Religion and the Socioeconomic and Political Realities in the Town of Kassala, Eastern Sudan

Ph.D. Research Proposal in Social Anthropology

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1. **Introduction:**

In the centuries known in Europe as the Middle Ages the northern region of the present Sudan was divided into three kingdoms: Makuria, Nobatia, and Alodia (Karrar 1992). Between these kingdoms and the Red Sea lay the Beja country. The introduction of Christianity into these kingdoms in the sixth century marked a new era, as it was adopted to such an extent that it became the state religion (Hasan 1966).

With the fall of Egypt in the hands of Muslims, preparations began for the conquest of Sudan. By 652 Islamic forces invaded Makuria, the northern kingdom whose people won decisively and for six centuries thereafter were able to impose their own terms upon relations with the Islamic world. The Islamic forces, then, turned their acquisitive attentions eastward towards the Beja. Raids were undertaken to impose tribute upon nearby chiefs and open their county to Muslim traders. In years to come, many immigrant Muslim Arabs would be absorbed into the northern Beja lineages, creating mixed-descent communities that were recognized as the first Beja Muslims (Spaulding 2000).

After a time, many Muslim Arabs drifted towards the southern Nubian kingdom of Alodia. The capital town of Soba had a quarter for Muslim traders as early as the tenth century; and by the twelfth century the kingdom began to break up. Then, the hostilities between the northern Nubian kingdom and the Muslims began to erupt. In 1276 a major Mamluk force conquered Makuria. Under the terms of settlement the Nubians were allowed to keep their religion as protected persons under the Islamic *Sharīʿa* and were to be governed via a puppet king to be chosen by the conquerors. In 1324 the Kanz al-Dawla seized the throne from the old dynasty and the country disintegrated into warring factions. Renewed centripetal social forces restored the royal rule to the Nile in about 1500 and introduced the state form of government to the western highlands over the century and a half to follow. Thenceforth, the Sudanese kingdoms were lands of Islam that received recognition as such from their neighbours (Hasan 1966).

The power that finally won the victory for Islamic culture in Sudan was Muslim holy men who overwhelmingly transmitted the version of Islam known as Sufism. Then, a transition from what may be described as a “Sudanic belt” pattern of individualistic holy men to a Middle Eastern and North African one with organized *Sufi* tariqas (Arabic: tariqas) was beginning to take place (Karrar 1992).

In 1881, a Sufi leader by the name Mohammad Ahmed proclaimed his mission as the *Imām Al-Mahdī* (Arabic: divinely guided leader). He preached the message that the rulers were impious and oppressive and that the people were intent in agreement on illegitimate innovation and love of the things of this world. He called upon people to fight against the Turks who, because of their impiety and oppression, were unbelievers. By the time of his death in 1885, the Mahdīst forces controlled most of northern Sudan and began to establish a centralized state based on principles of rule defined by Al-Mahdī. The followers of Al-Mahdī, the *Ansār*, did not disappear when the Anglo-Egyptian army conquered the Mahdīst state in 1898-99, although they changed in dogma and political action. In the 20th century, they emerged as the largest organized politico-religious group in Sudan (Voll 2000).

Important new religious elements, which emerged in the mid-1940s, were the Muslim Brothers (Arabic: *Al-Ikhwān Al-Muslimoon*) that began as a student organization and had some following among urban intellectuals and professionals (Voll 2000) and the Republican Brothers (Arabic: *Al-Ikhwān Al-Jumhūriyyūn*) that was founded by Al-Ustaz Mahmoud Mohammad Taha with the aim of constructing a new civilization that is based on the "authentic" Qur'ān (Salih 1997). *Jama'at Attabligh wa Adda'wa*, which is engaged in efforts to revive the days of the Prophet, entered Sudan at the beginning of the 1950s through members from India and Pakistan. A more recent Muslim group in Sudan is *Ansār Al-Sunnā* (literally, Supporters of the Sunna) who call for the revival of the traditions of the Prophet.
Mohammad and whose version of Islam is akin to that of the Wahhābiyya in Saudi Arabia. They date their emergence in Sudan to the late 1970s.

Therefore, the islamisation of the Sudanese society was an effort of some Sufi migrants coming from Egypt, Hejaz, Morocco and Iraq. As stated in relevant literature, these Sufi pioneers did not face any difficulty in spreading and deepening the principles of the Islamic religion in Sudan. Their success depended on their knowledge, asceticism, morals and miracles (Huda 2007: 33). The prevalence of Sufi Islam was also implicit in Harold Tringham’s and Spencer McMichael's concept of popular Islam, in roughly describing the Islamic version in Sudan at that time (Abdullah 2016: 45).

The Sufi Islam has played an important role in the emergence and demographic composition of many Sudanese communities. The Sufi leaders contributed to the appearance of numerous Sudanese towns and big villages, as the called "saints' miracles" that were some of their attributes had made many people migrate to the places where these leaders were residing. One example of such towns is Al Damer in northern Sudan (Ajaimi 2012: 2). As Mohamed Nugud says, the Sufi leaders during the era of the Funj Kingdom became representatives of the spiritual power, which enabled them to benefit a lot economically (Nugud 2001: 85). Politically, the Sufi leaders played multiple roles in the Sudanese society. The two biggest political parties in the Sudanese political history are based on a sectarian basis; namely, the Umma Party, which represents the Ansar Al-Mahdi, and the Democratic Unionist Party, which draws its membership mainly from the Khatmiyya Sufi order (Mahajuob1973: 177).

2. Problem of the Research:

The Khatmiyya is one of the oldest and biggest Sufi orders in Sudan. It attracts a broad popular support, which makes it enjoy a real political influence in the country (voll 2002: 93). It was founded and introduced into Sudan by Sayid Mohammed Osman Al-Mirghani (Al-Khatim) during the period 1815-1816. Al-Khatim arrived from the Arab Peninsula, where he had been taught by his teacher Ahmad bin Idris.

Since its beginnings, the Khatmiyya order has been connected to the town of Kassala, the area of the proposed field study and the historic centre of this Sufi order. There one would find a large number of tombs of the Shaikhs of the Khatmiyya. Kassala was appearing from scratch at that time. Sayid Hassan Al-Mirghani, the son of Al-Khatim, came to Kassala from Bara in Kordofan in 1820. Since then the Khatmiyya order has been widening and spreading in the eastern part of Sudan. However, its impact on the town of Kassala in various aspects of social life have been the strongest, even today.

Although the land dispute cases in Sudan increasingly get complicated, for various reasons, the town of Kassala has some peculiarity in this regard. This has something to do with the dialectical relationship between religion and the economic situation, where the issue of land ownership arises from time to time at the grassroots level, sometimes at the political and religious levels. For example, there were strong protests by the citizens of the Sawaagi neighbourhoods in Kassala, which have been restricted mainly to cultivation, during the third democratic regime in Sudan (1987-1989). These protests showed a dispute over the ownership of lands in those neighbourhoods. The dispute was based on some questions raised by the protesters: is it a freehold ownership for the citizens of the town of Kassala, and the Sawaagi neighbourhoods in particular? Is it leasehold ownership that should be renewed frequently? Is it the property of the State? Is it a freehold for the Mirghani family or the Shaikhs of the Khatmiyya order in Kassala? However, this situation still exists.

Also, there is an old religious or sectarian relationship between certain social or tribal groups and the Khatmiyya in Kassala. Maybe this relationship has led these tribal and religious groups to own lands and gain distinct economic statuses in the present-day town of
Kassala. This in itself shows the need for doing an in-depth research on the relationship between religion and tribal structure of the area under study, particularly because some people link the coming of Sayid Hassan Al-Mirghani and his succeeding Khalifas with the immigrant groups who came later on. The widely told story, which links the coming of Sayid Hassan Al-Mirghani and the emergence and development of the town of Kassala, shows that Kassala was a forest full of wild animals and unpopulated before the arrival of Sayid Hassan Mirghani. Therefore, as the economy in Kassala is based mainly on agriculture, the land ownership is extremely important, especially because the different Sawaaqi neighbourhoods in the town are dominated by certain ethnic groups, on top of which are the Shaigiya. This in itself raises many questions.

Noted also, the beginnings of the political activities of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP), the political wing of the Khatmiyya Sufi order, were in Kassala. With the consolidation of this relationship between religion and politics during the Condominium period, and then during the early era of the national governments, the situation became more complicated. During the successive national governments the followers of the Khatmiyya order played considerable roles in achieving many political victories via linking the sectarian loyalty with the political affiliation.

What demonstrates the high degree of complexity here is the entanglement of religion with the economy and politics within the urban community of Kassala simultaneously. The evidence for this is the historical political conflict between the DUP and the other political parties and regimes, which succeeded each other in the administration of the region. The followers of the Khatmiyya order, however, played important and influential roles in this administration. Worthy of note, was the frequent political breakthrough attempts by the central national governments, which were intended for penetrating the Khatmiyya order and hence trying to separate the political affiliation from the Sufi sectarian loyalty in Kassala. One of the adopted mechanisms was, for example, to grab lands owned by the Mirghani family, and then redistribute them for free as neighbourhoods to lay inhabitants of the town. This has resulted in sorts of disagreement and dispute, which later forced the central national governments to render the grabbed lands back to the Mirghani family, according to agreements concluded by the political wing of the Khatmiyya order (i.e., the DUP).

Although the town of Kassala has been a Sufi religious centre for a long time, the recent period has witnessed the coming of other competing or perhaps doctrinally different religious groups, such as the contemporary Islamic fundamentalist movements and the Salafist and Jihadist groups. This foretells the emergence of a form of religious and political conflict in the region, especially with the weakness of the politico-religious influence of the Khatmiyya order in the recent decades.

Therefore, the proposed anthropological study stems from the controversy on the mysterious relationship between the Sufi religion, the ethnic structure, and the politico-economic situation in the town of Kassala. So this study tries to uncover the fathom of this complex problem, given that there are many facts that still vague.

3. **Questions of the Research:**

(1) What sort of dialectical relationship may exist between religious loyalty, political affiliation, tribalism, and local economy in the town of Kassala?
(2) Is there any link between such a hypothesized dialectical relationship and the ongoing conflicts over lands in the town of Kassala?
(3) Does the politico-economic situation in the town of Kassala reflect the form and nature of the social statuses and relations within the Khatmiyya Sufi order?
(4) What type of interaction is between the Khatmiya Sufi order and the other lately existed Islamic religious groups in the town of Kassala (fundamentalist, Salafist and Jihadist groups)?

4. Previous Anthropological Studies on Islam in Sudan:

Anthropological research on Islam in Sudan has started to be undertaken since the beginning of Post-Independence period when the concentration of anthropological research on religion was altogether shifted from South Sudan to North Sudan. The theoretical and methodological leads of the researches on Islam in Sudan varied considerably, as the involved anthropologists chose from the many classical and contemporary options. The issues that were tackled constitute four main concerns: the history and origin of Sufi orders, the popular and orthodox interpretations of Islam, and ideological issues.

Three of the previous studies concentrated on the history and origin of Sufi orders. In his study of the Sufi Ismailiyya in El-Obeid of Northern Kordofan, Al-Dawwi examines the origin and the historical development of the tariqa as a social religious organization, showing the role that its founder and successors played in spreading it out to the other parts of the country. He also deals with the followers of the tariqa (who are they?) and the things that the tariqa achieves for them. He shows the link between the Ismailiyya and the other Sufi organizations in El-Obeid community, aiming at clearing up its importance and the role that it plays in the community of the town (Al-Dawwi 1969). Osman tried to explain some of the factors behind the development and spread of the Qadiriyya Mikashiyya and to examine how it is made to persist despite its division into sections. He focused on the organization of the tariqa and the relationships between the leading sheikhs of the religious family and the mass of their adherents. He concludes that similar qualities possessed and similar roles fulfilled in comparison to those of the founder sheikh, enable his descendants to become independent, each leading a section, the unity and the persistence of the whole tariqa is explained through the solidarity of the leading men within the religious family being mainly reinforced by the unity of their ideology or belief. More importantly, the power of the tariqa to endure rests on the leaders’ success to manifest criteria appropriate with the possession of Baraka and their competence to save the tariqa its authenticity by making for the wider social relevance of their sections (Osman 1978). The purpose of an article by Al-Shahi on religion and related issues in Northern Sudan is to make some propositions as to the factors underlying the continuity of the Khatmiyya, both as a religious organization and as a political force speaking for its followers. In this context a number of factors are significant: the role played by certain members of the Mirghani family, the religious background and doctrine of the order, and, finally, its politics (Al-Shahi 1981).

There are four studies, which dealt with the popular and orthodox interpretations of Islam. Eltom discusses the role of the religious specialists (fakis) in the Berti religious life in Northern Darfur. He examines the use of traditional literacy promulgated by the Qur’anic schools among the Berti. This literacy is restricted both in the scope of its use as well as its social distribution, which remains limited to the fakis (Eltom 1983). Holy analyzes the form and the content of the Berti’s religious beliefs and practices. He argues that among the Berti the formal religious practices are predominantly the concern of men, while local, unorthodox customary rituals are performed mainly by women. He shows that the customary rituals constitute an integral part of the religious system of the Berti. For him, the distinction between the two classes of rituals is an expression of the gender relationships characteristic of the society (Holy 1991). A doctoral research on Islam, traditional beliefs and ritual practices among the Zaghawa in Darfur region was undertaken by El Tigani Mustafa Mohammad Salih. This research explains how the socio-economic crises and political upheavals in Dar Zaghawa in the 1960s, and the complicity of the national political parties with the Zaghawa chiefs anguished the commoners and led many of them to join the Muslim Brothers and Ansār Al-Summa and demand the return to the pristine
Islam and the application of Islamic Shari’a law (Salih 1991). A recent study by Ali was confined to the urban and rural communities of Shendi. It is primarily concerned with how Muslim groups (the Sufis, the Ansār Al-Mahdī, Ansār Al-Sunna, the Republican Brothers and the Muslim Brotherhood) in these communities interpret the Islamic texts, and with the factors that influence their interpretations. It sheds light on the relations of convergence and divergence of Islam as practiced in the communities under study to textual Islam; the mechanisms by which Islam looses or attains its textual character when diffused into a new setting; the conditions for coexistence or amalgamation of the constituents of Islam and other traditions; and the differences between the many Islamic doctrines, as well as how these differences emerged (Ali 2004). Fluehr-Lobban’s research in Sudan goes beyond textual analysis of the law to include observations of the court system in action. It studies not only the philosophical and religious underpinnings of the Shari’a law, but case material and legal statistics to analyse its application in personal status law in Sudan. It stresses marriage, divorce, child custody, women’s status and social movements for change (Fluehr-Lobban 1989).

El Hassan’s study (1980) on the Badrab of Um Dubban was unique, concentrating on the ideological appropriation of labour and production surplus. It explains how a popular form of social organization based on Islamic religious ideas was becoming ideologised; that is, how the religiously appropriated surplus product and labour are kept and invested for the benefit of the appropriating religious groups.

5. **Importance of the Research:**

According to the previous anthropological studies summarized above, the presently proposed study gains importance from its quest for bridging the gaps in these studies. Most important here, the proposed study considers the relation between religion and economic situation, on one hand, and religion and tribal structure, on another hand. The study, which focused on the relation between religion and the economic situation, concentrates on the ideological exploitation of followers by their sheikhs (the Badrab of Um Dubban). Therefore, this study sought to clarify the bilateral nature of that relation, i.e. what the followers achieve from the *tariqa*. Although the relation between religion and tribal structure is very important, it has been omitted by all these studies.

Most of the previous studies were conducted in the countryside; therefore, the proposed study is trying to deal with the Sufi version of the Islamic religion in an urban environment (the town of Kassala in eastern Sudan), besides the role of religion in the emergence of towns/cities. Moreover, the proposed study focuses on the role of religion in politics, which the previous studies did not address directly. Taking the Khatmiyya, which perhaps represent the main politico-religious body in Sudan, as a case study, the proposed study tries to explain the relation between the sectarian loyalty and the political affiliation.

The proposed study tries to explore the triangular relationship between religion, politics, and economics in the urban context of Kassala. Here and finally, the study attempts to link this triangular relationship with the current issue of radicalization of Islam and extremism, violent extremism, and terrorism (EVET).

The importance of the study of the relationship between religion and economic, social and political situation in the town of Kassala, Sudan, can be looked on from several considerations.

6. **Methodology of the Research:**

The proposed research is a type of qualitative, replication study in the sense that it repeats a similar research study undertaken by Abdalla S. Bujra in 1971 in a small town (Hureidah) in Hadramaut, Yemen. It repeats Bujra’s study in the Sudanese town of Kassala, with a different situation and different subjects, to determine if the basic findings of his study
can be generalized to other participants and circumstances. In doing this, the proposed study makes use of the historical approach, which studies events through the passage of time to give an image of what appears at the present. The historical method might be useful in pursuing the development of both the Khatmiyya Sufi order and the town of Kassala. It could help—in particular—in detecting the dialectical relationship between religion, politics and economy in the town of Kassala.

Besides the secondary data, which will be collected through the review of relevant books, journal articles, statistics, documents, official reports, and unpublished dissertations, the proposed study will utilize some primary data that could be gathered via the following techniques: (1) Individual interviews: to gather data about the historical relationship between religion and the demographic structure of the town of Kassala. (2) Direct observation: to gather data about the daily interaction of individuals and groups in the urban setting of Kassala and at main religious ceremonies. (3) Key informants: to gather data from elders with sharp observations and memories, concentrating mainly on the oral history and demographic composition of the town and stories of in- and out-migrations. (4) Group interview: to gather data about contested issues, particularly the issues of conflict over the land and overlap between religious loyalty and political affiliation.

7. Theoretical and Conceptual framework of the Research:

As mentioned above, the proposed research repeats Abdalla S. Bujra's study on Islam as a political ideology in the Yemeni town of Hureidah in the Sudanese town of Kassala. Therefore, it is necessary to review the main ideas and findings of this study, which could be treated as the theoretical and conceptual framework of the proposed research, taking into account that the replication study usually involves using the same methods but with different subjects.

In his study, which was published in 1971, Bujra deals with the problem of political change in a stratified community (Hureidah) in Hadramaut, Southern Arabia. He analyses the formal framework of stratification as it operates there and its implications in other spheres of social activity, such as marriage and the distribution of wealth and power. He pays particular attention to external factors impinging on the community of Hureidah and affecting its stratification.

Hadrami society has a system, which divides all people into three general strata, two of which are also internally ranked. The highest stratum is that of the Sadah (singular: Seyyid, meaning master or lord), of people who claim to be descendants of the Prophet Mohammad. Such people are regarded as having the highest descent and religious status in the society. The second stratum is composed of groups known as Mashaikh and Gabail. The Mashaikh (singular: Sheikh, meaning scholar and holy man) are groups of people who claim descent from well-known and reputed Hadrami scholars and holy men of the past. As such, they too have an ascribed religious status, though inferior to that of the Sadah. They claim that their ultimate ancestor is Qahtan, the ancestor of all Southern Arabs. The Gabail (singular: Gabilah, meaning tribe, and Gabili tribesman) are tribesmen who claim descent to the eponymous founding ancestors of their respective tribes. These tribes claim descent to now extinct tribal groupings, and ultimately to Qahtan. Thus both the Mashaikh and Gabail have an equal descent status. The tribesmen, however, do not have a religious status like the Mashaikh, who are therefore given a higher rank than the tribesmen. The third and lowest stratum is that of the Masakin or Du’fa (singular: Maskin, meaning poor, and Da’if, meaning weak). The Masakin are a residual category in terms of descent. They belong neither to the line of the Prophet nor to that of Qahtan; neither do they have ancestors who were religious leaders. They thus have the lowest descent status and no ascribed religious status. The population of Hureidah consists of groups belonging to all these three strata (but each stratum
group has a local name), and as such it is typical. In studying Hureidah, then, Bujra was analysing the operation, in microcosm, of the over-all Hadrami system of stratification.

The importance attached by Hureidah community to the principle of rank is expressed in the residential separation of people, in dress, in formalized behaviour, and, most important, in ritual. The emphasis given to the ranking of the groups implies that each group has certain ascribed roles and attributes associated with its position in the social hierarchy. Importantly, the Attas (the Sadah group in Hureidah) claim to be the descendants of the Prophet Mohammad and as such their descent status is considered to be the highest in the value system of the society. Both their link with the Prophet and their past missionary role give them a high religious status. They use their cultural past to justify both these attributes. They are dispersed over a number of towns and their political influence extends to these places. In Hureidah they are the largest corporate descent group. They are politically organized with a formal leadership, and in spite of internal divisions are more united than any other strata in the community. They are the religious leaders of Hureidah and control all religious institutions in the community. Until the Government took over the schools, they controlled the educational system and had produced highly educated people. In addition, they have always been an important section of the national elite. They have important links with administrators, scholars, merchants in all the big towns, as well as the two Sultans.

The success of the Attas in acquiring political and economic power is not so much because of their position in the system of descent ranking, but results rather from the pattern of relationships existing within the community, and between it and the outside world.

The Attas, as rulers and founders of the sanctuary of Hureidah, have acted as missionaries and mediators amongst the Ja’da and Nahd tribes (the Gabail groups in Hureidah) and this role have established extensive political ties with the tribesmen in order to secure protection for Hureidah and to safeguard their rule of it. As a large group, the Attas have used religious institutions to ritualise their status and unity, and they have used their ‘cultural past’ to provide them with an ethos which would maintain this unity within Hureidah and between its segments in various parts of the country. Furthermore, both as missionaries and scholars, they had established themselves as members of the national elite throughout the country and in this way made political contacts in all important centres of power. When the Qua’ity Government was established, they shifted their emphasis away from their political ties with the tribes towards their ties with the national elite, which has been absorbed into the State. In this way they ensured the continuance of their political power within Hureidah under the new system. Of all the groups in Hureidah, the people best placed to manipulate the new system were the Attas, and, furthermore, they were the people least dependent on other groups. In addition, their traditional role of scholarship gave them a built-in advantage in the competition for power, since the educational criterion was a major one in the competition. It is therefore not surprising that the Attas immediately monopolized the new local power structure.

Cultivation is the most important economic activity in the community and is therefore the basis for economic relations. The way land is distributed is crucial to the kinds of economic relationships that arise between people in the community. There are two kinds of land rights in Hureidah. Firstly, there is the normal right of ownership over land in which a person can sell his land or can leave it to be inherited by his heirs. Secondly, there is wakf land, which is bequeathed either to particular institutions or for the purposes of charity. This land is controlled by those people who are responsible for the running of such religious institutions as mosques. Although the trustees of the wakf land may use it themselves, they also rent it out on a sharecropping basis. Where the trustee of the land is also the cultivator, he is supposed to take half of the income for himself and give the other half to a religious
institution or as charity. In practice, however, he often keeps more than half of the income of the land, and where the trustee gives out the land to a share-cropper, half the income of the land goes to the share-cropper whilst the trustee has control over the other half. Again he should use this for religious purposes, but in many cases he does not. Thus on the whole trustees take economic advantage of their position of trust.

The total amount of wakf land in Hureidah is 116.7 acres (19.7 per cent of the total cultivable land), of which 110.7 acres is controlled by the Attas and 6 acres by the Basahl (the Mashaiikh group in Hureidah). No other group controls any part of this land although many other people farm wakf land as tenants. It is said that the Hirthan (of the Masakin) and the Gabail were the original inhabitants of Hureidah. They owned all the cultivated land before the Basahl came, followed soon afterwards by the Attas. These latter two groups played an important religious role as missionaries and were greatly respected and feared for their supernatural powers. People gave them land free as a gift for their services as mediators and as religious leaders. As time went by some people bequeathed part of their land to mosques, which were administered mainly by the Attas. Gifts continued to be given to individual Attas and according to the Hirthan many Attas ‘extorted’ land by threatening them with their supernatural powers. Thus in Hureidah’s development there seems to have been two very important principles in the distribution of wealth. One of these was the giving of gifts to religious leaders and pious people, and the other was the endowing of property to religious institutions. Since the Attas have been the most eminent religious group (as they built six out of the seven mosques in Hureidah, control all the religious ceremonies, and have produced some reputed holy men), they now have a virtual monopoly over endowed land. Similarly much of the land given as gifts must have gone to them. The Basahl, too, must have acquired wealth in this way since they were the first religious group to come to Hureidah and it was they who built the first mosque there. In many cases the endowed land of the mosques must have become indistinguishable from the property of the family that looked after the mosque. The Attas and Basahl, then, appear to have acquired all of the wakf land they control from the Gabail and the Hirthan. On the other hand, the Gabail, Akhdam, and Subyan had no religious status and therefore could not acquire the control of wakf land. They could only acquire land through inheritance or by buying it on the open market.

The Attas and Basahl control all wakf land in addition to their own land. If, then, we take together both owned and controlled land, they will be shown to hold more land per household than any other group in the community. They have more income-producing land at their disposal than any other group. Furthermore, because of the additional wakf land at their disposal, they are able to act as landlords to many sharecroppers, and this gives them a measure of economic power over many people in other groups. In general, the proportion of land owned and controlled by a group is related to its status in the social hierarchy. If we add the income of each group from non-agricultural activities and from migration to the income earned from the land the distribution of the total income will be even more closely correlated with the position of a group in the social hierarchy than is shown by looking at the distribution of land alone.

The descent framework of Hadramaut ranks people in three patrilineally ascribed strata, a person always inheriting his descent status from his father. A system of this kind can only be maintained by a discriminatory pattern of marriage, and the theory of marriage in Hadrami society is based in the principle of kafa’ah (equality of marriage partners). As interpreted by the Sadah, kafa’ah is held to refer to equality of descent only, and they have supported this interpretation with religious arguments and their power in society. Thus they argue that a man ought to marry one of equal descent status to himself, but that if no such suitable spouse exists he may marry a woman of lower descent. Such a marriage is allowed because the children will take the descent status of their father and not of their mother. A woman,
however, should never be allowed to marry a man of lower descent than herself, since her children would take the lower status of her husband, though she may marry a man of higher descent status. The strongest preference of both men and women, however, should be for endogamous marriage within the stratum.

The interpretation of kafa’ah by the Sadah was not seriously questioned. As the topmost, and the most politically powerful and wealthiest stratum in the society, the Sadah have always refused to give their daughters in marriage to others, although they themselves take wives from others. The Mashaiikh-Gabail stratum has followed a similar policy vis-à-vis the Masakin. The preference for stratum endogamy can clearly be seen in the marriage figures from Hureidah, which show that each stratum has a high percentage of endogamy and that there is no case of hypogamy, i.e., a man marrying a woman from a higher stratum. Masakin men are in fact forced to be endogamous. They have no choice but to marry within the stratum, since no higher stratum would give them wives and there is no stratum below them into which they could marry hypergamosly. Attas men, by contrast, have the highest percentage of hypergamous marriages. This is because they, as the highest stratum, have a wider choice and can take wives from either of the lower strata. More important, as the ruling group in Hureidah, the Attas appear to have contracted political marriages with other groups. It is significant, for example, that four out of the ten Sadah men married hypergamosly are married to Gabail women. This is mainly a hangover from the past political situation, when the Gabail were the most powerful people around Hureidah.

This marriage pattern shows that both descent status and other factors are taken into account when choosing a spouse. It is a continuing restatement of the social hierarchy in Hureidah, and it buttresses the wealth differentials within the community. Since women may inherit property in Hureidah (both land and houses) any marriage outside the group leads to an eventual redistribution of wealth between the groups in the social hierarchy. The very high percentage of endogamous marriages within the groups shows that an attempt is being made to keep women, and thereby property, within the group. Over the generations, the high percentage of endogamous marriages has maintained the distinctiveness of each group in the social hierarchy.

The Attas not only have the highest rank in the stratification system, they are also the ruling group and religious leaders within the community, expressing their status through various rituals and political mechanisms. They legitimise their status by maintaining recorded genealogies and by being the chief ‘experts’ on local history. Also, they recognize and legitimise the status of other groups. Most important are the political and economic relationships, which they have with other groups, which define and continually reinforce their status. It would therefore be difficult to visualize another group moving up to an equivalent status with the Attas, when the latter have enough power to prevent such a move. It is just as impossible for individuals from any other group to become Attas, since recruitment into the group is by birth only. The Basahl, on the other hand, are in a less secure position. They did not and do not have political power. Their status rests solely on their claim to descent from Sahl. This claim gave them both their descent and their religious status. But the Basahl, unlike the Attas, have not been distinguished by a continuing tradition of scholarship and missionary activities. In fact, since the death of their ancestor Sahl, they have produced neither scholars nor holy men. Their status essentially rests on its recognition by the Attas who have incorporated into local history a ‘myth’ that defines Basahl status in relation to their own status and that of other groups. More important, the Attas have ritualised Basahl status and formalized the relationship between the two groups. In this way Basahl status has been fixed and they have been ensured against movement down the social hierarchy. This has enabled the Basahl to recruit followers in Hureidah and outside on the basis of their religious status, and in turn has reinforced their position within the community.
To be a descendant of a local holy man and scholar is not, however, a guarantee against change of one’s status. The Basahl, as we have seen, have been able to maintain their status not so much by scholarship, by Attas recognition of this status. There is another descent group in Hureidah, however, the Bakhamis descent group, which has moved down from their original status as Mashaikh, like the Basahl, to their present status of Hirthan. The story goes that the founding ancestor of the Bakhamis, a man called Abdul-Rahim, was a well-known scholar at the time of Umar, the ancestor of the Attas. The two men were closed friends, and Abdul-Rahim was recognized as a Sheikh. He even taught some of the children of the Attas, and during the ‘Id festival the Attas used to visit him, thus recognizing his religious status. When Abdul-Rahim died, however, the Bakhamis did not build a shrine to honour the memory of their ancestor and to symbolize his religious status. Nor, in the generations that followed, did they produce any more scholars. It is thus said that instead of retaining the status of Mashaikh, which their ancestor had won for them, the Bakhamis have slowly lost their status over the years. We see here a clear contrast between the Basahl and the Bakhamis, two groups that had the same religious status in the past. But whereas the status of the Basahl was recognized and continually restated in ritual, that of the Bakhamis was not ritualised, though it had been recognized in the past. Neither the Basahl nor the Bakhamis produced any scholars after their original scholar ancestors, nor did they play an important missionary role. But whereas the Basahl ancestor left symbols of his past status, in the form of the first mosque in Hureidah, and the shrine on his grave, the Bakhamis ancestor left no symbol of his status nor did his descendants ensure the preservation of his status by building a shrine for him. Thus the status of both the Basahl and the Bakhamis ultimately depended on its acceptance and ritualization by the Attas.

Incorporation into the Qua’ity State established a new political system in Hureidah in which the State monopolized all political power. The Government set up a power structure to be run partly by the people of Hureidah and partly by government administrators from outside the community. This meant that the Attas and the Ja’da lost their traditionally ascribed political roles, and that under the new system they have an equality of legal status with other groups. Since then all groups have had to compete for political power within the rules set out by the new political system. The ‘qualifications’ required under the new system are education, wealth, past relations with the Sultans, and, most important, contacts with the new administrative and ruling elite. But competition under the new system has resulted in an unequal distribution of power within Hureidah. Despite the equality of power status of all the groups, the Attas have achieved and acquired most of the power. They are therefore able to continue to maintain the status quo in Hureidah, especially since recent political changes have not been accompanied by major changes in the distribution of wealth, which has remained almost the same as it was in the past, in spite of the open economic organization now prevailing. The Attas are still the wealthiest in Hureidah and the Akhdam and Subyan the poorest.

The political power of any group in the new context is based on its ability to dominate and influence the formal political structure. This is what the Attas have done and the change is reflected in their control of the Council and the personal powers of its President, Abubakar. The other groups in Hureidah have failed to gain any influence within the new structure, and are therefore politically under Attas domination. Relations between the Attas and the non-Attas are primarily regulated by this factor. Non-Attas groups have a common political status as the dominated groups, and the success of the Attas in increasing their power has consolidated the new alignment of the non-Attas groups. This basic political division was clear as early as 1952 but the important point here is that the last years have sharpened the division with the result that the non-Attas camp has become more ‘solid’ in spite of Abubakar’s attempts at breaking it.
8. **Design of the Research:**
Chapter One: Introductory statements.
Chapter Two: A historical background about the Khatmiyya Sufi order in Sudan.
Chapter Three: The historical development of the town of Kassala community.
Chapter Four: Religion, social stratification and land ownership in the town of Kassala.
Chapter Five: The politicization of religion and the religionization of politics in the town of Kassala.
Chapter Six: The Khatmiya and the others Islamic Salafi (extremist) groups in the town of Kassala.

9. **Sources and references**


Ismail, O. S. 1975 *Religion and Politics: the Origins and Development of the Khatmiyya and the Ansar*, the Central Archives Bureau, Khartoum (in Arabic).


