inheritance issues might have been collected together or the authenticity of the document (said by one once duped into not questioning the authenticity of a similarly buried document of great, local historical significance).

The Sahara has an abundance of inheritance literature (over 200 manuscripts on inheritance are documented at the westafricanmanuscripts.org site), including nawazil, or collections of like cases, that are not dissimilar to Lydon’s discovery. Each collection deserves attention for the purpose it serves, the reasons why it has been preserved, and its context as well as its content. When she deals with how commercial networks function, Lydon seems to absolve herself from seeking these connections by declaring that the “relationship between political power and commerce . . . is not one I explore here” (348). But elsewhere she makes clear that it is difficult “to understand Saharan exchange outside its religious framework” (337), so the background for political analyses is, in fact, clearly laid. She broaches fascinating questions in her case study, which are hinted at in manuscripts from the Saharan jurists in their discussions of inheritance and the nature of evidence, law and its function in a stateless society, and religious affiliation and juridical authority. Most of these questions are as pertinent to untangling political and commercial interests today as, evidently, they were to Saharan jurists two centuries ago.

We are indebted to Ghislaine Lydon for bringing all this and much, much more together, effectively opening research arenas that formerly were foggily defined, at best, and spelling out methodologies frequently ignored by Africanist blinders. But most of all, she has reaffirmed the importance of our attention to the tens of thousands of manuscripts, now increasingly accessible and known, across the Sahara and West Africa.

Charles C. Stewart, University of Illinois


To write the history of Islamism in the Sudan is to explore the relationship between violence, religion, and politics. The First Islamist Republic is Abdullahi Gallab’s attempt to explain the political rise and fall of the National Islamic Front (NIF), while exposing the disastrous effects of Islamist rule since 1989. His primary goal is to challenge the movement’s
Gallab argues that it actually represents the latest round of totalitarianism in Sudan, which has manifested itself in varying ideological forms since the country’s independence in 1956. By systematically documenting the regime’s abuses of power, Gallab offers a trenchant indictment of Islamist leaders for the violent repression, economic hardship, and political marginalization that the Sudanese population has suffered under the first and second Islamist republics. Although his critique is important and timely, Gallab reduces Islamism to an instrument for political gain and thus sidelines the multifaceted dimensions of religious expression in the Sudanese public sphere.

Through a sociological analysis of recent Sudanese political history, Gallab largely succeeds in his efforts to offer an alternative narrative about the Islamists’ seizure of power. He maintains that academic histories written by prominent Islamist intellectuals are merely attempts to construct a “myth of uniqueness” for the movement (38). Instead, Gallab demonstrates how Hassan al-Turabi’s group mimicked extant institutions that transcended ethnic, tribal, and regional lines, such as the army, labor unions, and political parties. What was new about the Islamists, he argues, was their unified class identity, as well-educated, wealthy elites who controlled Muslim banking institutions and maintained close ties to Saudi Arabia (89). By minimizing ethnic and regional conflicts, Gallab argues that class warfare is the main cause of the many horrific acts of violence and repression in Sudan, and especially in Darfur.

The First Islamist Republic joins increasingly fervent calls from within and outside the academy demanding the cessation of violence and the removal of the current president, Omar Hassan Bashir. For Gallab, the Islamists constitute a “self-sufficient political association, rather than a religious movement,” and represent a fusion of Islam and totalitarianism (40). Focusing on the thought of al-Turabi, Gallab shows how Islamists appropriated the writings of Sayyid Qutb and Hassan al-Banna in order to demand complete obedience from the populace, amass wealth through the Islamic banking system, and eliminate dissent through violence. After the 1989 coup that brought him to power, al-Turabi assumed the title of shaykh to signify his role as the “grand jurist” who possessed the authority to perform *ijtihad*, or independent judicial reasoning. This title invested