et la dignité africaines ?

'Doctrines', according to Vico, 'must take their beginning from that of the matters of which they treat'.¹ In other words, doctrines which in this instance reference the practice of history or 'History'² must begin at the beginning in order for it to gain authenticity. To begin at the beginning in an intellectual exercise like this which is targeted at retrieving the past in the present – an exercise whose future lies in its attempt at expounding and exploding the past in order to hew out of it new ideas, new meanings and new directions for African *history* - two different texts immediately catch our attention. These are Abdulrahman al-Jabartî's (1753-1825) *Târîkh Muddat al-Faransîs bi Misr*³ (History of the French Occupation of Egypt) and Napoleon Bonaparte's *Déscription de l'Egypte* (Description of Egypt).⁴ The first, *Târîkh Muddat*, is probably the first record of the history of domination to be written by the 'victim' in Africa; while the second, *Déscription*, is probably the first history of domination to be written by the 'perpetrator' in/on Africa. Al-Jabartî wrote *Târîkh Muddat* as a victim and an Arab-African eye-witness of resistance to domination while Napoleon's *Déscription* was written by the witness and an actor in the theatre of war, violence and domination of the continent. *Târîkh Muddat* was written by Al-Jabartî to chronicle events in the pre-Napoleonic and the Napoleonic eras⁵ in Egypt, while *Déscription* details the conqueror's strategy and plans for Egypt and indeed for Africa in the twentieth century. While the former strives to, among others, expose the falsehood of the ideological template upon which the French invasion of Egypt took place, the

latter seeks to portray the conquest as the best thing that could ever have happened to Egypt. Al-Jabartî's record images the solemn and salient factors which rendered Egypt and, later, Sudan, 'open' to aggression and exploitation. On the other hand, Napoleon's account details the style of the perpetrator, his strategies and stratagems, his politics and 'politricks' in colonial Africa. Al-Jabartî's record is picaresque of, in the word of Edward Said, the 'price'⁶ Africans paid in the course of resisting domination; but the history written by Napoleon is about the 'prize' the 'perpetrator' won for being brutal and violent while running and ruling over Egypt.

Placed side-by-side as we have attempted to do, scholars appear not to be taken aback by the fact that both *Târikh Muddat* and *Déscription* have subsequently produced, along with Edward Said, other 'histories'⁷ for the world to behold. The two works appear to be 'monumentalistic'⁸ in nature. They call attention to the inner fissures, frictions, and contradictions in the historiography of domination and resistance in and on the continent. For example, whereas Al-Jabartî details, in part, the inhumanity and violence that Napoleon's invasion eventuated in Egypt, the writers of the Napoleonic's version, on the other hand, chronicle the invasion as that of a benevolent conqueror who respects the culture of the dominated. The dissonance and lack of complementarity in al-Jabartî and Napoleon's histories makes a re-reading of that and subsequent phases of African history a categorical imperative. The two works awaken us to the fact that extant histories of domination and resistance written in/on Africa are patently and essentially human records. Human records, according to Ibn Khaldûn, are 'by their nature prone to error'.⁹

But why would the history – or should it have rather been 'herstory' – of such an important epoch the era of forceful domination of Africa by Europe, be susceptible to error? Again Ibn Khaldûn, the African historian and precursor in the field of sociology/ethnography, offers at least seven propositions. According to him, history is prone to error because its 'custodians' often from partisanship, over-confidence, mistaken belief in the truth, misplacement of events in the schema of history, abandonment of integrity for pecuniary/personal aggrandizement, unwarranted exaggeration and embellishment, and, most importantly, ignorance of the law of nature.¹⁰ Thus when writers/historians suffer, for example, a combination of two or more of these 'ailments', when they suffer what Nietzsche calls 'malady of history'¹¹ it becomes inevitable that their product – history – becomes dis-eased the moment it is born; it becomes pertinent that history becomes contaminated the very moment it is documented. Thus historians, as producers of knowledge, or is it understanding,¹² become manufacturers of 'fake' products; they

become, in the words of Collingwood, 'killers' of the past they claim to 'resurrect'; they become detectives of the 'crime' they themselves commit.¹³

Face to face with this reality, the following questions demand our immediate contemplation: given the polyphonic nature of the histories of Africa, could there be an objective and, therefore, 'valid' historiography of 'domination' and 'resistance' in/on the continent? Might there exist, with particular reference to these themes or categories, a corpus of history that could be referred to as excluded, unwritten, or forgotten histories of Africa? How might the latter be written into African historiography? Might the deployment of literature energize or enervate efforts geared toward the appropriation of a holistic history of domination and resistance in Africa since, as it appears, history is incapable of achieving this all alone?

In order to attend to a discourse that would concern itself with the above, a brief engagement with the problematic of the word 'history' becomes a desideratum. In the first instance, the word bears no link, 'historically', linguistically, and etymologically with Africa. The word originated outside Africa, it is circumscribed, in the main, by Western philosophies, even as its goal, when carefully contemplated, does not completely speak to and satisfy the African 'reality'. In other words, before the ascension of the word 'history' on to Africa's intellectual landscape, and long before the extrapolation of the word as a profession, a specialized field of inquiry, a pastime, a window through which the non-African Other 'sees' and constructs the Other and as a weapon with which Europe could 'world' the rest of the world, Arab-Africans had been familiar with and made use of the word *Târîkh*. *Târîkh* bears and images north Africa's cultural reality; it is closely linked to the 'time' the individual African lived and the space in which he had to negotiate his existence. While approaching *Târîkh*, Africans began by asking 'Who am I? How long have I lived? Why am I like this?';¹⁴ but while engaging in historical practice the non-African historian, on the other hand, began by asking: 'Who are they? How are they? How could they be overcome?'¹⁵ In other words, *Târîkh* is all about 'us'; history is traditionally all about 'them'; *Târîkh* is all about 'we', history is all about 'they'; *Târîkh* is for and about the leader and the led; history is, in the main, about and for the leader; *Târîkh* is about the masses, history is all about Kingship and royalty – it is, in the words of Salman Rushdie, the 'handshake of the winners'.¹⁶

But whatever it is worth, it could be presumed that the field of history, though not value-free, is nonetheless universal – it is there waiting for us, beckoning on us, inviting us to tell it. In order to tell/write history, we must put on the garb of a 'building contractor'; in order to 'build' the history of domination and resistance in Africa, the blocks must be laid one on top of

the other. In other words, an attempt to re-read the themes of 'domination' and 'resistance' in Africa (British-Sudan) would demand that we recognize the fact that while posturing as two sides of a coin, the two themes were not 'produced' or 'written' all at the same time. The theme of domination emerged first before that of resistance and as such our engagement should primarily be with the former before the latter.

Found in what we have hereafter termed, in recognition of its dissimilarity and unfamiliarity to Africa, as *Afranj* history, the theme of domination was first conceived and written about in the intellectual circles of the metropolis (Europe) before it staged its appearance, in practice, on the sandy terrain of the Nile Valley (Egypt and Sudan). In other words, the idea to dominate Africa started, first, in the mind of, for example, the British imperialists and was initially marketed not in Africa but in the history books written by the racialists in Europe. What this means, among others, is that with reference to the theme of domination in *Afranj* history, we should keep two types of corpus in view: the one written in the metropolis for the citizens of her majesty; the other written in the metropolis by the colonizer for the colonized. The first, like *The Burden of the White Man*, was written for the consumption of the citizens of her majesty, while the other, including Charles Darwin's *Origin of the Species* (1859)¹⁷ was written in order to convince the soon-to-be-dominated of their primordial inferiority. The first corpus of historical record of domination figures the creation of the White man as a subject which is second only to the divine in creation; the second corpus was written with the sole purpose of dominating the minds of Africans, the blacks and the coloured, and to convince them of their status as the third, if not the fourth, in the hierarchy of existence.

Put differently, the first historiography of 'domination' in which Africa (Egypt and Sudan) occupies not the margin but the centerpiece of the imperialist vision was written in order to enlist the support of the 'King/Queen' and the proletariat in the metropolis for the task of 'civilizing' the backward nations of Africa and Asia. It was, in line with Massis, an 'idea'¹⁸ which was generated in Europe but was meant to be eventuated in Africa and Asia. It was an 'idea' that was mapped in the palace of her majesty, expounded upon by the 'intellectuals' and taught to the mass of the European citizens. In other words, citizens of her majesty were, in line with Plato, 'taught lies' about Africa, 'in order to instill (fake) patriotism'¹⁹ in them. They were taught of an Africa that was primeval and in utter state of 'inertia';²⁰ an Africa on its knees pleading that Europe should take it over; it was only Europe that could save Africa from itself.

The negative portrayal of the continent of Africa as primeval, brutish and backward is nothing but a means towards an end – the violent exploitation of

its human and material resources. In other words, without such a portrayal, there could be no way the perpetrator could have justified its barbarity, inhumanity, and violence while trying to dominate and vanquish the people of Africa. For example, writing as the perpetrator, Evelyn Cromer quotes the explanation offered by her husband, the British Agent and Consul-General of Egypt from 1883-1907, Lord Cromer, and the philosophy which undergirded the British incursion into Egypt. Central to that philosophy is the irresistible material gains which the British expected would accrue to them. It is in reference to this that he is quoted to have said as follows: 'The European would not reside in Egypt (and by extension in Sudan) unless he could make money by doing so'.²¹ But in order to make money from Egypt, the British realized the necessity of dominating, violently, the citizens of the Nile Valley. Thus the theme of domination in *Afranj* history of Africa came to have not only the seal of the dominant but is also picaresque of the style and method that the latter employed in order to achieve his purpose. It is this that a French officer in colonial Egypt probably had in mind when he said as follows:

...the essential thing is to gather into groups this people which are everywhere and nowhere; the essential thing is to make them something we can seize hold of. When we have them in our hands, we will then be able to do many things which are quite impossible for us today and which will perhaps allow us to capture the minds after we have captured the bodies.²²

The officer's reference to a 'people who are everywhere but nowhere' is to the orientalized subjects – the people of Africa; the people of Egypt and Sudan. His description of the 'path' that domination must travel in colonial Africa in order to achieve its purpose gives credence to Elleke Boehmer, who refers to colonialism as a 'metaphoric and cathographic undertaking'.²³ In other words, the theme of domination in *Afranj* history of Africa appropriates two different spheres of reality: the physical and the intellectual. The first, the metaphoric undertaking, speaks to the solemn, subtle, intangible but profound spheres of domination; the second appropriates the physiology, the geography and the reality of the dominated people of Africa. The first 'opened' up Africa's intellectual space for Europe to dominate; the second made the continent available to physical possession by the Europeans. It is probably in order to emphasize the truthfulness of this undertaking for the Europeans that the French Poet, Lamartine, spoke *ex cathedra* about the people of Africa, as 'nations without territory, *patrie*, rights, laws or security...waiting anxiously for the shelter of European occupation'.²⁴ This became the driving force for European incursion into Africa. Thus, Europeans

proceeded to write the theme of domination from imagination into practical reality. For them *history* is not and indeed cannot reference only events in the past; it is and should be a weapon of/from the past for the construction of the future. It is the 'womb' in which Africa of the twentieth century – the colonial Africa – was conceived.

But the *Afranj* history of domination of Africa, the history which bears the emblem and stamp of the 'perpetrator', might also, and curiously too, include the one written by the fifth columnist, the perpetrator within; the perpetrator 'in' Africa who happens not to be 'of' Africa. Here, reference is being made to, with regard to the British-Sudan of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, the Egyptian State and its Turkish leaders. The Turkish leaders of Egypt did not just become 'perpetrators' and 'historiographers' of domination in Africa. Rather, they became one by virtue of the fact that they represent vestiges of the 'other' domination. In other words, long before Sudan came under British hegemony, Egypt had become a vizier, at least *de jure*, to the Ottoman powers in Turkey.²⁵ While it is true that for most of the period between late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries it was the *Mamluk*²⁶ that held *de facto* authority over Egypt, history also bears witness to the fact that the political chasm created in-between the Turkish pretenders and the Mamluk occupiers eventually facilitated the entry of the French and the British into Egypt. Whereas the French were driven out of Egypt after three years, the British proved to be astute imperialists, more adroit in intrigues and better in treachery.²⁷ They told the Turks that the deployment of Egypt's economic and military resources to the conquest or annexation of other parts of Africa, particularly Sudan, would be to the glory of, in the main, Egypt not Britain. They talked the Turkish rulers of Egypt into believing that Egypt was superior to other parts of Africa, particularly Sudan.²⁸

Thus, we come to a point in this article where, with reference to the theme of domination in African history, we behold four important lessons: i) that the conquest and the 'domination' of the Sudan by the British would not have taken place had the Turkish rulers of Egypt refused to cooperate with the former; ii) that before the conquest of Sudan, Egypt had become the first African state to suffer triple domination – the domination it suffered in the hands of the Ottomans, the French and the British; iii) that it is in the character of the dominated (reference Egypt) to seek to dominate – in other words, as far as the theme of domination in African history is concerned the example of Egypt in relation to British-Sudan was that of the dominated which sought to be dominant in relation to other dominated entities and spaces within its milieu; and, iv) that to be dominated, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries in Africa, meant to learn how to dominate and to seek to dominate.

We might at this juncture side-step the *Afranj* history of the British-Sudan, the ‘perpetrator’s perspective of the theme of domination in Africa, in order to consider the second major trajectory we have identified in this article, namely the Africanist historiography. The historiography of domination of Africa written by the Africanist travels, in part, a pathway other than that of the perpetrator. Whereas the perpetrator concerns himself with the theme of domination in African history both as an actor and a ‘witness’, the Africanist, on the other hand, writes either as a witness, a biographer or a recorder of the events as they occurred in Africa; he writes African history neither in the first nor second person but in the third. Two trajectories are discernible in his activity: the subjective/imperial/pecuniary and the objective/altruistic/anti-imperial.

In the first, namely the subjective/imperial/pecuniary, the Africanist historian treats the history of domination of Sudan, and by extension that of the whole of Asia and Africa, as an intellectual sparring partner. Here, he is involved with African history for situational, institutional and personal reasons. The situational reason consists of his identity as a historian on Africa and one who resides and indeed must reside, not in Africa but in the West. To be resident in the West is to assume authority over the non-West; to write the non-West into or out of existence. Thus, this Africanist’s involvement with African history becomes an extension and a continuation of the unfinished business of imperialism. His activity gives credence to Hoyt Fuller who says that ‘the glass through which black...(history) is viewed by white...(historians) is, inescapably...befogged by the hot breadth of history. True objectivity, where race is concerned, is as rare as a necklace of Hope diamonds’.²⁹

The Africanist historian might also be involved with African history, not history in Africa,³⁰ for institutional reason. This references the preponderance and panoply of agencies and centers in the academia outside Africa which concerns itself more with Africa than with the history of its immediate environment. Designated atimes as area studies,³¹ these centers derive its glory solely in ‘producing’ Africa. The way it relates to and treats Africa also makes what may be referred to as distanciation in historical exercise a possibility. Here, distanciation references a situation where Africanist historians, entrenched as they are in Western academia, are able to distance themselves from Africa and the values which the continent’s true history embody and entail while posturing to do otherwise. Thus, what they write could be described as history in Africa not African history. The history they write is usually dry and malnourished; atimes it is completely lifeless. They

write in such a way that Africa and Africans are made to carry the can of the evil that Europe has heaped on them for over two centuries.

When the Africanist engages with African history for personal reasons, however, then history simply becomes a means towards an end, the end being the achievement of material comfort. The more he writes about Africa, the more popular he becomes, especially in the inner caucuses of the state in Europe; the more he writes about Africa the more he is acclaimed for the 'profundities' of his knowledge; the more he writes the more he is seen as the specialist on Africa. His perspective on African affairs becomes more valid than that of the African; it is his version of history of domination and resistance that is treated as the 'truth'. This occurs despite the fact that the Africanist could have been involved in writing African history less for the purpose of knowledge but more for the purpose of bread. He could have written about Africans not as Africans would have wished to be written about, but in the way that pleased him; he could have written about African history not based on African experience but solely on the basis of his own experience and heritage.

In the second, namely the objective/altruistic/anti-imperial, the Africanist historian, even though he has no links, biologically that is, with Africa, nonetheless writes African history in the 'first person'; he writes African history as if his umbilical cord was interred inside the African soil. Re-reading texts produced by these Africanists' give the impression that in writing about the theme of domination in African history, this group of historians experiences a guilt complex and as such, it is through fidelity to the history of the continent that they could experience true redemption.

But that might actually not be the case. The anti-imperial/objective/altruistic Africanist historian might approach African history in fulfillment of the oath of truthfulness and honesty which history demands of its practitioners. Thus, a careful reading of the works of such writers invites a synergy and convergence between their version of the historiography of domination and that written by the African. In other words, there appears to be similarities in the works of, for example, Sean O'Fahey's 'Growth and Development of the Keira Sultanate' and that of Muddaththir Umar's 'Imperialism and Nationalism' (1986); there appears to be historical concurrence in G. Warburg's 'Religious Policy in the Northern Sudan' and H. A. Ibrahim's 'Imperialism and Neo-Mahdism' in *A Study of British Policy towards Neo-Mahdism* (1980). A reading of M. O. Al-Bashir's *Revolution and Nationalism in the Sudan* returns us to the work of Winfred Cantwill Smith. In his analyses of the factors for, features and impacts of domination on the Muslim nations of Asia and Africa, Smith, in the manner of the 'victim',

says: 'when a Muslim is subject to alien rule, it feels as if sovereignty is not only lost but the body politic put in chain, but rather one in which history has gone wrong and the government of the universe has been upset'.³²

In other words, reading the perspective of a group among Africanist scholars of African history calls attention to that locale in historical practice where a 'valid' historiography of domination might exist. Here, African historians occupy an important position. To them, history is both a weapon and a profession: a weapon with which the history of domination and resistance in and of Africa written by the 'perpetrator' could be un-written in order to be re-written; a profession by which the African could properly reposition the continent for the future. Such histories, including the ones written by the Sudanese like Mu'awiyah Muhammad Nur,³³ were never printed in Sudan. They could not have been allowed to be printed in Sudan by the British authorities because such an exercise would have amounted to the British committing historical suicide. This is because the works written by Nur and other Sudanese critics of the British picture the barbarity, the inhumanity and the bestiality of the British hegemony. The historiography of domination that got printed in Sudan while the British still held sway over the political fortune of the country were written anonymously.³⁴

But writing the history of domination, particularly after the establishment of the British suzerainty, soon lost its appeal, particularly among the Sudanese; it quickly ceased to be the *doxa*: the dominant theme or opinion in the British-Sudan, the only ace in the country's historiographical and cultural reality. In its place, the Sudanese began to 'sing' the song of resistance. This is because, soon after the establishment of the British hegemony over their land, the Sudanese discovered that resisting the British hegemony was not going to be, along with Edward Said, only about 'the struggle for control over territory'; rather, it was also going to be a 'struggle over historical and social meaning'.³⁵ Thus, resistance to the British in Sudan featured active participation from Sudanese ethnic, tribal and religious subjects³⁶ all of whom strove to reclaim and assert their multiple identities. Beneath and beside this broad and official spectrum of resistance against British domination, however, there exist a corpus of historical materials that could be described as the un-written histories of resistance against the British in Sudan. It is in its portrayal that the Sudanese literature finds relevance.

But why would Sudanese literature, particularly poetry, stage a presence in a field which traditionally 'belong' to history and how? In other words, why is literature important in re-reading African history? Chinua Achebe's oft-cited statement, once again, is very relevant. He says:

The writer cannot be excused from the task of re-education and regeneration that must be done. In fact, he should march right in front... I for one would not want to be excused. I would be quite satisfied if my novels (especially the ones I set in the past) did no more than teach their readers that their past – with all their imperfections – was not one long night of savagery from which the first Europeans acting on God's behalf delivered them'.³⁷

Linda Orr's perspective is equally germane. She posits that literature could be of immense benefit to the field of history because it does the 'most consistent critique of history; and because it evokes the other history that history refuses to write'.³⁸ In other words, literature provides humanity with 'the story *behind* the story'. Whereas the historian might not write history based on the lack of availability of information or data, the literary writer depends solely on imagination; he is concerned not with what happened but rather with, in line with Aristotle, 'what could have happened'. This is evidenced in William Shakespeare's *The Tempest* and Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*; it is also axiomatic in the trilogy written by the North African Nobel prize winner, Najib Mahfouz.³⁹ These and other similar works were concerned with the 'story behind the story'; they were concerned with 'excluded/forgotten/unwritten' historical agents of the time of their producers. It is to the exploration of the same trajectory in British-Sudan and how the Sudanese poetry has and could function to 'include' the 'excluded' that we shall be engaged with below.

Three poems written by the Sudanese poet, Muhammad Miftâh al-Faytûr⁴⁰ (b. 1930) in-between the years 1948 and 1953 could be examined to buttress the above discussion. The choice of this poet is not haphazard. Rather, it is based on the fact that his poetry and politics – the former in its lyrical and postcolonial texture, the latter in its practical and existential tenor – image the intellectual perspective to the theme of domination and resistance in British-Sudan and is also mimetic of the non/violent interface between the colonial and the anti-colonial forces on the rigid terrain of the Sudan. Our choice of al-Faytûr's poetics and politics is also based on its pre-eminent status within the larger Sudanese literary horizon: it is based on the fact that his works not only preceded that of Sudanese writers including Tayyeb Salih's *Season of Migration to the North* (1969), but were actually written when her majesty's flag was still hoisted in Sudan. Again, al-Faytûr's poetry is uncanny in its Africanist themes and vision – it is dedicated to the critique of race and racialism, domination and oppression in Africa; it mirrors the socio-historical and cultural trajectories in the early modern period in British-Sudan in which the Sudanese became slaves, not on foreign lands, but on the quintessential Sudanese soil.

al-Faytûrî begins by writing as a 'victim', a witness and a chronicler of the history of domination and resistance in Africa. In his *persona*, history, creativity and experience find union. His poetics figures domination as a precondition for resistance. In other words, as far as he is concerned, the texture and tenor of resistance is often a function of the texture and tenor of domination; the quality of domination is prescriptive for the quality and tenacity of resistance. In order to poeticize, not narrativize, resistance, in order to image and mirror the trajectory in the Sudanese's non/violent interface with the British, it appears seemly to him that the idea that generated domination should first be re-engaged as a product of its own antecedent; the idea which produced domination must first be re-enacted in order for the resistance which it produced to be properly mirrored. Thus, his poem entitled *al-Tûfân al-Abyad*⁴¹ (The White Typhoon) bears contemplation. The poem creates the persona of the potential colonialist, while still in Europe, as he contemplates and imagines Africa. The poem goes in part thus:

Land of slaves!... Africa...
 O! Land of the bare-footed naked Negroes
 See how they are walking in their nudity
 And how they are walking behind life
 And their bodies
 Those wonderful ebonies
 Structured like the humans
 And their fire in the ravine of the mountains
 Their children in the bellies of the trees

When shall I find money
 To buy a shoe, a dog and a new cloth
 I shall then proceed to the land of Africa
 To hunt a caravan of slaves

O! land of the naked Negroes
 I will come to you one day...like a new warrior
 Who desires wealth...who desires life.⁴²

This poem amply pictures the frame of mind of the dominant subject (the European) just before he began his journey into the land of Africa. The voice that says: 'Land of Slaves! Africa...' ⁴³ belongs to that of the imperial cartographer who feels he must map his field of endeavour, his space of conquest, before attempting to occupy it. His portrayal of Africa as a land of slaves, as if the experience of slavery in human civilization is delimited to the continent, functions as a pre-condition for its eventual domination. In other words, Africa had to be negatively 'named' or tagged in order that it may be possessed; it had to be designated as a land of slaves so that the British and its imperialistic counterparts may justify, first, the enslavement of the people of Africa, and second, the domination of the people of the continent through colonization.

Again, by portraying Africa in the above manner, the impending dominant subject from Europe postures himself as having a complete knowledge of the continent – he knows what Africa is, what Africa will be and what Africa will never be. But his knowledge of Africa is, on the one hand, empty. On the other hand, it is slippery. It is empty because it is based, in the main, on hearsay, on 'lies' told to the mass of the European citizens in order to justify the project of dominating the continent of Africa. The knowledge the imperialist has about Africa and one which justified its domination of the continent is slippery because it assumes universality over the future of the continent. Thus, he goes on to construct Africa and Africans: 'O! Land of the barefooted naked Negroes/See how they are walking in their nudity/And how they are walking behind time/And their naked bodies'. ⁴⁴ By describing Africans as a people who go about naked, the imperialist invariably opens up a gap in the cultural template which foregrounds the ideology of domination. Aside from the fact that the statement 'O! Land of the barefooted naked Negroes' ⁴⁵ is nothing but an indulgence in an unwarranted generalization and essentialization of Africans, the description also flies in the face of the European, especially now that nudity has become the *modus* of fashion and modernity. But the imperialist still goes on to negatively historicize Africa; he constructs and de-constructs the continent as a preamble to his journey to the continent. He says: 'When shall I find money/To buy a shoe, a dog and a new cloth/I shall then proceed to the land of Africa/To hunt a caravan of slaves'. ⁴⁶

In other words, before coming to the continent, the imperialist feels he is in dire need of three things: a shoe, a dog and a new cloth. The need for the European to venture into Africa in a new cloth and shoe, the type Albert Memmi describes as 'Wellington shoes', ⁴⁷ might be understandable. But then one might be tempted to ask: Why the reference to a dog? The imperialist

feels he needs a dog only as a metaphor for other weapons of violence without which his domination of the continent might be impossible. Thus, he says: 'O! land of the naked Negroes/I will come to you one day...like a new warrior/Who desires wealth...who desires life'⁴⁸. Could the dog be a clue to the unexplored regions of the violent domination of Africa in the twentieth century?

al-Faytûrî's second poem that concerns itself with resistance is curiously titled '*Ila waj-in abyad*' (To a White's Face). The poet imagines that the imperialist has now arrived Africa, he has succeeded in dominating the flora and the fauna of the continent. In order to resist his presence and practice of domination on his soil, al-Faytûrî creates the *persona* of the dominant British ruler in Sudan and engages him thus:

Is it because my face is black?
 Is it because your face is white?
 You named me a slave
 You trampled on my humanity
 You demeaned my spirit
 You made a chain for me
 You unjustly consumed my honour
 You ate my grocery in anger
 You lived in garden of paradise
 Whose hard rocks were cleft asunder my hands
 And I...how many times have I lain the dark hut
 Burning under darkness and cold
 Like a goat...mulling my grief and sorrow
 Until light of the heavens are extinguished
 And the stream of dawn (begin) to flow
 I woke my skinny cattle up
 And I began to drive it towards its pasture
 When it became fat you enjoyed its flesh
 You abandoned the intestine and the skin for me⁴⁹

Reading the above poem as a corpus of historical document, it could be proposed that the theme of resistance began in British-Sudan the same way the theme of domination staged its emergence in the metropolis: in the mind. Probably tired of and nauseated by the carriage and conduct of the imperialist on his land, the Sudanese began by resisting domination in his mind; he

began by positively dominating his own mind in order that he might intellectually and physically resist the British on the sandy terrain of Khartoum. He began by interrogating himself: 'Is it because my face is black?'.⁵⁰ This question references the character of the Sudanese who seeks to know why, for centuries, he has been a dominated subject; he wants to know whether there is a primordial link between blackness and domination. Perhaps not satisfied with the idea that Africa is dominated largely because of its blackness, he goes on to ask again: 'Is it because your face is white?'. Here again he is in search of an answer: he wants to know whether to be dominant means to be 'white'. Put differently, is whiteness a synonym for the dominant the same way blackness is a synonym for the dominated. But if we read these questions together thus: 'Is it because my face is black? / Is it because your face is white?' then we are awakened to the racial template which foregrounds the birth of that historical-geography known as the British-Sudan. The persona of the Sudanese that makes this statement is desirous of investigating the idea that led to domination before accurate account could be given of how Africans stood to resist it. His voice could also reference the need for careful attention to be paid to the dual perspectives of the 'black' and the 'white' historians when reading the theme of domination and resistance in the history of the British-Sudan, of the 'black' and 'white' actors on the rigid terrain of the British-Sudan and of the 'black' and 'white' witnesses to the events.

In other words, the voice that says: 'Is it because my face is black? / Is it because your face is white?'⁵¹ is useful for its polyphonic role. On the one hand, it could be read as reference to the fact that the history of the early modern period in Africa was largely and probably written based on colour. Thus, the voice appears prepared to confront the 'white' historian with the falsity of his claims which was hinged solely on the premise that the African is 'black' and that he, the historian, is 'white'. The voice that speaks in the poem also reminds us of the fact that when the 'white' historian undertakes to chronicle events in the continent, he does this probably because his face is white. He constitutes Africa, in al-Tahtawi's manner, as a subject in 'a blackness in a blackness in a blackness';⁵² he constitutes Africa as a subject in need of being written into history.

Thus, in reading al-Faytûrî's poetry, we find ourselves face-to-face with history; in reading history we are engaged with poetry; in reading 'poestory'⁵³ we are compulsorily drawn, as in a theatre, to witness the poetics of colour in African history. The poetics of colour references the values, the codes, and the importance that colour – red, green, yellow, black, and white – has historically and culturally been endowed with in human civilizations and across times and climes. The voice that says 'Is it because my face is black?

/ Is it because your face is white?' therefore yearns for a new African history not history 'in' Africa. It demands that history of Africa be re-written, not necessarily because of colour but because Africans have hitherto been written as objects of history not as historical agents. Central to this demand is the destruction of the myth that has been woven around the continent – that Africa is a land of the slaves. It is this myth which led to the perpetration of other crimes by the British against the Sudanese and Africans as a whole. The voice reminds us of some of the myth thus: 'Is it because my face is black? / Is it because your face is white?/ You named me a slave/You trampled on my humanity/You demeaned my spirit/You made a chain for me/You unjustly consumed my honour'.⁵⁴

. But in saying: 'You ate my grocery in anger/You lived in garden of paradise/Whose hard rocks were cleft asunder my hands',⁵⁵ we witness a transition from the mythical to the practical. The voice reminds us of a 'story behind the story'; of a reality in British-Sudan which historians would probably have, given their preference for the sensational, glossed over. This has to do with the un-explored-for-unsuspected regions of domination in British-Sudan. This references the psycho-social and environmental dehumanization and oppression which the Sudanese suffered in the hands of the colonizers. This occurred via the deliberate bifurcation of the colony into two: an abode for the dominant and the other for the dominated. The abode of the dominant power, the British authorities in Sudan were, in the words of Fanon, 'a sector built to last, all stone and steel; that of the dominated is 'a famished sector, hungry for bread, meat, shoes, coal and light'.⁵⁶ The abode of the dominant in British-Sudan was built by the sweat of the dominated and, in doing so, the latter was deprived of all resources with which he could build his own abode.

To put it differently, resistance to the British rule in Sudan in the mid-20th century occurred in part because of the way the British impoverished the natives with reckless abandon. This is evident from the voice which says: 'Until the light of the heavens are extinguished/And the stream of dawn (begin) to flow/I woke my skinny cattle up/And I began to drive it towards its pasture/When it became fat you enjoyed its flesh/You abandoned the intestine and the skin for me'.⁵⁷ In other words, the Sudanese were denied the rights to own lands, they were forced to pay high taxes and for those who could not bear the sight of the dominant British officials on the streets of 'Umdurman, voluntary exile became an escape measure.

Face to face with this inhumanity, and confronted with a condition in which colonialism becomes worse than slavery, the Sudanese soon entered into another phase of their resistance to domination. It is a phase which would make violence a categorical imperative. Thus, al-Faytûrî's poem entitled

Thawrah Qarah (Revolt of a Village)⁵⁸ which was written in 1953 is worth being contemplated. It reads, in part, thus:

A black child said:

O! my father I'm afraid of the red man

Each time he saw me walking he spat on the ground in derision

My father! Don't leave him among us

He is a stranger on this land

Kill him...! Kill him!!

For so long he has thoughtlessly crushed my inner self'

And the old man kept quiet

(then) the darkness was penetrated by the voice of a young girl...

She said, while showing a naked body

A hurricane has been destroyed in anger...

Here, here behind this wall

Which overlays our grief

The master slept...in paradise

The roof of which was made with the bones of our grandfathers

Then the faces became animated

(Faces) whose grief had long been neglected to no end

Their hands became strong under the darkness

Like a plow on top of which is an echo.⁵⁹

This poem combines personal recollection with historical validation. Here, we read of the voice of a small child – a child in the colony who is drawn into an interface with the colonizer; a child who could not escape domination through voluntary exile; the African child whose role in resisting domination in Africa has been excluded from African history. Here he is given a space in the text, in history. Or rather, here we read about and see the African child as he reclaims his voice, as he creates a space for himself in Africa's historiography of domination and resistance. In the first instance, he calls on his father to resist, not the white but the 'red man'. Thus the African child reminds us of the shifting *topoi* and the illogicality of the employment of colour in designating humanity; he awakens us to the fact that, when properly contemplated, 'no white man is actually white like snow or common salt.'⁶⁰

But perhaps more importantly, the persona of the boy-child who says: 'O! my father I'm afraid of the red man/Each time he saw me walking he spat on the ground in derision...' and that of the girl-child who says: 'A hurricane has been destroyed in anger.../Here, here behind this wall/Which overlays our grief/The master slept...in paradise/The roof of which was made with the bones of our grandfathers'⁶¹ represent voices of the excluded in the history of domination and resistance in Africa. The boy and the girl-child also remind us of the fact that resistance against domination would probably not have emerged as a passionate theme in African (Sudanese) historiography if Africans had been contented with the way the British treated them. In other words, resistance to domination occurred as a manifestation of the psychological frame of mind of the colonized and the dominated who feels humiliated not so much for the economic and political deprivation he suffered in the hands of the colonizer – even though this, with particular reference to the British-Sudan,⁶² accelerated, in part, the destruction of the colonial structures- but more for the refusal of the colonizer to constitute and recognize his subjectivity. In colonial Africa, the dominant related to the dominated as lacking the three basic elements that are constitutive of the human being. These are 'the ability to perceive, the capacity to know and the capability to experience things'.⁶³

Thus, the voice that says: 'My father! Don't leave him among us/He is a stranger on this land/Kill him...! Kill him!!/For so long he has thoughtlessly crushed my inner self'⁶⁴ gives credence to Edward Said's proposition that 'each poet or poem is involuntarily the expression of collectivities'.⁶⁵ In other words, the boy and girl-child speak on behalf of the voiceless and the dominated in British-Sudan; they document the events that accentuated the destruction of the dominant by the dominated; they picture how the hands of the dominated become strong under the darkness – at a time the dominant was asleep; they show how the dominated descended on the dominant 'Like a plow on top of which is an echo'.⁶⁶ Thus, as far as the history of British-Sudan is concerned, the theme of resistance features, in its quintessential manner, one in which not only the Sudanese men and women served as actors/witnesses but also children, girls and boys, even though unsung, argue and proclaim its validity.

Approaching the point of departure – since history admits of neither conclusion nor closure – it is evident from the foregoing that the themes of domination and resistance in African history features a panoply of works in which the dominant/perpetrator, the dominated/victim, and the witnesses have interfaced. The article also argued that even though the *Afranj*, the Africanist and the African historians might have attempted to explore, in-depth, the themes of domination and resistance in the twentieth century history of Africa,

the literary writing of the era, itself a product of domination, colonization and resistance, has much to offer us in our effort to re-read and explore the unexplored regions of the history of the continent during the period. It is evident from this inquiry, therefore, that the Sudanese poetry, particularly that of al-Faytûrî, represents one of such regions and perspectives. His poetry calls attention to the fact that in order for us to have a near perfect understanding of the history of domination and resistance in British-Sudan and in the whole of Africa we must endeavour to, along with Louis Mink, 'know its consequences as well as its antecedents'.⁶⁷ al-Faytûrî's poetics also argue the similarity in the literary and historical enterprise; that literature and history have a lot in common: the uncertainty in their vocation, the shifting topoi of their practice and the fluidity in their method. Both fields of inquiry are 'hands in glove' as far as the need for humanity to 'respond to that aspect of human reality that yearns for the translation of 'knowing into telling'⁶⁸ is concerned. al-Faytûrî's poetry could also be regarded as imaging the 'resistant', or the 'dissident'⁶⁹ theme in African history. It is dissident/resistant because it subverts authority, it patronizes and celebrates the excluded, the uncelebrated in African history; it questions colonial order, even as it seeks to dismantle the hierarchy of knowledge, domination and colonization.

Notes

1. E. Said: *Beginnings, Intention and Method* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985) p.347.
2. S. Weber: 'Capitalizing History: Thoughts on the Political Conscious' in *Diacritics* 1983 p. 20-25.
3. A number of scholars tend to approach al-Jabartî's work only as a foil for their appropriation of the events which immediately followed the occupation of Egypt by Napoleon Bonaparte even though his work actually engages the era which precedes the Napoleonic incursion. For example see: S. Gikandi: 'African Literature and the Colonial Factor' in *Cambridge History of African and Caribbean Literature* vol. 1 (ed) A. Irele and S. Gikandi (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004) 379-385. For the translation of the original work see: *Al-Jabartî's Chronicle of the French Occupation of Egypt* (trans.) S. Moreh (Princeton: Marcus Weiner Publishers, 2001) p. 1.
4. *Déscription de l'Egypte* is actually the 'handiwork of the large contingent of scholars whom Napoleon recruited for his conquest and colonization of Egypt' See: *Al-Jabartî's Chronicle of the French Occupation of Egypt* (trans.) S. Moreh (Princeton: Marcus Weiner Publishers, 2001) p. 68.
5. Ibid p.68.
6. E. Said: *Orientalism* (New York: Vintage Books 1979) p. 334.
7. Ibid
8. The 'monumentalistic' historian, like Nietzsche, is the historian or artist who 'emphasizes certain (historical) traits (facts) at the expense of the others...'. For more on this see: *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (ed) W. Kaufmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1974) p. 144, 160, 415.

9. Ibn Khaldun *An Arab Philosophy of History* (trans.) C. Issawi (London, 1969) p. 27-28.
10. Ibid
11. Said *Beginnings* p. 270
12. In Arab-Islamic epistemology, the word knowledge (*al-ilm*) references scientific inquiry which is precise, universal and value-free. Thus Muslim scholars would rather designate other fields of intellectual endeavour such as history which is fraught with human biases, prejudices and perspectives as understanding (*fiqh*). Through such designation, researchers become aware of the tentative nature of their findings, the imprecise destiny of their endeavour and the imperfection of their vocation.
13. R. C Collingwood: *The Idea of History* (Oxford 1946) p. 269.
14. A. A. Ibrahim: Abdul Gani, A. Ibrahim: *Târîkh: Târîkhuhû, watafsîruhû, wakitâbatuhû* (Khartûm: Dâr al-Sûdâniya lilKutub; n.d) p. 1
15. ibid. p.20
16. Quoted in: D. Malouf: *Remembering Babylon* (Chatto and Windus:: 1993) p.16.
17. For a criticism of these texts see: E. Said: *Culture and Imperialism* (Vintage Books 1994).
18. H. Massis: *Defense of the West*, trans. F.S. Flint (London: Faber and Gwyer, 1927) p. 133.
19. Plato, *The Republic*, in *The Portable Plato*, (London: Penguin, 1977).
20. J. G. Fletcher, 'East and West', *The Criterion* June 1928: p.313.
21. E. B. Cromer, *First Earl of Modern Egypt* Baring: *First Earl of Modern Egypt* vol. 2 (London: Macmillan 1908) 1908; p.432.
22. T. Mitchel: *Colonizing Egypt*, (Berkeley, California: University of California Press 1988) p. 95.
23. E. Boehmer, *Colonial and Postcolonial Literature: Migrant Metaphors* (New York: Oxford UP, 1995) p.14.
24. Quoted in J. De Groot De Groot Johanna: 'Sex' and 'Race': The Construction of Language and Image in the Nineteenth Century' in Susan Mendus and Jane Rendall (eds) *Sexuality and Subordination: Interdisciplinary Studies of Gender in the Nineteenth Century* (London: Routledge, 1989) p. 98.
25. On the role of the Turks in modern Egypt see: P.K. Hitti: *History of the Arabs* (London: Macmillan; 1970) p. 709.
26. The word *Mamluk* refers to the descendants of slaves in the medieval Arab society who later became rulers and custodians of political authority. See Hitti: *History of the Arabs* p. 719.
27. On the politics of British occupation of the Nile Valley see: P. Mansfield: *The British in Egypt* (London: Weiderfield and Nicolson: 1971).
28. On the the notion that Egypt is not part of Africa see : Samar Attar: 'The Fascination of An Egyptian Intellectual With Europe: Taha Husayn And France' in *Arab Studies Quarterly* vol. 29 Issue No. 1 (2006) p.13-32; on the notion that Egypt is superior to Sudan see: E. M. Trout Powell: 'From Odyssey to Empire: Mapping Sudan through Egyptian Literature in the mid-19th Century' in *International Journal of Middle Eastern Studies* No. 31 (1999) p. 401-427; for how this is reflected in Sudanese literature see:

- Oladosu, A. A: 'Wad-Nil: Mapping the Egypto-Sudanese History through the Sudanese Fiction' in *Hamdard Islamicus*, (Karachi) 2004.
29. H. Fuller: 'Introduction: Towards a Black Aesthetic' in *The Black Aesthetic* (ed) A. Gayle Jr. (Garden City NY: Doubleday 1971) p.3-12.
30. The phrase 'African history', unlike 'history in Africa', appears to recognize Africans as participants not on-lookers in the making and construction of their history. The phrase also calls attention to the existence of a body of history which is patently African, written by Africans and, in the main, for Africa and Africans. The phrase 'history of/in Africa', on the other hand, gives a sense of a body of history which is foreign to the continent; a historiography which was written outside Africa and was brought to the continent in order to give it credence and validity.
31. On the criticism of the Area Studies program in Western academia see: Said: *Orientalism* p. 2, 53, 106-7.
32. W. C. Smith: *Islam in the Modern World* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957) p. 10.
33. Mu'âwiyyah Muhammad Nûr was one of the earliest Sudanese critics and writers. He studied in Bayrût and upon graduation secured employment in Cairo as the editor of the young Egyptian journal, *Jarîdat Mi'ra*. Due to his sharp criticism of the British rule, he was tagged a security risk and was denied entry into Sudan. Most of his works were published in Cairo. By the time Nûr died in 1935 he had amassed a large collection of essays on history of Sudan and literary criticism. This has, however, only recently been published in a volume. For further reading see: R. U. Khâlid: *al-A'amâl al-Adabiyyah li Mu'âwiyyah Muhammad Nûr* (Khartûm: Dâr al-Khar'ûm li Tibâ'at, 1994).
34. On how the Sudanese who refused to go on self-exile engaged the British through anonymous criticism see: M. S al-Qadal: *Târîkh al-Sûdân al-Hadîth 1820-1955* (Khartûm: Markaz Abdul Karîm Mîrghanî; 2002) p. 413.
35. E. Said *Beginnings* p. 331.
36. al-Qadal: *Târîkh al-Sûdân al-Hadîth* p.404-517.
37. C. Achebe: 'The Novelist as a Teacher' in *African Literature: An Anthology of Criticism and Theory* (ed) T. Olaniran and A. Quayson (Oxford: Blackwell: 2007) p. 30.
38. L. Orr: 'The Revenge of Literature: A History of History' in *New Literary History* vol. 18 No. Autumn (1986) p. 19.
39. For insights into the interplay of history and literature in the works of Najib Mahfuz see, among others: S. Mehrez: *Egyptian Writers Between Fiction and History: On Naguib Mahfouz, Sonallah Ibrahim and Gamal al-Ghitani* (Cairo: American University, 2005)
40. M. al-Faytûrî: *Aghânî 'Âshiqun min, Udhkurînî, yâ Ifrîqîyyah* (Bayrût: 1967) 46-48.
41. *ibid*
42. *ibid*
43. *ibid*
44. *ibid*
45. *ibid*
46. *ibid*
47. A. Memmi: *The Colonizer and the Colonized* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1991) p.3.
48. al-Faytûrî: *Aghânî* p. 48.

49. al-Faytûrî: *Aghânî* p.30
50. ibid
51. ibid
52. R. R. al-Tahtâwî: *Manâhij al-Albâb al-Misriyya fî Mabâhij al-âdâb al-'Asriyya* (Cairo: Matba'at Shirkat al-Ragâib, 1912) p. 267.
53. This is a schematic or diachronic reading and fusion of history and poetry together.
54. al-Faytûrî: *Aghânî* p.30.
55. ibid
56. F. Fanon: *The Wretched of the Earth* (New York: Grove Press, 2004) p. 4.
57. al-Faytûrî: *Aghânî* 30
58. ibid p.31
59. ibid
60. E. I. Salami: *The Power of the Poor* Salami, (Benin: Fisbar Media Services, 1993) p. 3.
61. al-Faytûrî: *Aghânî* 30.
62. The Sudanese were particularly irked by the British policy which, among others, removed the right to own lands from them and imposed high taxes on the citizens. For further reading see: al-Qadâl: *Târikh al-Sûdân* p.433.
63. E. Moosa: *Ghazâlî and the Poetics of Imagination* (North Carolina: The University of North Carolina Press, 2005) p. 225.
64. al-Faytûrî: *Aghânî* p. 31.
65. E. Said: *The World, The Text and the Critic* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press; 1983) p.156.
66. al-Faytûrî: *Aghânî* p.30.
67. Quoted in M. Mcquillan: *The Narrative Reader* (New York: Routledge, 2000) p. 263
68. H. White: 'The Value of Narrativity in the Representation of Reality' in *The Content of the Form* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University, 1987) p. 1.
69. N. Saadawi: *The Dissident Word* in *The Oxford Amnesty Lectures* (ed) C. Miller (New York: Basic Books, 1995/1996) p.151-60).