Language and War

The Political History of Arabization in Sudan and Algeria

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Arabization & Civil War

- Britain in Sudan 1898-1956
- Sudan independent 1956

- France in Algeria 1830-1962
- Anti-colonial war 1954-62
- Algeria independent 1962
- Algerian civil war: 1990s
Northern Africa and the Middle East

OSD/AFRICOM Roundtable on African Languages and Cultures
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The Plan

• The colonial period; how France in Algeria (1830-1962) and Britain in Sudan (1898-1956) used language policy in ways that left Muslims deeply aggrieved

• The Sudanese case

• The Algerian case

• Conclusion: where things stand today
France in Algeria

• 1830 invasion
• 1848: Algeria = part of France
• Settler colony
• Land seizures
• Muslims = non-citizens; Christians & after 1870 Jews = citizens
• Pauperization
French language policy

- French as vehicle for assimilation
- Closure of Qur’an schools, 19th century decline in Arabic literacy
- 1930s growing Algerian Muslim nationalist movement, important role of ‘ulama (religious scholars) and mosques
- “This Muslim Algerian nation is not France; this nation does not want to become France.”
Ahmed Ben Bella (b. 1918):

“The national language, Arabic, will find its place”
Charles de Foucauld (1858-1916)

research on Tifinagh writing
The Kabyle Myth: The French colonial idea of Berber exceptionalism
The (Turco-) Egyptians and Muhammad Ali: Sudan’s first modern imperialists
Sudanese Timeline

• Turco-Egyptian rule: 1820-c.1885
• Mahdist jihad & revolution: 1881-1885
• Mahdist state (Muslim theocracy): 1885-1898
• Anglo-Egyptian “Reconquest”: 1898
• Anglo-Egyptian Condominium: 1898-1956
British North & South

• The Muslim “North”: avoiding jihad, supporting mosques, promoting Arabic

• The “South”: mostly practitioners of local religions, small Muslim communities (especially in military centers), incipient Christian communities (under missionary influence), promoting English and African “vernaculars”. Language policy clarified at Rejaf Language Conference of 1928.
A response to the British “war on Arabic” in southern Sudan?

ARABIZATION AND WAR IN SUDAN
Decolonization and Arabization

• 1949 British appointed first Northern Sudanese minister of education
• Immediate proposal to Arabize southern schools
• Problems: “knowledge of Arabic was nil”, lack of teachers, pedagogical skills, and resources
Sirr al-Khatim al-Khalifa (1919-2006)

“The educated southerners...feared that the future was only for those who knew Arabic well...they feared domination by Northerners.”
Sudan’s “First” Civil War

- 1955 Torit Mutiny
- January 1, 1956 independence
- 1957 “Southern Federal Party” sought recognition of English, Christianity, and Africanism
- 1958 First military coup: General Abboud
- 1962 Expulsion of Christian missionaries
- Anyanya guerrillas & their language policy in the jungle
Sudan’s “Second” Civil War

• 1972-83 Addis Ababa Accord: a lull in the war
• 1983 Numayri declared Shari’a law; John Garang broke off to join SPLM/A
• Outbreak of war; spreads to Nuba Mountains
• 2 million dead; 4 million displaced?
• 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement
• Post-2003 Darfur conflict vis-à-vis civil war
Ja’far Numayri & John Garang
Confronting or avoiding the painful histories of language

ARABIZATION AND WAR IN ALGERIA
Algerian Leaders

Boumediène (r. 1965-78) & Benjedid (r. 1979-92)
The Pace of Arabization

• Arabizing primary and secondary schools
• Importing Egyptian teachers ("religious fanatics"?)
• Arabizing humanities & social science departments in universities
• Ordering all signs, license plates, court cases, etc. in Arabic
• Abolishing professorship in Berber Studies at the University of Algiers
Berber Consciousness
Tafsut: Berber Spring (1980)
The Algerian Civil War

- Skyrocketing youth unemployment
- Mobilization of Islamist groups
- 1990: National Islamic Front (FIS) won local & regional elections
- 1991 army cancelled elections
- Descent into war (ended c. 2000?)
- 100,000 dead
- Jihadist remnants
What was the war about?

- A cultural civil war that was “waged without respite” after 1962?
- An Algerian linguicide?
- Unsettled scores and unresolved conflicts dating from the 1954-62 war and before?
Why did Arabization fail?

- Ruling elites failed to persuade people of the economic and political benefits of Arabization
- Ruling elites lacked sincerity to match ideology
- Parallel with Iraqi history: failure of Arabist nationalism (with its vision of monolithic national culture)
- Need for a pluralistic Iraqi, Sudanese, or Algerian nationalist vision
New Directions:

The Impact of Mobile Phones and the Internet on Linguistic Cultures
Capitalizing on Colonial Languages

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What’s next?