The British drew their clerks, teachers, and technicians from a narrow upper stratum of "Arabized" families from the riverain north in the hope of co-opting this potentially disruptive element of indigenous society. This well-researched study looks at how British colonialism in Sudan created a penny-wise machinery of domination by training native subalterns who, in due course, formulated their own national identity and ideology of anticolonialism. Much recent work on the history of colonial medicine argues that medicine was the handmaiden of colonial power and of capitalism. Dr Bell challenges this interpretation through careful investigation of the complicated relationship between medicine, politics, and capital in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

This chapter explores the process of reforming 'refractory' female bodies in the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan. It discusses the goals of the Midwives Training School in Omdurman and the methods of the British women who established it during the 1920s and 1930s in light of ethnographic data from the rural north. I suggest that while midwifery training had contradictory outcomes and failed to undermine the logic that underpinned the practice of pharaonic (female) circumcision, some aspects of it became woven into the fabric of Sudanese daily life in unexpected ways. Parties to the colonizing venture looked, inescapably, in two directions at once: to the immediate situation in which they were mutually engaged, and to the respective cultural contexts of health from whence they came and in which they remained grounded.