It is not really surprising that two of these books should feature guns on their front covers: in the Sudan, the association between religion and violence is difficult to avoid. Yet each of these books makes the point that the country’s long, and multiple, civil wars are not simply the result of religious conflict. In doing so, they all draw on a wider literature, developed over the last two decades, which has argued that Sudan’s conflicts are not between Muslim and Christian, and they do not simply set north against south. Rather, these are the multiple manifestations of a different divide—between those who occupy the physical and political centre of the post-colonial state, and those who live on its margins. Those at the centre—who have come to be routinely characterised as ‘the riverain Arab elite’—dominate the state and mono-
polise its resources; those who live on its margins—whether they are westerners, southerners, non-Arabs or rural people generally—struggle against chronic exclusion. A seminal work in this genre was Tim Niblock’s *Class and Power in Sudan*; recent notable contributions have come from Douglas Johnson, in *Root Causes of Sudan’s Civil Wars* and Heather Sharkey’s *Living with Colonialism*, an excellent study of the genesis of a political elite with a very narrow vision of ‘nationalism’. But this focus on the post-colonial situation does not entirely explain one salient feature of Sudan’s conflicts—the apparently steadily deepening importance of Islam to those who dominate the state. Three of the four books considered here deal with this question; the fourth offers an insight into the developing relationship between Christianity and political conflict.

Gaby Warburg’s *Islam, Sectarianism and Politics* reflects a lifetime devoted to the study of Islam in the Sudan, and is accordingly thorough in its scholarship (if idiosyncratic in its referencing style). The strongest part of the book is that which deals with the period of effective British rule, under the ‘Anglo-Egyptian Condominium’, from 1898 to 1956. For this section, Warburg draws on extensive archival research as well as a wide range of published sources, and he amplifies and expands arguments he has already made, notably on the often tense relationship between a state-sponsored body of religious scholars and popular Islam. There is a nice discussion here of the chronic uncertainties and inconsistencies of British policy: should they be trying to promote a particular, reformed kind of Islam, and *sharia* law, in the northern Sudan? Or should they be ensuring their alliance with the popular forces of Sufism and Mahdism through courting the leaders of these movements? Through this debate on reformism, Warburg reminds us that *sharia* is not a fixed and homogenous body. There are substantially differing ideas about what *sharia* is, or should be, which reflect fundamental philosophical differences. Should legal decisions be based solely on *taqlid*, or received tradition (much of this being drawn from the *hadith*, the reputed sayings and doings of the Prophet)? Or should there be instead a reliance on *ijtihad*, on scholarly reasoning by analogy, which allows adaptation to changing circumstances? Warburg’s argument is that the conflict between *taqlid* and *ijtihad* is an enduring one, which consistently ranges state-sponsored religion against popular and inspired leadership. The Mahdi, the nineteenth-century leader who defeated Turco-Egyptian rule (and tweaked the nose of the British by killing Gordon in the process) was a prime exponent of *ijtihad*; so too have been those of his children and grandchildren who have succeeded him as leaders of the resilient popular movement of Mahdism. And so too have been the leaders of