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Women's poetry in Sudan and the diaspora during the 2018/2019 Uprising

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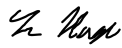
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Wien, 03.04.2020

Lilian Ann Häge



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The title of this thesis is based on a quote by one of my interview partners, “Esi”, who called poetry a “superpower” and the title of a song/ poem that another interview partner, Alaa Dishouni, wrote during the revolution and talked about with me in our conversation. The words of those who shared with me their experiences and insights, songs and poetry made this research possible and I want to thank them: Alaa Dishouni, A.S., Dafalla Hassan Bashir Mohammed, “Eljae” Asiya Elgady, “Esi”, “Firdaus”, “Gholama”, Ishraga Mustafa, Khalda El Jack, Sabah Sanhour. And Alaa Dishouni, Eljae, Lujane Atif and Tasneem Jaafar thank you for giving me consent to additionally provide readers with your lyrics and poems – some examples of the writing that originated during the Sudanese popular uprising in 2018/2019. I also want to thank my supervisor Dr. Philipp Bruckmayr, as well as Dr. Tomi Adeaga for additional support.

Dear ‘Azza, I hope we’ll meet again soon.

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[...]

We do this every day – make a good thing
out of nothing,
be the strong ones,
be okay even when we're not.

But today, we're more than okay,
we are women.
So, take my strength, I've got plenty.

Take my hands, I've got two.
Take my voice, let it guide you
and if it shakes, ask yourself:

*When the earth shakes,
do you think that she's afraid?*¹

~ from the poem "The Things She Told Me"

~ Emtithal Mahmoud

¹ Mahmoud, Emtithal. 2018. *Sister's Entrance*. Kansas City: Andrew McMeel Publishing. p.30.

1. Introduction

In the foreword to an anthology of Modern Sudanese Poetry that was published in autumn of 2019, Matthew Shenoda describes Sudan as “a country that sits at the border of myriad multiplicities”². I chose this quote because not only does it describe the diversity of this vast country using remarkably few words, but it does so with poetical precision. Just take a look at the personification or the alliteration! It seems an appropriate way to introduce a country whose history and events of the day are deeply entangled with poetry.

Women, as influential poets to their communities and preservers of oral history; ruling queens and army leaders; politicians and pillars to their families; anti-colonialist icons and forces to be reckoned with in now three successful revolutions in the past six decades, have helped shape contemporary Sudan in manifold ways. Poetry is one of them, with a long tradition that has recently been revived. During the most recent revolution that started at the end of 2018 and continued until August 2019, an image of a woman chanting poetry to the crowds became the iconic symbol of women’s contribution.³

This might well be the most visible example of how women, politics, poetry and contemporary history intersect in Sudan. Yet, it only represents a tiny fraction of this intersection.

The thesis at hand seeks to shed more light on the broader context in which Sudanese women use poetry in society to express themselves and how poetry is used by women to contribute to political movements.

1.1. Research Interest

During my bachelor studies, I had the opportunity to visit Sudan with our institute at the University of Vienna. For a couple of weeks, we travelled quite a distance, visited historical sites and met with students from different universities throughout the country. Most

² Shenoda, in: Babikir, Adil (Ed.). 2019. *Modern Sudanese Poetry: An Anthology*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. ix.

³ See Malik, Nesrine. 24.04.2019. “She’s an icon of Sudan’s revolution. But the woman in white obscures vital truths”. In: *The Guardian*. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/apr/24/icon-sudan-revolution-woman-in-white>. Accessed: 26.08.2019.

prominently in my memory is our visit to the Aḥfād University for Women, which led to the building of long-lasting friendships. Based on this experience and continued conversations, my interest to focus my studies on Sudan intensified.

In November 2018, I handed in the subject of this thesis. I wanted to research the contemporary poetry scene in Khartoum with a focus on women's poetry and political expression.

On the 19th of December however, protests broke out in ^ṣAṭbara, a city north of Khartoum, and sparked what soon became a nationwide protest and subsequently the popular uprising against the decades-old regime of ^ṣUmār al-Baṣīr. While I already initially had wanted to research political aspects of women's poetry, the turn of events made it clear that there was a whole different level on which poetry soon became a central force.

To start with, what had sparked the idea of researching women's poetry in Sudan was reading about the Ḥakamāt, female poets in Darfur and other states with a high standing and political authority within society. What I found most compelling was that it seemed like women's poetry was not only deeply rooted within Sudanese society but rather an institution. The Ḥakamāt caught my interest for three main reasons: the obvious feminist aspect, the connection to peace, conflict, and war, and the focus on the power of language, specifically poetry. For as long as I can remember, I've had an interest in poetry, and recently poetry slam. What fascinates me most is the intersection of poetry and political expression and activism. I then came across the Darfuri Poet Emtithal "Emi" Mahmoud (Imtiṭāl Maḥmūd, *1992/93) and her collection of poetry called "Sister's Entrance" from 2018, which I did not only find deeply touching but reflecting the three aspects that initially interested me in the Ḥakamāt. "Mahmoud uses evocative spoken word poetry to build compassion for refugees. An activist, author [...] and once a refugee herself, Emi was recently appointed as Goodwill Ambassador to the UNHCR"⁴. I took this as an indication that the power of women's poetry to support political change is being acknowledged and regarded as an asset to be taken into consideration.

Talking to friends in Khartoum about women's poetry and getting the feedback that indeed there seems to be a very active scene for poetry slam that is intertwined with activism and feminism corroborated the research interest. Following the unfolding of events in Sudan, however, pointed my interest more in the direction of how poetry was being used in this

⁴ TedxTalks. 26.07.2018. "Emi Mahmoud: The Power of Words (For Equality and Justice)". In: YouTube, *TEDxKakumaCamp*. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bAp9qh0szA8>. Accessed: 01.12.2019.

specific time. Being an active user of Social Media, I witnessed how friends in Sudan and the diaspora started sharing poems to share emotions and how poetry seemed to accompany and illustrate the ongoing Uprising. Having in mind the historic example of the Ḥakamāt, I wanted to keep the focus on female poets but decided to specify the political aspect to include the Sudan Uprising. Instead of the connection of women's poetry to war and peace, I would focus on the connection to social and political movements, protest, power, and revolution.

Although this sort of research would have been ideal for field research, it was for most of the planning unclear if I would be able to realize this and spend several months in Khartoum. Field research would have meant focusing more on the poetry scene in Sudan itself, yet another interesting aspect of the research, namely how poetry acted to connect the diaspora via Social Media to the Uprising, posed an additional possibility of research without the necessity to be on location. Indeed, as the following overview of the Sudan Uprising shows, field research turned out to be impossible and the decision to include Sudanese diaspora an insightful addition.

1.2. Sudan Uprising: An overview

In the following chapter, I turn to the struggle in Sudan for change and a civilian elected government. These events that turned into a revolution in December of 2018 are in so far important for this thesis as they build the background and were the reason for certain adaptations to the thesis. However, the revolution itself is not the focus of this thesis but an example of the ways in which poetry is being used. In a preliminary private conversation with one interview partner, I was asked "Do you have to write about the Sudanese Revolution?" for fear of misrepresentation of an ongoing movement by an outsider. Although the answer might strike as obvious, it is worthwhile to contemplate this for a second. Do I have to write about the Sudanese Revolution just because it's the topic dominating all other topics about Sudan during this time? When deciding on the topic of women and poetry, the revolution had not yet started. So, was including the revolution truly necessary or just the seemingly obvious choice?

While I have set out to research how women use poetry to express themselves, it soon became clear that the revolution was a catalyst for art and poetry and that there were many

women using poetry both to contribute and express themselves. Therefore, including the revolution as time and background in which the original question is pursued does indeed seem like an adequate adaption to the thesis. This said, several Sudanese authors have highlighted⁵ the dangers of the narrative of the revolution being taken over by outsiders during the protests. The timeframe of this thesis ends with the beginning transition to a civilian government, most of the material was thus assembled during the ongoing revolution. Therefore, it is important to note that this overview of the protests should not be understood as a comprehensive analysis but an abstract of sources.

Since the country's independence in 1956, Sudan's history has been dominated by conflict and only rare episodes of peace. Among the oftentimes intersecting issues dividing Sudan – very literal in the secession of South Sudan in 2011 – are legacies from Egyptian and British colonial rule, unequal sharing of power and access to resources, clashes in identity projects, and a number of political and religious issues that have not least led to severe violence and civil war.⁶ As most of these issues remain unresolved, they inform the understanding of the Sudanese Uprising of 2018/ 2019. “[H]ow do we make the world understand the significance of the June 3 massacre, of the nationwide sit-ins, of all of this and why the Sudanese people are revolting in the first place, without recounting the story of the last 30 years under the Bashir regime?”⁷ Therefore, the revolution is neither basically about bread (as a symbol for the dire economic situation) as has been suggested by some, nor a “women’s awakening” as it was framed after the picture of protester Ālā’ Šalāḥ (*1996/97) went viral, nor a belated Arab Spring.⁸ “Almost every part of this revolution has a [sic] been a mirror reflection of Sudan's rich history of resistance; one can almost say that it is following tradition”⁹.

⁵ See Elhassan, Sara. 21.06.2019. “Inside Sudan's Viral Revolution: What You Need to Know”. In: *okayafrica*. URL: <https://www.okayafrica.com/inside-sudans-viral-revolution-what-you-need-to-know/>. Accessed: 16.07.2019.

⁶ See Sørbrø, Gunnar/ Ahmed, Abdel Ghaffar. 2013. “Introduction: Sudan’s Durable Disorder”. In: Sørbrø/ Ahmed (Ed.). *Sudan Divided: Continuing Conflict in a Contested State*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. p.1-24. p.18.

⁷ Elhassan. 21.06.2019.

⁸ See Elhassan, Sara. 13.06.2019. “Sudan’s Revolution Isn’t a Fluke—It’s Tradition”. In: *okayafrica*. URL: <https://www.okayafrica.com/sudans-revolution-isnt-a-fluke-its-tradition/>. Accessed: 17.07.2019.

⁹ Elhassan. 13.06.2019.

1.2.1. Retrospection: Sudanese Economy and Political Landscape before the December Protests

The policies of the Islamist regime of ʿUmār al-Bašīr, who had been in power since 1989 and shaped thirty years of Sudanese politics and economy, “have led to increasing fragmentation and a trend toward ‘ethnic territorialization’”¹⁰. The conflict and disorder stemming from this fragmentation, which has established a centre-periphery dichotomy, has in turn been instrumentalized by the regime to consolidate power.¹¹ “The outcome has been systematic marginalization and exclusion of the broad masses of nonnorthern groups from access to state power”¹² The ruling elites in Khartoum have tried (and mostly succeeded) since independence to centralize power under an Arabist/ Islamist ideology in the central northern states, while the periphery was dominated by neglect from the state and resistance to its policies and authoritarianism.¹³ The diverse conflicts, especially the civil war with the South¹⁴, put a strain on the economy as military expenditure skyrocketed at the expense of development.¹⁵ “[E]xtreme decades of civil war have weakened financial and institutional mechanisms for growth, while the loss of oil revenue from the South in 2011 exposed the weak diversification structure of the underlying Sudanese economy”¹⁶. This economy is mainly characterized by large patronage networks and unsustainable policies. The revenues stemming from oil could

¹⁰ See Sørnbø/ Ahmed. 2013. p.13.

¹¹ See Sørnbø/ Ahmed. 2013. p.10.

¹² El-Battahani, Atta. 2013. “The Post-Secession State in Sudan: Building Coalitions or Deepening Conflict?” In: Sørnbø/ Ahmed (Ed.). *Sudan Divided: Continuing Conflict in a Contested State*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. p.25-44. p.25.

¹³ See Sørnbø/ Ahmed. 2013. p.3.

¹⁴ The conflict between the “Arab” North and the “African” South has its roots already before independence but gained momentum with the question of the identity of the future independent Republic of Sudan. It erupted in two civil wars, which officially lasted from 1955-72 and 1983-2005, and led to the secession of the South by referendum in 2011. The South had gained regional autonomy in 1972, but with the implementation of Islamic law in 1983, the conflict broke out again with revived calls for separation. See Kramer, Robert et al. 2013. *Historical dictionary of the Sudan*. 4th Edition. Lanham: Scarecrow Press. p.394f. Briefly summarized, the South spearheaded by the Sudanese People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM) followed an alternative idea of the nation with the concept of a “New Sudan” based on a federate Southern Sudan constructed in opposition to the North as “African” and rather secular. “Thus two diametrically opposed forces dominated the period from the mid-1980’s to 2011, and the wars fuelled processes of disintegration”, Sørnbø/ Ahmed. 2013. p.12.

¹⁵ See El-Battahani. 2013. p.32f.

¹⁶ Ali, Ilham. 28.01.2019. “The Political Economy of Inflation in Sudan”. In: *Andariya Magazine*. URL: <https://www.andariya.com/post/The-Political-Economy-of-Inflation-in-Sudan>. Accessed: 13.08.2019.

only mask the regime's failure to diversify the economy until the secession of South Sudan.¹⁷ The oil money had been used to consolidate power through patronage networks and finance (re-) election campaigns and the military.¹⁸ While the North lost one-third of its territory with the South-Sudanese independence, it also lost three-quarters of its oil fields – yet essential export routes remain in the north.¹⁹ With the economy so heavily dependent on oil, this meant the implementation of severe austerity measures and in some cases the discontinuance of political patronage. It also meant that the income from oil no longer posed an alternative to the sanctions imposed on Sudan by the West.²⁰ “The resulting inflationary crisis seen today across Sudan is a direct result of government mismanagement and corruption”²¹. Though there were several protests in the past years, they were either violently smothered²² or soon silt up: “Periodically subsidies would get lifted and people would protest but they get quelled very quickly and very easily [...] and they [the protests] would die down very quickly”²³. However, skyrocketing prices for basic commodities such as bread, fuel and medicine and plans to lift all food and fuel subsidies in 2019²⁴ finally led to the outbreak of mass protests starting at the end of 2018.

1.2.2. The Outbreak of Protests in December 2018

Although protests started on the 13th of December 2018 in ad-Damāzīn, the burning of the National Congress Party's building in ʿAṭbara six days later marks the widely recognized

¹⁷ See Sørbø/ Ahmed. 2013. p.12. By 2002, 44.8% (\$805 million) of government revenues stemmed from oil and “were expected to increase to 0.5 barrels per day with a net cash flow of \$1.7 billion by 2009”, El-Battahani. 2013. p.33.

¹⁸ See Sidahmed, Alsir. 2013. „Oil and Politics in Sudan”. In: Sørbø/ Ahmed (Ed.). *Sudan Divided: Continuing Conflict in a Contested State*. New York: Palgrave MacMillan. p.103-120. p.116.

¹⁹ See Sidahmed. 2013. p.103.

²⁰ See Sidahmed. 2013. p.116f.

²¹ Ali. 28.01.2019.

²² See Ali. 28.01.2019.

²³ Hanrahan, Jake (Producer). 12.06.2019. “On the Ground for Sudan's Uprising”. Interview with Yousra Elbagir. On: *The Popular Front*. Nr. 45. Spotify. Link: <https://open.spotify.com/show/053vsnz2gfWX1bMeLto2QW?si=oG-GHDsCSQCXHcr8bbylew>. 02:39 – 02:48.

²⁴ See Ali. 28.01.2019.

beginning of what became known as the Sudan Uprising.²⁵ What started in the marginalized and often neglected periphery soon swept over the capital as well.²⁶ The framing as a “bread revolution”²⁷ was due to the triplication of bread prices overnight that was among the initial triggers of protest. “It wasn’t even just the economy [...] I would feel a suffocation in the air [...] people barely being able to survive economically [...] they stopped caring about the crack-down, they stopped caring [about] the consequences because they couldn’t survive either way”²⁸. In the government crackdown in the early days of the protests, at least 40 people were killed, others sustained serious injuries and more than 1000 people were arrested according to Amnesty International.²⁹ But the protests had become a revolution: “By mid-January 15 out of Sudan’s 18 states were part of the protest movement”³⁰.

1.2.3. “Tasqut Bas”

Despite the government’s retaliatory action, protestors kept on and the critique quickly became a systematic one. It seemed as if the brutal crackdown in Khartoum had shown people what had been going on in other parts of Sudan like South Kordofan or Darfur for years, was real and could happen in the capital as well.³¹ It is one of the characteristics of the centre-periphery divide in Sudan that for decades, violent conflict had mainly been carried out in the margins while the urban elites in the centre remained mostly untroubled: “The Sudanese

²⁵ See Diab, Ola. 16.06.2019. “Everything you need to know about the Sudan Revolution”. In: *500 Words Magazine*. URL: <http://500wordsmag.com/sudan-news/everything-you-need-to-know-about-the-sudan-revolution/>. Accessed: 08.08.2019.

²⁶ See Abbas, Reem. 28.01.2019. “Sudan’s protests: The revolt of the periphery”. In: *Al Jazeera*. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/sudan-protests-people-revolution-led-periphery-190127061619964.html>. Accessed: 20.08.2019.

²⁷ So-called „bread riots” had occurred throughout the Middle East and North Africa between 1984 and 1988 after reforms in the foreign debts of developing countries pushed by IMF and World Bank had led to severe cuts in subsidies for food and basic commodities. What followed was a structural food shortage, in many regions of the Sahel topped by a draught in 1984/5 that resulted in famine (it is estimated that in Ethiopia over a million people starved to death in this time). During the student protests against the Numayrī regime the bread riots were taken up as well with demands directed at the IMF and World Bank. See Schulze, Reinhard. 2016. *Geschichte der Islamischen Welt: Von 1900 bis zur Gegenwart*. München: C.H.Beck. p.378f.

²⁸ Hanrahan. 12.06.2019. 03:06 – 03:22 / 04:17-04:24.

²⁹ See. Amnesty International. 10.01.2019. “Sudan: Security officers pursue injured protestors into hospital”. In: *Amnesty.Org*. URL: <https://www.amnesty.org/en/latest/news/2019/01/sudan-security-officers-pursue-injured-protestors-into-hospital/>. Accessed: 15.08.2019.

³⁰ Abbas. 28.01.2019.

³¹ See Hanrahan. 12.06.2019. 08:35- ~09:10.

state has always had a factionalized core, an inner periphery of relative stability, and an outer periphery or frontier marked by violence”³². Jok (2007) identifies three basic issues that underly the various conflicts: “[...] racial policies that facilitate the control of power by the Arabs of the northern Province [...] the use of militant Islam and Arab cultural nationalism as mechanisms for cultural homogenization [...] [and] the silencing of the marginalized non-Arab majority of the population”³³. Opposition to this concept of nation-building has been answered with violence by the state, the deployment of militias and in turn, a radicalization of the periphery where civilians have served as a proxy to the fighting parties.³⁴ With the southern independence, marginalized states formerly accounted to the “north” in effect constitute a “new south”, where civil wars persist.³⁵ The wars have caused immense civilian suffering, with forceful dispossession of land, massive displacement, scorched-earth strategies³⁶, man-made famine and rape as weapons of war, the militarization of local ethnicities and genocide.³⁷

During the 2018/2019 Uprising, “Tasqut Bas” which roughly translates to “just fall, that’s all” became the motto and preferred chant of the people, along with other slogans like “we are all Darfur”.³⁸ The socio-political stance of the protests is furthermore also represented by the symbolic use of the former blue-yellow-green flag of the early days after Independence on Social Media: it “symbolizes rejection of the current pan-Arab flag as it represents pan-Arabism ideologies and the Arabisation of the Afro-Arab Sudan”³⁹.

³² Sørbo / Ahmed. 2013. p.20.

³³ Jok, Madut Jok. 2007. *Sudan: Race, Religion, and Violence*. Oxford: OneWorld Publications. p.277. It is important to note that at the time of this publication, South Sudan was not yet independent. As South Sudan, constructed as “African” and secular, is in opposition to the above-mentioned centralization of power under Islamist/ Arab/ Northern rule, the secession can also be seen as “trading territory for state power”, See El-Battahani. 2013. p.42. With the secession, the majorities have shifted.

³⁴ See Jok. 2007. p.277f.

³⁵ See El-Battahani. 2013. p.38f. These states and regions of conflict, that form a crescent around the riverine centre, are most prominently Darfur, the Nuba Mountains in South Kordofan and Blue Nile state. It should however be noted that these conflicts are in addition fuelled by neighbouring conflicts and international interests of various kinds in the region (oil, radical Islam etc.). See Jok. 2007. p.282f.

³⁶ The complete destruction of anything that could be useful to the enemy.

³⁷ See Jok. 2007. 288f.

³⁸ See Suleiman, Mahmoud A. 20.01.2019. “Tasqut Bass is the buzzword and a slogan of the Sudanese uprising”. In: *Sudan Tribune*. URL: <http://sudantribune.com/spip.php?article66943>. Accessed: 20.08.2019.

³⁹ 500 Words Magazine. 27.12.2018. “Why is the First and Former Flag of Sudan Resurfacing on Social Media?”. In: *500 Words Magazine*. URL: http://500wordsmag.com/sudan-news/why-is-the-first-and-former-flag-of-sudan-resurfacing-on-social-media/?fbclid=IwAR01pKmKjELIGe3i_GyLOWFLuY14Jkms3oFIO8KhToVdFB-VaaN69hnYQobc. Accessed: 20.08.2019.

An umbrella association of different trade unions called the Sudanese Professionals Association (Tağammu^ῥ l-Mahaniyyīn as-Sudāniyyīn, SPA)⁴⁰ started to spearhead the revolt and on the 1st of January 2019, the Declaration for Freedom and Change was introduced that called for president ^ῥUmār al-Bašīr to be replaced.⁴¹

Social Media proved to be an important instrument in organizing and spreading reliable news among the masses.⁴² While it was professionals spearheading the Uprising, they quickly became one of the main targets, with Security Forces targeting hospitals and attacking doctors and previously injured protesters seeking medical care with teargas and live ammunition⁴³: “[the] thing they did was make hospitals unsafe spaces. [...] one thing one of the doctors I interviewed said was their whole strategy is to cripple the doctors because if they cripple the doctors [...] then they’ll cripple the protests”⁴⁴.

By February, although there had been casualties and hundreds were arrested and still the protests did not stop, Bašīr became desperate, called out a nationwide state of emergency and replaced his government.⁴⁵ But the protests continued, and finally gained broader attention by international media with the image of Ālā’ Šalāḥ as “icon of the revolution” going viral.⁴⁶ Her chants (as a representation of the protestors), however, also opened up a discussion about the nature of the revolution, as seen in an argument by Nizār Būlahia in an article for al-Quds al-^ῥArabī, who cited her reciting a verse during the protests to make the point that some protesters were misguided in directing their anger against religion instead of the regime: “‘They stole us in the name of religion ... They killed us in the name of religion ... They burned us in the name of religion ... They imprisoned us in the name of religion’, then

⁴⁰ The SPA has formally existed since October 2016, when three of Sudan’s largest professional associations (The Central Committee of Sudanese Doctors, The Sudanese Journalists Network, and The Democratic Lawyers Association) agreed on an alliance charter. Previous attempts to form such an umbrella organization (2012, 2014) failed due to regime opposition. Unions have been historically been very active in Sudan. See Sudanese Professionals Association. (No date). *About us*. URL: <https://www.sudaneseprofessionals.org/en/about-us/>. Accessed: 01.02.2020.

⁴¹ See Copnell, James. 2019. “Sudan’s Third Revolution”. In: *History Today*. Vol. 69/7. Online Archive. URL: <https://www.historytoday.com/archive/behind-times/sudan%E2%80%99s-third-revolution-0>. Accessed: 12.08.2019.

⁴² See Ahmed, AlRumaisa. 01.05.2019. “Social Media and the December 2018 Uprising”. In: *Andariya Magazine*. URL: <https://www.andariya.com/post/Social-Media-and-the-December-2018-Uprising>. Accessed: 12.08.2019.

⁴³ See Amnesty International. 10.01.2019.

⁴⁴ Hanrahan. 12.06.2019. 23:42 – 23:55.

⁴⁵ See Copnell. 2019.

⁴⁶ See Malik. 24.04.2019.

corrected it and added, ‘but religion is innocent today’⁴⁷. He argues that “[t]hey [media as well as certain actors within and outside the country] want to invent an imaginary conflict between those peoples⁴⁸ and their religion, and limit tyranny not to the nature of regimes, but to the essence of religion”⁴⁹, which speaks to how the protests were at times represented in Arabic media.

1.2.4. The beginning of the sit-in in Al Qeyada and ousting of al-Bašīr

On the 6th of April – heavily symbolic as the 34-year-anniversary of the overthrow of Ġaʿfar Muḥammad an-Numayrī⁵⁰ (in power 1969-85) as a result of the Second Sudanese Revolution in 1985⁵¹ - the SPA called on the people for a million to march to the Sudanese Armed Force’s Headquarters. “[...] by evening it was this mass throbbing crowd in front of the military headquarters”⁵² that would not leave again. “It was [...] just people who’d come together for something they felt was bigger than them”⁵³. Following the march, protestors camped on Al

⁴⁷ Poetry chanted by Ālā’ Šalāḥ, as cited in Būlahia, Nizār. 16.04.2019. “Al-Ġazā’ir wa as-Sudān: hal ṭāritā ‘alā ad-Dīn ‘am ‘alā al-Mustabdīn?” In: *Al-Quds al-‘Arabī*. URL: <https://www.alquds.co.uk/%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AC%D8%B2%D8%A7%D8%A6%D8%B1-%D9%88%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%B3%D9%88%D8%AF%D8%A7%D9%86-%D9%87%D9%84-%D8%AB%D8%A7%D8%B1%D8%AA%D8%A7-%D8%B9%D9%84%D9%89-%D8%A7%D9%84%D8%AF%D9%8A%D9%86-%D8%A3%D9%85/>. Accessed: 04.03.2020. Translated from Arabic.

⁴⁸ He was comparing the Sudanese protests to those simultaneously happening in Algeria as well as to protests in Egypt and Tunisia during the Arab Spring. See Būlahia. 16.04.2019.

⁴⁹ Būlahia. 16.04.2019. Translated from Arabic.

⁵⁰ Numayrī (1930-2009) came to power in 1969 after a military coup that overthrew the civilian government (1965-69) of Ismāʿīl al-ʿAzharī. His years in power are characterized by a shift from socialist reform towards Islamization. Initially, he tried to transform the Sudanese economy in a project of nationalization with state-led socialist reforms, planning to develop agriculture and industry, a project that mostly failed due to corruption and inefficiency and left Sudan with large debts. The “national reconciliation” in 1977 with Islamist parties lay the groundwork for their later ascent to power. In 1979, economic pressure forced his government to implement severe austerity measures, and he sought to quell the intensifying discontent of the population through an alliance with the Islamists. The introduction of sharia law in 1983 can be seen as a measure of controlling the people. He was ousted by a popular uprising in 1985. See El-Battahani. 2013. p.29f.

⁵¹ Numayrī’s mismanagement of economy and political measures of control brought about his own downfall. In the dire economic situation (see also the earlier mentioned bread riots) student protests in Khartoum, which were answered by violence from Security Forces, sparked wider protests in the rest of the country, soon led by urban professionals, demanding the restauration of democracy and basic human rights as well as an end to the destructive economic policies and Western influence. See Berridge, W.J. 2015. *Civil uprisings in modern Sudan: the 'Khartoum Springs' of 1964 and 1985*. London: Bloomsbury. p.62f.

⁵² Hanrahan. 12.06.2019. 40:37 - 40:42.

⁵³ Hanrahan. 12.06.2019. 54:21 - 54:29.

Qeyada square in a mass sit-in that lasted for almost two months and was only dispersed by force.⁵⁴ On the third day, after nightly attacks by Security Forces, the Army openly showed their support of the people.⁵⁵ Under pressure from this massive movement that encompassed all walks of life and periphery as well as the capital, ʿUmār al-Bašīr was ousted by a coup d'état on 11th April after 30 years in power. A few days later he was transferred to a maximum-security prison in Khartoum.⁵⁶

1.2.5. The TMC's grasp for power

The first head of the newly found Transitional Military Council (TMC) rolled quickly – figuratively speaking – when it became clear that the protesters would not simply accept the former vice president as their new interim head of state.⁵⁷ Protests intensified yet again and General Aḥmad ʿAwaḍ b. ʿAuf had to step down after merely one day.⁵⁸ He was then replaced by ʿAbd al-Fattāḥ al-Burhān, the former Inspector General ⁵⁹ with his second in command, Muḥammad Ḥamdān Daqalū (Dagalo), nicknamed “Ḥimīdtī” - a key player in the escalation of violence against protestors. Ḥimīdtī is also infamous as the commander of the Janjaweed⁶⁰, a paramilitary militia that has been committing atrocities against the non-Arab population of Darfur for years and has in recent years also been deployed to fight alongside the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen.⁶¹

⁵⁴ See Diab. 16.06.2019.

⁵⁵ See Hanrahan. 12.06.2019. 41:20 - 41:40.

⁵⁶ See Diab. 16.06.2019.

⁵⁷ See Hanrahan. 12.06.2019. 48:37 - 49:00.

⁵⁸ See Diab. 16.06.2019.

⁵⁹ See Hanrahan. 12.06.2019. 49:00 – 49:30.

⁶⁰ The so-called Janjaweed are an Arab militia armed by the government to fight the mainly non-Arab rebels in the conflict in Darfur, recruited from *Abbala* Arabs, a group attributed with herding camels. See Tubiana, Jérôme. 2013. “Darfur after Doha”. In: Sørbø/ Ahmed (Ed.). *Sudan Divided: Continuing Conflict in a Contested State*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. p.161-183. p.168. “[R]ather than looking for rebels these militias simply laid waste: shooting down whoever crossed their path, torching homes, and looting. These raiders were given a popular name derived from an old western Sudanese epithet for bandits: Janjaweed or ‘devils on horseback’”, Jok. 2007. p.123.

⁶¹ See Burke, Jason. 29.05.2019. “Hemedti: the feared commander pulling the strings in Sudan”. In: *The Guardian*. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/may/29/hemedti-the-feared-commander-pulling-the-strings-in-sudan>. Accessed: 12.08.2019.

When several Janjaweed leaders grew critical of the government in Khartoum, Ḥimīdtī remained loyal to the Bašīr regime and was thus picked in 2013 to lead the newly-formed Rapid Support Forces (RSF)⁶² under the command of the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and administered by the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), “an enhanced paramilitary force [...] [formed] in an effort to retake control of the Janjaweed”⁶³. The RSF, however, grew more and more uncontrollable and “began exporting Darfur’s violence to central Sudan [...] [T]he force became Bashir’s praetorian guard, whose role was to protect the president from protests or from any coup attempt by the army—it turned into a third pole of power within Sudan’s security apparatus, rival to both army and intelligence”⁶⁴.

In the early days of the interim military council, it was yet unclear where several of its key military players stood in relation to the protesters. There were reports of Ḥimīdtī refusing orders by al-Bašīr to violently disperse the sit-in area previous to Bašīr’s ousting.⁶⁵ “Hemedti literally framed himself as the man who saved the revolution”⁶⁶. And at least in the beginning, it seemed as if that framing did work.

At the end of April Ḥimīdtī warned protesters not to cause any more “chaos” hinting that otherwise, the military would deploy force.⁶⁷ By this time around 10.000 Rapid Support Forces, mainly comprised of Janjaweed militiamen were observed in and around the Khartoum area.⁶⁸

While there were talks on how to proceed with the Transitional Government and eventually the hand-over to a civilian government, protesters in the sit-in area refused to leave, not yet satisfied with the turnout of the revolution. At that point the area in Khartoum still seemed to be relatively safe, however, there were reports of brutal crackdowns in other regions of Sudan like Darfur.⁶⁹ When RSF militiamen tried to clear out barricades on the 8th of May,

⁶² Al-Quwāt ad-Daʿm as-Sarīf.

⁶³ See Tubiana, Jérôme. 14.05.2019. “The Man Who Terrorized Darfur Is Leading Sudan’s Supposed Transition”. In: *Foreign Policy*. URL: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/05/14/man-who-terrorized-darfur-is-leading-sudan-s-supposed-transition-hemeti-rsf-janjaweed-bashir-khartoum/>. Accessed: 01.03.2020.

⁶⁴ Tubiana. 14.05.2019.

⁶⁵ See Burke. 29.05.2019.

⁶⁶ Hanrahan. 12.06.2019. 50:12 - 50:18.

⁶⁷ See Associated Press. 30.04.2019. “Sudan’s military rulers to protesters: No more ‘chaos’”. In: *AP News*. URL: <https://apnews.com/4596efd655fa4d42a7c23f1b4c581b4a>. Accessed: 12.08.2019.

⁶⁸ See Burke. 29.05.2019.

⁶⁹ See Hanrahan. 12.06.2019. ~58:00 – 59:00.

violence escalated again with six people getting killed and 170 injured.⁷⁰ Nevertheless, “[...] people still struggled to believe that the RSF had brazenly opened fire at protesters”⁷¹ and negotiations were kept up.

1.2.6. 3rd of June massacre in Khartoum

On the 29th day of Ramadan, in the early hours of June 3rd, RSF and other paramilitary forces violently dispersed the sit-in area.⁷² „It was the RSF that led the murderous crackdown on the protesters' sit-ins. The fact that the regular military forces had to withdraw to their barracks is quite telling about who really holds power in Sudan right now”⁷³. The whole extent of what happened on June 3rd however only came to light over one month later, when the internet was restored on the 9th of July and flooded with footage of that day. It had been shut down since the 4th of June following a Media ban.⁷⁴ “They [RSF] went to the extremes to make sure the Sit-in area was emptied”⁷⁵. Casualties can only be estimated since until today people are still missing after the violent dispersal of Al Qeyada. More than 100 people were killed, over 300 injured.⁷⁶ Other sources speak of at least 200 deaths following the attacks on protesters.⁷⁷ “At least 40 bodies were pulled out of the Nile River where paramilitary forces disposed of dead bodies. In addition, residents reported rapes and robberies at the hands of paramilitary forces. Others have been arrested, sexually abused, brutally beaten and even urinated on”⁷⁸. The fact that weighted bodies were dumped in the Nile by RSF and the internet was soon shut down completely, points towards the measures being taken to at least partially cover up what happened on 3rd of June: “[...] in reality, the death toll is probably much higher

⁷⁰ See Hanrahan. 12.06.2019. 59:10 – 62:15.

⁷¹ Hanrahan. 12.06.2019. 62:26 - 62:30.

⁷² See 500 Words Magazine. 10.07.2019. “Return of Internet in Sudan Reveals More of 3 June Massacre”. In: *500 Words Magazine*. URL: <https://500wordsmag.com/sudan-news/return-of-internet-in-sudan-reveals-more-of-3-june-massacre/>. Accessed: 13.08.2019.

⁷³ Albhai, Khalid. 07.06.2019. “No, it's not over for the Sudanese revolution”. In: *Al Jazeera*. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/sudanese-revolution-190607082209760.html>. Accessed: 12.08.2019.

⁷⁴ See 500 Words Magazine. 10.07.2019.

⁷⁵ Hanrahan. 12.06.2019. 76:29 – 76:35.

⁷⁶ See Diab. 16.06.2019.

⁷⁷ See Mdoda. 12.06.2019.

⁷⁸ Diab. 16.06.2019.

and we may never know the exact number, as the criminal forces who committed the massacre have taken measures to cover up their crimes”⁷⁹.

1.2.7. Civil Disobedience, Internet Blackout, and Social Media Campaign

Mere days after the violent dispersal in Khartoum, RSF and other militias attacked civilians in the village of Deleij in Darfur, killing at least 17 people and burning down over a hundred houses.⁸⁰ With most coverage on Khartoum, it is important not to forget that there were protests and crackdowns in the periphery as well, where the protests had originally started.

Although the sit-in in Khartoum was dispersed and the people in shock, they would not stop but instead proclaimed nationwide civil disobedience – large parts of Sudan became a sit-in.⁸¹ The violence against protesters continued, but without internet access, it became difficult to verify numbers and reports.

One day after the violent dispersal of the sit-in area, the internet was completely shut down. However, the protesters found ways to skirt the regime’s measures to control media and communication “organizing through bulk SMS and leaflets, walking door to door to raise awareness about civil disobedience”⁸² and running a TV Channel called *Sudan Bukra* (Sudan Tomorrow) to inform people about ongoing events.⁸³ As activist and artist Khalid Albhai noted in an article for *Al Jazeera*, the diaspora was “also doing its duty, amplifying reports from the ground and campaigning abroad”⁸⁴. During the internet shutdown, a world-wide Social Media campaign run by the Sudanese diaspora turned the internet “blue for Sudan” (#blueforSudan): the hashtag had started when activist Muḥammad Maṭṭar was killed and his friends turned to Social Media, remembering him by his favourite colour blue.⁸⁵ The

⁷⁹ Albhai. 07.06.2019.

⁸⁰ See Al Jazeera. 13.06.2019. “Sudan: UN says it confirmed 17 deaths in Darfur region violence”. In: *Al Jazeera*. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/sudan-confirmed-17-deaths-darfur-region-violence-190613144041672.html>. Accessed: 19.08.2019.

⁸¹ See Hanrahan. 12.06.2019. ~ 77:45- 78:05.

⁸² Albhai. 07.06.2019.

⁸³ See Albhai. 07.06.2019.

⁸⁴ Albhai. 07.06.2019.

⁸⁵ See Elbagir, in: Colorsxstudios. 29.07.2019. “Yousra Elbagir recounts the story behind #BlueForSudan”. In: *Colorsxstudio* Instagram account. Link: https://www.instagram.com/tv/B0gpQAIExN/?utm_source=ig_web_copy_link. Accessed: 21.08.2019.

restoration of landlines as well as mobile internet came on the 9th of July through a court order as the result of Sudanese lawyer ⁵Abd al-⁵Azīz al-Ḥassan's lawsuit challenging the shut-down.⁸⁶ And yet, the protests remained peaceful although there were reports of possibly undercover RS Forces trying to encourage people to take up arms:⁸⁷ "There are already reports that security forces and the RSF are leaving weapons behind to encourage civilians to arm themselves and give them [RSF] an excuse to launch an even more brutal repressive campaign. But the Sudanese revolutionaries know better."⁸⁸ Indeed, accounts of the revolution indicate no violence on the side of the protesters.

1.2.8. The shooting of students overshadows the agreement

While criticized by many, an agreement was reached on the 17th of July between the TMC and FFC "to establish a joint 11-member military-civilian sovereign council that will rule the country by rotation for a period of at least three years and three months"⁸⁹. Additionally, the parties agreed to a constitutional declaration on the 3rd of August to clarify the power and relationship of the different branches of the transitional government.⁹⁰ However, many issues remain, like the investigation of the massacre and the atrocities committed. An Investigation Report into the June 3rd massacre by a committee of inquiry that supposedly "carried out its work independently and without any influence from any side"⁹¹ was rejected by the opposition. It claims to be unable to identify those who carried out the atrocities, does not disclose a "true" number of victims and denies any allegations of rape, burning of bodies or dumping them in the river.⁹² The report was followed by further protests.⁹³ "There is little to be expected from a power structure that utilized the same militia responsible for the war

⁸⁶ See 500 Words Magazine. 10.07.2019.

⁸⁷ See Hanrahan. 12.06.2019. 87:05 – 88:00.

⁸⁸ Albhai. 07.06.2019.

⁸⁹ Diab. 16.06.2019.

⁹⁰ Diab. 16.06.2019.

⁹¹ Attorney General Abdallah Ahmed Abdallah, cited in: Dabanga. 22.07.2019. "Investigation report on June 3 massacre submitted". In: *Radio Dabanga*. URL: <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/investigation-report-on-june-3-massacre-submitted>. Accessed: 25.08.2019.

⁹² See Sudan Tribune. 28.07.2019. "Sudanese opposition rejects Attorney General's report on 3 June massacre". In: *Sudan Tribune*. URL: <http://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article67847>. Accessed: 25.08.2019.

⁹³ See Sudan Tribune. 28.07.2019.

crimes in Darfur to put down the peaceful protests”⁹⁴ In fact, during protests in the city of al-Ubayyid⁹⁵ in North Kordofan, four high school students and one medic were shot by Security forces during protest rallies on the 29th of July.⁹⁶ The power-sharing deal was finalized on the 17th of August.⁹⁷

1.2.9. Women in the protests

Iconic images of women in recent revolutions often have become the symbol of the respective protests, its aspirations as well as its failures.⁹⁸ Think the image of “The Lady in Red” in the Gezi-Park-Protests of 2013, the young black woman opposing rows of policemen during Black-Lives-Matter protests in Baton Rouge in 2016 – or now the image of the “kandake” in Sudan chanting to the crowds. “It was the image that finally drew the eyes of the world to Sudan’s revolution: a young woman, swaddled in white, standing on top of a car with her hand aloft and a finger raised in rebuke [...] dressed in homage to a generation of Nubian warrior queens [...] She became an icon of the protest movement and of womanhood on the frontline”⁹⁹. Suddenly there was a lot of focus on “the women leading the Sudanese Revolution” as if they had just emerged from the shadows of history. While the problem is not the focus on the many women participating in the Sudan Revolution per se, the framing and narrative often were “that women participating in the revolution were somehow an exceptional

⁹⁴ Mdoda, Zama. 12.06.2019. “The Sudan Revolution: This is how it got here”. In: *Afropunk*. URL: <https://afropunk.com/2019/06/the-sudan-revolution-this-is-how-it-got-here/>. Accessed: 12.08.2019.

⁹⁵ Also: El Obeid.

⁹⁶ See Al Jazeera. 29.07.2019. “Four students killed in El-Obeid ‘massacre’: Sudan opposition”. In: *Al Jazeera*. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/07/sudan-school-children-shot-dead-el-obeid-massacre-190729184528614.html>. Accessed: 21.08.2019.

⁹⁷ See Reuters. 17.08.2019. “Sudan opposition and military sign final power-sharing accord”. In: *The Guardian*. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/aug/17/sudan-opposition-group-and-military-sign-power-sharing-accord>. Accessed: 25.08.2019.

⁹⁸ See Lisiak, Agata A. 2014. “Women in Recent Revolutionary Iconography”. In: Lisiak/ Smolenski (Ed.). *What Do Ideas Do?* Vienna: IWM Junior Visiting Fellows’ Conferences, Vol. 33. Retrieved from: IWM Institute. URL: <https://www.iwm.at/publications/5-junior-visiting-fellows-conferences/vol-xxxiii/women-in-recent-revolutionary-iconography/>. Accessed: 26.06.2018.

⁹⁹ Malik. 24.04.2019.

thing, framing their political activity as if they had just come out of purdah¹⁰⁰¹⁰¹. Behind this one iconic picture that tried to distil a multitude of narratives from women of all walks of life into one image, there are generations of Sudanese women who have participated in revolutions and contributed to political and cultural life in manifold ways. To understand what role poetry, music, and spoken word art play in this, it is important to deconstruct this simplified narrative. This will be discussed more in-depth in the theoretical part of the thesis.

1.2.10. Art in the protests

“One upshot of the uprising though has been the geyser of colorful and vibrant artwork that has dominated both the streets and Sudanese social media”¹⁰². After the protests started and especially during the sit-in, it was like there was an explosion of art on Social Media: “social media platforms were flooded with digital collages, political cartoons, and drawings echoing the slogans of the protests”¹⁰³. There were music and poetry as well. It became obvious how very important art seemed to be for contemporary political expression. “Artistic expression—be it poetry, music, or paintings—has for decades held an important spot among Sudanese society”¹⁰⁴. As Sondra Hale has already observed during the 1960s and '70s in the greater Khartoum area, “[t]here are times when the ‘art’ of Sudan seems to take on the quality of a newsreel, but generally it is the song of social experience. Most apparent in Sudanese art – particularly in music/poetry – is the function of expression of subjective involvements with contemporary events”¹⁰⁵. With the revolution as a catalyst for artistic political expression

¹⁰⁰ Purdah is a Persian term that literally means “curtain”. The term describes the “practice of secluding women from contact with men outside of the immediate family. This may be accomplished through virtual imprisonment in separate quarters in the home, veiling in public, and the provision of segregated public facilities”, White, Elizabeth. 1977. “Purdah”. In: *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, Vol. 2/1. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. p.31-42. p.31.

¹⁰¹ Malik. 24.04.2019.

¹⁰² Dahir, Abdi Latif. 12.07.2019. “Sudan’s street protests have inspired another revolution—in art”. In: *Quartz Africa*. URL: <https://qz.com/africa/1664733/sudans-protests-inspire-art-graffiti-revolution/>. Accessed: 26.08.2019.

¹⁰³ Elkogali Häggström, Issraa. 02.04.2019. “Art for the Revolution: How Artists Have Changed the Protests in Sudan”. In: *Kultwatch*. URL: <https://kultwatch.se/2019/04/02/art-for-the-revolution-how-artists-have-become-key-for-the-protests-in-sudan/>. Accessed: 26.08.2019.

¹⁰⁴ Dahir. 12.07.2019.

¹⁰⁵ Hale, Sondra. 1970. „Arts in a Changing Society: Northern Sudan”. In: *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, Vol.1/1. California: University of California Digital Library. p.64-79. p.65. Quotation marks in original.

and the following reciprocal effect of both fuelling one another, including the role of poetry during the revolution into the wider scope of this thesis seemed important.

1.3. Research question(s)

With the traditional status of women's poetry and the Sudanese Uprising in mind, in which women are a driving force, I want to focus on this intersection of traditional functions of poetry, women in social movements and the power of language during revolution. Therefore, the following question is central to this thesis:

How do Sudanese women use poetry in contemporary society and political movements?

Although the underlying assumption of this question is that there is the political component of women's poetry in Sudan, this aspect also remains to be tested against the interviewee's statements. In more detail, the research will be guided by the following sub-questions:

- *Which functions does poetry fulfil regarding (political) expression for women in Sudan?*
- *Which functions does poetry fulfil for the Sudanese diaspora, especially during the Sudanese Uprising?*
- *How powerful is (women's) poetry for social movements and how is that power constituted?*

1.4. State of the Art

In general, it can be said that literature on women in Sudan is relatively scarce and a lot of more in depth-research apart from conflict and development research predates this century. Here the anthology by Kenyon/ University of Khartoum (1987) can be mentioned, with relevant contributions on women in medieval Sudan by Kheir and women's folk poetry by Ahmed. The role of women in the ancient Sudanese kingdoms is furthermore comprehensively discussed in the works of Fluehr-Lobban (1998) and Lohwasser (1999). Within Sudan, the academic landscape for gender studies is dominated by the Aḥfād University for Women, with prominent voices like Badri (2006). Although women have been and continue to be very active in political movements, they are within the literature often subsumed under the respective movement's history. For an understanding of Sudanese feminism, however, the

continuous work of Hale (1996, 2015) remains of importance, with additional, more recent research on women and gender justice by Halim (2009), Islamic and Islamist feminism by Tønnessen (2010, 2011) and Pan-African aspects of feminism by Osman (2014). While a lot of research has framed Sudanese women mainly in terms of conflict and peacebuilding, Abbas (2010, 2014) gives an understanding of how women are stakeholders and participants in different levels of the political arena. Regarding women and poetry in Sudan, the majority of research seems to focus on the Ḥakamāt and the role of folk poetry. The most recent, in depth-account is a book with a focus on Ḥakamāt in Darfur by Musa (2018), as well as a dissertation by Adam (2013, 2016). How poetry is used politically and has the power to shape history is still relevantly discussed by Muhammad (1996). Yet, the contribution of women to the poetical landscape of Sudanese literature apart from traditional folk poetry hardly finds mentioning. A very recent anthology of Modern Sudanese Poetry by Babikir (2019) is a first step of filling that void. For insights on Sudanese youth movements, grassroots activism and the use of Social Media in protests of 2011 and 2013 see Hale and Kadoda (2015); furthermore the articles by Hofheinz (2017) and Ali (2019) who as well explore the role of Social Media and the political potential of youth and women's groups online. Although a systematic analysis of the Sudanese revolution of 2018/2019 is yet to be awaited, the voices of Yousra Elbagir and Sara Elhassan should be mentioned in providing comprehensive and in-depth information and analysis.

1.5. Chapter Overview

After having illustrated the research project, its evolution and embedding in the Sudan Uprising, I will move on to present the research design in the following chapter. The method and tools for analysis will be explained in detail and difficulties encountered during the research process reflected. Additionally, I will discuss ethical concerns regarding the research and share reflections on my positioning as a researcher. The theoretical part of this thesis is divided into two parts: First, women's history in Sudan is addressed, with a focus on the *kanakes* and queens of the historic kingdoms and women's movements in the 20th century, especially since Sudan's independence. This discussion leads to notions on contemporary feminist thought and women's political participation, both conventionally and in civil society.

Additionally, relevant concepts of diaspora and previous findings on the Sudanese diaspora are outlined. The second part of the theoretical framework is dedicated to shedding light on the evolution of women's poetry in oral and written traditions and aspects of language and power. Specifically, I will briefly examine the connection between language and power in Sudan and discuss language in revolution with regard to findings from the Arab Spring in Egypt. This is followed by the analytical part of this thesis, in which the interviews are analysed in-depth based on categories derived from the empirical data. Subsequently, results are discussed and referenced back to prior findings in the literature. The thesis is finalized by further reflections on the research, the conclusion and an outlook to further connecting factors and needs for research.

2. Research Design

2.1. Method

Originally, the idea was to conduct field research in Greater Khartoum for approximately three months in summer 2019. Yet, with the volatile situation in Sudan during the months of preparation in mind, there had to be a Plan B in place, in case the field research would not be possible after all. Eventually, I did have to rely on alternative ways to conduct interviews. Still, I wanted to stick with the original research design as closely as possible. Thanks to Social Media and messaging apps, personal interviews via Skype or WhatsApp seemed to be the best alternative, as I still wanted to include voices from Sudan and not exclusively from the diaspora. Therefore, the final research design of this thesis is an adaption of the planned field trip. The thesis at hand accounts as an explorative study into a field (contemporary women's poetry in Sudan) that has not been covered extensively in a systematic approach. It should allow for preliminary insights and first impressions concerning the topic without a claim to completeness. With the limited resources and framework for a master's thesis, only so much ground can be covered, and I am aware that there are yet many voices to be heard concerning women's poetry in Sudan. Nevertheless, what an explorative study can provide is a basis of systematic findings on which further studies can be carried out. Due to the character of the research, the thesis is heavily dependent on the interview partners who will mainly determine the relevant categories. The chosen method, therefore, does not rely on preconceived categories (although findings from related fields will be considered) but deduces them from the compiled data.¹⁰⁶ It is also important to note that the method is based on a feminist framework, which means there are certain implications as to what role the interview partners play in this research, as discussed in the following subchapters.

¹⁰⁶ See WPGS. (no date). „Explorative Forschung und hypothesenprüfende Forschung: Das Forschungsziel“. In: *WPGS (Wirtschaftspsychologische Gesellschaft)*. URL: <https://wpgs.de/fachtexte/forschungsdesigns/explorative-forschung-hypothesenpruefende-forschung-forschungsziel>. Accessed: 30.08.2019.

2.1.1. Field

While the field originally would have encompassed the wider area of Khartoum and its sister cities, it becomes blurrier with the necessary adaptations. Since the main criterion for interview partners was either to be a Sudanese citizen or part of the Sudanese diaspora abroad, the field is very broad in terms of region. The research design at hand meant including Social Media as a research instrument, which therefore incorporates the virtual sphere as well. This means that the field can be loosely described as “Sudan” and “Sudanese diaspora” with the conjunctive element of Social Media. In practice, the narrower field is derived from the participants of this research who are at the core of it. It was lucky that those who were interested in participating come from different regions in Sudan as well as different countries in the diaspora.

2.1.2. Interviews

I chose the method of interviewing because I wanted to centre the voices of those at the heart of this research. Also, it seemed to be the most adequate of methods, allowing “access to the observations of others [...]. We can learn [...] about people’s interior experiences [...], what people perceived and how they interpreted their perceptions”¹⁰⁷. Especially in the given context, the own interpretations of participants are of high importance. The aim is to come to a multifaceted description that integrates diverse perspectives and bridges them intersubjectively.¹⁰⁸

I conducted 11 interviews with ten participants between January and the end of August of 2019 that inform the analysis. Most interviews were held during June, July, and August via WhatsApp or Telegram call and took approximately half an hour¹⁰⁹. In one case a personal interview was possible. Interviews were conducted in English and in one case, German¹¹⁰. Although English was not a prerequisite for interviews, in general, when Arabic would have

¹⁰⁷ Weiss, Robert. 1995. *Learning from strangers: the art and method of qualitative interview studies*. New York: The Free Press. p.1.

¹⁰⁸ See Weiss. 1995. p.10.

¹⁰⁹ This time includes only the recorded interview, not the additional conversation time.

¹¹⁰ In this case, direct quotes are translated into English for the thesis.

been an alternative, interview partners' level of language skills in English for an in-depth conversation over the phone simply exceeded my skills in Arabic dialect and more specifically, Sudanese dialect, and thus using English allowed for a more detailed interview.

Since I took an inductive, explorative approach, I conducted qualitative interviews, which means interview questions were rather open.¹¹¹ I followed a guideline of openly formulated questions that allow for comparability yet leave space for the individual interviewee to share their specific perspectives, with me only guiding the respective account. This openness of the approach also meant that the interview duration varied highly, depending on how freely and how extensively the interview partner was ready to share their perspective. In one case that meant having a follow-up interview, in another, resuming the recording after a casual conversation. Therefore, interviews can be anything between ten minutes or over an hour. With the consent of the participants, interviews were recorded for analysis, these recordings constitute the main set of data for this research. They were transcribed focusing on content, which was the basis for analysis. Before the interview, I informed participants about the research and premises of participation¹¹² and they had the chance to ask me questions. After the interview, there was always the opportunity for further conversation, feedback or questions. Impressions from these non-recorded conversations inform the thesis as well, yet without linking them to a certain interview/ interview partner as they are not part of the actual interview.

2.1.3. Participants and recruitment

Ten interview partners informed this research, nine of whom are female and one male. Participants self-identified as poets and writers and are either Sudanese or part of the Sudanese diaspora.¹¹³

What changed the most with the alternative research design, was the recruitment of potential participants. I no longer could rely on meeting potential interview partners at poetry slams

¹¹¹ See Weiss. 1995. p.8.

¹¹² Like voluntariness, consent, anonymity.

¹¹³ There was one case in which I, unfortunately, had to exclude an interview due to a misunderstanding of the participant's nationality with no direct ties to Sudan.

or related events that by default would have assembled people with an interest in poetry and who would have reflected the poetry scene in Khartoum. Instead, I had to rely on a snowball technique¹¹⁴ with three different components to recruit interview partners: firstly, through a network of people familiar with the field I had established during the months of preparation, as well as from my first visit to Sudan in 2016. This word of mouth recruitment proved to be very effective. Secondly, I used Social Media like YouTube, Facebook, and Instagram to gather some impressions and contact potential interview partners. Especially after the revolution had started and the diaspora took to Social Media, it was a very helpful tool for recruitment. In both cases, referrals by previous contacts or interview partners were an important component.¹¹⁵ And lastly, I shared a call for participants, again on Social Media (Instagram and Facebook); in addition to directly contacting people, this provided for the opportunity to contact me. However, although I was able to recruit one interview partner through this online-shared call, it was the least successful method.

The criteria for inclusion were the following: Sudanese citizen or part of the Sudanese diaspora, female, involved in some form of written or spoken art which could mean either poetry (writing, spoken, slam), prose (e.g. short stories) or song lyrics. Participants can, therefore, be seen as a *panel of knowledgeable informants*¹¹⁶ who, given their involvement in the topic of written art, account as experts. At the same time, it is also a sample of convenience¹¹⁷ consisting of those that were within reach for me. There was no stipulated age, however, since a lot of the first contact occurred via Social Media platforms, participants were on average in their 20s or 30s. Language-wise, participants either produce their art in Arabic or English language. While the general focus is on women, I still wanted to keep an open approach and when one man contacted me proactively after my call for participants, I decided to include this perspective as well.

¹¹⁴ See Weiss. 1995. p.25.

¹¹⁵ See *snowball sampling*, Weiss. 1995. p.25.

¹¹⁶ See Weiss. 1995. p.17.

¹¹⁷ See Weiss. 1995. p.24.

2.1.4. Rapport-building

“Rapport development and a trusting relationship are key to facilitating discussion of sensitive topics”¹¹⁸. In the cases in which an interview partner was referred to me by either another interviewee or a previous contact person rapport was established easily, as there was already a certain amount of trust. In cases where I initially contacted interview partners however, this advancement of trust was not a given. While most participants were eager to lend their voices to the research, whether in their name or anonymously, I encountered two cases that require additional mentioning.

In one case, the interview partner felt too shy to be talking to me over the phone and preferred to be interviewed in written form. To maintain the interview character, we agreed to do it via chat. Although this makes an interview especially hard, since not only body language but also voice is missing, I agreed to this form to make the interviewee as comfortable as possible about sharing her experience.

In another case, being able to build the necessary rapport meant a preliminary phone call in which the potential participant had the opportunity to get to know me and the aim of the research better. I found this conversation of high importance since it not only meant a level of reflection about the ethics of this research and my positioning that I believe cannot be achieved without confrontation, but it also strengthens the active part of the interviewee as voice and not object of research. All in all, empathy and the ability to actively listen were considered crucial to rapport building.¹¹⁹

2.1.5. Analysis

While in theory analysis is the last step of a qualitative interview study, this is not necessarily the case when it comes to conducting the actual research. It is often outlined in the literature,¹²⁰ and I made the experience myself, that phases intermesh and preliminary analysis

¹¹⁸ Dempsey, Laura et al. 2016. “Sensitive Interviewing in Qualitative Research”. In: *Nursing & Health*, Iss. 39. Wiley Online Library. p. 480-490. DOI: 10.1002/nur.21743. p.81.

¹¹⁹ See Abrahams, Hilary. 2017. “Listen to me: a reflection on practice in qualitative Interviewing”. In: *Journal of Gender-Based Violence*, Vol. 1/2. Bristol: Policy Press. p.253–259. p.255f.

¹²⁰ See Weiss. 1995. p.14.

can influence subsequent interview emphasis. It is, therefore, an inherent and ongoing part of the research.¹²¹ With research into the use of language, there are different approaches as to how to analyse the interviews by either focusing on how language is being used (e.g. discursively), what is being said individually (descriptive analysis) or what is being said rather collectively, as a starting point for theory building.¹²² This study takes the individual perspective into account, the main focus, however, is on what is being said collectively. To achieve these insights, I will use qualitative content analysis. This method was mainly developed for an inductive approach to topics and to understand underlying meanings; it is deeply grounded in the acquired data.¹²³ Transcribed interviews will be coded openly; categories are therefore derived from the data without formerly established structures. Codes and categories will be revisited repeatedly during the analysis process in reference to grounded theory to reach a dense saturation of data.¹²⁴ The findings from these categories will then allow for preliminary conclusions regarding the generality of the topic and the building of a systematic framework.

2.2. Positioning and Reflections on ethical research

2.2.1. Ethical concerns regarding this research

“To pursue questions of ethics is to engage in an exploration of the good and bad effects of how we live and what we do, to question ourselves and our work. It is to ask the question: ‘Is what we do and the way we do it moral?’, instead of complacently assuming the inherent goodness of our vocation and approach”¹²⁵. Following the events of the violent dispersal of the sit-in area on June 3rd on Twitter, I came across several tweets directed at researchers

¹²¹ See Spencer, Liz et al. 2003. “Analysis: Practices, Principles and Processes”. In: Ritchie, Jane/ Lewis, Jane (Ed.). *Qualitative Research Practices: A Guide for Social Science Students and Researchers*. London/ Thousand Oaks/ New Delhi: Sage Publications. p.200-218. p.200.

¹²² See Spencer et al. 2003. p.201.

¹²³ See Zhang, Yan/ Wildemuth, Barbara. 2005. “Qualitative Analysis of Content”. In: Wildemuth (Ed.). *Applications of Social Research Methods to Questions in Information and Library Science*. Libraries Unlimited. p.1-12. p.1.

¹²⁴ See Spencer et al. 2003. p.201. The term dense saturation means that new data will likely not add to the developing theory. Yet a complete saturation as suggested by grounded theory might require a longer research period and a wider variety of interview partners.

¹²⁵ Mama, Amina. 2007. “Is It Ethical to Study Africa? Preliminary Thoughts on Scholarship and Freedom”. In: *African Studies Review*, Vol. 50/1. Cambridge University Press. p.1-26. p.5.

studying Sudan. Most of them seemed rather angry and dissatisfied with the researcher's conduct towards the country and people they were working on (as opposed to *with*). The following tweet is an example: “@ all the academics shame on you if you're using #Sudan for your thesis & essays, and not showing up for Sudan when they need it the most. Your publications mean nothing if you're not pro-actively contributing to positive political & social change”¹²⁶. Any research should always be questioned for its motives and the way it might affect parties connected to that research. Having that in mind, researching a country or aspects of society during volatile political circumstances puts a spotlight on how research works and issues that might be problematic. In the following passage, I want to outline some of the ethical concerns and responsibilities regarding this research and give a possible answer on how to deal with them under the given circumstances. This poses the question: what can and what should research do during times of political turmoil and if people's lives are in danger? The code of conduct of the British Sociological Association (BSA) reads as follows: “Sociological research is a valuable activity and contributes to the well-being of society”¹²⁷. Putting the well-being of society in the centre inherently includes normative and moral standards to the code of conduct. Yet, even if all social researchers can agree that risks have to be minimized and any detriment to participants needs to be prevented, actively contributing to the “well-being of society” has a more normative demand. But the more normative value is given to research, the more researchers need to be reflexive about their positioning and responsibility.¹²⁸ Reflexivity is especially important when conducting field research, even more so when the “field” is another country with a different political environment. In the political environment of violent oppression that has marked Sudan especially visibly since December 2018, this demand is crucial when talking to people residing in Sudan. Originally, this research would have been based on field research in Sudan's capital Khartoum during the months of May, June and July 2019. Problems with the visa and security concerns caused several postponements. Although eventually I was issued a visa at the end

¹²⁶ @SpoonfulOfSass. Tweet 06.06.2019, 07:58. URL: <https://twitter.com/SpoonfulOfSass/status/1136648440371392512>. Retrieved: 07.06.2019.

¹²⁷ BSA, 2002, as cited in Unger, von, Hella. 2014. „Forschungsethik in der qualitativen Forschung: Grundsätze, Debatten und offene Fragen“. In: Unger, von, Hella/ Narimani, Petra/ M'Bayo, Rosaline (Ed.). *Forschungsethik in der qualitativen Forschung: Reflexivität, Perspektiven, Positionen*. Wiesbaden: Springer VS. p.15-39. p.19.

¹²⁸ See. Unger, von. 2014. p.24.

of July, I decided to stick to the altered research design both for ethical reasons as well as feasibility and time management. For one, research interests must stand back when it comes to a person's security, the researcher's as well as people involved or impacted by research.¹²⁹ With the situation in Khartoum being very volatile, with outbreaks of open violence by state forces against civilians, it would have been unforeseeable what kinds of risk political research carried out by an obvious outsider might have subjected participants and myself to. Another important point to base sociological research on is the commitment not to add to the trauma that people collectively or individually have been or are experiencing.¹³⁰ In addition to the experience of traumatic events, trauma here is also defined as vicarious trauma or "the response of those persons who have witnessed, been subject to explicit knowledge of or, had the responsibility to intervene in a seriously distressing or tragic event"¹³¹. The massacre of the 3rd of June and the subsequent shutdown of the internet that left so many people in the dark about family's and friend's whereabouts and safety doubtlessly constitutes such individual and collective trauma and must be dealt with sensitively.

Having these concerns, the question arose whether the research was still feasible and ethically maintainable. The first question mainly meant overthinking the method, the second however I believe cannot be answered conclusively or autonomously by me. Instead, there is a need to enter into dialogue with those involved and potentially participating in this research and to listen to what they have to say about research and the method itself. This also meant being open to discussion and making the interest and aims of the thesis, as well as my positioning, transparent to potential interview partners. While before I have pointed out many of the concerns of social research (especially by an outsider), its potential should find mention as well: to increase broader attention to the topic; amplify voices; lay the groundwork for solidarity; feed into the process of understanding contemporary events from different perspectives, just to mention a few. Ideally, and especially coming from a feminist perspective, research should benefit those involved and impacted by it and not be a one-sided extraction of knowledge.

¹²⁹ Unger, von. 2014. p.29.

¹³⁰ See Dempsey et al. 2017. p.487.

¹³¹ Lerias, Doukessa/ Byrne, Mitchell. 2003. "Vicarious Traumatization: Symptoms and Predictors". In: *Stress and Health*, Vol. 19/3. Wiley Online Library. DOI: 10.1002/smi.969. p.129–138. p.130.

Eventually, I decided to retain the topic because it turned out that not only I was invested in it, but several of the people I had been in touch with for months as well. I felt responsible to continue the research but make the changes necessary to adapt to the situation at hand and rethink my options to carry it out without field research, yet still centring the voices of Sudanese women. The adaptations made were outlined earlier in this chapter.

Not being able to conduct research directly in Sudan poses new ethical concerns, especially regarding the aspect of Social Media. Here I would like to point out several aspects that should be considered. For one, although online citizen journalism played an important role during the revolution, to write the above overview, only sources that were not published on private accounts were used. Therefore, personal accounts of the events only stem from the interview participants who were informed about the research and gave their consent. Furthermore, although Social Media was used to recruit several of the participants, only information given during the interviews is used, as they are covered by consent. It should be self-explanatory that further information shared on Social Media is not covered by consent and is in no way part of the analysis. These boundaries should be made explicitly clear as connecting on Social Media poses a new link between researcher and participant which oftentimes poses insights into additional information. Participants must be assured that only information shared voluntarily and specifically concerning the interview is being used by the researcher.

On a last note regarding research ethics, I would like to point out the question of the identification of participants. The paramount concern is the security of participants, which might advise for anonymizing all interviews. Yet, this could also contribute to the silencing of voices. Therefore, all interview partners were informed about the options of anonymity, choosing a pseudonym, using their full name or any other option they might prefer, and names are cited accordingly.

2.2.2. Positioning

Coming from a feminist perspective I reject the notion of an objective researcher and instead follow the concept of positionality. “Thus, our perception of the world—our gaze—is itself circumscribed by our positionality within particular social, political, and cultural networks

and necessitates an ethical stance on the topics we choose to investigate”¹³². Underlying is the deconstruction of objectivity as “the power to see while not being seen”¹³³, as Donna Haraway puts it. This simply means that no social researcher is ever above their research but embedded within the world they are researching. Rejecting the myth of objectivity here means that we as researchers become visible and therefore responsible and answerable for what we see.¹³⁴ How important it is to not only quietly and reclusively reflect on our positioning but in dialogue with those involved or affected by the research became very clear in a preliminary phone call with one potential interview partner. Being a white woman with a European background puts me in a position of power and privilege. To address these power relations and the systematic privileges and to commit to critically reflecting one’s position means becoming vulnerable. This, however, is necessary to create a sustainable rapport with participants and the groundwork for ethical research. For me, this meant being very honest and open about my background, how I came to this topic and how I am committed to centring Sudanese women’s voices. However, I am aware that this is not a lesson learned once, but a process that asks for continuous reflection and dialogue. “Though we may strive to create egalitarian relationships with our interlocutors and to create neat alignments, a commitment to politically engaged research does not eliminate power asymmetries, nor does it lead to moral clarity”¹³⁵. This said, being an outsider in this context can also serve to highlight certain aspects of the topic at hand that might otherwise remain unexpressed, as sharing a cultural background with participants can lead them “to assume shared knowledge and opinion”¹³⁶.

¹³² Loperena, Christopher Anthony. 2016. “A Divided Community: The Ethics and Politics of Activist Research”. In: *Current Anthropology. CA Forum on Public Anthropology*. Vol. 7/3. Chicago Press. p.332-346. p.334.

¹³³ Haraway, Donna. 1988. “Situated Knowledges: The Science Question in Feminism and the Privilege of Partial Perspective”. In: *Feminist Studies*, Vol. 14/3. Feminist Studies Inc. DOI: 10.2307/3178066. p. 575-599. p.583.

¹³⁴ See Loperena. 2016. p.334.

¹³⁵ Loperena. 2016. p.345.

¹³⁶ Petray, Theresa. 2012. “A walk in the park: political emotions and ethnographic vacillation in activist research”. In: *Qualitative Research*, Vol. 12/5. Thousand Oaks/ CA: Sage Publications. p.554-564. p.557.

Theoretical Framework I: Politics, Feminism and the Diaspora

3. Women in Sudan

3.1. Kandakes and queens

The image of the Nubian queen has been of high importance during the revolution, especially in the way Western media depicted Sudanese women, therefore I will begin this chapter by shedding some light on the historic precursors of this iconic image.

Accounts of (western) scholars on the legendary “queens” of the Kushite era¹³⁷ are often romanticized, exaggerated stories that feed into orientalist imaginations of “eastern” women.¹³⁸ Yet, far from myths and biblical stories, a matrilineal system of succession in the Nubian kingdoms¹³⁹ and even its Arab successors¹⁴⁰ was central to the transference of power in the royal family.¹⁴¹ Thus, royal women enjoyed a very high status. In fact, while Egypt – though famous for them – had but seven ruling females in over 3000 years, the Meroitic era saw at least sixteen women in power in under 700 years.¹⁴² While the majority of rulers were still male, it was not a king’s son who would follow him, but his sister’s son. The sister’s

¹³⁷ Kush refers to an ancient kingdom that emerged after the end of Egyptian occupation in the region that would later become known as Nubia, a term often used interchangeably with Kush. This region spans southern Egypt as well as northern Sudan. As a political entity, Kush existed approximately from the 10th century BC until the 5th century AC. There are two main eras of the Kushite kingdom, derived from the respective capitals, Napata and Meroë: the Napatan era describing the period before the 4th century BC and the Meroitic era referring to the period after the 4th century BC when it is believed that the capital was transferred. See Török, László. 1997. *The kingdom of Kush: handbook of the Napatan-Meroitic civilization*. Leiden/ New York: Brill. p.1f.

¹³⁸ See Fluehr-Lobban, Carolyn. 1998. “Nubian Queens in the Nile Valley and Afro-Asiatic Cultural History”. In: *Ninth International Conference for Nubian Studies*, August 20-26, 1998 Museum of Fine Arts, Boston U.S.A. PDF: <http://africanhistory.yolasite.com/resources/Nubian%20Queens.pdf>. Retrieved: 15.10.2019. p.1.

¹³⁹ Nubia describes the area of the Nile Valley south of Aswan in Egypt, well into North Sudan (third or fourth Nile cataract). It is the region of the ancient kingdoms of Kush and other, smaller states and the later Christian kingdoms of Nobatia, Muroia and Alwa (14th -16th century), before the population became mainly Muslim and the kingdoms were superseded by the Funj Sultanate. See Kramer et al. 2013. p.327f.

¹⁴⁰ The spread of Islam and Arabic as a language happened gradually in the Nubian region. In 1315, there was for the first time a Muslim king in Dongola, with more and more kingdoms becoming Islamic until the last Christian kingdom (Alwa with its capital Soba) fell in 1504. See Kramer et al. 2013. p.8.

¹⁴¹ See Kheir, Al Hag Hamad Mohammed. 1987. “Women and Politics in Medieval Sudanese History”. In: Kenyon, Susan (Ed.). *The Sudanese Woman*. Khartoum: Graduate College Publications, University of Khartoum. p.8-39. p.8.

¹⁴² See Fluehr-Lobban. 1998. p.2.

daughters accordingly were the carriers of further royal legitimation.¹⁴³ The term “kandake” is derived from the Meroitic *kdi-go* which means “great woman”¹⁴⁴ and was held by powerful royal women, although they were not always in a ruling position; whether the term referred to the queen mother or sister-wife is disputed.¹⁴⁵ Co-regency between a brother and sister can be seen as a function of the matrilineal descent.¹⁴⁶ “In Kush-Meroë, all queens and kings had to be born to a queen, usually the ruler's sister; they believed their father was the god Amun; therefore each regent was part divine and part human with the queen providing the human link”¹⁴⁷. Depictions of one of the most famous kandakes, Amanitore (1BCE-20CE), show her in the same position, carrying out the same duties as her brother, being crowned next to him, which suggests that she was not only his equal but probably also legitimized him as king.¹⁴⁸

While the kandake was mainly used as a symbol of peace during the Sudan Uprising, the historic queens have been known for their military action as well. Shanakdakhete (170-150 BCE), the first queen to rule in her own right, was not only depicted as ruling queen, but triumphant warrior smiting her enemies. Grave goods found in different burial sites substantiate the image of the female warrior.¹⁴⁹ At this point it should also be highlighted that we are talking about royal women – less is known about ordinary women and their status within society, but it seems that the woman was mostly associated with the domestic sphere and had no or inferior functions in public and palace life.¹⁵⁰

When in medieval times Islamic kingdoms replaced the former Christian-Nubian ones¹⁵¹, the fact that Islam spread only gradually, allowed for incorporation and continuance of aspects

¹⁴³ See Lohwasser, Angelika. 1999. „Die Frau im antiken Sudan“. In: Dornisch/ Wenig (Ed.). *Sudan. Festschrift Steffen Wenig*. Nürnberger Blätter zur Archäologie: Sonderheft. Nürnberg: Bildungszentrum Nürnberg. p.121-136. p.126f.

¹⁴⁴ See Fluehr-Lobban. 1998. p.1.

¹⁴⁵ See Kheir. 1987. p.10.

¹⁴⁶ See Fluehr-Lobban. 1998. p.4.

¹⁴⁷ Fluehr-Lobban. 1998. p.3, following Haynes (1992. p.25)

¹⁴⁸ See Lohwasser. 1999. p.131.

¹⁴⁹ See Fluehr-Lobban. 1998. p.6f.

¹⁵⁰ See Lohwasser. 1999. p.128.

¹⁵¹ With the fall of the last Christian-Nubian kingdom in the early 16th century, larger states emerged like the Funj Sultanate with its capital Sinnar which was one of the major powers in the Nile valley. In Darfur, smaller states emerged. During this period, roughly from the beginning of the 16th century until the Turco-Egyptian invasion in 1820, Islam was firmly established. While the final years of the Funj Sultanate were characterized

of Meroitic culture, which often meant that the high status of royal women survived.¹⁵² Here it is also noteworthy that more is known about the status of non-royal women and the high status they held in general. An example of this status is that women could teach and assume the shaykh ship, even if there was a possible male successor to the shaykh.¹⁵³ The function of the ruling sister can also be found in the Islamic kingdoms of Sudan during medieval times like the Funj Sultanate¹⁵⁴ – she is referred to as *iya basi* and held a certain degree of political power¹⁵⁵. Her status was above any other member of the ruling family except her brother.¹⁵⁶ Sources show that several of these ruling sisters exerted a high authority, led armies and controlled entire territories, with her role being described as “very much that of a man”¹⁵⁷. Even with the decline of the kandakes and queens, women remained as (mythological) founders of cities and societies, traditions related to the former royal and ruling women.¹⁵⁸ Furthermore, the image of the “Lady of Victory”¹⁵⁹, employed in different Arab narratives, might well be a continuance of these early warrior queens of Nubia.¹⁶⁰

Still, several queens and powerful women played important roles well into the 20th century and Kheir (1987) concludes that “whenever time was opportune for a woman to assume power [sic] she was given such status with respect. [...] matrilineal heritage was always

by internal conflict, more local kingdoms emerged throughout the region “and it was a divided and anarchic Sudan that the Turco-Egyptian forces invaded in 1820”, Kramer et al. 2013. p.9.

¹⁵² See Kheir. 1987. p.11.

¹⁵³ See Kheir. 1987. p.15. The title shaykh is ascribed to a religious leader or teacher (especially in Sufism which is prevalent in Sudan) and thus a respected figure of authority within society. In this instance, it mainly means the function of religious guide and teacher.

¹⁵⁴ The Funj Sultanate was established in 1504, when Amara Dunqas was victorious at Soba. Sinnar became the permanent capital in the 17th century when the Sultanate reached its peak of power. From 1761 onwards, the Funj Sultanate began to erode, its final decades dominated by inner conflict. In 1822, the Sultanate finally capitulated to the Turco-Egyptian invasion. “The Funj Sultanates represented a loose federation of local rulers from Sinnar to Upper Nubia [...] Funj society was structured around a ruling sultan [...] [and] Funj political culture was mixed with a growing Islamic influence over pre-Islamic practices”, Kramer et al. 2013. p.168f.

¹⁵⁵ See Kheir. 1987. p.19.

¹⁵⁶ See Fluehr-Lobban. 1998. p.5.

¹⁵⁷ Nachtigal. 1971. p.315-316; cited in: Kheir. 1987. p.19.

¹⁵⁸ See Kheir. 1987. p.25.

¹⁵⁹ „The Lady of victory” is a practice/narrative throughout southwest Asia and the Arab world in which a woman becomes the symbol of encouragement to the fighting men, either through fighting herself or e.g. song/poetry etc.: “Its first account appears as Hind al-Hunud, an enemy of Muhammad who opposed the Prophet on the battlefield brandishing a sword exhorting her men folk to bravery. [...] In later versions some women of high social standing (in other accounts a virgin) [...] would travel to the battlefield in sight of the warriors, singing songs of encouragement”, Fluehr-Lobban. 1998. p.6.

¹⁶⁰ See Fluehr-Lobban. 1998. p.7.

evident and with such a tradition, even in the days of Islam, rule by a queen was always possible”¹⁶¹. Then why was matriliney not able to outlast the ancient kandakes of Meroë?

An interesting theory that Fluehr-Lobban (1998) brings forward, is that matriliney was often still successful in the early stages of state formation, however, it “tends to disappear after a threshold of empire-building where endemic warfare is a major characteristic of the state [...] and] declined in the face of the modern nation-state, [...] especially assaulted by European colonialism”¹⁶². Although it is a jump, I will now move on to the role and struggles of women in 20th century Sudan, when the nation gained independence from British-Egyptian rule and major women’s movements emerged which shape the contemporary notion of women’s activism in Sudan.

3.2. 20th-century feminist movements between Socialism and Islamism

The development of women’s movements – or feminist movements, although this term will need further explanation – in the 20th century can broadly be situated between two schools of thought, namely communism/ socialism and Islamism.

While several aspects of Sudanese feminism will become clear in the following chapter, the term feminism should not be overcharged with Western and Eurocentric conceptions of feminism that might distort and obscure the struggles and fights of women in other settings.

Islamism, being a term inflationary used in mainstream media, is often misunderstood as a synonym with extremism or even terrorism. On an analytical level, the term is used to describe discourses that “postulate a normative [...] relationship between Islam and the order of the world”¹⁶³. This does however not yet qualify the nature of this relationship, it simply means that actors described by the term “Islamist” seek to develop an understanding of concepts of society like state, law, culture or economy based on principles rooted in Islam. “Therefore, ‘Islamism’ is an oftentimes ideological mode of determining and qualifying state,

¹⁶¹ Kheir. 1987. p.36.

¹⁶² Fluehr-Lobban. 1998. p.5.

¹⁶³ Schulze. 2016. p.32. The quote is translated from German.

society or culture through Islam”¹⁶⁴. Thus, Islamists operate based on an understanding of Islam in which the religion also provides the basis of structuring the world.

3.2.1. Women in communism and socialism

Sudanese communism as part of a broader socialist movement first started in Egypt as a branch of the movement there before the Sudanese Movement for National Liberation (SMNL) as the precursor of the first communist party in Sudan was established in the mid-1940s.¹⁶⁵ The movement’s foundation was rooted in nationalism and the right to political self-determination with the aim „to set up a political organization to include all classes of Sudanese society“ focusing on „workers and peasants as the cornerstone of the nationalist movement“¹⁶⁶. Women are not explicitly mentioned; the focal point is rather a communist understanding of class. However, the socialist movement was a catalyst for and in many cases directly involved in the establishment of Sudanese Unions¹⁶⁷, among them the Sudanese Women’s Union (SWU), who was central in the fight for women’s rights.

Due to the influence of Chinese communism, the leadership of Sudanese socialism started to incorporate more communist ideologies towards the end of the 40s, which for the first time meant directly mentioning women in their manifesto: „Membership should be opened to any Sudanese young person, male or female”¹⁶⁸. While the Communist Party did not set any specifically feminist goals, they did regard women as equal and integrated them into their worker’s movement. However, Schmiedinger (2009) concludes, „Although [they] [...] did have a progressive position towards gender issues in Sudan, this was still an exception”¹⁶⁹. It should also be mentioned that after Sudan’s independence in 1956, for a long time the

¹⁶⁴ Schulze. 2016. p.32. The quote is translated from German.

¹⁶⁵ See El-Amin, Mohammed Nuri. 1996 (a). “The Sudanese Communist Movement: The first five Years – I”. In: *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.32/3. London: Frank Cass Publishers. p.22-40. p.23f.

¹⁶⁶ El-Amin, Mohammed Nuri. 1996 (b). “The Sudanese Communist Movement: The first five Years – II”. In: *Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol.32/4. London: Frank Cass Publishers. p.251-263. p.253.

¹⁶⁷ See Schmiedinger, Thomas. 2009. “Suppressed but not defeated: Unionism in Sudan”. In: *Sudan Studies Association Bulletin*, Vol.27/2. PDF: https://homepage.univie.ac.at/thomas.schmiedinger/php/sudan_unionism.pdf. p.8-13. p.9.

¹⁶⁸ El-Amin, Mohammed Nuri. 1997. “The Sudanese Communist Movement: The first five Years – III”. In: *Middle Eastern Studies* Vol.33/1. London: Frank Cass Publishers. p. 128-151. p.134.

¹⁶⁹ Schmiedinger. 2009. p.9.

Communist Party was the only party open to women.¹⁷⁰ As the most important activist branch for women's rights emerging from the socialist/ communist spectrum, I will now focus more in-depth on the Sudanese Women's Union.

3.2.1.1. *The Sudanese Women's Union*

„The most collective activist work of women has been the establishing of the Sudanese Women's Union in 1951 [...] requesting equal rights in the workplace [...] [and] calling for equal political rights”¹⁷¹. The Sudanese Women's Union (SWU, al-Ittiḥād an-Nisā'ī as-Sudānī) can moreover be regarded as the biggest and at the same time “the most provocative post-independence women's organisation in Africa”¹⁷². The SWU quickly became a mass movement within Sudan which did not only address issues faced by urban, working women¹⁷³ but tried to include a variety of living environments into their campaigns. The SWU began in the wake of Pan-Africanism and Pan-Arabism throughout the continent and the Middle East to crosslink with other women's organizations for support. Also, the SWU published for the first time in 1955 their own magazine called *ṣawt al-mar'a* (Women's Voice) that addressed the topic of emancipation and constituted a forum for women beyond the national level.¹⁷⁴ While the SWU is oftentimes regarded as a branch of the Communist Party with the party in instances seeing the Union as an opportunity to recruit more women, this position is contested by the SWU's long-time chairwoman Fāṭima Aḥmad Ibrāhīm (1934-2017). Although pointing out the communist's support for women's rights, she negates any direct affiliation.¹⁷⁵ During the phase of frequent changes in government in the decades after independence, the SWU had to move operations underground before finally being banned in 1989, with the establishment of the Islamic State of Sudan. These recurrent political changes had also an impact on

¹⁷⁰ See Osman, Amira. 2014. “Beyond the pan-Africanistic Agenda: Sudanese women's movement, achievements and challenges”. In: *Feminist Africa*, 9/2014. Cape Town: African Gender Institute. p.43-57. p.47.

¹⁷¹ Badri, Balghis. 2006. *Feminist Perspectives in the Sudan: An Overview*. Berlin: Feminist Perspectives Tagung 2006. Workshop-Paper. PDF: https://www.fu-berlin.de/sites/gpo/tagungen/tagungfeministperspectives/balghis_badri.pdf. Retrieved: 13.09.2018. p.9. Badri states the year of the founding of the SWU as 1951, the majority of sources I have found however mention 1952 as the founding year.

¹⁷² Osman. 2014. p.43.

¹⁷³ See. Hale, Sondra. 1996. *Gender Politics in Sudan: Islamism, Socialism and the State*. Oxford/ Colorado: Westview Press. p.167.

¹⁷⁴ See Osman. 2014. p.48.

¹⁷⁵ See Ibrahim, in Hale. 1996. p.169.

the members of the SWU, who began to polarize along the political divide: leftist and socialist feminists, Islamists and supporters of Islamic feminism as well as supporters and adversaries of Numayrī during his time in power.¹⁷⁶ Several quotes by Fāṭima Aḥmad Ibrāhīm shed light on the understanding the early SWU had of Sudanese feminism:

„Emancipation does not mean getting rid of our national, good traditions and values, or for us Sudanese women to become another copy of the Western woman”¹⁷⁷. The reference to national traditions that also involve Islamic practices and the differentiation from Western feminists allows for example also for Muslim women and feminists to identify with the goals of the SWU. A more socialist approach to feminism can, however, be seen in the following quote: „Men, as males are not responsible for discrimination against women. Most of them are also exploited and discriminated against. For this, women and men should work together to make social changes that preserve democracy, which is based on social justice and human rights”¹⁷⁸. This point however also opened the SWU to criticism like the accusation that the women’s movement oftentimes sacrificed structural, feminist goals for other projects like nationalism or socialism based on the singular understanding of class. While the SWU is indisputably not only a powerful motor of the women’s movement but an important aspect of the political landscape, several authors like Hale (1996) have criticized their lack of strategic feminist interests which sometimes rather led to a reinforcement of traditional gender roles.¹⁷⁹ Instead, the focus seems to have been more on the next popular uprising or daily struggles, with Hale stating the common motto as “Wait till *after* the revolution”¹⁸⁰.

In the 1980s this logic of deferral, however, got questioned by a new generation of women who developed a more strategic feminist approach that challenged “cultural” traditions and patriarchal role allocations.¹⁸¹ Badri (2006) summarizes the relevance of the SWU rather value-free: „The movement could be described as a women’s movement in the public areas

¹⁷⁶ See Badri. 2006. p.9.

¹⁷⁷ Ibrahim, Fatima A. 1996. “Sudanese Women’s Union: Strategies for Emancipation and the Counter Movement”. In: *Ufahamu: A Journal of African Studies*, Vol.24/ 2-3. California: University of California Digital Library. p.3-20. p.6.

¹⁷⁸ Ibrahim. 1996. p.6.

¹⁷⁹ See Hale. 1996. p.172.

¹⁸⁰ Hale. 1996. p.172.

¹⁸¹ See Hale. 1996. p.178.

of work and politics engaging in activism in a new and organized way. They did not want to antagonize the society [...] they wanted to safeguard national unity”¹⁸².

The achievements of the SWU – many of which were nullified by changing regimes – mostly lie in the establishment of an organized women’s movement and the improvement of daily struggles and needs rather than in structural feminism.¹⁸³ However, this shortfall is ascribed to the communist movement as a whole. One of the biggest achievements of the SWU is the full right to vote for women which was gained after the popular uprising of 1964¹⁸⁴. In addition, the so-called October Revolution “established a new set of protest norms that challenged existing assumptions that regimes in the Middle Eastern and African region could only be brought down by – usually military – force”¹⁸⁵ – an important precedent for later uprisings. After women obtained the passive and active right to vote, Fāṭima Aḥmad Ibrāhīm became the first woman to be elected to parliament.¹⁸⁶ Her only other female contestant had come from the National Islamic Front.

3.2.2. Women in Islamic/ Islamist movements

Women’s movements that can be associated with Islamist groups in Sudan have never reached a comparable degree of size or extensive network as the SWU did. However, besides the socialists and communists, only two other political organizations were likewise able to recruit large numbers of women and both are part of the spectrum of Islamic schools of

¹⁸² Badri. 2006. p.9.

¹⁸³ See Osman. 2014. p.49.

¹⁸⁴ In October of 1964, a popular uprising that also became known as the October Revolution peacefully overthrew the military regime (1958-64) of Ibrāhīm ‘Abbūd (1900-1983), after student protests at the University of Khartoum had been violently quelled by police forces. Within a period of ten days, mass protest and civilian disobedience brought down the military regime that already since the beginning only had a narrow base of support and often had to rely on coercion. There are different framings of the uprising as either arising from (communist) mobilization of the working class and professionals, a nationalist uprising or a religious movement inspired by the Muslim Brotherhood. See Berridge. 2015. p.13f. Although Ḥasan at-Turābī (see following sections) did play a role in mobilization of the protests, Berridge concludes that the October Revolution was mainly driven by secular civilian movements and of a highly spontaneous nature. Largely concentrated on the capital, “[t]he October Revolution can be seen as a kind of microcosm of the wider Sudanese nationalist project – it was the brainchild of an urban elite [...] and excluded large sections of the population”, *ibid.* p.37f. What followed was a short parliamentary period until 1969.

¹⁸⁵ Berridge. 2015. p.14.

¹⁸⁶ See Osman. 2014. p.50.

thought: The National Islamic Front (al-Ġabha al-Islāmiyya al-Qawmiyya, NIF) and the Republican Sisters as a part of the Republican Brotherhood (Iḥwān al-Ġumhūriyyīn).¹⁸⁷

One of the most restrictive laws for women was passed in 1983 during the Islamization of the an-Numayrī regime, which became known as the September laws.¹⁸⁸ Having used women's rights before to polish his regime's image, the September laws effectively nullified the better part of women's rights achievements and downgraded women to an inferior status.¹⁸⁹ "The most controversial among these provisions are the permitting of polygamy, the provision of unilateral divorce without grounds for men only, and the assignment of child custody to the father and his family upon divorce", as well as "the notions of *qiwma* and *wilaya* (guardianship of men over women) and *taa'a* (obedience of women to their husbands)"¹⁹⁰. The Public Order Law of 1991 additionally established a framework to impose an Islamic dress code on women regardless of religion and "introduced laws that distinctively affect women along class, ethnic, and regional lines"¹⁹¹. Nevertheless, the process of Islamization at the same time did have the potential to make several women's rights activists more visible.

3.2.2.1. *Ḥasan at-Turābī and the National Islamic Front*

„We think that women are better human beings than they think [...] [and] we are standing up for our sex. We are working in the NIF to praise women and to make women have a better

¹⁸⁷ See Hale. 1996. p.193.

¹⁸⁸ Two juridical reforms were passed to implement Islamic criminal law (sharia law) in Sudan: one in 1983 under the regime of an-Numayrī and one in 1991 under al-Bašīr. The laws of 1983 ("September laws") were mainly introduced as a tool of political oppression by adding more severe punishment for "political offenses" and uncoupling the degree of punishment from the severity of the offense. See Köndgen, Olaf. 2017. *The codification of Islamic criminal law in the Sudan: Penal codes and Supreme Court case law under Numayri and al-Bashir*. Studies in Islamic law and society, Vol. 43. Leiden: Brill. p.52f. The law rendered the status of women inferior to that of men and discriminated against non-Muslims. An important addition is the Public Order Law and its system of courts in 1991, which "allows for much faster punishment, normally without appeal" carried out by a Public Order Police, *ibid.* p.396f. Both law reforms and the resulting legislation, which often conflicts with traditional sharia law, have functioned as instruments of the respective regimes to create a "Sudanese national sharia", *ibid.* p.407.

¹⁸⁹ See Halim, Asma Mohammed Abdel. 2009. "Women's Organisations seeking Gender Justice in the Sudan 1964-1985". In: *Review of African Political Economy*, Vol.36/121. London: Routledge. p.389-407. p.392. Although equal rights for women were protected in the Permanent Constitution of 1973, the sharia law opposes these rights in many aspects. See Kramer et al. 2013. P.461f.

¹⁹⁰ Mustafa Ali, Nada. 2016. "Sudan after Al-Turabi: Understanding the Gendered Legacy of Islamism in Sudan and Beyond". In: *Journal of Women in the Middle East and the Islamic World*, Iss. 14. Leiden: Brill. p.3-19. p.6.

¹⁹¹ Mustafa Ali. 2016. p.7.

status and to tell the world that we are as equal as men and are as efficient as men and we are as educated as men and we are as good as men and as great as men”¹⁹². These words regarding the status of women stem from Wiṣ’āl al-Maḥdī, wife of Ḥasan at-Turābī (1932-2016) who founded the National Islamic Front. Her vehement support for equality might sound unusual for a movement that has been regarded as Islamist, but at least for a time, they were very active in the proclamation of gender equality. Founded after the coup in 1985, the NIF was “an outgrowth of the Muslim Brotherhood [...] a broader base for popular mobilization towards a political agenda of Islamization”¹⁹³. The NIF was based among others on the works of Raṣīd Riḍā (1865-1935) and represented a reformist Islam.¹⁹⁴ It is noteworthy that the Islamist agenda had not only gained a popular base but very importantly, a significant economic base with the introduction of the Islamic banking system in 1978.¹⁹⁵ In addition, an effort was made to Islamize the army.¹⁹⁶ The goal was to establish Sudan as an Islamic Republic based on sharia law, “defining politics in Islamic terms”¹⁹⁷. The NIF came to power through a military coup in 1989. While especially his wife Wiṣ’āl al-Maḥdī stood for the equality of women and men (rooted in Islam), at-Turābī advocated the membership of women in the Muslim brotherhood as well and played a part in the founding of the International Organisation for Muslim Women. In his interpretation of Islam, oppression of women went against all principles, while equality was rooted in the religion as well as in law.¹⁹⁸ The argument was that oppression had only come through Arab culture, not religion, and in an Islamic state with

¹⁹² Wiṣ’āl al-Maḥdī, cited in Hale. 1996. p.216.

¹⁹³ Kramer et al. 2013. p.315. At-Turābī had formerly been a member of and political candidate for the Muslim Brotherhood, where he organized the Islamic Charter Front, precursor to the NIF, to partake in the democratic elections after the popular uprising of 1964. See *ibid.* p.305. When an-Numayrī started to pursue a more Islamist agenda, the Muslim Brotherhood collaborated with the regime in several instances. This stigmatized the Brotherhood to a certain degree and at-Turābī used the chance after the coup to establish his own party. See *ibid.* p.430. Due to a power struggle between al-Baṣīr and at-Turābī in 1999/2000, the party split into Baṣīr’s National Congress Party (NCP) which remained in power until 2019, and Turābī’s splinter party, the Popular Congress Party (PCP). See *ibid.* p.311.

¹⁹⁴ See Hale. 1996. p.209.

¹⁹⁵ See Mustafa Ali. 2016. p.9.

¹⁹⁶ See Mustafa Ali. 2016. p.10. Already the Muslim Brotherhood had sought to infiltrate the army through specialists in several fields and had even sent members for military training to Pakistan, Iran or Lebanon. See *ibid.* p.10.

¹⁹⁷ Ibrahim, Abdullahi Ali. 1999. „A Theology of Modernity: Hasan al-At-Turābī and the Islamic Renewal in Sudan”. In: *Africa Today*, Vol.46/3. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p.195-222. p.215.

¹⁹⁸ See Burr, Millard/ Collins, Robert. 2003. *Revolutionary Sudan: Hasan at-At-Turābī and the Islamist State – 1989-2000*. Leiden/ Boston: Brill. p.22.

the correct implementation of religion, oppression would necessarily end.¹⁹⁹ As one of the most important activists of the NIF, Wiṣ'āl al-Maḥdī fought for equal rights of (Muslim) women and men – however, not to be confused with equalization of genders. Here she referred to the nature (*fiṭra*) of men and women and natural differences: „We are *women* after all [...] I am *not* like a man”²⁰⁰. Imposing this understanding of equality on the extreme diversity of women in Sudan, however, effectively discriminates against the majority of women, which became apparent with the Public Order Act in 1991 and the regime’s treatment of non-Muslim women. The NIF even suggested that in the conflict with the South, Muslim soldiers should “‘get married’ to Southern women so that these women bear children who would belong to the land of Islam”²⁰¹. Therefore, the discourse led by at-Turābī and the abuse of women’s rights during his time in power stands in stark contrast to each other.²⁰²

3.2.2.2. *The Republican Sisterhood*

Although rather small and only active for about 20 years before being banned in 1989, the Republican Sisterhood is not to be underestimated in their significance for women’s rights. Part of the Republican brotherhood²⁰³ founded by Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha (1909-1985)²⁰⁴ who propagated the *Second Message of Islam*²⁰⁵ based on the Meccan principles of justice, equality, and tolerance, both branches demanded equality of men and women.²⁰⁶ Founded before Sudan’s independence, the Republican brother- and sisterhood also had an anti-colonialist stance, again rooted in the idea of equality: “Equality between men and women was

¹⁹⁹ See Hale. 1996. p.216.

²⁰⁰ Wiṣ'āl al-Maḥdī, cited in Hale. 1996. p.215. Italics in original.

²⁰¹ Mustafa Ali. 2016. p.13.

²⁰² See Mustafa Ali. 2016. p.17.

²⁰³ First founded as the “Republican Party” (al-Ḥizb al-ḡumhūrī) in 1945, it later (1951) understood itself more as reformist religious movement (although sticking with the original name) based on Ṭaha’s “Second Message” of Islam. Therefore, the Republican brothers and sisters never took part in any elections. See Oevermann, Annette. 1993. *Die „Republikanischen Brüder“ im Sudan: Eine islamische Reformbewegung im Zwanzigsten Jahrhundert*. Frankfurt a.M.: Verlag Peter Lang. p.48/52f.

²⁰⁴ He himself names his year of birth as either 1909 or 1911. See Oevermann. 1993. p.43.

²⁰⁵ The “Second Message” essentially states that there are two messages of Islam: one (Medina) that is only applicable to its own context, the 7th century, and another (Mecca) that includes the fundamental principles of religion and is still applicable today. The “Second Message” includes individual freedom, communality of property and the absolute equality of genders. See Oevermann. 1993. P109f.

²⁰⁶ See Halim. 2009. p.394.

consistent with Ṭaha's anti-colonial idea of equality among all the peoples of the world as the solution to oppression"²⁰⁷.

The Sisterhood intended to directly challenge society's stance on women²⁰⁸ which speaks to a more structural approach to feminism. "To be a Republican sister was to validate the premise of gender equality that was the core teaching of *The Second Message of Islam* [...] The women of the movement demonstrated [...] in their daily lives [...] that they in fact were the ultimate examples of the Republican ideology under the circumstances of Sudanese patriarchy"²⁰⁹. Thus, Ṭaha's teachings directly linked the struggle for women's rights to the development of the country and even the continent as a whole.²¹⁰ An interesting point is that the Republican sisters were not only encouraged to speak in public – oftentimes as representatives and examples of the Republican ideology – but they were quite famous for their public recital or even chanting of spiritual poetry while wearing their chosen garments, a white *taub*.²¹¹ As the only Sudanese women's organization, they openly and on a constitutional level challenged the oppressive September laws of 1983 by appealing to the court: „This was the first time in the history of the Sudan that women named their rights ‚constitutional‘ and sought to declare discriminatory laws unconstitutional"²¹². Thereby they also challenged the legitimacy of sharia law and called for a realignment of Islam based on human rights.²¹³ This open opposition to the intensifying Islamization of the an-Numayrī regime, however, led to the prosecution and subsequent execution of Ṭaha on the grounds of apostasy in 1985 and the banning of his movement, which henceforth only subsisted underground.²¹⁴ What is probably most remarkable about the Republican sisters is that they publicly presented themselves as modern Muslim women and just as publicly followed an agenda to elevate the status of

²⁰⁷ Howard, Steve. 2016. "The Republican Sisters of Sudan: Moving to the Front Lines of Muslim Social Change". In: *Journal of Women of the Middle East and the Islamic World*, Iss. 14. Leiden: Brill. p.20-52. p.23.

²⁰⁸ See Halim. 2009. p.394.

²⁰⁹ Howard. 2016. p.21. Italics in original.

²¹⁰ See Howard. 2016. p.23.

²¹¹ See Howard. 2016. p.41f. The *taub* is a traditional Sudanese garment that is wrapped around the body, a bit like a *Sari*, and that to the Republican sisters represented Islamic modesty but also being a modern woman. The image of a modern woman speaking her mind in public, chanting poetry while wearing a white *taub* is now reproduced in the iconic image of Ālā' Salāḥ during the revolution, although I did not find any specific reference to the Republican sisters.

²¹² Halim. 2009. p.396.

²¹³ See. Halim. 2009. p.397.

²¹⁴ See Oevermann. 1993. p.94f.

women to absolute equality without making any distinctions between public and private sphere.

3.2.3. Notions of Feminism in 20th century Sudan

The aforementioned movements, although dealing with mostly the same struggles, have shown very different strategies of how to deal with and fight oppression and discrimination. Hale (1996) for example distinguishes with regards to the SWU between *practical gender interests* and *strategic gender interests*²¹⁵: the former concern themselves with practical conditions of life, the latter with structural causes for discrimination. While the SWU tackled the former like no other Sudanese women's organization, they missed the chance to formulate and assert strategic interests.²¹⁶ This can be understood as "nego-feminism"²¹⁷, following a term by Nnaemeka (2003) that describes a form of feminism that mainly negotiates a compromise with the patriarchy. „The Women's Union proved that it knew when, where and how to negotiate *with* and *around* the patriarchal *Shar'ia* institutions in the Sudan [...]. This had certainly brought about benefits that, however limited, became a source of empowerment to Sudanese women"²¹⁸. The NIF, however, used a strategy that conceptualized emancipation and equal rights -if not any conception of feminism - as rooted in Islam. Therefore, in principle, the question of strategic feminism does not arise because it is already manifested in the pursuit of an ideal Islamic state. Since this goal calls for social transformation, which was pursued by the women of the NIF with vast strategies and a structural framework, Hale (1996) calls them "gender activists"²¹⁹. This term might, however, be contested as rooted in a Eurocentric understanding of feminism and be opposed with the term "Muslim feminism" which I will revisit later. The Republican Sisterhood, in contrast, seems to have employed a double strategy coupling "their theological thought with practical measures such as the initiation of lawsuits and public opposition"²²⁰. This can be understood as the attempt to interconnect a religious reform with a structural feminist approach.

²¹⁵ See Hale. 1996. p.179.

²¹⁶ See Hale. 1996. p.179.

²¹⁷ Nnaemeka, cited in Halim. 2009. p.402.

²¹⁸ Halim. 2009. p.403. Italics in original.

²¹⁹ Hale. 1996. p.217.

²²⁰ Halim. 2009. p.403.

3.3. Contemporary conceptions of feminism

As mentioned in the introduction to this chapter, feminism should not be merely understood as one monolithic block, which was already in part illustrated in the previous section. Therefore, the very broad and inclusive definition by Badran (1995) of what feminism is seems appropriate as a starting point to classify feminist schools of thought within Sudan: feminism acknowledges “constraints placed upon women because of their gender, [and] [...] attempts to remove these constraints and to evolve a more equitable gender system involving new roles for women”²²¹. At the latest with the establishment of the Islamic state after the coup in 1989, Islam became one of the main linchpins for the further development of feminism. “What we see in contemporary Sudan is different types of women’s (non)movements ranging from Islamic feminists, Islamist feminists, and salafist [sic] women who offer qualitatively different and competing interpretations of women’s rights and roles in Islam generally”²²². Still, one of the biggest problems contemporary feminism faces, as Badri (2009) points out, is a lack of solidarity among women as they compete for pre-eminence of their particular belief system.²²³ To clarify these terms furthermore, Islamic feminism refers to “feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm”²²⁴. This means gender justice based on Islamic epistemology.²²⁵ Rooted in cultural relativism²²⁶, the underlying assumption is that Islam already holds all the answers for women within this cultural background and any other form of feminism is alien to the specific culture.²²⁷ Islamist feminists, however, do not promote equality rooted in Islam, but “postulate a view which reinforces inequality between men and women within family law while simultaneously promoting equality in public law”²²⁸. This points to the crucial question that causes much of the divide, namely if the

²²¹ Badran, Margot. 1995. *Feminists, Islam, and Nation: Gender and the Making of Modern Egypt*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. p.19-20.

²²² Tønnessen, Liv. 2010. “Is Islam a Threshold for Escape or an Insurmountable Barrier? Women Bargaining with Patriarchy in Post-Islamist Sudan”. In: *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East*, Vol. 30/3. Durham/ NC: Duke University Press. p. 583-594. p.584.

²²³ See Badri. 2009. p.13.

²²⁴ Badran, Margot, cited in: Tønnessen. 2010. p.584.

²²⁵ See Tønnessen. 2010. p.585.

²²⁶ The understanding of cultures as monolithic blocks entirely distinct from each other.

²²⁷ See Tønnessen, Liv. 2011. “Feminist Interlegalities and Gender Justice in Sudan: The Debate on CEDAW and Islam”. In: *Religion and Human Rights*, Iss.6/2011. Leiden: Martinus Nijhoff Publishers. p.25-39. p.26.

²²⁸ Tønnessen. 2011. p.27.

relationship between the genders should be “equal” or “complementary”.²²⁹ But it is also non-Islamic activists who can be accounted to the spectrum of Islamic feminists since oftentimes these women have also employed Islamic arguments to undergird their feminist goals.²³⁰

This means that although not necessarily coming from any Islamic background themselves, they do not push to change the political system but rather reform it – and therefore political Islam – in ways that will further the feminist agenda. In short, “[w]omen’s activism is seen in not only those acts that resist patriarchy, but also in those acts that aim to preserve patriarchy”²³¹.

Yet, Islam is not the only dominant framework within which feminist thought developed in Sudan. In this respect, it is also important to mention the contribution of South Sudanese women in the struggle for women’s rights, although scarcely addressed within the literature²³² and unfortunately beyond the scope of this work. But Pan-Africanism and the interconnectedness and solidarity with feminists from other African countries have played a role in the evolution of northern feminism as well.²³³ For example, there were attempts already in the ’70s to “bring African women’s socio-economic concerns into a common women’s agenda under a pan-African banner”²³⁴. The most important aspect of this Pan-African feminism, as opposed to the dominant Islamist agenda of Arabisation and Islamisation, is the focus on ethnic and religious diversity, solidarity and unity.²³⁵ While there is also the aspect of solidarity in Islamist feminism, it is mainly with Muslim women from other Muslim countries.²³⁶

On an academic level, the Aḥfād University for Women in Khartoum should be mentioned, as well as the University of Khartoum, which both “introduced the women’s issue as an independent discipline into academia and promoted a feminist research agenda and qualitative research methodologies”²³⁷, thereby strengthening academic feminism in Sudan and

²²⁹ See Jünemann, Anette. 2017. „Zum Wandel arabischer Geschlechterdiskurse in Zeiten von Transformation, Restauration und Bürgerkrieg“. In: Demmelhuber et al (Ed.). *Arabellion: Vom Aufbruch zum Zerfall einer Region?* Leviathan Sonderband 31. Baden-Baden: Nomos. p.303-324. p.316.

²³⁰ See Tønnessen. 2010. p.591.

²³¹ Tønnessen. 2010. p.594.

²³² See Osman. 2014. p.46.

²³³ See Osman. 2014. p.43f.

²³⁴ Osman. 2014. p.49.

²³⁵ See Osman. 2014. p.50.

²³⁶ See Tønnessen. 2011. p.36.

²³⁷ Badri. 2009. p.10.

supporting women. Asked about the victories of feminist struggles in North and sub-Saharan Africa, Fatima Sadiqi concludes:

“They wanted to include their voices and histories as *herstory* and succeeded in establishing what many of us refer to as a countermemory by subverting the canon. [...] Another victory is the ability of these feminists to resist male hegemonic political and social discourses and become agents in their homes, communities, and beyond. They created genuine social movements [...] [and] and were initiators of the culture of street demonstrations”²³⁸.

What yet becomes clear is that there are many competing conceptions of feminism, as they are often embedded within broader belief systems that are ranked more important than a common feminist agenda. This also speaks to the ongoing marginalization and discrimination of women from rural areas, ethnicities that are designated “non-Arab” / African and non-Muslims.

3.4. Political Participation

3.4.1. Conventional Participation

While women have gained relative broad political and economic rights on paper²³⁹, these are oftentimes juxtaposed by the negligence of civil rights²⁴⁰ which in turn stand between women and exercising their rights in the political arena. Paradoxically, based on the constitution of 2005, a woman could become president of Sudan and yet need a male guardian (*wali*) to get married according to family law of 1991.²⁴¹

Another challenge is the vast diversity of women and women’s movements: “Women in parliament have not been able to bridge the political, ethnic and religious divides and set aside

²³⁸ Sadiqi, Fatima/ Ouguir, Aziza. 2018. “Reflecting on Feminisms in Africa: A Conversation from Morocco”. In: *Meridians: feminism, race, transnationalism*, Vol.17/ 2. Durham: Duke University Press. p.269-278. p.274.

²³⁹ The Constitution of 1998, Article 21 states that all Sudanese are equal before the law. See Sherwood, Leah. 2012. “Women at a Crossroads: Sudanese Women and Political Transformation”. In: *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, Vol. 3/15. Bridgewater/ MA: Bridgewater University. p.77-90. p.81.

²⁴⁰ Namely, the Public Order Act of 1996, which virtually enables a vast exclusion from women in the public sphere; See Sherwood. 2012. p.81.

²⁴¹ See Tønnessen. 2011. p.30f.

competing agendas to stand together as women to address this gap”²⁴². This is also due to ruling parties' attempts to provide the only doorway for women to political power and purposefully exclude women from the opposition.²⁴³ Such a lack of solidarity between competing notions of feminism and women's movements is not untypical and have especially in the aftermath of the Arab Spring been symptomatic for the development and political participation of women's movements in other countries of the Middle East and North Africa.²⁴⁴

Since Sudan's independence, the main political system has been an authoritarian regime of some sort with only about eleven years of what Abbas (2014) calls an “elected, multi-party government”²⁴⁵. Although it might be assumed that multi-party elections would open more paths for women to institutionalized political participation, the opposite is true: “preceding decades had taught women a painful lesson in gender politics: women's representation rises under dictatorship, and collapses to almost nothing following multiparty, competitive elections – reflecting for the most part a reluctance of political parties to nominate women in the first place”²⁴⁶. Within the parties themselves, the same is true as for the aforementioned movements: loyalties mostly lie with the party, not with women outside of the party's ideological framework.²⁴⁷ Interestingly, women did serve as a valuable asset in recruiting more women to vote, sometimes outnumbering men in the voter's registration – but still, the rise of female voters, often enough voting for the male candidates, did not lead to an increased representation.²⁴⁸ The introduction of a quota for women in 2008, although serving as a catalyst for the entering of more women into politics which in itself can be seen as a historical

²⁴² Sherwood. 2012. p.81.

²⁴³ See Abbas, Sara. 2010. “The Sudanese Women's Movement and the Mobilisation for the 2008 Legislative Quota and its Aftermath”. In: *Institute of Development Studies Bulletin*, Vol. 41/5. Oxford/ Malden: Blackwell Publishing. p.100-108. p.103.

²⁴⁴ See Jünemann. 2017. p.313. Jünemann concludes that after the Arab Spring, many of the achievements made by secular women in their struggles for women's rights during the former regimes have been accounted to these and labelled as “state feminism” and thus discredited by many of the Islamist women's movements, while she also points out a lack of solidarity of secular women's movements with Islamist women. See p.312f. Another dichotomy that divides women's movements and that seems especially important for the situation of Sudan is the divide between city/ urban areas and the periphery/ rural areas. See *ibid.* p.318.

²⁴⁵ Abbas, Sara. 2014. “Pathways to Political Power in Sudan”. In: Tadros, Mariz (Ed.). *Women in politics: gender, power and development*. New York/ London: Zed Books. p.84-99. p.85. She uses this term alternately to democracy.

²⁴⁶ Abbas. 2014. p.85.

²⁴⁷ See Abbas. 2014. p.87.

²⁴⁸ See Abbas. 2010. p.101.

moment²⁴⁹, mainly secluded women as a separate entity within their parties and deepened the divide between women from different camps.²⁵⁰

Apart from conventional forms of political participation women have been and continue to be very active politically within civil society and other forms of political participation like general strikes or uprisings. “An irony of contemporary Sudanese feminist politics is that when the parties were banned [...] in 1989, many women found new spaces for activism”²⁵¹.

3.4.2. Civil society on the move

“Contrary to popular belief, Sudanese women have been at the forefront of every socio-political movement dating back to pre-colonial times up until the present day. Our history is filled with female icons who have protected the land, and society they birthed”²⁵². Aside from conventional politics, women, and especially young women have found manifold ways to engage in politics and break through the historic divides of party lines and belief systems to find a more common agenda. Especially when it came to the organization and persistence of mass movements that turned the political tide, women were crucial.

Until the Arab Spring of 2011, though often forgotten about, Sudan was the only country counted to the Arab world to successfully end two military regimes through popular uprisings.²⁵³ Civil society is extremely powerful in Sudan, as Berridge (2015) concludes that the “army acts as a ‘mirror to society’”²⁵⁴ since leaders of the army and leaders of the revolution oftentimes stem from the same urban elites. The army is, therefore, more likely to side with the protesting population, as was seen in the popular uprisings of 1964 and 1985.²⁵⁵

²⁴⁹ Jünemann for example points out that the mere existence of women in political offices is a “manifestation of the female claim for participation rights”. Thus, a new normality of women in these public functions is established and female perspectives can potentially inform the political agenda. Jünemann. 2017. p.314.

²⁵⁰ See Abbas. 2014. p.96f.

²⁵¹ Hale, Sondra. 12.05.2015. “Sudanese feminists, civil society, and the Islamist military”. In: *Open Democracy*. URL: <https://www.opendemocracy.net/en/5050/sudanese-feminists-civil-society-and-islamist-military/>. Accessed: 21.11.2019.

²⁵² Abbato, Iman. 07.06.2019. “Reclaiming Azza: A history of female resistance in Sudan”. In: *Sisi Magazine*. URL: <https://www.sisimag.com/blog/2019/6/7/reclaiming-azza-a-history-of-female-resistance-in-sudan>. Accessed: 21.11.2019.

²⁵³ See Sherwood. 2012. p.78.

²⁵⁴ Berridge. 2015. p.215.

²⁵⁵ See El-Battahani, Atta. 2016. “The Sudan Armed Forces and Prospects of Change”. In: *CMI Insight*, 03/2016. Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute. p.1-8. p.1. Later developments however weakened the monopoly to state-

Although the contributions of women to these uprising are oftentimes not specifically mentioned in the literature in favour of subsuming them within broader ideological movements, the contribution of women to these movements was highlighted in the preceding chapters. Likewise, in South Sudan female leaders played important roles in non-violent resistance and the formation of the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA)²⁵⁶ during the civil war.²⁵⁷ The erasure of women from historical memory can be explained by a common red thread for post-revolution states, namely that once transition begins, women are once again pushed to the margins.²⁵⁸ This can be in part explained by post-revolutionary trauma and the need for some sense of stability and security, oftentimes found in the reorientation towards "traditional" societal norms – in other words, with political upheaval there is little room for fundamentally reshaping society and gender roles.²⁵⁹ Therefore, revolutions and political crises are momenta for intensified political mobilization by women, which have, however, so far not translated into more access to institutionalized political power in their aftermath. It is almost ironic to see that in the face of revolution and liberation of the country as a whole, women from different factions and movements seem to agree that any gendered interests must stand back in favour of fighting a regime or oppressive system.²⁶⁰

In recent years, however, women have been very active in civil society organizations and movements, spearheading events like the "Khartoum Rising" in 2013 or the "One Billion Rising" in 2014.²⁶¹ "The civil society participation of progressive women has become a quasi-movement in and of itself, perhaps displacing the more ideologically-inclined party participation, but representing a more robust movement on behalf of women and youth"²⁶². The so-called "youth" mainly consists of students, graduates and young professionals, most of whom

sanctioned violence the SAF as the regular army held. Instead, the regime under al-Bašīr strengthened the power of the National Intelligence and Security Service and enhanced the status of tribal militias to paramilitary forces like the Rapid Support Forces, who were specifically brought in to deal with threats to the regime like rebels or civil unrest. "SAF's historic legacy of stepping into the political fray and changing the course of events is now conditioned by a combination of its economic interests, structural changes and the presence of partners and competitors in the military-security nexus", *ibid.* p.6.

²⁵⁶ The military branch of the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM).

²⁵⁷ See Abbaro. 07.06.2019.

²⁵⁸ See Sherwood. 2012. p.83.

²⁵⁹ See Jünemann. 2017. p.309.

²⁶⁰ See Jünemann. 2017. p.317.

²⁶¹ See Hale. 12.02.2015.

²⁶² Hale. 12.02.2015.

have grown up under the Bašīr regime and often distinguish themselves by a rejection of or opposition to established movements and organized politics and an association with new technology.²⁶³ Kadoda and Hale (2015) offer four explanations for this shift away from established groups and ideologies, that centre around women's participation and the influence of younger generations, often from the diaspora: "(1) the exclusion of women and youth in the leadership of most parties; (2) the domination of affiliated women's wings by parties; (3) the influence from the diaspora where youth and women were freer to be active and vocal about contentious topics; and (4) the consequent migration of many youth and women into NGOs"²⁶⁴. Social Media here provides new and creative forms of political expression and an extension of the public space with more opportunities to connect beyond party lines. What emerged from these spheres are "social nonmovements"²⁶⁵ that are "different from established political parties just as much as from the numerous NGOs [in the country]"²⁶⁶. The internet has offered the younger generation ways to organize independently from these parties and movements, thereby bypassing traditional hierarchies.²⁶⁷ "This frame of mind appears to be fairly typical for today's internet-savvy Sudanese youth: perceiving the persistent power of patriarchal authority, they prove ingenious in persisting to carve out spaces to raise their voices in defiant self-assertion"²⁶⁸. Findings by Ali (2019) suggest, that even seemingly non-political groups in which women discuss beauty and grooming pose a significant political potential for civil disobedience and protest. Confronted with critical discourse, these groups have the potential to mobilize in new ways.²⁶⁹ Sara Elhassan, one of the important voices of the revolution on Social Media, pointed out the important role of the likes of Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram as a tool of citizen journalism and creative contribution.²⁷⁰ In the past,

²⁶³ See Hale, Sondra/ Kadoda, Gada. 2015. "Contemporary youth movements and the role of social media in Sudan". In: *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue canadienne des études africaines*, Vol.49/1. Routledge. p.215-236. p.216f.

²⁶⁴ Hale/ Kadoda. 2015. p.220.

²⁶⁵ After Asef Bayat, cited in Hofheinz, Albrecht. 2017. "Broken Walls: Challenges to Patriarchal Authority in the Eyes of Sudanese Social Media Actors". In: *Die Welt des Islams*, No.57. Leiden: Brill. p.278-302. p.282.

²⁶⁶ Hofheinz. 2017. p.282.

²⁶⁷ See Hofheinz. 2017. p.286.

²⁶⁸ Hofheinz. 2017. p.302.

²⁶⁹ See Ali, Nada Mustafa. 2019. "Sudanese Women's Groups on Facebook and #Civil_Disobedience: Nairat or Thairat? (Radiant or Revolutionary?)". In: *African Studies Review*, Vol. 62/2. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. p.102-126. p.123.

²⁷⁰ See Elkogali Häggström. 02.04.2019.

Social Media platforms by grassroots organizations were already used by international media to counter the “official” narrative of state media.²⁷¹

One outcome of this changing character of civil society is noted by Hale and Kadoda and of high importance for the study of Sudan: “Sudanese youth activities are no longer confined within borders. In part, this is because of better access to the Internet, but also there is large diaspora now, and a tendency to internationalise events”²⁷².

4. The Diaspora

4.1. People as plants

The term “diaspora” has become heavily politicized within different public discourses in recent years and therefore needs some clarification.²⁷³ A Greek word, diaspora translates to an “act of dispersion” or “group of people who have been dispersed”²⁷⁴. While the term originally only referred to experiences of specific groups like Jews or Armenians and was only gradually inclusive of other religious minorities in Europe, its use has been an inflationary trend since the 1970s and now vaguely refers to varying (imagined) groups of people living outside of their country of origin.²⁷⁵ Within the literature on diaspora Wilcock (2018) identifies three main precepts of diaspora formation: “(a) a shared homeland, (b) a mobilisation towards it and (c) an engagement in processes of imaging it”²⁷⁶. Therefore, the term implies fostering “dense and continuous linkages across borders”²⁷⁷. Although it has been suggested that such continuous linkages refrain members of a diaspora from integrating into their country of

²⁷¹ See Hale/ Kadoda. 2015. p.222.

²⁷² Hale/ Kadoda. 2015. p.227.

²⁷³ See Faist, Thomas. 2010. “Diaspora and transnationalism: What kind of dance partners?” In: Bauböck, R./ Faist, T. (Ed.). *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. p.9-34. p.10.

²⁷⁴ See Kläger, Florian. 2014. “Symbols of Diaspora”. In: Ahrens, R./ Stierstorfer, K. (Ed.). *Special Focus – Symbols of Diaspora*. Berlin/ Boston: De Gruyter. p.1-17. p.3.

²⁷⁵ See Faist. 2010. p.12.

²⁷⁶ Wilcock, Cathy. 2018. “Mobilising towards and imagining homelands: diaspora formation among U.K. Sudanese”. In: *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, Vol.44/3. London: Routledge. p.363-381. p.364.

²⁷⁷ Faist. 2010. p.12.

settlement, newer concepts take into consideration the hybridity of (cultural) identity.²⁷⁸ Identity is a central element in the concept of diasporas. Bruneau (2010) defines diaspora as communities bonded by a common identity. “This bond can come in different forms, such as family, community, religious, socio-political and economic ties or the shared memory of a catastrophe or trauma suffered by the members of the diaspora or their forebears”²⁷⁹. Depending on the intensity of this bond, diasporas can stretch over generations and include members that were not born in the imagined homeland.²⁸⁰

Central to the reproduction of diaspora identity is a set of “symbolic and ‘iconographic’ capital”²⁸¹ that even with the factors of time and space allows for the bond of the diaspora community, oftentimes dispersed in different countries of settlement, to remain intact. A central metaphor to the symbolism of diaspora is the understanding of *people as plants or seeds*, from which then the rootedness within a certain (cultural) context is derived.²⁸² The “homeland” is in this sense not simply a geographic place but produced based on this symbolic language of origin and belonging: “homelands do not produce diasporas. Instead, it is diasporas who produce their homeland”²⁸³. But not only does the shared imagining of origin form diasporas, but the imagining of the political future of the homeland can also pose another source of collective mobilisation towards the homeland.²⁸⁴ Literature, as well as other forms of art and creative expression, are important sources in which the identity of a diaspora is created, explored and analysed.²⁸⁵

4.2. Sudanese diaspora

“In myriad host countries, Sudanese have created unique communities called jalias. [...] In most cases, these diaspora communities also play important roles in the economic and

²⁷⁸ See Faist. 2010. p.13.

²⁷⁹ Bruneau, Michel. 2010. “Diasporas, transnational spaces and communities”. In: Bauböck, R./ Faist, T. (Ed.). *Diaspora and Transnationalism: Concepts, Theories and Methods*. Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press. p.35-49. p.35.

²⁸⁰ See Faist. 2010. p.22.

²⁸¹ Bruneau. 2010. p.35f.

²⁸² See Kläger. 2014. p.4.

²⁸³ Wilcock. 2018. p.365.

²⁸⁴ See Wilcock. 2018. p.366f.

²⁸⁵ See Monika Fludernik, cited in: Kläger. 2014. p.7.

political transformations in their countries of origin”²⁸⁶. Research from before the Sudan Uprising in 2018 suggests that diaspora formation does mostly not occur towards the whole country, but certain parts of it like Darfur, the Nuba mountains or the South.²⁸⁷ It would certainly be interesting to see whether this has changed in any way since the revolution. In her case study on Sudanese diaspora in the U.K. Wilcock (2018) identifies three focal points of diaspora formation: first, the sense of responsibility towards those “left behind” in specific regional and ethnic contexts; secondly, the shared experience of genocide and thirdly, the “emotional need to belong to homeland state building”²⁸⁸. An important observation is that not only the homeland is being imagined, but there is mobilisation towards a united Sudanese diaspora.²⁸⁹ In another ethnographic research on second-generation Sudanese diaspora in Qatar, Malik (2017) finds that an important part of the diaspora identity is the use of Sudanese dialect when communicating with other Arabic speakers and thereby highlighting their belonging. They perceive themselves as Sudanese and are oftentimes heavily involved in the daily politics of their homeland. Social Media is here an instrument to connect and negotiate belonging within new spaces.²⁹⁰ At the same time, online spaces have become an indispensable tool for diaspora communities to stay informed and get news on the homeland, which in the case of Sudan has led to intensive political dialogue. “The engagement of the Sudanese diaspora, in a context of global connectedness, and new trends of resistance seen in the developed and developing worlds, bring new ways and spaces for organising, and infinite knowledge sources for creative expressions”²⁹¹. Also, when it comes to oppressive regimes, the diaspora often fulfils the function of fact-checking and providing an external reference point for information on the homeland, also for those residing in the country. Besides, diasporas hold the potential to pressure such regimes from the outside.²⁹²

²⁸⁶ Fadlalla, Amal Hassan. 08.08.2019. “The role of diaspora in revolution”. In: *Africa is a country*. URL: <https://africasacountry.com/2019/08/rethinking-the-role-of-diaspora>. Accessed: 24.11.2019.

²⁸⁷ See Wilcock. 2018. p.367.

²⁸⁸ Wilcock. 2018. p.377.

²⁸⁹ See Wilcock. 2018. p.377.

²⁹⁰ See Malik, Saadia Izzeldin. 2017. “Identity, citizenship and ‘home’ through the transnational perspective(s) of second generation Sudanese migrants in Qatar”. In: *Diaspora Studies*, Vol. 10/2. London: Routledge. p.175-192. p.189f.

²⁹¹ Hale/ Kadoda. 2015. p.227.

²⁹² See Mudawi, Abuobeida A. 2015. *A Virtual Ethnographic Study of Online Communication and Democratic Behavior in the Sudan's Diaspora*. Dissertation: Ohio University. Ann Arbor: Pro Quest Publishing. p.146f.

“No longer only an economic force sending remittances back home, the diaspora community is a powerful social and political asset with which Sudan’s rulers have to reckon”²⁹³. During the recent Sudanese revolution, the diaspora was not only key in raising awareness, keeping an eye on Sudan and putting pressure on the regime from the outside, but also in constructing the vision of a united homeland that is no longer divided by religion, ethnicity, race or gender.²⁹⁴ “Diaspora activism has transformed the burden of being away from home into a gift of giving, alliance, and moral support from afar”²⁹⁵.

²⁹³ Fadlalla. 08.08.2019.

²⁹⁴ See Fadlalla. 08.08.2019.

²⁹⁵ Fadlalla. 08.08.2019.

Theoretical Framework II: Women, poetry and language

5. Women's poetry in Sudan

5.1. Oral traditions

Besides Arabic, Sudan features a multitude of other languages and vernaculars, most of which have no written tradition. Therefore, literature in Sudan consists of two different traditions, one the oral transmission, the other the much more recent tradition of written genres. Even today, much of Sudan's literature is transmitted orally, through live performances, screenings on television or recordings.²⁹⁶ Oral traditions of storytelling and poetry have the important function of recording history and historical narratives.²⁹⁷ Mayaram (2003) notes that "Most history has been written from the vantage point of the state [...] [and] often attempts a pseudoimpersonality. Voice assumes the appearance of a masquerade, projected as impartial and distant. It disguises the 'I' that writes"²⁹⁸. And while oral tradition is not necessarily an "other" to written history, it does pose a strong opportunity for counter-narratives that form an alternative collective memory. "In the case of oral texts the 'I' is not screened off, but is identified with the speaker or author. There is also a built-in transparency [...]. Through [oral traditions] we have an alternative construction of historical encounter, a subject and subaltern perspective on different state formations. Mythic memory helps counter official memory"²⁹⁹.

The main genres of oral literature were stories and narrative poetry.³⁰⁰ Within this classification of verse also fall proverbs and riddles, which are often used to lead over to the long,

²⁹⁶ See Tinawi, -al, Muhammad. 2014. "The Role of Sudanese Rural Women's Oral Folk Poetry in their Social Life: With Regard to Darfur Culture". In: *AMARABAC, Journal of American Arabic Academy for Science and Technology*, Vol. 5/14. URL: <https://platform.almanhal.com/Reader/Article/71472>. Accessed: 27.11.2019.

²⁹⁷ See Muhammad, Baqie Badawi. 1996. "The Role of Oral Poetry in Reshaping and Constructing Sudanese History (1820-1956)". In: *Folklore Forum*, Vol. 27/1. Indiana University: Department of Folklore and Ethnomusicology. p.60-76. p.62.

²⁹⁸ Mayaram, Shail. 2003. *Against History, Against State: Counterperspectives from the Margins*. New York: Columbia University Press. p.228f.

²⁹⁹ Mayaram. 2003. p.229.

³⁰⁰ See El-Nour, Eiman. 1997. "The Development of Contemporary Literature in Sudan". In: *Research in African Literatures*, Vol. 28/3. Bloomington: Indiana University Press. p. 150-162. p.150.

narrative stories.³⁰¹ “Poetry, proverbs, riddles, and other genres are used as acts of communication and as forms of education from elders to the young and from generation to generation”³⁰². Based on different classifications regarding the theme, the way a poem is performed and the underlying metric, oral poetry is divided into male and female domains.³⁰³ Yet Al Tinawi (2014) points out that due to the nature of traditional networks of transmission, women’s poetry has received less exposure to further recitation and memorizing.³⁰⁴ Oral traditions also constitute an important reference point and inspiration for newer genres like the novel, most famously represented by the works of aṭ-Ṭaiyib Ṣāliḥ (1928-2009).³⁰⁵

5.1.1. Oral poetry and political resistance

“Today our men on their horses
In front of them their command
In his beautiful horse struts.
Our men, like lions when they roar
Oh, Fool Pasha, just let your chickens go away”³⁰⁶

~ war song (approx. 1820), by Mihīra bint ʿAbbūd

“Folk songs and oral poetry were weapons used by the Sudanese, especially by women, as a mode of resistance. Resistance led to creation of poetry, but poetry also reformed and reshaped the historical record”³⁰⁷. Therefore, Muhammad (1996) concludes that oral poetry

³⁰¹ See Ahmed, Asia Mahjoub. 1987. “Women and Change in Humr Oral Traditions”. In: Kenyon, Susan (Ed.). *The Sudanese Woman*. Khartoum: Graduate College Publications, University of Khartoum. p.149-176. p.153.

³⁰² Al Tinawi. 2014.

³⁰³ See Al Tinawi. 2014.

³⁰⁴ See Al Tinawi. 2014.

³⁰⁵ See El-Nour. 1997. p.161.

³⁰⁶ Song translated by Muhammad. 1996. p.64. Mihīra bint ʿAbbūd wrote this song when the Turkish invaded Sudan in 1820 and she and other women wanted to encourage the men to fight the technologically superior army. “The imagery explaining differences is fascinating, creating a contrast between the two groups of warriors. The Sudanese in this song are described as lions, whereas Muhammad Ali's troops are described as chickens (metaphors for courage and cowardice, respectively)”, *ibid.* p.64f.

³⁰⁷ Muhammad. 1996. p.62f.

not only has the function to record and reshape history, but to give historical events “their full meaning”³⁰⁸.

One famous story that exemplifies how oral poetry was used by a woman to incite political action is the story of Tāḡā, sister to the ruler of Darfur during the British invasion of Darfur in 1916. Outnumbered and technologically inferior, the sultan had the choice of surrender or face the invaders. As the story goes, Tāḡā became infuriated with the thought of surrender and threatened her brother: “If men refused to fulfill their responsibilities, she threatened that women would take their place. According to Sudanese traditions and values, this would be a real humiliation for men, because warfare is the men's concern. At this time, many songs were created by women to encourage men to face the invaders”³⁰⁹. Another example that shows not only how oral poetry was used to stir political feeling but also how it can by no means be restricted to the local area is that of Sudanese women opposing Hitler and Mussolini through their poetry during the Second World War, which speaks to active engagement with world politics.³¹⁰

Muhammad concludes that “As artistic expression, poetry has the potential to affect the process of history-making and to represent powerful forces in its reshaping of events. [...] The symbolic, metaphoric forms, and other devices used in the creation of the poetry secure the connection of the message to the community”³¹¹.

5.2. Folk poetry and the Ḥakamāt

Often treated as an “exotic phenomenon” the Ḥakamāt– female folk poets of Baggara³¹² groups throughout Sudan³¹³ - have received more and more attention in recent years in academia and the media as important actors within rural communities. “The Hakamat perhaps

³⁰⁸ Muhammad. 1996.p.63.

³⁰⁹ Muhammad. 1996. p.68.

³¹⁰ See Muhammad. 1996. p.70f.

³¹¹ Muhammad. 1996. p.72.

³¹² The Baggara or Baqqara are a mainly nomadic, cattle-herding people of Arab descent who primarily live in Darfur and Kordofan. See Kramer et al. 2013. p.85.

³¹³ The Ḥakamāt are not only present in Darfuri society (See Musa 2018), although they have received the most attention due to the conflict in Darfur, but also within other baggara societies like the Humr in south-western Kordofan or Khartoum North (See Ahmed 1987).

first gained the attention of [international] organizations as potential peacebuilding actors and participants in peacebuilding workshops because of their ‘extraordinary’ role as women who can influence issues that were regarded as ‘male affairs’: that is, conflict and violence”³¹⁴. Thereby being “at odds” with common notions of women in conflict regions as victims of their circumstances, the Ḥakamāt have become of interest to more research.

The word Ḥakama is commonly associated with “wisdom, judgment and rule”³¹⁵, thereby attributed to the Arabic root ḥ-k-m, with ḥakama meaning “to pass judgement, rule, have authority”³¹⁶. Ḥakama is then the feminine form ascribed to a person worthy of these attributes. Musa (2018) however argues that this etymology is not necessarily correct and Ḥakama might well be a “neutral form of exaggeration (having more of a something)”³¹⁷ which would point to the status of authority a Ḥakama holds within society³¹⁸. She is “a female who possesses a raft of special qualities: a poet, a performer and a singer”³¹⁹. Ḥakamāt as a profession or rather a way of life only includes women, which brings Musa to the conclusion that this position of female authority within the Darfuri and Baggara nomadic societies poses a “gendered resilient mechanism for dealing with hazards and uncertainties”³²⁰.

Although there are different types of songs, in general, a Ḥakama’s verse and song focus on “words of wisdom [...] and [she] has the ability to judge others”³²¹, most poems are somehow connected to the theme of courage.³²² One of the most prominently acknowledged functions are songs to incite fighting and war³²³. These songs are also known as “blood lyrics” and encourage violence.³²⁴ The authority these songs have is exemplified in an article shared by

³¹⁴ Adam, Nadine Rea Intisar. 2016. “Hakamat and Peacebuilding 2004-2012”. In: *Égypte/Monde arabe: Troisième série, Le Soudan, cinq ans après l’indépendance du Soudan du Sud*, Vol 14/16. Kairo: CEDEJ. DOI: 10.4000/ema.3595. p.155-167. p.155.

³¹⁵ Adam, Nadine Rea Intisar. 2013. *Darfur’s Evil Women? The Hakamat and their role in peace, conflict, violence and war*. Dissertation: Universität Wien. p.102.

³¹⁶ See Wehr, Hans. 1994. *The Hans Wehr Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. Edited by Cowan, J.M. 4th Edition. Ithaca/ NY: Spoken Language Services. p.228f.

³¹⁷ Musa, Suad M.E. 2018. *Hawks & Doves in Sudan’s Armed Conflict: Al-Hakkamat Baggara Women of Darfur*. Rochester: James Currey. p.47.

³¹⁸ In this case, Musa researched the Darfuri Baggara society.

³¹⁹ Musa. 2018. p.46.

³²⁰ Musa. 2018. p.48.

³²¹ Musa. 2018. p.46f.

³²² See Ahmed. 1987. p.156.

³²³ See Adam. 2013. p.102.

³²⁴ See Adam. 2013. p. 103.

several NGOs working in the field. After deadly clashes between two groups of conflicting tribes a peaceful settlement seems to have been reached, however upon returning home, members of the groups were greeted by Ḥakamāt:

“[...] the Fayreen men who reached the agreement were confronted by groups of Haka-mat singing songs about cowardice. The women removed their Islamic headscarves to indicated [sic] their lack of respect for the men and to question their manhood. They walked barefoot to suggest that the men had run away so fast that they did not have time to fasten their shoes. Faced with such ridicule, the men took up arms and re-turned to fight the Rizeigat, resulting in dozens of deaths on both sides”³²⁵.

However, what becomes quite obvious in this article as well, is how the Ḥakamāt are being framed by international actors, peacebuilding entities and NGOs: phrases like “it is difficult to change them to sing for peace”³²⁶ or “explaining [to them] about peace”³²⁷ show that the women are not being regarded as subjects with agency but rather instruments without their own voice. Presumably, they just must be educated about peace so they can serve the agenda. Although this notion acknowledges the importance of the Ḥakamāt to the community, it effectively silences their voices and instead depicts them as an “exotic phenomenon”.³²⁸ This does not do justice the status and authority female poets have traditionally held in Sudanese societies and obscures the consistency of women expressing their concerns towards the community in creative ways. In their article, the authors Elamin and Ismail point out the “significant social and political roles as oral historians”³²⁹ the Ḥakamāt have and are continuing to play. Not only have they actively engaged in peacebuilding efforts, but the authors also highlight their critique of members of the regime.³³⁰

Poetry in the oral tradition, therefore, does also reflect ongoing changes and has thus become a medium for recording and transmitting contemporary events.³³¹ “[The] urban folk-poetry

³²⁵ Evans-Pritchard, Blake/ Yousif, Zakia. 04.01.2012. “Female Singers stir blood in Darfur”. In: *IWPR, ACR*, Iss.312. URL: <https://iwpr.net/global-voices/female-singers-stir-blood-darfur>. Accessed: 05.06.2019.

³²⁶ Salim, cited in Evans-Pritchard/ Yousif. 04.01.2012.

³²⁷ Salim, cited in Evans-Pritchard/ Yousif. 04.01.2012.

³²⁸ See Adam. 2013. p.138.

³²⁹ Elamin, Nisrin/ Ismail, Tahani. 04.05.2019. “The many mothers of Sudan’s revolution”. In: *Al Jazeera/ Africa*. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/alaa-salah-sudanese-mothers-190501175500137.html>. Accessed: 20.06.2019.

³³⁰ See Elamin/ Ismail. 04.05.2019.

³³¹ See Ahmed. 1987. p.166.

is full of references to both national and international political problems”³³². Ahmed (1987) even compares folk-poetry to other forms of mass media.³³³

Regarding women’s poetry and verse in the spectrum of (political) conflict and crisis as the aforementioned “gendered resilient mechanisms for dealing with hazards and uncertainty” poses a wide spectrum of interesting starting points from where to deconstruct female power through the use of language in conflict situations not as an “exotic phenomenon” but as a mechanism and means of expression, participation, and power.

5.3. From the Jungle and the Desert to Nas with Notepads

With the dawn of the 20th century and the introduction of the press, print and the written dissemination of literature meant a new development for traditional storytelling and poetry.³³⁴ With Arabic by then being the dominant language in Sudan, traditional written poetry developed much in accordance with other Arab countries. Yet, when it comes to themes, Sudan’s distinct positioning as an Arab-Afro country sets it apart in terms of identity.³³⁵ The blending of Arabism and Africanism into a hybrid identity is prominently found in the *The Jungle and the Desert* current of the mid-20th century, in which poets, frustrated with the hegemony of Arab culture, sought to unite Arab and African heritage.³³⁶ Here, also song as part of the poetical genre plays a role, especially for the more colloquial use of language: “Sung to an accompaniment of a mixture of African and Arabian rhythms, Sudanese songs, together with poetry, became an expression of a nation in search of its identity and cultural heritage”³³⁷. Other main topics of the time, owing to political upheaval, are nationalist and anti-colonialist stances as well as questions of (social) justice, not least influenced by the rise of socialist realism.³³⁸ Yet another current of poetry is rooted in Sufism, which is deeply

³³² Ahmed. 1987. p.173.

³³³ See Ahmed. 1987. p.174.

³³⁴ See El-Nour. 1997. p.150/151.

³³⁵ See Babikir, Adil (Ed.). 2019. *Modern Sudanese Poetry: An Anthology*. Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press. xiii.

³³⁶ See Babikir. 2019. xiv/xv.

³³⁷ El-Nour. 1997. p.155.

³³⁸ See Babikir. 2019. xviii/ xix.

entrenched in Sudan.³³⁹ Since the 1980s, free verse has become the dominant style of poetry, with oftentimes women being representative of this “new wave of prose poets”³⁴⁰. The fact that Sudan has a poor publishing industry might have kept many poets from becoming internationally renowned³⁴¹, but here Social Media poses a multitude of new opportunities. *Nas*³⁴² *with Notepads*, already exemplified in the name, is one example of a new generation of poets using the Internet and Social Media to build a community and provide an online and offline platform for people to express themselves through poetry, thereby also redefining their country’s image: “Nas with Notepads strives to introduce a different image of Sudan to the world; an image that exudes creativity, innovation and positivity”³⁴³. Still, folk poetry remains equally important with a large audience on more conventional media like television and radio³⁴⁴. I was told that one of the most popular TV shows during Ramadan is a program that centres around the presentation of different (male and female!) poets every evening of the month.³⁴⁵

5.4. What are their names?

Dominant history mostly focuses on men and their contributions and this is also true for the transmission of renowned female poets and their inclusion in representative poetry anthologies. However, there are some famous poetesses remembered also for their political contributions.

“Among Sudan's renowned female poets are Meheira bint Aboud from Nubia, who famously recited poems to Sudanese warriors fighting against the invading armies of Egyptian Khedive Mohammed Ali Pasha, and the anti-colonial icon Hawa al-Tagtaga

³³⁹ See Babikir. 2019. xxiv.

³⁴⁰ Babikir. 2019. xxvi.

³⁴¹ See Babikir. 2019. xxix.

³⁴² *Nas* means people.

³⁴³ Nas with Notepads. (date unknown). “About Us”. In: *Nas with Notepads*. URL: <https://www.naswithnotepads.com/>. Accessed: 27.11.2019.

³⁴⁴ See Babikir. 2019. xxviii.

³⁴⁵ Interview with Sabah Sanhuri. 25.07.2019.

from Kordofan, who was jailed by the British after performing nationalist songs [...] on the eve of Sudan's independence"³⁴⁶.

Mihīra bint ʿAbbūd is remembered as a patriotic hero of the resistance of 1821 and her poetry of the events has found entrance into the folk traditions paying tribute to the resistance.³⁴⁷ Hawā at-Taḡtaḡa also became known as the poetess of Ismāʿīl al-Azharī, the first president of independent Sudan.³⁴⁸ Both poetesses pose examples of how women historically used their poetry for political impact inspiring direct action and how, in return, the poetry serves as a medium to remember those events. Another way that poetry is remembered is through popular music, "Poems composed by such female names as Shaghaba in the sixteenth century and Banouna bitt al-Makk in the nineteenth century are popular songs today"³⁴⁹. Both women were Ḥakamāt of their respective tribes. The theme of war also remains present in modern-day Sudanese poetry, a testimony to the longest civil war in Africa. An example is here the South Sudanese poetess Nylawo Ayul, who writes in Arabic.³⁵⁰ Contemporary female voices that are also found in a recent anthology on modern Sudanese poetry are Ruqaya Warrāq and Naḡlā' ʿUṭmān al-Tūm, both representative of a new generation of prose poets. "That wave brought to light other female names, such as Iman Ahmad, Randa Mahjoub, Kaltoum Abdalla, Sara Hasabo, Iman Adam. These poets address a wide range of themes and pose a complex mixture of existential and philosophical questions"³⁵¹. During the Sudanese revolution this past year, one of the loudest voices of poetic resistance was Marwa Babiker. The British *Vogue* featured her as "a modern griot, documenting stories through poetry. She wrote her first poem 12 years ago, borne of the rage of being told that only men could speak on political issues"³⁵². Again, this shows that there seems to be an important link between poetry and women addressing political issues in Sudan. She uses her poetry not only to address political topics but also to challenge beliefs anchored within the society: "We have a very old saying

³⁴⁶ Elamin/ Ismail. 04.05.2019.

³⁴⁷ See Fluehr-Lobban. 1998. p.6.

³⁴⁸ See Muhammad. 1996. p.72.

³⁴⁹ Babikir. 2019. xxviii.

³⁵⁰ See Babikir. 2019. xxvii.

³⁵¹ Babikir. 2019. xxvi.

³⁵² Mukhtar, Amal. 24.05.2019. "The Brilliant Women Making A Difference In Sudan's Female-Led Revolution". In: *Vogue Britain*. URL: <https://www.vogue.co.uk/article/sudanese-female-revolutionaries-speak-out>. Accessed: 26.11.2019.

in my country that ‘even if a woman is an axe it will not cut anything’. I used that in my poetry to say now we know that this is absolutely not true”³⁵³. She goes on to say that “Historically, the women of Sudan have been there to motivate the men to pull through wars. [...] But now, this has changed, they’re not only motivational, they are side-by-side with them in the revolution, doing every single thing that men are doing”³⁵⁴. Another important name when it comes to women and poetry in Sudan is ^ʿAzza. Not because she was a famous poetess and left her poetry for the posterity to remember her by – but because until this day, and especially during the Sudanese revolution, she prominently appears in songs and poetry. One of Sudan’s best-known poets, Ḥalīl Farah (1894-1932), for example, wrote a poem to “My beloved Azza”³⁵⁵ praising the country by interchangeably addressing ^ʿAzza and his love for her. “Khalil Farah’s song ‘Azza’ stands as an ever-vivid evidence of Sudanese people’s high regard and respect for Sudanese women”³⁵⁶. The wife of ^ʿAlī ^ʿAbd al-Laṭīf, a nationalist opposition leader organizing a revolt against the British colonialists in 1924, ^ʿAzza Ḥağ al-ʿAmīn was the first woman to lead the protests.³⁵⁷ She took part in secret gatherings, secured communications and even beat a British officer who wanted to search her home for incriminating anti-colonialist material.³⁵⁸ “Her name Azza soon became a reference for the love of Sudan in many songs during the British rule over Sudan which prohibited patriotic songs. Many Sudanese named their daughters Azza to show their love for Sudan even after the independence”³⁵⁹. While there is apparently not much literature on her actual life, she seems to have become almost a mythological figure, synonymous with the whole country and often used as a metaphor to address it, an “embodiment symbol for all its values and high morals”³⁶⁰.

³⁵³ Marwa Babiker, in Mukhtar. 24.05.2019.

³⁵⁴ Marwa Babiker, in Mukhtar. 24.05.2019.

³⁵⁵ See Babikir. 2019. p.1.

³⁵⁶ Sudanow Magazine. 23.12.2018. “1st January Sudan National Day: Women Role In Independence Movement”. In: *Sudanow Magazine*. URL: <https://sudanow-magazine.net/pageArch.php?subId=&Id=567&type=new>. Accessed: 13.12.2019.

³⁵⁷ See Albhai, Khalid. (date unknown). “A Woman Named Azza”. In: *Colby*. URL: <http://www.colby.edu/khalid-albhai-revolutions/love/>. Accessed: 27.11.2019.

³⁵⁸ See Muhammad. 1996. p.69.

³⁵⁹ Albhai. (date unknown).

³⁶⁰ Sudanow Magazine. 23.12.2018.

6. The Power of Language

6.1. Contested tongues: language and power

In a country where much of the history is transmitted through stories, poetry might incite war and a proverb can settle a dispute³⁶¹, the power of language should not be underestimated.

“It has been through the power of language that affection, connectedness, understanding, [...] belonging and longing have substantiated their sensibility within human life. [...] Language has been powerful in shifting attention in politics and political games [...]. Language has been suppressed, silenced and suffocated through language, and it has been language that has displayed its domineering power in certain discursive modes”³⁶².

Yet, what is the power in language? Much has been written on this topic that can be but discussed briefly. Power is often understood in terms of Max Weber, who famously equated power with the ability of one party to exercise their will over that of another, not least by force and coercion and against resistance.³⁶³ There have been many adaptations and clarifications to the faces of power, yet one of the most important notions is that power “involves relationships, particularly ones of inequality” and the exertion of it does – contrary to Weber – occur in more subtle ways than blunt force or coercion.³⁶⁴ Power is not only exercised in language but through language. Although it is not within the scope of this work to address this in-depth, it is important to mention the postcolonial stance on language and power, since language hegemony is an essential aspect of exertion of power over another. Derrida (1997) writes that every culture is forcefully installed by politics of language, and the more powerful – the hegemon – often seeks to reduce language to monolingualism to consolidate power.³⁶⁵

³⁶¹ See Ahmed. 1987. p.152.

³⁶² Fatemi, Sayyed Mohsen. 2019. *The Psychology of Language*. New York/ London: Routledge. p.1f.

³⁶³ See Edwards, John. 2006. “The power of language, the language of power”. In: Pütz, Martin/ Fishman, Joshua (Ed.). *Along the Routes to Power: Explorations of Empowerment Through Language*. Berlin: De Gruyter Mouton. p. 13-34. p.15.

³⁶⁴ Edwards. 2006. p.15.

³⁶⁵ See Derrida, Jaques. 1997. „Die Einsprachigkeit des Anderen oder die Prothese des Ursprungs“. In: Haverkamp (Ed.). *Die Sprache der Anderen*. Frankfurt am Main: Fischer Taschenbuch Verlag. p.15-42. p.27f.

Therefore, “Language both reflects and has an impact on power structures”³⁶⁶. It becomes the tool, the medium and the battlefield of power.

In the case of Sudan, immediately after the end of the British-Egyptian condominium, the new nationalist leaders sought to install standard literary Arabic as the dominant language in accordance with policies of Arabization and Pan-Arabism.³⁶⁷ This meant the imposition of a language that was not the primary or mother tongue for about 40-50% of the population, which is extremely diverse language-wise.³⁶⁸

Language plays an important role in imagining parts of the population as “Arab” while others are constructed as “African”. The fact that Arabization went hand in hand with further Islamization speaks to how language is used as a tool of social engineering.³⁶⁹ The imposition of Arabic as the dominant language is one of the most visible symptoms of discrimination and further marginalization of other ethnic groups in Sudan. Effectively, “language politics helped fuel the civil war”³⁷⁰. In 2010, before the independence of the South, then-president al-Bašīr had announced that in case of the secession of South Sudan, “we will change the constitution and at that time there will be no time to speak of diversity of culture and ethnicity. [...] Islam [will] be the official religion and Arabic the official language”³⁷¹. But if language has the power to consolidate political power – it also has the power to do the exact opposite and contest it.

6.2. Sudanese dialect and minority languages

There are at least 136 different languages (including foreign languages like English) registered in Sudan, and still, linguists suggest even higher numbers.³⁷² Often, opposition agendas included a call for multilingualism.³⁷³ Therefore, minority languages are a part of contesting

³⁶⁶ Zouhir, Abderrahman. 2015. “Language Policy and Identity Conflict in Sudan”. In: *Digest of Middle East Studies*, Vol.24/2. Wiley Online Library. p.283-302. p.285.

³⁶⁷ See Sharkey, Heather. 2012. “Language and Conflict: The Political History of Arabisation in Sudan and Algeria”. In: *Studies in Ethnicity and Nationalism*, Vol.12/3. Hoboken: Wiley-Blackwell. p.427-449. p.42f.

³⁶⁸ See Sharkey. 2012. p.428ff.

³⁶⁹ See Sharkey. 2012. p.431.

³⁷⁰ Sharkey. 2012. p.436.

³⁷¹ ʿUmār al Bašīr, cited after: Sørbo/ Ahmed. 2013. p.2.

³⁷² See Zouhir. 2015. p.286.

³⁷³ See Zouhir. 2015. p.293.

hegemony and constructing a “counter identity”³⁷⁴ that distinguishes between the oppressor and the oppressed. But not only minority languages but also the use of colloquial Sudanese Arabic, though part of the dominant language, can be used to contest the power of the ruling elite or, as was mentioned in the chapter on Sudanese diaspora, to set apart one’s identity from that of the majority population. While the use of standard written Arabic poses certain thresholds and is therefore mostly associated with the elite and written text, colloquial Sudanese and dialects are the language of orally transmitted literature and poetry and much more accessible.³⁷⁵ It is therefore not far-fetched to assume that dialect is the language of “the people” and thus mass movements. The findings of Michel (2013) researching language during the Arab Spring corroborate the theory “that language acts as a carrier and conveyor of revolutionary sentiments and that there is [a] [...] relationship between loyalism to the incumbent regimes and the use of MSA³⁷⁶ register and support of, if not identification with, the *thuwwa:r*, revolutionaries, of the Arab Uprisings and the choice to speak Colloquial Arabic”³⁷⁷.

6.3. The language of revolution

Language shapes every part of revolutions: how they are sparked, carried out, how revolutionary identity is imagined, how they are perceived and spoken about and how they are remembered and (re)-constructed. Just think “Arab Spring” which inherently implied “awakening” and was later often exchanged for “fall”. But revolutions also develop their very own language. “[L]anguage is used to carry revolutionary sentiments and attitudes, change minds and conceptions, and inspire specific actions. The ‘language of revolution’ is intellectual production—in the Arab Spring, speech is activism, as is engaging in the language, or messaging”³⁷⁸.

³⁷⁴ Zouhir. 2015. p.294.

³⁷⁵ El-Nour. 1997. p.158.

³⁷⁶ Modern Standard Arabic.

³⁷⁷ Michel, Nazir Nader Harb. 2013. *Irhal! The Role of Language in the Arab Spring*. Dissertation: Georgetown University. Ann Arbor: ProQuest Publishing. p.118.

³⁷⁸ Michel. 2013. p.41.

Chants and poetry have been central to the language of revolution in Sudan as well as revolutions across the Arab world, often being described as “galvanizing” and a driving force of the movement.³⁷⁹ Colla (2011) notes that during the revolution in Egypt, poetry in and of itself has become a revolutionary act that surpasses textual literature: “This poetry has the power to express messages that could not be articulated in other forms, as well as to sharpen demands with ever keener edges”³⁸⁰. Mostly, poems are not simply being read out loud by individuals, but collectively chanted. Although the sharing of poetry via Social Media poses a new function of revolutionary poetry that remains to be analysed in-depth, chanting is probably the most powerful act of speech in mass movements. “By collectively chanting, the people display a ‘shared sense of legitimacy’ that they give to this act and the poetically inspired slogan, in particular”³⁸¹. An equally important factor of poetry and chanting, however, is the ability to quickly transcend borders and not only raise awareness but spark solidarity. This has been especially true for revolts in the Arab world.³⁸² Another interesting notion Colla makes regarding the chanting during the Egyptian Revolution in 2011 is the impact language can have on the psychology of fear: “Likewise, the act of singing invective that satirizes feared public figures has an immediate impact that cannot be explained in terms of language, for learning to laugh at one’s oppressor is a key part of unlearning fear”³⁸³.

But it is not only language in conventional terms that is powerful in resistance movements: art is another form of communicating political opinions and of contesting power, especially in repressive environments. Here, art can be a “loophole”³⁸⁴ through which authority is challenged. „Making a statement in work of art or a song allows for civil disobedience without direct confrontation by state security and armed militias”³⁸⁵.

³⁷⁹ See Ghanem, Heba. 2018. “The 2011 Egyptian revolution chants: a romantic-Mu‘tazilī moral order”. In: *British Journal of Middle Eastern Studies*, Vol. 45/3. London: Routledge. p.430-442. p.430.

³⁸⁰ Colla, Elliott. 31.01.2011. “The Poetry of Revolt”. In: *Jadaliyya*. URL: <https://www.jadaliyya.com/Details/23638/The-Poetry-of-Revolt>. Accessed: 29.11.2019.

³⁸¹ Ghanem. 2018. p.434.

³⁸² See Ghanem. 2018. p.433.

³⁸³ Colla. 31.01.2011.

³⁸⁴ Sara Elhassan in Elkogali Häggström. 02.04.2019

³⁸⁵ Elkogali Häggström. 02.04.2019.

Analysis

The following chapter analyses the interviews I conducted with nine women and one man from Sudan and the Sudanese diaspora, who all self-identified as poets and writers. For the analysis, important topics are identified, and categories established to systematize the interviews and gather a deeper understanding of the matter. Still, it should be noted that the different categories do not stand isolated but oftentimes intersect with several other categories.

7. Women

7.1. A special connection

An important point that has been brought up by every interview partner is the deep-felt need to express emotion. In some cases, this need for emotional expression was directly linked to being part of Sudanese culture:

[“Esi”]: “Poetry is in our culture. We’re really emotional and we’ve been really oppressed and the only way to express that is through this”³⁸⁶.

It has become clear throughout the literature that there is a historic connection between women and poetry that is rooted within Sudanese society. Yet I was interested to hear how my interview partners would describe this connection between women and poetry in Sudan. The most common answer was in some way pointing to a unique access to emotion that is associated with women.

[“Firdaus”]: “Women focus more on the emotional side – more than men – and have a deeper expression of it”³⁸⁷.

In some cases, this distinction was considered natural with reference to *fiṭra*³⁸⁸, in others it was regarded as a social construct, that was at the same time contrasted by a certain image of men:

³⁸⁶ Interview with „Esi“. 29.07.2019.

³⁸⁷ Interview with „Firdaus“. 27.06.2019.

³⁸⁸ Interview with “Firdaus”. 27.06.2019. *fiṭra* is an Arabic term that refers to the nature of human beings.

[Khalda]: “Society expects men to always have it together [...] – to be a man is to be tough, not express [their feelings]”³⁸⁹.

However, it should be noted that my question already assumed a difference between women’s and men’s poetry, which might have supported a certain gender binary. Only one interview partner challenged a dichotomy and thereby brought up an important discussion about the meaning of women’s writing.

[Sabah]: “We have this debate on feminine writing. I don’t know what to think. I believe writing has no gender. [...] I believe writing must be original, without gender and without making comments about the gender of the writer. I don’t think being a woman affects everything”³⁹⁰.

In contrast, one interview partner referred to the poetry of men and women in Sudan as two entirely different concepts, pointing out the high status of women and their poetry in Sudanese society.³⁹¹ In a follow-up interview, he went to specify:

[D.H.B.]: “I think that poetry written by women is very passionate [...] they support their power and women’s poetry can address emotions and feelings more than men. The other thing that makes women’s poetry special is her ability to express things honestly and deeply”³⁹².

The attribution of honesty and adequacy to women’s poetry was again brought up in another interview, where the interview partner ascribed the ongoing importance of women’s poetry to analytical accuracy:

[A.S.]: “[...] she knows so well how to write about a situation, she knows how to make it clear [...] [and] she is going to be 100 % right! That’s why she is so powerful”³⁹³.

In summary, interview partners³⁹⁴ highlighted three attributions to women’s poetry that make the connection between women and poetry “special”: the historic link and consistency between both; a deep connection to emotions and the ability to express them; and an analytical accuracy in breaking down events and rendering them “honestly”, comprehensibly and

³⁸⁹ Interview with Khalda El Jack. 03.07.2019.

³⁹⁰ Interview with Sabah Sanhoury. 25.07.2019.

³⁹¹ See Interview a) with D.H.B. Mohamed. 08.07.2019

³⁹² Interview b) with D.H.B. Mohamed. 27.08.2019.

³⁹³ Interview with A.S. 07.08.2019.

³⁹⁴ Whether male or female; there was no difference in the given answers regarding the gender.

poignantly to their audience. At the same time, (women's) poetry is also regarded as having the ability to change the status of women in society:

[D.H.B.]: "And the poetry can change the perception of society about women and the perception of society about itself"³⁹⁵.

7.2. Between power and oppression

In the Interview with D.H.B. Mohamed, an interesting antagonism came up which draws through most of the interviews but was most pointedly in his account regarding the status of women in society. Shortly after pointing out the high appreciation of women and their poetry in Sudanese society, he went on to say "and there are those who say that women's oppression and discrimination against women in Sudan makes them write poems that draw attention"³⁹⁶. It seemed like an accepted fact and no contradiction that women are powerful and hold a high status in society and are at the same time oppressed and marginalized. Interestingly, this statement was made regarding the power of women's poetry.

In all interviews, women were portrayed as powerful, having (traditionally) a high status and central importance to society, as exemplified by this quote by Khalda El Jack:

"There is a strength and a presence that Sudanese women have always had – whether that's in her role in the household, within the community, even in history going back, in times of revolution, they were always present"³⁹⁷.

The role of women in the household is here directly linked to women's power and importance in society, which can be seen as another source of why women's poetry is traditionally important in Sudan.

[Khalda]: "She understands what it means to raise the kids, what struggles we are fighting, [...] she is the one who knows about the daily struggles. And if she is not there in society to speak about these things - I don't know who else is going to do it"³⁹⁸.

³⁹⁵ Interview with D.H.B. Mohamed. 27.08.2019.

³⁹⁶ Interview with D.H.B. Mohamed. 27.08.2019.

³⁹⁷ Interview with Khalda El Jack. 03.07.2019.

³⁹⁸ Interview with Khalda El Jack. 03.07.2019.

Still, most interview partners also addressed the oppressive environment women face in Sudan and the continuous struggle for women's rights. Society is oftentimes portrayed as detrimental to the empowerment of women.³⁹⁹ Writing and performance are also described as either inherently or through the discussion of sensitive issues carrying a stigma, as here by singer and songwriter Alaa Dishouni:

“For me as a female Sudanese musician, I face a lot of difficulties [...] – there is a stigma on that. [...] Other struggles you might struggle with – living in a society that does not appreciate women that much, means you start creating barriers for yourself, too. [...]. Women in Sudan do not have the freedom to choose whatever they want”⁴⁰⁰.

Although the earlier quote by Sabah Sanhoury shows that not all interviewees use their writing to specifically address women's issues⁴⁰¹, many of the other interviewees pointed out this aspect of their writing, which will be analysed later in more detail. The struggle for women's rights was also brought up in reference to the revolution and the role and visibility of women in it.

[Khalda]: “There is a notion of what the role of women in the protests is, but it is not going to be easy to manifest that within a new Sudan – women still need to work twice as hard to have their position solidified and talk twice as loud”⁴⁰².

Two seemingly mutually exclusive concepts appear to shape the environment in which women in Sudan seek creative expression: on one hand, a high status that centres the power of women as authoritative figures within the family and community; and on the other hand, the oppression of and discrimination against women within society which diminishes and taboos free expression. This is where poetry comes into play.

³⁹⁹ See most prominently interviews with Ishraga Mustafa. 18.07.2019; Khalda El Jack. 03.07.2019; Alaa Dishouni. 21.08.2019.

⁴⁰⁰ Interview with Alaa Dishouni. 21.08.2019.

⁴⁰¹ Whatever that means, as the quote also contested what constitutes “feminine” writing.

⁴⁰² Interview with Khalda El Jack. 03.07.2019.

8. Poetry

8.1. Poetry as a Safe Space

One of the fundamental functions of poetry that solidified in the interviews was poetry being a safe space for self-expression. A quote from the very first interview I conducted with “Gholama” was most striking and later corroborated by the other writers:

“You can say everything with words – you can say anything you want, but you stay protected [...]. I remember being told not to say something disrespectful. But with poetry you are totally free – you can say anything – against anyone – even against God. [...] and no one has the right to tell you that it is disrespectful or not allowed”⁴⁰³.

Criticizing God in an Islamic state ruled by an authoritarian regime is probably the epitome of free expression – but the only space to do so is a form of expression that is so ambiguous that any message is inconclusive. Through poetry, anything can be said – yet any message is open to interpretation.

[“Esi”]: “People in my country are not allowed to speak. We are always afraid to speak about our rights, like women’s [rights] – so being creative was the only way and we could express to each other, sing to each other and just feel each other”⁴⁰⁴.

The topics addressed in relation to poetry as a safe space range from criticizing God and religion⁴⁰⁵, over challenging the regime⁴⁰⁶ and discussing topics that are taboo in society⁴⁰⁷ to dealing with personal issues⁴⁰⁸. Therefore, the function of poetry as safe space spans the political, social and personal space.

8.1.1. The Ambiguity of Poetry

To illustrate the ambiguity of the poetical message, I was told an anecdote by one of my interview partners who just wants to be referred to by A.S.: during the beginning of the

⁴⁰³ Interview with „Gholama“. 11.01.2019.

⁴⁰⁴ Interview with „Esi“. 29.07.2019.

⁴⁰⁵ See Interview with „Gholama“. 11.01.2019.

⁴⁰⁶ See e.g. Interview with A.S. 07.08.2019; Alaa Dishouni. 21.08.2019.

⁴⁰⁷ See Interview with Ishraga Mustafa. 18.07.2019.

⁴⁰⁸ See Interview with “Firdaus”. 27.06.2019.

revolution, her band was scheduled to perform in a function that can be described as favourable to the regime or at least not challenging the status quo, as they were asked to perform in a non-political way.⁴⁰⁹ And indeed, they did choose very peaceful songs:

[A.S.]: “they were not too political, just about Sudan... [...] but for certain people, it would sound so political! But, you know, it was just about the people! It was actually for every single person in the sit-in area protesting”⁴¹⁰.

Her point was to show that with the right framing, something political could seem innocent and vice versa. This anecdote shows that when the message is left to the interpretation of the receiver, one can get away with being political even in a restrictive environment.

[Sabah]: “Poetry is like a secret formula, you can use it for what you want”⁴¹¹.

This quote by Sabah Sanhoury is particularly interesting as it shows that poetry can be a tool, used to illustrate but also obscure a message if need be. Ambiguity is like the protective garment that safeguards those who express opinions that are not favoured either by the authorities or society. Poetry, therefore, becomes the safe space in which one can express more freely.

[“Esi”]: “So, there was a way – so they tried to stop that, too. But it’s not like anyone was saying anything to anyone directly, it was just – art!”⁴¹².

8.1.2. (Self-) censorship

Although poetry as a safe space was one of the most prominent functions brought up by the respective writers, in several instances some had also made experiences of (self-) censorship. Family or society can function as a form of supervisory authority that can lead to self-censorship without there being any institutionalized censoring.⁴¹³ This excessive influence of society on the individual creative process might narrow the function of poetry as a safe space, as the account of Alaa Dishouni shows:

⁴⁰⁹ Details are left out or changed to protect the anonymity of the interview partner.

⁴¹⁰ Interview with A.S. 07.08.2019.

⁴¹¹ Interview with Sabah Sanhoury. 25.07.2019.

⁴¹² Interview with „Esi“. 29.07.2019.

⁴¹³ See Interview with Ishraga Mustafa. 18.07.2019.

“Poetry is a means of self-expression, it should be completely free, but even as a poet you need to choose your words, you cannot just say anything. [...] that applies for men too. If you have men discussing things like sexuality or other sensitive issues, it won’t be accepted by society”⁴¹⁴.

Noteworthy is here that men are seen as equally affected by this form of censorship.

8.2. Poetry as liberation, resistance, and empowerment

[Ishraga]: “Writing is a form of liberation [...]. Even before I start writing, I feel it boiling in my blood, in my entire body – there is something in me, I don’t exactly know where, in my brain, in my heart and after I write it down, I feel liberated. It is like a chain around my neck and I can’t breathe”⁴¹⁵.

Somewhere between poetry as a safe space and poetry as a form of resistance lies the function of liberation, that can occur on a very personal level, like the account above shows, but also on a structural level, when the need to express freely in a safe space transfers to using this space for resistance. While poetry can be the safe space to express and explore oneself in ways that are probably not sanctioned by the surroundings, this form of freedom of thought can also be a means of liberation and resistance, in which dominant thought is contested and taboos are broken. Instead of using poetry as a safe haven from society, it is brought forward to challenge it (or parts of it). Ishraga Mustafa, writer and women’s rights activist, for example, sees her writing not only as a form of self-expression but a medium to contest society’s beliefs about women:

“Early on I was concerned with poetry as resistance. You cannot reach the goal of liberation without resistance. [...] In my work as an activist for women’s rights and issues like sexuality – already then, I started writing texts that were regarded as disrespectful – I received abuse [...] but that was my resistance, my obstinacy, these are my thoughts and I’m going to publish them”⁴¹⁶.

⁴¹⁴ Interview with Alaa Dishouni. 21.08.2019.

⁴¹⁵ Interview with Ishraga Mustafa. 18.07.2019. All direct quotes are translated from German.

⁴¹⁶ Interview with Ishraga Mustafa. 18.07.2019.

While writing and publication in itself can be seen as an act of resistance or even defying authorities⁴¹⁷, it can also be used as a medium of empowerment for those resisting⁴¹⁸. As the following quote shows, poetry, or in this case a song, can not only be used to contest a common stereotype or stigma but also to specifically empower those affected by it. The example that Alaa Dishouni offers is a song she wrote during the revolution:

“[...] in Sudan, it is a stigma to have been raped or sexually abused. Imagine. These women⁴¹⁹ will never get the support they need in this community. So, my song said, you’re beautiful, you’re appreciated, you did what you had to do [...] – because you could have also gotten killed there – to see a better future. It was like a message so she can get stronger, she knows [...] she is supported”⁴²⁰.

In other words, poetry, as a (safe) space of ideally free expression, can also become a site of carrying out conflicts and challenging common beliefs and dominant systems.

8.3. Poetry vs. politics

The aforementioned functions of women’s poetry have shown that the interview partners see them anywhere on a spectrum that ranges from very personal to political. Yet, when it comes to the question of “political”, it is interesting to see how much the accounts varied.

While no one denied the political possibilities of poetry and (song-) writing, several interviewees did not necessarily see a political aspect in their writing. Others, however, use poetry to specifically address political issues like women’s rights. One account was particularly interesting, as “Gholama” brought up a wide variety of community issues she addresses through poetry, like for example climate change, with the function of a public announcement.⁴²¹ This speaks to a very immediate political function of poetry. And then there was the view that poetry holds not only the possibility for political usage but is inherently political.

⁴¹⁷ See Interview with Alaa Dishouni. 21.08.2019.

⁴¹⁸ This will be discussed in more detail in the category of poetry in the revolution.

⁴¹⁹ The women that were raped during the protests, mainly during the violent dispersal of the sit-in area on June 3rd.

⁴²⁰ Interview with Alaa Dishouni. 21.08.2019.

⁴²¹ See Interview with „Gholama“. 11.01.2019.

[Eljae]: “Poetry specifically is political. The opportunity it gives for change, for recording history. It can be weaponized too. There’s a lot in poetry”⁴²².

This view was corroborated by Ishraga Mustafa stating her inability *not* to be political when writing:

“I cannot write poetry without politics. As a poetess, I am also an activist”⁴²³.

Yet I noticed that when we started talking about the revolution, even in cases where the interviewee had said before that poetry was political, often a separation between writing and direct political action occurred, best represented by the following quote by Sabah Sanhoury:

“My contribution was not a poetical one but a political one”⁴²⁴.

This seems to be due to a feeling of being overwhelmed by emotion and an inability to express them and the need for some sort of “direct” action.

[Ishraga]: “Since the revolution started in Sudan, I didn’t write a single text – nothing. I feel my emotions are jumbled – and now is the time for politics”⁴²⁵.

While during the revolution for some the need to express through poetry intensified, others turned to different forms of political action.

8.4. Poetry in the revolution

“Strengthen your resolution and say the right thing
With a loud voice, with a beautiful sound
Justice is like a singing bird with its light showing you your path
And it fills your insides with peace and song
Rise up, and refuse all kinds of injustice, rise up ʿAzza
With pulsating hope
Lifting you up and lifting our Sudan
Rise up, fight and never compromise your right
Fight and take [your right]

⁴²² See Interview with Eljae. 19.07.2019.

⁴²³ Interview with Ishraga Mustafa. 18.07.2019.

⁴²⁴ Interview with Sabah Sanhoury. 25.07.2019.

⁴²⁵ Interview with Ishraga Mustafa. 18.07.2019.

Rise up, our silence has never solved any issue and it has never helped
We went out [to the streets]⁴²⁶ against the people who stole our sweat⁴²⁷
We went out [to the streets] against the people who killed our sons
We went out and we rose up, we refused injustice and we said - enough hurt⁴²⁸
We went out and we rose up, our chant the love of humanity, peace"⁴²⁹

~ Alaa Dishouni, "The Voice of Revolution"

In our conversation, Alaa told me that she had written the song right after being released from prison, where she had been after being arrested at the protests in January of 2019. Writing a song and posting it on YouTube was her way of dealing with the anger and rage and the negative feelings she encountered from her experience, expressing her emotions. Yet, out of fear, she posted the song anonymously, which, she told me, she later came to regret. Therefore, being cited in this thesis with her full name instead of a pseudonym and sharing her experience can also be seen as another act of resistance.⁴³⁰ Her detailed account will be discussed below, when talking about the various functions of poetry and song in during the revolution.

Poetry in the revolution had a variety of different functions. Several of these functions, however, are rather specific for the Sudanese diaspora and can hence be found in the chapter analysing the accounts related to diaspora experience.

⁴²⁶ "Naḥnu maraḡnā maraḡnā maraḡnā ..." was a popular chant during the revolution. In Alaa's song, *maragḡnā* (we went out) is repeated three times, and again three times in the following line. *Maraḡa* literally means to renegade or strike.

⁴²⁷ Expression in the dialect, meaning hard labour.

⁴²⁸ Also: damage or insult.

⁴²⁹ Translated from the Arabic original. Alaa kindly provided me with the Arabic lyrics to this song that she posted on YouTube in January of 2019. The song can be found at Dishouni, Alaa. 21.01.2019. "Sawt at-Tawra". YouTube. URL: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=waYUTsfqjUE&t=3s>. Accessed: 06.03.2019.

⁴³⁰ See Interview with Alaa Dishouni. 21.08.2019.

8.4.1. Poetry as revival

Throughout the interviews, it became clear that poetry has deep emotional value to the participants as a link to Sudan and its history. While in almost every interview, references were made regarding the history of Sudan and the role of poetry in passing on events but also the art form itself, the function of revival becomes especially clear in the following two quotes by Hassan Dafalla Mohammed:

“I think that going back to poetry in times of peace, war, and revolution is something that exists in the contemporary and old history. Since the ancient kingdoms of Sudan [...] people were fighting for a poem”⁴³¹.

“Times of crisis are the perfect times for literary and creative production. [...] Here lies the importance of poetry which plays a major role in addressing emotions inspired by the history of Sudan. [...] the return to poetry means a return to history”⁴³².

Two aspects become evident in the quote, corroborated by the other accounts of poetry in the revolution: by reciting poetry in the protests, a link is established to a) the tradition of poetry itself and b) historical events that have traditionally been transmitted through poetry. The reference to “fighting for a poem” taps into the historical power a poem could hold within the community. A consistency is evoked by the reference to revolutions or times of crisis of the past, in which poetry becomes the bearer of revolutionary emotions. Poetry in itself can thus be seen as a tribute to and a revival of history. Women, as central figures to past revolutions and powerful poetesses to their communities, are repeatedly mentioned as important actors in the establishment of links to the past. A special function in the return to history is assigned to ʿAzza. One of my interview partners, Khalda El Jack, is the founder of a platform on which letters, which read as poetry, are being shared addressed to ʿAzza instead of Sudan or the people.

[Khaldia]: “ʿAzza was the name that was interchangeably used to describe both country and woman in old Sudanese songs, so it is also a form of revival of that – paying tribute to our history in writing and in song [...] it is something that has started to resurface again”⁴³³.

⁴³¹ Interview with D.H.B. Mohamed. 08.07.2019.

⁴³² Interview with D.H.B. Mohamed. 27.08.2019.

⁴³³ Interview with Khalda El Jack. 03.07.2019.

⁴³⁴Azza, the almost mythological yet historical figure of the 1924 revolt against the British Empire becomes the personification of the revival of history and its heroes, with an emphasis on women.

8.4.2. Poetry as a contemporary witness

One of the reasons given before for why poetry is important in the revival of history was that it has the ability to invoke emotions inspired by Sudan's past.⁴³⁴ While in many cases those who experienced events that are now historic to us might not be alive any more to share their emotions of that time, poetry seems to have the ability to preserve these emotions and render them accessible to future generations. This point, already indicated in the section above, was one of the main points addressed by interviewees who chose to talk about the revolution more in-depth.

[Khalda]: "I think the role of writing, the role of poetry is so powerful when we come to tell the story generations from now about how we were feeling, what the country was going through and it's not a literal translation of the news, but it's how you were feeling at a specific moment in time"⁴³⁵.

In this quote, it is being indicated that historical accounts are limited. They can convey the details of events to the succeeding generations, but not the emotional experience of individuals. While poetry might not have the same accuracy as a "literal translation" of the news, it does have the ability to preserve emotions that can be revisited. This rather general statement about poetry as an emotional witness was further deepened by a more personal account in another interview:

[Eljae]: "I write because I want to render as accurately as possible the experience I am having now so that later I remember what it was I went through. And that is particular around memory and trauma"⁴³⁶.

Poetry, therefore, functions as a contemporary witness of emotion, both for the individual and the collective memory.

⁴³⁴ See Interview with D.H.B. Mohamed. 27.08.2019.

⁴³⁵ Interview with Khalda El Jack. 03.07.2019.

⁴³⁶ Interview with Eljae. 19.07.2019.

8.4.3. Being seen

Another function of poetry that is closely linked to that of being a contemporary witness was roughly suggested in several interviews, but very on-point described by Eljae in our interview. Therefore, the analysis of this function will be mainly in her words. In another interview, A.S. mentioned how important it had been for her during the revolution to see the murals that were destroyed in Khartoum being reproduced in other parts of the world, specifically the US.⁴³⁷ This indicates the importance to be seen by the outside world in times of crisis. Yet Eljae broke this importance down to a very nuanced analysis. She brought up the example of a poem she had written for a friend during the revolution, who witnessed everything first-hand:

“The function [of the poem] was to convey to her and for her – to have an external reference point. Something she can look to and realize she’s being seen, outside of her immediate environment. And also, by rooting it in a conversation with one person, I felt that it did service to the fact that this is a people’s revolution”⁴³⁸.

Three aspects of being seen become clear: a) being seen by the outside world; b) being seen as an individual human being in a mass movement, where there is often no time for the single-story; and c) having a point of reference to see the own situation from an outside position.

[Eljae]: “In order to have morale you need something outside of yourself that sees you, that recognizes you, that comforts you. [...] If it’s a mural you see, a song you hear, a poem that’s recited, a chant that gets you – great, it keeps you going, it’s outside of you. So, there’s a very tangible, contemporary function of poetry”⁴³⁹.

Although the Sudanese diaspora has fulfilled an important role in this function of art and poetry being external reference points, I would suggest that the same applies to the poetry produced and consumed in the immediate environment of the protests, which is why I chose to subsume it to the more general function of poetry in the revolution.

⁴³⁷ See Interview with A.S. 07.08.2019.

⁴³⁸ Interview with Eljae. 19.07.2019.

⁴³⁹ Interview with Eljae. 19.07.2019.

8.4.4. Trauma and healing

In the section on the separation of politics and poetry, it became already clear through several quotes that writing was not for everyone the means to deal with the events and trauma of the revolution. Several interview partners shared having experienced difficulties in finding words for their emotions.

[Eljae]: “For a long time, I didn’t know – I didn’t – how – what would I write about?”⁴⁴⁰. Here, the difficulty to even express the experience should be noted. Yet, in many cases writing, and specifically poetry, was referred to as a space to process trauma, heal – or simply let all the emotions out that were encountered during the months of the revolution. In this respect, I was especially moved by the experience that Alaa Dishouni shared with me in relation to the genesis of her song “Voice of the Revolution”:

“One [song] for example says we need to get rid of this regime, we need to rise up, we need to fight. I wrote it in the beginning of the revolution. [...] I was arrested in the demonstration in January and I was in prison. [...] I was worried that they could come and take me again. But I felt it was the only way to express myself, [...] all the negative feelings. I was part of the demonstration and [...] people with whom I were out on the streets were killed. [...] I was very angry because we were peaceful [...]. And it was the only way to express [...] the anger and the rage”⁴⁴¹.

In her account, which is also another example of how poetry functions as a safe space of expression in an oppressive environment, the writing of a song becomes the only possible outlet for emotions and to deal with the traumatic experience.

Directly linked to this is the space for healing that writing can provide.

[Alaa]: “The words themselves were enough to continue. [...] they gave you the strength to fight, and it also gave you healing”⁴⁴².

[“Firdaus”]: “It is all about feelings and how to help people [...]. We cannot solve anything when we are broken inside”⁴⁴³.

⁴⁴⁰ Interview with Eljae. 19.07.2019.

⁴⁴¹ Interview with Alaa Dishouni. 21.08.2019.

⁴⁴² Interview with Alaa Dishouni. 21.08.2019.

⁴⁴³ Interview with „Firdaus“. 27.06.2019.

8.4.5. Chants

The form of poetical expression during the revolution that was most emphasized in the interviews was the chanting of popular songs, poems, and slogans. While the chants were generally referred to as a form of poetry, they stood out as having unique powers that are connected to several other categories.

[Eljae]: “They are always melodic, poignant, and poetic, even in their simplicity”⁴⁴⁴. Eljae brought up one example in which a man started chanting “You’re racist! We are all Darfur!” to contest then-president ⁵Umār al-Bašīr during a speech:

“and it was interesting because even in his rage, there was a melody, there was a rhythm. At the time I was like, this is inspiring. [...] And also, it’s interesting because it’s been a medium for the use of humour – like the jokes!”⁴⁴⁵.

It seems that through the chants, people had a platform to not only challenge the regime but taunt and ridicule it at the same time. All those who had directly experienced the chants told me about the powerful emotions they could evoke – a feeling of unity, inspiration, a responsibility to those around and the motivation to continue the struggle even in the face of immediate threat and danger.

[Sabah]: “It becomes like a big wave of something already agreed on. Just like we have a composer – we all become one even if we don’t know it [the chant]”⁴⁴⁶.

The simple act of chanting the same words with thousands of other people has a unifying power and a dynamic of its own.

[Alaa]: “Every time we would gather, and we would sing [starts chanting a popular chant] we would say these words and would feel peaceful and whatever would happen, we wouldn’t care so much because [...] we are going to protect each other and nothing harmful would ever get to you. [...] If you would hear *Tasquṭ Bas*⁴⁴⁷ or *Madaniyya*⁴⁴⁸ or whatever, at that moment you would become united”⁴⁴⁹.

⁴⁴⁴ Interview with Eljae. 19.07.2019.

⁴⁴⁵ Interview with Eljae. 19.07.2019.

⁴⁴⁶ Interview with Sabah Sanhoury. 25.07.2019.

⁴⁴⁷ „Just fall, that’s all“ – popular chant to demand the end of the regime.

⁴⁴⁸ Call for a civil government.

⁴⁴⁹ Interview with Alaa Dishouni. 21.08.2019.

In summary, when interview partners talked about the chants, three aspects were highlighted: the importance of dialect phrases like *Tasquṭ Bas*; the unifying power that motivated to continue the struggle; and the poetry that was able to evoke an array of emotions and connect to the situation and the people.

9. Diaspora

“Dear ʿAzza,
They said that I have lived my life abroad,
Without going through what they have been through.
ʿAzza, I have come to tell you about me.
My exile hasn’t been all rose collars
And not all of my days were ʿĪd⁴⁵⁰.
And because your time and my time is tight now
I will not complain to you
We will still have time for hope, after the troubled times are freed
I have a lot of things to tell you,
A lot of tears,
Caresses
After things have calmed,
We will sit together
And sing for a better tomorrow.
Tell our old stories,
Catch up what we have missed and
Repeat”⁴⁵¹
~ Tasneem Jaafar/ Emirates/ 11.04.2019

⁴⁵⁰ Islamic holiday.

⁴⁵¹ Translated from Arabic. This poem/letter by Tasneem Jaafar was posted on the “Dear Azza” Instagram page on 11.04.2019 and is cited here with the writer’s consent. It can be found on “Dear Azza” Instagram in the original Arabic. Jaafar, Tasneem. 11.04.2019. “Dear Azza”. In: “Dear Azza” Instagram Account. URL: <https://www.instagram.com/p/BwsNLIOnTu8/>. Last Accessed: 18.03.2020.

9.1. Imagining “home”

The oftentimes difficult and ambivalent relationship to Sudan as “home” is a big part of the writing of those interview partners who have either temporarily or primarily lived in the diaspora outside Sudan⁴⁵².

[“Gholama”]: “About three years ago, I started talking about Sudan [in her writing] – about what my view is, what I hate about the combination between religion, politics and how we suffer in Sudan – how I feel as diaspora. I live in Sudan, but still, I feel like diaspora. All my life I felt like Sudan is my home, but when I went there, I found that it is not the free land I imagined before”⁴⁵³.

The principal point of this quote is a discrepancy between the imagined homeland Sudan and the actual country and living environment. While she had a certain image before – “the free land” – of what “home” would mean, the reality of living in Sudan challenges this image and seeks a space in which it can be explored and discussed. This space to negotiate the imagined homeland and the experience of living in Sudan becomes writing. The discrepancy between both became also clear in the interview with Ishraga Mustafa:

“In reality, when I’m in Sudan, I think differently – I am very critical with regard to the system”⁴⁵⁴.

In the former quote, however, the experience is a very specific one as “Gholama” moved from the diaspora to Sudan. In this case, writing poetry to negotiate these experiences also circles back to poetry as a safe space, which she points out, as it allows her to discuss topics like religion and politics.

⁴⁵² Specific experiences differ as the countries of settlement vary: among them are several European countries as well as Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. Yet it is beyond the scope of this thesis to highlight the experiences made in the countries of settlement.

⁴⁵³ Interview with „Gholama“. 11.01.2019.

⁴⁵⁴ Interview with Ishraga Mustafa. 18.07.2019.

9.2. Poetry as an emotional bridge and identity

[Ishraga]: “[Writing] is my emotional bridge. In reality, when I’m in Sudan, I think differently – I am very critical with regard to the system. But here, Sudan is never far from my mind, not for one second. It is an important part of my being. Here, I am the woman from Sudan”⁴⁵⁵.

The quote shows that not only is writing an important part of imagining the homeland, but also of maintaining the emotional connection to it. Although the reality might differ from this imagination, the link is consistently reproduced through writing. Another way of maintaining the Sudanese identity abroad and constantly reproducing the emotional link through writing is the use of Sudanese dialect. This might be especially true for those living in Arabic countries of settlement, as there is a special emphasis on the Sudanese accent. Asked what Sudan means for her writing, “Firdaus” told me:

“It’s its soul. Literally. All my poems are in my Sudanese accent and my Sudanese identity is very clear in it. [...] When I write with my accent, I feel more comfortable”⁴⁵⁶.

Sudan – here symbolized through the usage of the Sudanese accent – becomes not only the focal point of writing but its basis, exemplified by the use of “soul”.

9.3. Diaspora poetry in the revolution

While the aspects discussed above were mentioned by several interview partners, the focus when discussing their poetry and writing was on the revolution. It became clear that poetry played an important role for the diaspora during the Sudanese Uprising.

9.3.1. Poetry as means of contribution

Whenever we came to discuss the revolution, those who were not in the country during the protests talked about experiencing feelings of guilt, helplessness and the need to contribute to the revolution, to support the people struggling in Sudan. Poetry became a means to contribute:

⁴⁵⁵ Interview with Ishraga Mustafa. 18.07.2019.

⁴⁵⁶ Interview with „Firdaus“. 27.06.2019.

[Eljae]: “I remember the poem came to me feeling like the only skill I have to contribute to this revolution is poetry. I’m not a doctor, I don’t have any medical skills [...] I don’t have anything that is material that would help people in these times. The one thing I do have is poetry. [...] I was talking to a friend and she asked me, must you write a poem and I said yes because it’s the only thing I have. Must it be now? And I said, well yes, because at the time June 3rd had happened”⁴⁵⁷.

This quote by Eljae summarizes a lot of the emotions most of the interview partners who live in the diaspora talked about. Poetry becomes not only the outlet for these feelings, for example when dealing with the violence and deaths during the June 3rd massacre, oftentimes not being able to contact friends and family, but poetry becomes a way to support the people in Sudan.

[“Firdaus”]: “I wrote it to reassure people and strengthen their revolutionary spirit. [...] poetry is a way for me and a lot of people to help and take part in this revolution. It is important for me to ease the useless feeling that I feel and to give the revolution a lot of dimensions”⁴⁵⁸.

While in the first quote, which is actually much longer, several ways to contribute to the revolution practically or materially are listed – like being a doctor, a psychiatrist, an engineer or having any other “tools of service”⁴⁵⁹, the contribution of poetry is seen more emotional, yet no less important. Earlier in this analysis, the importance of having an external reference point during times of crisis was discussed. The diaspora, in a position between the people in Sudan struggling for months before international media even took notice and said international audience fulfilled a central function in rendering this external reference point and making visible what was happening. The other point that was made regarding the contribution of poetry was that of strengthening morale and supporting the “revolutionary spirit”.

⁴⁵⁷ Interview with Eljae. 19.07.2019.

⁴⁵⁸ Interview with „Firdaus“. 27.06.2019.

⁴⁵⁹ See Interview with Eljae. 19.07.2019.

9.3.2. Emotional connection and hope

It is easy to ask the question “what actual contribution can poetry even make” when not directly affected by crisis. This point became very clear in Eljae’s account of how people in the UK react to poetry:

“People there get a bit like, oh, what’s the point of poetry? If you don’t functionally need it then probably you will not see its value. It is in times of comfort that we think poetry is not necessary”⁴⁶⁰.

That quote makes it perfectly clear that poetry is not only seen as a valuable contribution to the revolution but a necessity. She went on to say that art and poetry are a “gateway to seeing a world outside of your own. It allows you to dream”⁴⁶¹.

The diaspora, knowing what is happening in Sudan, yet not physically affected by violence and repressive action, has an important role in making the people in Sudan feel like they are seen and supported from the outside. Here, poetry is an emotional and individual link that at the same time can reach a huge number of people. It also allows to reimagine the future of Sudan, both by the people in the country and the diaspora. Poetry did not only work to establish an emotional connection between the diaspora and Sudan but also between parts of the diaspora as a community. An example I would like to point out here is the Instagram platform “Dear Azza” which features letters by the diaspora to Sudan, symbolized by ^ʿAzza. The use of this name shows once more how important the historic link is, whether it’s for those in the protests or the diaspora. Khaldia El Jack, the founder of the platform, told me in our interview about her motivation:

“I grew up in the diaspora [...] I think in light of everything that has been happening, I noticed on Social Media [...] that there was so much that [people] wanted to say – to the country, or the people – in appreciation or just expression of feeling. [...] It started off with myself, wanting to write a letter to the country and the people – that was around the time where they made announcements of the president falling – so a lot of emotion and trying to comprehend – and obviously I was not the only one with things to say so I thought why not make this a platform of letters to the country because

⁴⁶⁰ Interview with Eljae. 19.07.2019.

⁴⁶¹ Interview with Eljae. 19.07.2019.

people around the world are sharing the same sentiment. [...] When you read [the letters] you read them as poetry because it is such a strong form of expression”⁴⁶².

Unfortunately, it is beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse the poetical letters on the platform, but this project shows that poetry can be an important contribution and a way to express emotions, maintain an emotional link and support people. Two poems were however included as examples in this thesis. An observation Khaldia El Jack made was that the platform served to record and reflect the emotions the diaspora went through during the revolution:

“You can see a change in tones as different events unfold, like extreme ‘we are the revolution’ to like, reflections on being part of the diaspora and wishing they were there – and then it went to super depression around the massacre time and then it started to uplift – you know, with some of the poems, it was upsetting in the beginning, but then hope at the end”⁴⁶³.

In addition, it is interesting to note that a huge majority of those posting poetry were women.

9.3.3. Raising awareness

Especially concerning Social Media, poetry was also used by the diaspora to raise awareness on Sudan. As described above, poetry has the ability to make emotions visible and provide easy access for connection that cannot be delivered by the news. The message is being delivered on a different level, “because it’s like you’re talking to people [...] like it’s a conversation. [...] A poem or song could just be too beautiful to forget”⁴⁶⁴ [“Esi”].

This important role of poetry and art was corroborated as well in the interview with A.S.:

“A lot of people reacted to this, to what was going on, because of art. Art was one of the reasons why people focused on what was going on with us. [...] it touches your heart real quick”⁴⁶⁵.

⁴⁶² Interview with Khaldia El Jack. 03.07.2019.

⁴⁶³ Interview with Khaldia El Jack. 03.07.2019.

⁴⁶⁴ Interview with „Esi“. 29.07.2019.

⁴⁶⁵ Interview with A.S. 07.08.2019.

But not only the poetry itself can serve to raise awareness, but the simple fact of having an audience. Here especially spoken word poetry is important. Eljae, for example, talked about performing a spoken word poem about Sudan and using her introduction to ask people to follow the revolution on Social media and thus help raise awareness.⁴⁶⁶ In the poem, she also deals with being separated from loved ones in Sudan (it is addressed to “my good sister”) and the fear what might happen:

“[...] when mattar⁴⁶⁷ died, I didn't know if she would survive;
because grief is a coating never shed only thinned and really
how much weight could she carry?
when my sister I thought she might die
and I wouldn't know it, because silence is a weapon being used to kill the dead,
while they are still living
and her burial would be missed til my timeline showed her body, or her name became
another
that we gave, as a martyr”⁴⁶⁸

~ Eljae, 08.07.2019

10. Language

10.1. Dialect

As has been implicated in other categories, the use of dialect is a powerful tool in poetry.

⁴⁶⁶ See Interview with Eljae. 19.07.2019.

⁴⁶⁷ Referring to Muḥammad Mattar whose death sparked a wave of solidarity for Sudan and the hashtag #blueforsudan.

⁴⁶⁸ Part of a poem (“Alasada Al-thawragiya”) by Eljae that she posted on her Instagram account on 08.07.2019. She kindly provided me with the written verses. Formatting in original. The whole poem and performance can be found on her Instagram account. See Eljae. 08.07.2019. “Alasada Al-thawragiya”. In: *eljaepoetry* Instagram account. Link: <https://www.instagram.com/tv/Bzq1zJRHbDq/?igshid=3ejrd89xsnm> Last Accessed: 31.03.2020.

[“Esi”]: “I remember growing up, poetry and song, especially in our dialect, is really strong and tender. There is a huge message in it from the Sudanese people and it’s expressive. [...] You would understand strongly, you would feel it, maybe even cry. [...] It’s everything. A part of being Sudanese”⁴⁶⁹.

This quote conveys the strong emotionality that dialect poetry carries. Dialect as a “message from the Sudanese people” establishes a link through time and space with all those imagined as one people and makes the language a carrier of a shared message. This message is directly addressed to all those identifying with the dialect and speaks to them on an emotional level, which is probably not understood by “outsiders”. By creating “insiders” who are able to read the message conveyed and “feel it”, dialect becomes a central aspect of Sudanese identity. In several interviews, there was an emphasis on the use of dialect in poetry, especially by women.

[Sabah]: “[Women] use the local language, they don’t use the classical language. [...] Usually, it’s very local depending on the state where they come from, they use their accents and their local slang words. It’s really powerful, it’s amazing and it shows the diversity”⁴⁷⁰.

The main reason given why women mainly use dialect is that it’s “powerful”, another aspect that is mentioned is the diversity. Dialect as the language of the people has the ability to make belonging, in this case to the different states in Sudan, visible and thereby celebrate diversity.

[“Gholama”]: “Today, many use it [dialect] and women use it – they try to use the local [language] in poetry because Arabic is so difficult, in the streets no one can understand it”⁴⁷¹.

Why dialect is powerful is best described in the following quote by Khalda El Jack:

“To have people speak in your language – and they are not using formal Arabic but street Sudanese local Arabic – that’s the power in language. That’s the ‘I get you – I feel the same way – and I am talking in your language because I am doing this for you’. Poetry is just like that. [...] People writing down their raw feelings. [...] it might not get

⁴⁶⁹ Interview with „Esi“. 29.07.2019.

⁴⁷⁰ Interview with Sabah Sanhoury. 25.07.2019.

⁴⁷¹ Interview with “Gholama”. 11.01.2019.

to the president, but it gets to the people and people get fed into the political process”⁴⁷².

It seems that an important aspect of the power of dialect is the removal of barriers. “Street Sudanese” implies that this is not the language spoken by the elite, but the language of regular people. It implies closeness to, and an understanding of the struggles faced by the people and identifies rather with them than the elite, which is symbolized by the use of Standard Arabic. Dialect, therefore, has a function in unifying the people. This was especially important for the chants and the poetry during the revolution, as the dialect is a focal point of the earlier discussed revival of history and the identification of the people vs. the elite:

[Eljae]: “There is this one entire song⁴⁷³ [...] and it’s like really? Are you being serious? Mocking the wife of Bashir. It is so funny! I keep telling people, Sudanese Arabic is made for shame and insult – but it’s so wonderful! There is a general reverberance in the dialect, [...] a disregard [and] simplicity to the way respect is conveyed. Sudanese dialect is a language that conveys a lot to my mind, and I love it for that reason”⁴⁷⁴.

Through dialect, the people disregard the regime, essentially mock and taunt it and make fun of its representants and thereby dismantle an important aspect of its power.

10.2. Standard Arabic

While the Sudanese dialect was often talked about in a very emotional way, formal or classical Arabic was mainly mentioned as opposed to the dialect. While one interview partner mentioned the use of Standard Arabic as a functional means to reach more people in the Arabic speaking world, but still preferred the dialect, only one interview partner talked about the use of classical language in her poetry for emotional reasons:

[“Gholama”]: “When I read the Quran, I get the same feeling as when I read poetry. I take a lot of poetry from the Quran – [...] – I use a lot of words from the Quran to describe how I feel”⁴⁷⁵.

⁴⁷² Interview with Khaldia El Jack. 03.07.2019.

⁴⁷³ A chant that was sung during the revolution that, in its essence, mocks the wife of al-Bašīr and the elite.

⁴⁷⁴ Interview with Eljae. 19.07.2019.

⁴⁷⁵ Interview with „Gholama“. 11.01.2019.

In this quote, a whole other tradition of poetry, namely that derived from the Quran and Classical Arabic is addressed, yet it is interesting to see that this tradition played hardly any role for the other interview partners as opposed to specifically Sudanese traditions like oral and folk poetry. Mainly, Standard Arabic is seen in opposition to the dialect, an obstacle to connecting with the people and alien to the struggles of daily life, therefore rather representing the regime.

10.3. The power of words

It should not come as a surprise that being writers, poets, and singers, all the interview partners agreed that words are immensely powerful. Although this has been brought up in relation to many of the other categories, I want to summarize the power of words and poetry in an additional category.

[Khalda]: “There is something about words that is eternal. I think the role of writing - the role of poetry is so powerful when we come to tell the story generations from now about how we were feeling [...] at a specific moment in time”⁴⁷⁶.

One aspect of the power of words is that they outlast those who write them and specifically through poetry, can conserve emotions for later generations. Thereby poetry records moments of history while they are happening and at the same time provide a basis for retrospective analysis. Language and words, in general, can be a tool of empowerment, like the before mentioned mocking of the regime or by challenging a common stereotype.

[Khalda]: “Language is an art and language in itself is political and powerful because it is something that you can always reflect on [...] If I am able to read, I feel empowered and I feel empowered knowing that I am not alone feeling the way that I feel – and that in itself feeds into the political process. That goes for a lot of poetry and spoken word”⁴⁷⁷.

Besides the ability to outlive generations, the unifying character of words and poetry, specifically the chants during the revolution, was mentioned in many interviews. In this function,

⁴⁷⁶ Interview with Khalda El Jack. 03.07.2019.

⁴⁷⁷ Interview with Khalda El Jack. 03.07.2019.

poetry and chants have the strongest political impact, as they unite the people who then feed into the political process.

[Sabah]: “It’s like the effect when you drop a stone in the river, and it will form circles.

Words are like this movement. It’s like a butterfly effect”⁴⁷⁸.

What became apparent is that all interview partners put a lot of hope into the power of words and poetry. Anytime we would come to speak of the power of words, the respective interview partner would be ready with a mostly nuanced, emotional answer that conveyed a deep belief in the power of words, like:

[“Esi”]: “It’s like a superpower”⁴⁷⁹.

In its strongest sense, the power of words was compared to a weapon:

[“Esi”]: “It’s the only weapon”⁴⁸⁰.

Yet, while weapons symbolize violence, power by threat and subsequently death, the power of words as weapons was always used to contrast these inherent meanings. It was always pointed out that words were the *only* weapons. They were not used to incite more violence but rather used to confront and oppose violence, even in the face of imminent danger.

[Alaa]: “A lot of people are getting hurt because they just want a better life [...] many lost their lives because of that. And you feel like you can do nothing, you cannot protect them. We were peaceful and we can just write, and hope things will get better. [...] I believe words do have the power to change. It’s like a peaceful weapon”⁴⁸¹.

[“Esi”]: “A song or a poem could spread easily [...] – that’s why it’s considered threatening”⁴⁸².

During the revolution, words have also taken a material form as writings on walls, that added a visual aspect to the chants and poetry and intensified their power:

[Alaa]: “[...] so many words written on the walls – [...] whenever you would see these words, you would feel responsible, you don’t have the luxury of just giving up and going back home. [...] It has the power to give you hope where there is no hope. [...] it motivates you to keep on going”⁴⁸³.

⁴⁷⁸ Interview with Sabah Sanhuri. 25.07.2019.

⁴⁷⁹ Interview with „Esi“. 29.07.2019.

⁴⁸⁰ Interview with „Esi“. 29.07.2019.

⁴⁸¹ Interview with Alaa Dishouni. 21.08.2019.

⁴⁸² Interview with „Esi“. 29.07.2019.

⁴⁸³ Interview with Alaa Dishouni. 21.08.2019.

One of the most significant aspects of all these accounts is the fact that words are always regarded as peaceful and opposed to the violence the regime executed. Words and art and poetry are constantly described as the only ways to achieve the demands of the protests and to answer the violent events.

[Alaa]: “It was a really humane situation. [...] that time got the best of us. It would help us to feel we are good people and to love ourselves and each other”⁴⁸⁴.

[Eljae]: “I think what poetry is doing is reminding people of their humanity in inhumane times”⁴⁸⁵.

The hope and believe in the power of poetry is probably best summarized in the following quote:

[D.H.B.]: “Poetry can change oppression to freedom and death to life”⁴⁸⁶.

⁴⁸⁴ Interview with Alaa Dishouni. 21.08.2019.

⁴⁸⁵ Interview with Eljae. 19.07.2019.

⁴⁸⁶ Interview with D.H.B. Mohamed. 27.08.2019.

11. Discussion of Results

The analysis shows that poetry for women in Sudan and the Sudanese diaspora is not simply a form of creative expression but deeply entangled in the social and political life, a link to the past, to “home” and a gateway to imagining the future. Given the turbulent history of the past decades, the patriarchal environment and the recent popular uprising, poetry as a means of individual and political expression becomes a necessity, not a luxury.

First, I want to discuss the insights the interviews gave on what it means to be a woman in this context.

Already historically, in the romanticized accounts of western scholars on the legendary Nubian queens, women in Sudan were essentially misrepresented and framed in a way that served the dominant narrative. Interestingly, it was again the tale of the Nubian queen that was used during the revolution in western media to tell the single story of the Sudanese woman, who finally stood up against year-long oppression and started to find her voice⁴⁸⁷. Whenever we came to speak on the representation of the Nubian queen during the interviews, it was heavily criticized as only centring Arab women and obscuring the immense diversity of women and their narratives, with the framing as the newly arisen icon of resistance misrepresenting the long history of women and power in Sudan. Indeed, the history of the “Nubian queen” herself poses an example for the further obscuring of the diversity of women’s history, precisely because her story dates back well before the Arabization of Sudan. Yet today Nubia is associated with the Arab/ Islamic north: “There is something tragically ironic about the fact that the defining image of the revolt against a regime whose leadership has been indicted for war crimes and accused of genocide and ethnic cleansing is associated with the very forces that protesters are striving to overthrow”⁴⁸⁸. In addition, the white *taub* as a symbol of professional and therefore well-educated women, as was traditionally worn for example by the Republican sisters, centres once again urban, educated women of the North. Thus, understanding this iconic image points to the fact that there is no one women’s history in Sudan but many, and those struggles still persist.

⁴⁸⁷ See Malik. 24.04.2019.

⁴⁸⁸ Malik. 24.04.2019.

The accounts by interview partners painted a picture of an environment for women in which contrarian concepts coexist. On one hand, there is the persisting link to the matrilineal historic kingdoms and celebrated female figures, who are remembered through song and folk poetry until today. With reference to anti-colonialist figures like ^ʿAzza and the important roles women played in three successful revolutions in the last 60 years, their power and strength, as well as their importance for the political history of Sudan, are highlighted.

Yet at the same time, society is described as oppressive, limiting women's rights and often-times marginalizing them and rendering them invisible. Taboos and stigma around women's lives diminish spaces for free expression. These more nuanced accounts mirror the findings in the literature that while women have a rather strong positioning regarding political rights, private life is still restricted by oppressive laws and patriarchal norms in society. It is important to understand this concomitance of positions of power and authority of women, and oppression and limitations within society to shed light on the different dimensions of women's poetry.

It is in this environment that poetry, on one hand, provides a much-needed safe space of free expression for women and is at the same time a traditional tool of power and influence. It can, therefore, be seen as an unconventional, yet traditionally sanctioned pathway to women's political participation. Although there is a close connection between women and poetry, it is not a singularly gendered medium but used and respected by both men and women and thus taken seriously on a broader scale. The analysis has shown that poetry as a safe space is one of the most important functions of women's poetry in contemporary Sudanese society. The ambiguity of the poetical medium allows for a space in which opinions can be discussed through metaphors and other stylistic elements that obscure a clear message and leave it open to interpretation. While society and decades of authoritarian regimes have put manifold limitations on the freedom of women, poetry remains a space that has also traditionally been established as a domain of female expression. Besides the historical aspect of female folk poets – the Ḥakamāt – constituting a close and consistent link between women and poetry, the social construct of women having deeper access to their emotions plays into the sanctioning of poetry as a medium for women as well.

Poetry as a safe space finds its epitome in the remark that through poetry, everyone can be criticized – even God.⁴⁸⁹ This form of critique in an Islamic state formerly ruled by an Islamist authoritarian regime is rather unthinkable in any other medium than art. Social Media means here an additional opportunity for carving out safe spaces.

By analysing the interviews, three levels on which poetry provides a safe space for women were identified: first, the personal level, on which poetry can be an outlet for emotions and daily struggles (like experiencing racism or discrimination, questions of identity and belonging and other individual experiences); secondly, the level of society, on which common taboos are discussed and challenged (e.g. dress codes, sexuality or stigmata placed on women); and thirdly, the political level, on which broader issues (like for example women's rights) are addressed that can otherwise not be freely discussed. Poet and well-known activist Sara Elhassan uses the term "loophole" to describe how art, poetry, and song were used during the revolution to make political statements without directly confronting state security or militias.⁴⁹⁰ At the intersection of politics, the functions of poetry as a safe space and a platform of resistance blend into each other.

Additionally, as a respected and long-standing medium of female expression, poetry can also be used to communicate those more sensitive issues in an acceptable way to the community. The focus then is not necessarily on the ambiguity of the message but rather the acceptance of the medium. A crucial aspect is here what Muhammad (1996) observed regarding folk poetry, namely that through poetical devices a continuous connection of the message to the community is secured⁴⁹¹. Thus, poetry can become a platform to contest and challenge society with the concrete potential for social and political change, for it has an audience that listens. The importance of having an audience has hardly been addressed but rather been implied or taken as a given as the cultural significance of poetry is manifested in TV and radio shows or live performances. Although participants have mainly been interviewed in relation to their role as writers themselves, they quite naturally have had the insights of being the audience as well which is the basis of accounts on the impact and power of poetry. This double perspective proved to be very insightful.

⁴⁸⁹ See Interview with „Gholama“. 11.01.2019.

⁴⁹⁰ See Elhassan, in: Elkogali Häggström. 02.04.2019.

⁴⁹¹ See Muhammad. 1996. p.72.

The other important aspect of poetry that has been discussed in-depth in the interviews is its potential for resistance and challenging hegemony. This aspect has already been noted by Muhammad (1996) as well as Mayaram (2003) and is corroborated in the contemporary accounts with some insight into detail.

Resistance can mean the liberation of limitations and stigmata put on women by society through free expression in writing, and openly disregarding and discussing taboos. Poetry as resistance can present itself as performance in the prominent function of poems recited and chants sung during protests, where both have a motivational and unifying character. It can also be used to challenge a common narrative, like the example of one of Alaa Dishouni's songs to erase the stigma of rape and instead support and appreciate the women who had been violated during the revolution. In its most extreme comparison, poetry can become a weapon of resistance. Weaponizing poetry finds its precursor in the role that women's poetry played in conflicts between tribes, anti-colonialist struggles, and former revolutions. Yet in contrast to some of these examples, in the case of the 2018/2019 Uprising, poetry as a "weapon" was never used to incite armed resistance. Instead, in the interviews, art, music, and poetry were often referred to as the only way to confront the violence of the regime peacefully and described as "reminding people of their humanity in inhumane times"⁴⁹². Although the past has shown that poetry could just as well function as a call to arms, its impact was used differently. The analysis has shown that poetry could mobilize and motivate people and keep the momentum going, in instances even erasing fear and thereby dismantling the power of the regime through language. An example of overcoming intimidation by the regime is the mockery of important representative figures through humorous chants and songs, "for learning to laugh at one's oppressor is a key part of unlearning fear"⁴⁹³, as Colla (2011) already observed during the Arab Spring in Egypt.

It has been suggested in the interviews that women's poetry is able to render a situation accurately to an audience and is, therefore, an important reference point in (political) opinion formation. This was mainly substantiated by a woman's two-fold insight as a central figure to family and community life, but also as being oppressed and discriminated against. The

⁴⁹² See Interview with Eljae. 19.07.2019.

⁴⁹³ Colla. 31.01.2011.

suggestion that the positioning as oppressed and marginalized poses a source of powerful knowledge is mirrored in intersectional feminist theory.⁴⁹⁴

The use of poetry to support the protests and unify the people has not been limited to the direct environment of the revolution within the country but has been an important part of diaspora contribution. Poetry is used to show solidarity, identify with the protestors and reproduce the own link to Sudan as the “homeland”. Furthermore, it becomes a medium to express and process emotion and take part in imagining a better future. These functions of diaspora poetry should come as no surprise as they have already been discussed in a multiplicity of works on diaspora poetry. However, what was significant was the way in which poetry was used on Social Media to raise awareness in an extensive diaspora campaign to shed light on Sudan. The ability of poetry to quickly transcend borders was thus multiplied. Poetry as a medium to deliver a comparably short message with emotional depth seemed to be the ideal means to point to Sudan on “likes”-centred Social Media. Here, an “internationalisation of events” by youth movements and a close link between local and diaspora actors as suggested by Hale and Kadoda (2015) has become apparent.⁴⁹⁵ In this respect, poetry provides an easy access to emotional connection even without in-depth knowledge of events, strengthened linkage and potential for mobilization beyond borders.⁴⁹⁶

Although this is in no way representative as it was beyond the scope of this thesis to analyse the platform in-depth or compare it to others, the connection between the diaspora, women, and poetry became most apparent to me in the example of the platform “Dear Azza”. The choice of ⁵Azza as a symbol for Sudan not only reproduces the link to the homeland but the role and importance of women in its history. Embedded in the context of the revolution it contributes to highlighting the powerful role of women. Instead of addressing the country, a revolutionary female icon is addressed as its representative. Every posted poem thus contributes to the visibility of women. The fact that the poems were mainly written by women might point to the presumption that poetry was a gendered mechanism to contribute to and

⁴⁹⁴ A detailed discussion is beyond the scope of this thesis, yet bell hooks *feminist theory: from margin to centre* (1984/ 2015) is one example in which this concept is discussed in-depth. See hooks, bell. 2015. *feminist theory: from margin to centre*. 3rd Edition. New York: Routledge.

⁴⁹⁵ See Hale/ Kadoda. 2015. p.227.

⁴⁹⁶ On a side note, while conducting research on Social Media, I more than once stumbled upon poetry written on the events in Sudan by people with no apparent connection to Sudan. It was interesting to see how widely poetry was used as a means to show solidarity and take part in the online awareness campaign not only by the diaspora.

deal with the revolution, yet with no comparison across platforms or any quantitative evidence, this remains mere speculation.

Furthermore, poetry can serve as an external point of reference, both in relation to the diaspora and those inside Sudan. Accounts of experiences during the protests have shown how chants and poetry were able to connect the individual to the greater picture of their struggles by reviving historic moments of reference or establishing narratives apart from their own to connect with. In its most visible form, these narratives became writings on the walls that reminded protesters for example of those who had been killed, yet their messages were kept alive and served as a reminder of why the people were out on the street in the first place. The diaspora is yet another point of external reference that mirrors back to the people in Sudan that they are being seen outside of their immediate environment, thereby also extending the dimensions of the protests.

The literature has already suggested that dialect plays an important role in women's poetry in Sudan. This has been fully supported by the findings of the interview analysis. Sudanese dialect is throughout the interviews seen as a powerful component of the potential of poetry to connect to the people and reach them emotionally. It is a crucial aspect of connecting the poetical message to the community and thus entering into dialogue. Dialect is central to the poetry and chants recited in the protests and therefore, for imagining a unified people regardless of the vast diversity. Using "the language of the streets" blends differences like class, ethnic background or the centre-periphery dichotomy. By using dialect in poetry, songs and chants, a common identity and shared sense of legitimacy are being reproduced in the protests.⁴⁹⁷

Poetry has the potential to impact contemporary events and outlive them, only to resurface and possibly be renewed in the future. Through poetry, women's voices can shape the formation of political opinions and influence people, who in turn feed into the political process. Ideally, poetry outlasts generations and serves to connect their experiences through the preservation of emotion. Thus, poetry is of high importance as a contemporary witness.

As Muhammad (1996) notes, poetry has not only the function to record and reshape history, but to give historical events "their full meaning"⁴⁹⁸. It has become clear in the analysis that

⁴⁹⁷ See Ghanem. 2018. p.434.

⁴⁹⁸ Muhammad. 1996. p.63.

poetry has had an important function during the revolution to revive the history and furthermore record it for future generations. What Muhammad could have meant by “their full meaning” is that poetry acts to highlight different dimensions of history such as the individual and emotional component. A similar argument is found in Mayaram (2003) who concludes specifically for oral traditions that they make visible the author or narrator behind the account.⁴⁹⁹ The ability of poetry to conserve emotions through time was named in several interviews as an illustration of the individual human experience behind the factual events of history. I believe in answering the question of how women’s poetry plays into contemporary society and political movements, this aspect is of high importance. This observation matches that of other revolutions like the Arab Spring in Egypt, where Colla (2011) notes that “the poetry of the streets is another form of writing, of redrafting the script of history in the here and now”⁵⁰⁰.

In the chapter on feminist movements in Sudan, it was discussed how women’s movements oftentimes were subsumed under the prevalent belief systems and thus their contributions to political history often obscured. Making (all) women more visible has not necessarily been a strategic interest of women’s movements and the subsequent chapters have shown that visibility was often owed to oral transmission. The women who were referenced during the Sudanese revolution like ⁵Azza or the kandakes survived in the collective memory through poetry and song and their deeds and heroic characteristics were once again reproduced through the medium of song and poetry. This speaks to the ability of both media to preserve the memory of women in the collective memory even if they are often written out of history, as the literature has shown. Therefore, contemporary women’s poetry poses an important contribution to giving events their full meaning by making visible women’s narratives, experiences, and emotions during this time and preserving them for future generations. The repeated reproduction of women’s poetry and female figures in poetry makes it less likely that they are being erased from history and provide a link of reference for those who come after. In addition, the subjective and author-centred accounts pose the potential to counter a women’s history, although in itself an alternative narrative of “factual” history, that centres

⁴⁹⁹ See Mayaram. 2003. p.229.

⁵⁰⁰ Colla. 31.01.2011.

around urban, well-educated women and instead make visible a multitude of women's histories and narratives.

12. Further Reflections on Research

Through the method of interviewing, it was possible to not only discuss Sudanese women's motivations for writing, their experiences with poetry and accounts of the protests but to include their own analysis and interpretations of their perceptions. I believe that the conjunction of perspectives of women in Sudan and the diaspora has led to a denser interpretation of experiences. As an outsider to both positions, it was interesting for me to see their interplay. In many instances, my outsider position of which I was concerned and very aware during the research, proved to be of benefit. In some sense, I also became an external reference point during the interviews which served for my interview partners to reflect experiences and integrate oftentimes emotional accounts with retrospective analysis.

The analysis of the interviews has – in addition to the previously discussed results in relation to the research question – given some further insights or pointed to important aspects of the topic. These go beyond the scope of the central question but shall be addressed briefly as they demonstrate starting points for further discussion and research.

Although a certain view on feminism was not part of the research question, there were repeated statements during the interviews that allowed for some insight into political and religious beliefs and opinions. It seems as if participants represented quite different perspectives regarding the role of women in society, yet it was interesting to see how similar statements regarding women's power and poetry were, even if argued differently. While the literature on feminist movements pointed out how women have struggled to formulate strategic interests as they compete for pre-eminence of their respective belief systems⁵⁰¹, these did not seem to play an overall important role in the interviews. The general feminist agenda was mainly to strengthen the position of women in a new Sudan.

An interesting aspect of the Sudanese Uprising was the rejection of Pan-Arabist symbols like the current flag. As has been shown in the introduction to this thesis, among the symbols of historic revival was the old blue – yellow – green flag of Sudan. Choosing local dialect over Standard Arabic as has been described in the analysis might be seen as another indicator for the construction of a Sudanese identity beyond divisions of Arab/African as imposed by

⁵⁰¹ See Badri. 2009. p.13.

Arabization. Yet, this would call for more research into the relationship between Standard Arabic, Sudanese Arabic dialects and minority languages. Also, poetry in languages besides Arabic and English is a blind spot of this research and would pose an entirely new perspective on the subject.

As mentioned in the methodological chapter, there was one interview that could not be used for analysis due to the interviewee's nationality. Yet, I briefly want to mention this interview too, as it was insightful into how the Social Media campaign served to mobilize awareness-campaigning by others and how art and poetry were, in turn, used to demonstrate solidarity with Sudan and especially Sudanese women during the revolution. It was the sketches of Sudanese women in the protest that were shared worldwide that had initially called my attention to this interview partner's account. During the interviews, the power of art was also brought up several times. A focal point was often the very visible art on walls and buildings in the sit-in area that was destroyed by Security Forces and militia. As a form of resistance and awareness formation, some of these paintings were reproduced on walls in the United States, and already in the early days of the transitioning period, people started to put the paintings back on the walls in Khartoum.⁵⁰² The emotional descriptions of the impact of art call for a separate, in-depth discussion of art in the revolution.

⁵⁰² See Interview with A.S. 07.08.2019.

13. Conclusion and Outlook

The research has shown that there is a strong link between women and poetry in contemporary Sudanese society that has its source in a long tradition of influential women's folk poetry. Women's poetry is dominated by the use of dialect and constitutes a traditionally sanctioned medium of female expression, thus securing the link between message and community.

Through the possible ambiguity of the poetical message, poetry fulfils an important function as a safe space of rather free expression for women, though still impacted by limitations and stigmata put on women's lives by society and the political environment. Yet, poetry is also being used within this space to confront society and challenge dominant narratives. Thereby it provides the potential for liberation and resistance and thus women's empowerment. It can, therefore, be seen as an alternative, yet traditionally sanctioned pathway to women's political participation and a medium of social change. These findings become evident in the Sudan Uprising of 2018/2019. Here, women's poetry proved to be a motivational force in the protests, often described as a peaceful weapon to confront the repressive regime and unify the people. Poetry, song and especially chants played an important role in challenging the power of the regime through language. Furthermore, poetry was used by the diaspora to contribute to the revolution, render an external point of reference, negotiate their own identity and link to Sudan and raise awareness on ongoing events. Through the repeated reproduction of women's poetry and influential female figures in poetry, Sudanese women's contributions to history are interlinked over time. As a contemporary witness, women's poetry poses an important contribution to giving events their full meaning by making visible women's narratives, experiences, and emotions during this time and preserving them for future generations.

Still, as the chapter on further reflections has already suggested, there are manifold starting points for further research into contemporary women's poetry and its impact on society and political expression. Especially, how a new generation of women carves out spaces for free expression through creative modes both within society and virtually, opens up fascinating fields for further discussion. Anyone under 30 is for the first time in their lives experiencing a Sudan not ruled by the Bašīr regime. Although the three-year transitional period remains a fragile formation on the way to elections and an entirely civilian government with many

issues of the past yet unsolved and potentially volatile, there have been some changes since the beginning of the transitional period that might affect women's lives positively. Most prominently, the Sovereign Council and Cabinet have decided in late November to repeal the Public Order Act of 1996 which changes the standing of women in society.⁵⁰³ On the brink of transformative shifts in power relations, many new avenues for women's political participation and creative expression are emerging.

To close what has begun with a poem, I would like to end with another one. In her letter to 'Azza, Lujane Atif intertwines the past experience of the Uprising with her hope for the future, yet not without warning against thinking the struggle is over:

[...]

Dear Azza,

Don't let them make a fool out of you,
Tell you it will all be okay,
Take you to places that are not yours or ours,
Make you seem like a hero,
When you are yet to save many.

Dear Azza,

You have died in your name.
You have sworn to keep us safe.
The graves are still newly dug,
The scent of what remains is still in the air.
Stand taller, my dear.
Look farther my friend.
We are still in a journey.
We are home, but not quite yet.

Written with fear, despair and hope⁵⁰⁴,

⁵⁰³ See Dabanga. 29.11.2019. "Sudan dissolves National Congress Party, repeals Public Order Bill". In: *Radio Dabanga*. URL: <https://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-dissolves-national-congress-party-repeals-public-order-bill>. Accessed: 13.12.2019.

⁵⁰⁴ This poem/letter by Lujane Atif/ Khartoum was posted on the "Dear Azza" Instagram page in English on 12.11.2019 and is cited here partially, with the writer's consent. The full poem can be found at Atif, Lujane. 12.11.2019. "Dear Azza". In: *"Dear Azza" Instagram Account*. URL: <https://www.instagram.com/p/B40JsT-oHs4G/>. Last Accessed: 18.03.2019.

~ Lujane Atif/ Khartoum/ 12.11.2019

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15. Appendix

Abstract

This thesis examines the link between women and poetry in Sudan and the functions of poetry for women's self-expression in contemporary society with a focus on political movements.

As the social and political landscape in Sudan has just undergone major change in the form of the 2018/2019 Sudan Uprising that ended the 30-year long regime of ^ʿUmār al-Bašīr, the revolution is taken into account as the most recent and radically transformative mass movement. Through qualitative interviews with female poets both from Sudan and the Sudanese diaspora, women's voices are centred and perspectives from inside and outside Sudan integrated to shed light on how women use poetry in society and during the revolution.

The thesis finds that there is a strong link between women and poetry in Sudan as poetry has been a traditionally sanctioned medium of female political expression and influence. In contemporary society and during the Sudan Uprising, poetry serves as a pathway to political participation and an important means of contributing to the protests, both for women in Sudan and the diaspora. Through the revival of history and iconic female figures, women's poetry both establishes a link with the past and preserves women's diverse narratives, experiences and emotions as completion of contemporary history.

Abstract

Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht die Verbindung zwischen Frauen und Poesie im Sudan sowie die Funktionen von Poesie für Ausdrucksformen von Frauen in der kontemporären Gesellschaft mit einem Schwerpunkt auf politischen Bewegungen.

Da die soziale und politische Landschaft im Sudan durch die Revolution 2018/2019, die das 30-jährige Regime von ^ʿUmār al-Bašīr beendete, gerade in einem grundlegenden Wandel begriffen ist, wird die Revolution als jüngste und radikal transformierende Massenbewegung berücksichtigt. Durch qualitative Interviews mit Dichter_Innen aus dem Sudan und der sudanesischen Diaspora werden Frauenstimmen zentriert und Perspektiven von sowohl

innerhalb als auch außerhalb des Landes integriert, um zu beleuchten, wie Frauen Poesie innerhalb der Gesellschaft und während der Revolution einsetzen.

Die Arbeit stellt fest, dass es im Sudan eine starke Verbindung zwischen Frauen und Poesie gibt, da diese ein traditionell sanktioniertes Medium des politischen Ausdrucks und der Einflussnahme von Frauen ist. In der heutigen Gesellschaft und während der Revolution dient Poesie als Pfad hin zu mehr politischer Partizipation und als wichtiges Mittel sowohl für Frauen im Sudan als auch in der Diaspora, zu den Protesten beizutragen. Durch die Wiederbelebung der Geschichte und ihrer weiblichen Ikonen stellt Poesie eine Verbindung zur Vergangenheit her und bewahrt die vielfältigen Narrative, Erfahrungen und Emotionen von Frauen als Vervollständigung des Zeitgeschehens.
