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The Republican Sisters and Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha -
Feminist Struggles for Equality in Sudan

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Abstract

Die vorliegende Arbeit untersucht das Leben und Werk von Asmā Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, die historische Entwicklung der von Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha ins Leben gerufenen republikanischen Bewegung im Sudan sowie deren Ideologie und feministischen Charakter. Zu den qualitativen Methoden, die zur Erforschung des vorgestellten Themas verwendet wurden, gehören Fallstudien, Inhaltsanalysen, Textanalysen, Lebensgeschichten und historische Methoden. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭahas republikanisches Denken wurde innerhalb der republikanischen Bewegung entwickelt und in die Praxis umgesetzt, die zu Beginn ihres Bestehens als politische Partei agierte. Nach einem jahrzehntelangen politischen Verbot wurde die Republikanische Partei 2017 wieder aktiv, nun unter der Führung von Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha. Diese Arbeit beleuchtet die republikanische Ideologie, die in ihrem Kern auf dem Islam basiert. Sie wurde jedoch von liberalen und sozialistischen Ideen beeinflusst. Darüber hinaus ist die Praxis der Gleichberechtigung zwischen Männern und Frauen eines der Schlüsselemente der republikanischen Bewegung. Seit Frauen in den späten 1960er Jahren begannen, in der Bewegung aktiv zu werden, wurden sie nachdrücklich ermutigt, ihren Glauben und ihre Aktivitäten unabhängig auszuüben. Abschließend zeigt diese Arbeit die Beiträge von Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha zur republikanischen Bewegung und ihren Kampf um deren Wiederbelebung. Ihre Hingabe an die Ideen ihres Vaters führte zur Neugründung der Republikanischen Partei, und ihre politischen Aktivitäten werden von ihrem starken Glauben an die von ihm aufgestellten Postulate angetrieben.

Schlagwörter: Republikanisches Denken, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, Gleichberechtigung der Geschlechter im Islam, Islamische Reform, Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, Feminismus

Abstract

This thesis examines the life and work of Asmā Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, the historical development of the Republican movement in Sudan established by Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, and its ideology and feminist character. Qualitative methods used to explore the presented topic include case study, content analysis, textual analysis, life history and historical method. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's Republican thought was developed and brought to its practical application inside the Republican movement, which operated as a political party at the beginning of its existence. After a decades-long political ban, in 2017 the Republican party became active, now under the leadership of Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha. This thesis brings to light the Republican ideology which is based on Islam at its core. It is, however, influenced by liberal and socialist ideas. Furthermore, a practise of equality between men and women is one of the key elements of the Republican movement. Ever since women started being active in the movement in the late 1960s, they were strongly encouraged to independently practise their faith and activities. Finally, this thesis shows the contributions of Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha to the Republican movement and her struggles with its revival. Her devotion to her father's ideas resulted in the reestablishment of the Republican Party, and her political activities are driven by her strong belief in the postulates set by him.

Keywords: Republican thought, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, gender equality in Islam, Islamic reform, Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, feminism

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1. Introduction

The Republican Party in Sudan was brought to life by Sudanese Islamic thinker and reformist, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha (1909 or 1911 – 1985), and it appeared on the Sudanese political stage in the pre-independence period. It was a religiously based organisation which advocated the establishment of a sovereign and independent Sudanese country. However, the Party evolved during the 1950s and 1960s into a movement which promotes Islamic social reforms. These reforms were rooted in the concept of how Islam addresses the equality within a society - equality of men and women and equality of Muslims and non-Muslims. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's work, *The Second Message of Islam – Al-risāla al-thāniya min al-islām* (1967), represents, in a way, a manifest of the Republican ideas and it is a guide to understanding the Republican concepts of a modern society. The Republican movement advocated the equality between men and women and therefore, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha encouraged women's participation in the movement's activities, but he supported women's independence in practicing of faith and their equal rights in everyday life.

Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's reformist ideas did not encounter a wide acceptance in the Sudanese society. They aroused a strong disapproval by numerous political and religious figures in Sudan, which led to Ṭaha's trial for apostasy and his execution in 1985. This also caused the dissolution of the Republican movement and banishment of the Republican members out of Sudan. However, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's daughter, Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha returned to Sudan and brought the ideas of her father back to life.

The thesis at hand aims to shed more light on the historical development of the Republican movement, its postulates, its feminist character and the life and work of Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, the leader of the Republican Party today.

2. Research design

2.1. Inspiration and methodology

Considering the nature of this work, I would like to point out several crucial reasons which led me to the idea of discussing the topic of feminism in Sudan. First, the contemporary political situation in Sudan had been unstable since the occurrences that took place during the Arab Spring in 2011, which culminated with numerous protests and demonstrations in 2019. The result was the creation of the Transitional Government which was obliged to prepare the necessary requirements for the first democratic elections in Sudan since the mid-1980s. To date, the necessary conditions for the elections have not been fulfilled due to several reasons. Undoubtedly, one of the vast number of reasons was the global pandemic of Covid-19. However, the animosity towards the political situation in the country continued to grow, which escalated with a series of demonstrations in 2021 and 2022. Second, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, Islamic thinker, reformist, and father of Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, was the founder of the Republican Party and the creator of the Republican thought in Sudan. He suggested a potential reform of Sharī'a law; a different understanding of the Qur'ān which would be more adequate for the modern world's standards. Third, throughout my studies and research in the area of the Islamic and Middle Eastern studies, I gained the impression that Sudan, or better said the topics referring to Sudan, did not arouse a great interest in the researchers when compared to the other parts of the Arab world. I found this fact rather unfair, considering the richness of Sudanese history, cultural and ethnical diversity, and also its contribution in the domain of Islamic philosophy. Finally, the topics which are connected to the questions regarding equality and feminism are, in my opinion, of great importance today, especially after the centuries-long dominance of patriarchy throughout every sphere of life.

The methodologies used in this research are qualitative methods such as: case study, content analysis, textual analysis, comparative analysis, life history and historical method.

Primarily, my complete work is based on and emerges from the already existing literature which deals with the work of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and his Republican

Party. The main source of the Republican ideology is presented in Ṭaha's work *The Second Message of Islam – Al-risāla al-thāniya min al-islām* (1967). The works of Stephen W. Howard, Annette Oevermann, Edward Thomas and Mohammed Mahmoud are at the forefront given their importance. Furthermore, an important amount of information has been gathered through the interviews that Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha has given in the past fifteen years (since 2009). The interviews are either in video format or written form. However, newspaper articles which mention and discuss the work of the Republican movement and reports from several NGOs on the topic of women's rights worldwide carry out the important information for the purpose of this research.

When I began my research on the given topic, I had a sincere intention to try to reach and establish a contact with Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, and I believe that would have been of great importance for my thesis. Unfortunately, my plan failed to come to fruition as the contact information which can be found on the official website and on the official Facebook page of the Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha Cultural Centre appears to be incorrect, since I did not receive any answer on several mails addressed to the organisation.

2.2. Research questions

As previously stated, the ultimate goal of this master's thesis is to examine the movement of the Republican Sisters in Sudan. More accurately, my main intention is to focus on the life and work of Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and on the ideology of the Republican movement in Sudan. Moreover, the aim is to find the common ground between the ideology of the Republican movement and the feminist thought in the area where the great majority of the population follow Islam, to explore it and provide as complete of a review and description as possible. Furthermore, the Republican activities from the 20th century will be compared with their work in the contemporary times. The goal is to explore and answer if there were changes in the ideology, organisational structure and means of the operational activities of the movement through a comparative analysis of the Republican activities with Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha as their leader on one side, and under the leadership of Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha on the other side.

Research questions that I aim to examine, answer and present in my thesis centre around:

- *reformist ideas of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha which inspired the attempts for equality inside the Sudanese community;*
- *the meaning of the term Islamic feminism;*
- *Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and the work of the Republican movement;*
- *the question of the Republican marriage;*
- *the clothing issue;*
- *the life and work of Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha;*
- *development of her activism during the course of time; and*
- *historical path and development of the Republican Sisters.*

3. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

In order to provide as complete of a picture as possible, the literature review is divided into three subchapters. The aim of each chapter is to explore the works which are dealing with vast amounts of information from different sublevels of the thesis. To introduce a reader into the field of *Islamic feminism* and to present the topic step by step, I will start with the broader meaning and then gradually narrow it down to the core of the topic. Since the main characteristic of this thesis is feminism, the opening subchapter is devoted to the general history and the basic information on feminism, which is followed by discussion on more distinct literature about *Islamic feminism*. The remaining chapter is reserved for the debate about the history of Sudan from the beginning of the 19th century until the end of the first half of the 20th century. This historical overview is necessary in order to provide crucial information for the topic and contextualise the life and work of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha within the historical situation.

3.1. Feminism – historical overview

The first important field from which this work stems is feminism. Since this term is widely known and it is the most common and general one in comparison to the other aspects of this specific scientific research, it is logical to start by providing crucial information about it.

What is feminism? Is there a particular and concrete definition of the term? There exists a vast number of different definitions and interpretations of it. To be able to fully understand the concept of feminism, one has to examine it historically, since feminism has evolved through time and reached different layers of society, which all led to the profiling of feminism that we know of today. Therefore, I intend to provide a brief overview on the history of feminism.

One can define feminism as a broad spectrum of numerous socio-political movements and ideologies which are heavily intertwined with each other. As a result of that, the main goal of feminism is the achievement of gender equality on several

different levels, such as: political, economic, individual, interpersonal, and social (Brunell & Burkett, 2024). Moreover, feminism dwells on the situations where societies prioritise the male point of view and how women are treated unjustly within those societies. Different efforts and attempts to change this situation may include deconstructing already existing gender stereotypes with the main goal to establish educational, professional, and interpersonal opportunities, outcomes and solutions for women that are decidedly equal to those for men.

The examples of activities that feminists have campaigned and continue to campaign for include numerous women's rights that have been put aside and have been neglected for centuries, such as: the right to vote, the possibility of holding public office, work, equal salaries, ownership of property, receiving education, entering contracts, etc. Furthermore, feminists have dedicated their activism to the potential health related problems which women face, such as contraception and abortions. Also, one of the most important discourses is promoting a heightened awareness of and ensuring protection for women and girls from rape, sexual harassment, and domestic violence (Echols, 1989, p. 16).

According to some scholars, feminist campaigns are considered to stand behind major historical societal changes of women's rights. For instance, Messer-Davidow (2002) claims that feminist activities and campaigns resulted in ensuring women the right to vote, the usage of gender-neutral language, rights concerning some legal issues (property owning and contracts) or health (abortions), etc. (p. 250).

Without any doubt, feminist advocacy is and has been focused on the promotion of and fight for women's rights since its beginning. On the other hand, some prominent feminists consider that men are also victims of the societal centuries-long praise and blind following of the traditionally established gender roles. Therefore, they also advocate for putting men's liberation also under the scope of feminism (Hooks, 2000, p. 69).

Feminist theory was developed throughout more than a century-long feminist activism. Its main goal is exploring the already deeply rooted gender inequality in the societies worldwide and providing possible solutions, whilst engaging with multiple disciplines. However, it is not only based on the examination of traditional social gender

roles and norms, but also with the personal experiences of women around the globe (Chodrow, 1989, p. 100).

It is barely possible to trace back the entire history of the feminist activities and to point out precisely the moment when it started, or to highlight the name of the founder of the feminist movement. Numerous attempts to address and improve women's rights appeared much earlier than the 20th century. One of the most prominent feminist activists was undoubtedly Simone de Beauvoir. She was a French philosopher who examined issues related to the feminist scope of activities in her work *The Second Sex* (1949), through a Marxist and existentialist approach (Bergoffen, 2004). Simone de Beauvoir provides information on Christine de Pizan claiming that she was the first woman to engage in feminist matters in the 15th century (Beauvoir, 1989, p. 105). However, she was not the only one who dealt with the topics related to the modern feminist theory. In the 16th and 17th century there are others who also who engaged in work on gender related issues (Schneier, 1992, p. xiv).

Nevertheless, scholars mostly agree that Mary Wollstonecraft is considered by many to be the founder of feminism. The reason for that can be found in her 1792 book titled *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. In her work, she argues for women's education (Rowlatt, 2015).

Interestingly, the first person to use the term "feminism" was Charles Fourier. He was a French philosopher and a utopian socialist who is credited with having coined the word "féminisme" in 1837 (Goldstein, 1982, p. 92). However, the Oxford English Dictionary dates the first appearance of the term in English in its contemporary meaning almost 60 years later, back to 1895 (Oxford Dictionary, 2023). It is also important to mention that different historical moments, cultures, countries, and other social circumstances provoked feminists around the world to stand up for divergent causes and goals which they had.

Numerous feminist movements and ideologies have developed over the years and stand for various viewpoints and aims. Consequently, the history of the modern feminist movement is divided into four distinct branches. These feminist branches are commonly known as "waves", since they appeared in different periods in history (Kroløkke & Scott Sørensen, 2006, p. 24; Brunell & Burkett, 2024).

At the beginning of the modern feminist epoch, there were two distinct feminist movements that were affected by contrastive political and sociological ideologies. On one side, feminist activism was inspired by Liberalism and its political framework, while on the other side, feminist movements were influenced by labour class struggles and Marxist socialist thought (Artwińska & Mroziak, 2021, p. 20). However, these two feminist thoughts were accompanied with radical feminism at the beginning of the second half of the 20th century. Radical feminism stems from the radical positions of second-wave feminism in 1960s. However, those radical ideas are seen as harmful for the sake of feminism in general, and they are often criticised by other feminists for having strong misandrist note (Sommers, 1995, p. 320). Together, these three “original” iterations of feminism are often considered to be the “Big Three” movements of feminist ideology (Maynard, 1995, p. 259).

The achievement of some feminist goals throughout the 20th century alongside the development of technology sparked some new ideas on the spectrum of feminist activism, which led to the establishment of new feminist forms. The new ideas questioned and criticised the perspectives of feminism in terms of race, level of education, religion, sexuality, etc. These developments within feminist thought led to the creation of the new movements, such as Black feminism (Weedon, 2002, p. 44).

3.1.1. First-wave feminism

First-wave feminism represents a period of feminist activism in human history that initially began in the first half of the 19th century and continued to flourish in the early period of the 20th century. It primarily started spreading throughout the Western world and eventually reached other parts of the world (Tong, 2018, p. 13). Actually, the term “first-wave feminism” itself was created much later by journalist Martha Lear in 1968 in her article “The Second Feminist Wave: What do these women want?” (Henry, 2004, p. 58). This means that the term “first-wave” was coined retroactively when the term “second-wave feminism” already came into use.

The main focus of first-wave feminism was based on legal issues, primarily on securing women's right to vote (Tong, 2018, p. 25). Furthermore, its aims were other legal issues that women faced which include the promotion of equal contract, marriage,

parenting, and property rights for women, especially in the United Kingdom and United States of America. For example, the right of custody of their children was given to women in the United Kingdom for the first time with the legislation that included the Custody of Infants Act in 1839 (Wroath, 1998, p. 139). Furthermore, legislation such as the Married Women's Property Act from 1870 and extended in the 1882 Act became models for similar legislation in other British territories (Married Women's Property Act 1882, 1882). In the beginning of the 20th century feminist activism was heavily focussed on the political sphere of life which was represented through the feminist fight for the right of women's suffrage, meanwhile the issues and inequalities in the spheres related to reproductive and economic rights had not hold as much importance in that period (Freedman, 2003, p. 464).

To a great extent first-wave feminism was inspired by the liberal thought that started spreading throughout the world in the 19th century. English philosopher John Stuart Mill was one of the first male proponents who examined the topic of feminism. Together with his wife Harriet Taylor Mill he developed the ideas upon which his work *The Subjection of Women* (1869) was based, and which argues for equality between men and women (Anschutz, 2024).

The struggle for the right of women's suffrage is long and is in fact still ongoing in some parts of the world. However, the first changes around this issue appeared in 1893, when the women of New Zealand were granted the right to vote. Their decision was followed by other British Australasian colonies: South Australia in 1894, which was followed by Australia granting female suffrage in 1902 (Women's Suffrage, n.d.).

Among the numerous activists, Emmeline Pankhurst was the most notable one in the United Kingdom. Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony were prominent feminist activists in the United States of America. They were influenced by the Quaker theology of spiritual equality, which asserts that men and women are equal under God (Ruether, 2011, p. 112-118). Besides their campaigns for the women's suffrage, feminists in the United States of America were also advocating and insisting on the abolition of slavery. Women in the United States of America achieved the ultimate goal of first-wave feminism – the right to vote - in 1919 when the Nineteenth Amendment was passed to the constitution (Freedman, 2003, p. 464).

When examining the examples of feminist activism in different countries, one must notice that it was greatly influenced by the ideologies and philosophies that had already been present or that were developing at that time in those particular areas. As mentioned before, feminist activities in the Anglo-American cultural sphere were under the influence of Liberalism. Another interesting instance of this occurrence can be found in China. Chinese society placed a great value on the respect of traditional gender roles which were inspired by a Neo-Confucian thought (Dooling, 2005, p. 45). However, after the communist revolution, feminist activism was under the influence of Marxist socialist ideology, which led to granting Chinese women rights to work (Dooling, 2005, p. 175).

Besides women's suffrage, first-wave feminists were also pointing out other legal issues. Since family laws were created in favour of husbands and married women enjoyed very few rights, feminist activists campaigned for their reform as well. To point out the extent of these issues, married women in France were not allowed to work until 1965, unless they were granted a permission by their husbands (Guillaumin, 1994, p. 193–95; Meltzer, 1995, p. 88). Another example of the feminist goals in this period is the reform of rape laws (Allison & Wrightsman, 1993, p. 89). Even though these laws underwent changes only at the end of the 20th century in most of the countries, it is important to mention that the feminists of the first-wave indicated on the issue of marital exemption in regard to rape laws since the end of the 19th century (Bland, 2002, p. 135). The main problem regarding rape laws which was addressed by the feminist activists was the lack of prosecution of husbands in the case of rape in marriage. Even today, criminalisation of the marital rape has still not been successful in numerous countries of the world (Burgess & Crowell, 1996, p. 127).

3.1.2. Second-wave feminism

Even though feminist activities were globally spread by the mid-20th century, women world-wide still lacked access to a significant number of basic rights. The major changes appeared only in the decades after the end of the Second World War. The consequences of World War II were severe for the civilisation in general. Therefore, it had a negative impact on every sphere of life and consequently feminist activities

experienced the same destiny, especially in the period after the war ended. Even though some women were able to experience glimpses of emancipation during war time, the period after the war brought back the reestablishment of the traditional gender roles in the societies (Bard, 2007).

Second-wave feminism is the next period of feminist activities which began in the early 1960s and is still active to the present day. As such, it means that it coincides and overlaps the periods which started later in history: third-wave and fourth-wave feminism. While first-wave feminism was focussed on the political issues, feminists of the second-wave feminism were predominantly dealing with gender equality beyond the political scope. In other words, second-wave feminist activists concentrate themselves on ending gender discrimination (Freedman, 2003, p. 464).

According to the second-wave feminist theory, there is a tight connection between political and cultural discriminatory issues which are faced by women. Moreover, second-wave feminists claim that the sexist structures of power characteristic for the political sphere reflect themselves in every aspect of a female individual's life. One of the trademarks of second-wave feminism is the slogan "The Personal is Political". The slogan was created by the feminist activist, Carol Hanisch (Echols, 1989, p. 185). Second-wave feminism, and also third-wave feminism to some degree, is primarily characterised by a re-examination of women's roles during the communist revolution in numerous countries (China, Yugoslavia, USSR, etc.) and other reform movements in other countries that appeared in the second half of the 20th century. Those new discussions were focused on whether women's equality had actually been fully achieved and what the actual status of changes in the area of women's rights was (Parpart, Connelly, Barriteau, & Barriteau, 2000, p. 215).

3.1.3. Third-wave feminism

Third-wave feminism represents another period of the feminist activities. Its beginnings are tied to the early 90s of the previous century and continued until the rise of the fourth wave in the 2010s (Rivers, 2017). Originally, it stemmed from the United States of America. The members of Generation X which were born in the 1960s and 1970s were raised and educated in the civil-rights advances. The existence of these

advances can be ascribed to the outcomes of the first and second wave (Baumgardner & Richards, 2000, p. 251). Third-wave feminists started evaluating new concepts in their feminist approach in an attempt to reevaluate the definition of being feminist. Their feminist theory relies primarily on the concept of diversity, and it also includes the idea of individualism. Therefore, the new streams appeared on the scope of the feminist theory as a result of this new approach to the feminist topics. However, this vast number of ideas can lead to a confusion around the third-wave feminist theory, but according to some feminists this confusion is a crucial characteristic of third-wave feminism (Evans, 2015, p. 49).

The beginning of third-wave feminism witnessed two important occurrences which had a strong impact on the future developments of third-wave feminist thought. The first is the emergence of the feminist punk movement known as Riot Grrrl (Garrison, 2000, p. 142). The origins of this subculture date back in the early 90s of the 20th century in the US town of Olympia. Another event which influenced third-wave feminism was the testimony of Anita Hill on the supposition of the sexual harassment (Piepmeyer, 2009, p. 45). Namely, Judge Clarence Thomas was accused of sexual assault in the time when he was nominated for the Supreme Court of the United States. This event somehow ignited the first usage of the term third-wave. Addressing the confirmation of Judge Thomas to the Supreme Court of the United States in her article which she wrote for Ms. Magazine, Rebecca Walker in 1992 said: "I am the Third-Wave" (Walker, 1993, p. 41). Walker intended to clarify that third-wave feminism was not just a reaction but a movement in itself, because the feminist cause, despite having achieved a lot of its goals throughout the past century, still had more work ahead.

3.1.4. Fourth-wave feminism

The new tendencies inside feminism's fourth wave emerged with the beginning of the new millennium. Fourth-wave feminism is a contemporary iteration of the feminist movement, and its new tendencies appeared for the first time. Its starting point cannot be precisely dated. Therefore, researchers agree that it began around 2010, but not before 2008 (Phillips & Cree, 2014, p. 938). The crucial characteristics of the fourth-wave feminism which profile it as a new wave and differentiate it from the

previous waves are a heavy reliance on the internet as a tool for spreading women's experiences and deeper engagement with the concept of intersectionality (Abrahams, 2017; Munro, 2013, p. 22; Grady, 2018). They managed to broaden their goals, focusing on abolishing gender-role stereotypes and expanding feminism to include women with diverse racial, religious, and cultural identities.

The term and concept of intersectionality was brought up to life in 1989 by Kimberlé Crenshaw (Evans, 2015, p. 22). Even though it is primarily used to address and explore the oppression of women of colour, "[the] term also refers more broadly to an intellectual framework for understanding how various aspects of individual identity—including race, gender, social class, and sexuality—interact to create unique experiences of privilege or oppression." (Samie, 2023) This concept flourished during the third-wave but only achieved its full importance with the rise of fourth-wave feminism. The intersectional feature of fourth-wave feminism had a strong impact on feminist theory and activism, because it caused a broadening of the feminist aims. Primarily, it led to the diversification of the feminist target audience and their inclusion in the feminist activism, since the intersectionality caused better understanding of the members from different ethnical, racial, religious and economic backgrounds.

With the development of the internet and increased accessibility to it, feminist activists, like their audience, appeared in online spaces at the break of the new millennium. This created a new opportunity for feminist activists to move their feminist campaigns online. At first, they started with the distribution of magazines in an electronic format. But later, they engaged in use of different internet tools for their cause, such as blogs and forums (Dimond, Dye, Larose & Bruckman, 2013, p. 486-7). Eventually, feminist discussions took their place on the social media networks, where women got a chance to share their personal lived experiences (Munro, 2013, p. 23; Phillips & Cree, 2014, p. 938). To be able to reach a wider audience, women marked their personal stories about experienced sexual abuse with a specific hashtag. One of the first examples of these practices can be seen in the rise of the "Me Too" movement (Strause, 2018). #MeToo represents a feminist movement which appeared online. Its main goal was opposing and publicising cases of sexual violence with a high emphasis on the problem of rape culture. The first woman who started using this hashtag, while sharing a personal story about their experience of sexual violence was Tarana Burke (Strause, 2018). She shared her experience on MySpace back in 2006.

Another advantage that is brought up with the internet is the speed of the information spread in online spaces. It is only a matter of seconds until news reaches a global audience. Furthermore, not only are the personal experiences spread fast, but there is also an almost certainty that they will reach every corner of the world, because of the global usage of the internet. All these instances point out that one of the crucial features of fourth-wave feminism is the use of the internet. (Munro, 2013, p. 24; Phillips & Cree, 2014, p. 930). Even though the feminists of former waves engaged in campaigns which included discussions on the problems of various marginalised groups, such as trans people and people of colour, intersectionality and interlocking systems of power are emphasised in the time of fourth-wave feminism. Therefore, feminists today are able to contribute in their attempts to educate individuals and eliminate the social discrimination of the marginalised groups (Weedon, 2002, p. 51).

Fourth-wave feminist activists did not abandon the goals which were established in the previous waves, in fact these goals are only widened. For example, the issues regarding equality in work environments are still the goals which fourth-wave feminists advocate for. This applies not only for the equal pay, but also the existence of equal opportunities at work.

Another concept that is of a vital importance for fourth-wave feminism is the question of men's liberation. By dealing with this issue, feminist intend to raise awareness on the system of traditional gender roles and norms which are deeply rooted in the society, and to eventually lead to the abolishment of them.

To summarise the main points and aims of the modern feminist waves, the first wave included advocating for the overhaul of the political women's rights, such as voting rights. It refers to the feminist activities in the 19th and in the first half of the 20th century. In the 1960s, the second-wave emerged and it was characterised by its campaigns for the social equality and women's liberation. The third-wave appeared at the beginning of the 1990s and it brought the new concepts of individualism and diversity into light. In or around 1992, a third wave was identified, characterised by its focus on individuality and diversity. Finally, the fourth-wave emerged to the scene around the beginning of the second decade of the 21st century. Today its defining factors are the use of the internet and its intersectional character. Nevertheless, numerous sharp critics against feminist activities appear even nowadays, especially

among the population who is based on the patriarchal and, in their words, “traditional values”. Even though a lot has been achieved in the field of gender equality, many problems constantly emerge from various sides. Considering the complete timeline of the human civilisation, one must not forget that these changes are relatively new, given that they came into power only in the last hundred years. Feminists are therefore not finished with their work. There is a need for securing the rights on a level that we know today. However, feminism must continue to enter every sphere of each society, whilst pointing out and emphasising the importance of gender equality.

3.2 Islam vs. feminism or Islam and feminism?

Until this point, we have mainly discussed the feminist history, development, and movements in the West. Going deeper into the topic, one encounters numerous new movements and ideologies that are actually a direct product of feminist struggle against patriarchy and gender inequality in societies where a predominant part are followers of Islam. In other words, one faces the coexistence of Islam and feminism. The term that researchers coined to describe the feminist actions and activities in Muslim societies is *Islamic feminism*.

Looking back at history, one realises that the impacts of colonialism can be seen in every sphere of life all around the African continent and the Middle East. The ideas of the previously described waves of feminism also penetrated the Arab world through a direct connection with Europe in the period of colonialism (second half of the 19th century). In the 1990s several scholars such as Leila Ahmed, Fatima Mernissi, and Amina Wadud¹ ignited new topics that examined the decline of the Muslim woman's status in the contemporary societies. Therefore, Badran implies that one must differentiate between two terms – *secular feminism* and *Islamic feminism*, even though they are both connected with the situation in the Arab world (Badran, 2005, p. 6). These two terms are often intertwined and cannot be fully separated from each other.

In the second half of the 19th century, the Middle East experienced the decline of Ottoman power and rise of European colonialism and imperialism. At the same time the Islamic reform movement started in Egypt, led by Islamic modernist Muḥammad Abduh. Under the veil of feminism, Egyptian jurist and Islamic modernist Qāsim Amīn wrote his work *The Liberation of Women* in 1899. Hence, he was considered to be the "father" of Arab feminism. In his work, he examines and fights for legal and social reforms for women (Ahmed, 1992, p. 145). Moreover, he manages to link women's position in Egyptian society with nationalism. This draws a precise connection between secular feminism and Arab nationalism, since these two movements coexist with one another. On the other hand, Qāsim Amīn was highly influenced with the work of the formerly mentioned Islamic reformist Muḥammad Abduh, which means that Amīn's work also incorporated an Islamic component. Besides, the Arab Nahda movement

¹ Ahmed (1993), Mernissi (1991), and Wadud (1992).

spread among the intellectuals in Levant and Egypt. The movement ignited intellectual and cultural revival among the Arabs. As a result of these tectonic socioeconomic changes, the discourse of national liberation has also penetrated the Middle East and inspired Arabs to fight for, and create their own independent states, based on the bonds of shared space and regional culture.

Historian Margot Badran claims that these occurrences put religion in the second plan and secular feminism emerged from within this environment (Badran, 2005, p. 7). According to Nawar al-Hassan Golley, Assistant Professor at the American University of Sharjah in United Arab Emirates, secular feminism was connected with and affected strongly by anti-colonial struggle and Arab nationalism (Golley, 2003, p. 15-34). Women possessed a dual role in the society's development of that time. On one side, they mirrored the modernisation of the society through increased presence in the public spaces. On the other side, women of the Arab societies were considered to be keepers of the traditional values, since they did not engage easily in the public life as teachers, doctors, lawyers, politicians. Women mostly cherished the roles of mothers and wives responsible for raising children and passing the nation's values to the new generations (Hafez, 2016, p. 180; Bilgic, 2018, p. 333). From this point on, women actively engaged in anticolonial struggles, organising themselves in movements which managed to mobilise numerous individuals for the anticolonial purposes (Hafez, 2015, p. 180). Another important event occurred in 1923; namely, Egyptian activist Hudā Sha'rāwī established the Egyptian Feminist Union, the first nationwide feminist movement in Egypt. She was the president of the union and was considered to be a symbol of the Arab women's rights movement because of her position (Badran, 1996, p. 20; Golley, 2003, p. 45).

When discussing *secular feminism*, we must point out that, former president of Egypt Jamāl 'Abd an-Nāṣir established "state feminism" in 1956. By initiating state feminism, Nasser succeeded to outlaw discrimination based on gender, managing to grant women's suffrage. On the other hand, he unfortunately limited and seized political activism from all feminist leaders (Badran, 1996, p. 188). During Muḥammad Anwar al-Sādāt's presidency, his wife Jihān al-Sādāt publicly advocated furthering women's rights. Though the Egyptian society began to drift apart from the activities connected to women's equality with the rise of new Islamist movement and growing conservatism (Badran 1996, p. 135).

Even though the western influence in various spheres of life was strong and managed to penetrate numerous discourses of everyday life, *Islamic feminism* had its own path of development. Its crucial characteristic, which differentiates it from secular feminism, is the fact that *Islamic feminism* was established and developed within the faith-based environment (Badran, 2005, p.10-11; Sirri, 2020, p.14). In other words, *Islamic feminism* was based primarily on Islam. This differentiates it also from the popular western feminism. The main sources from which *Islamic feminism* stems are the Islamic texts: the Qur'ān, ḥadīth, and sunna. Therefore, there exists a difference in the approach to studies and application of it since the Islamic scholars employ a secular approach in direct opposition to the classical western secularist approach. In other words, instead of resisting or objecting to the faith-based approach, Islamic feminists operate from the faith-based position. On the other hand, Badran (2005) claims that *Islamic feminism* was a direct result of people's disappointment with the newly formed nation-states in the second part of the 20th century (p. 13). Moreover, she points out the rise of conservative Islamic political movements whose ideology propagated a return of women to a modest domestic way of living away from the public (Badran, 2005, p. 10). Therefore, she draws, in a way, a line of distinction between religious and non-religious women in the Middle East. Consequently, there is also, as mentioned before, a distinction between *secular feminism* and *Islamic feminism*.

Islamic feminism represents a broad and diverse discourse which incorporates intellectual activism relevant to the lives of many Muslims around the world. Moreover, it gives tools for religious interpretation which adds value to their spiritual lives (Sirri, 2020, p. 1). Despite the diversity within the movement and even divergence in some views, the different strands of *Islamic feminism*, or as Sirri points out (2020), *Islamic feminisms*, are unified when it comes to their opposition to the dominant conservative stand within the Islamic tradition (p. 21). All the strands within *Islamic feminism* are unified in their attempts to deconstruct the naturalised differences between women and men, which are inherited through the Islamic patriarchal tradition. Therefore, *Islamic feminism* intends to present women and other marginalised groups as important historical figures and point out on the discrimination to which these groups are exposed throughout history. Islamic feminists attempt to criticise both the dominant position of the Muslim patriarchy and western feminists who strive to render Muslim women

invisible (Sirri, 2020, p. 21). Considering everything aforementioned, one realises that *Islamic feminism* represents a diverse and complex discourse.

In her work, Sirri (2020) mentions three misconceptions which are frequently connected to *Islamic feminism* and described as its defining characteristics (P. 1). They include:

- “First, *Islamic feminism* is considered an oxymoron.
- Second, *Islamic feminism* is seen as a new emerging idea.
- And third, engagement with Islamic feminism is limited to its feminist exegesis (which can be compared to Christian liberation theology)” (Sirri, 2020, p. 1).

These misconceptions embody themselves through various thoughts and activities. Describing and understanding *Islamic feminism* as an oxymoron is not a rare occurrence in modern society, not only among laypeople but it also happens often in scientific circles. Moreover, there were and still are numerous attempts to minimise and, in a way, underestimate the purpose and thought of *Islamic feminism*. For example, the claim that the term *Islamic feminism* is advocated by several scholars such as Shahrzad Mojab² and Hammed Shahidian³. Shahidian claims that he agrees with the thinking that *Islamic feminism* is a feminist movement, but only from a superficial point of view where it can present patriarchy less attractive to the wider public (Mojab, 2001, p. 130-131 as cited in Sirri, 2020, p. 2). On the other hand, he is certain that, when it comes to the question of complete abolishment of patriarchal oppression regarding issues around the individual’s identity and economic, political, social, and cultural dependency, *Islamic feminism* cannot benefit society in this field, which brings him to the conclusion that *Islamic feminism* is an oxymoron.

Moreover, Islam at its core reinforces patriarchal traditions. Mojab justifies her claims saying and goes even further, claiming that *Islamic feminism* in its various forms does not possess “... the potential to be a serious challenge to patriarchy” (Mojab, 2001, p. 131).

² Shahrzad Mojab is an academic researcher with an expertise in gender studies and a university professor at the University of Toronto (University of Toronto, n.d.).

³ Hammed Shahidian (1959-2005) was a scholar in feminist studies and Iranian studies (Mojab, 2006).

Today any form of resistance to the patriarchal oppression and fight for gender equality is considered to be mainstream feminism. On the other hand, *Islamic feminism* is in fact more concrete i.e., it stands for the struggle against patriarchy and sexism in a modern society with a Muslim majority. Even though it can be brought into the connection with intersectionality within the fourth wave feminism, Seedat claims that Islamic feminist intentions “[...] predate their first encounter with the term *feminist* as it is understood today” (Seedat, 2021, p. 25).

To deconstruct the misconception that *Islamic feminism* is a new trend that is still emerging, we need to examine the works of several famous scholars who traced the development history of *Islamic feminism*. These scholars include Leila Ahmad, Ziba Mir-Hosseini, Margot Badran, etc. There is a general consensus within the academic society that the origins of the history of the *Islamic feminism* can be linked to the rise of the Islamic modernism. Taking this as a starting point, it means that the origins of the *Islamic feminism* in today's form can be drawn from the chronological perspective in the late 19th century, since the Islamic modernist thought developed at the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century. But according to Badran, *Islamic feminism* fully emerged only in the second half of the 20th century (Badran, 2005, p. 8). For example, Mir-Hosseini refers to this movement as “neo-Traditionalist”, which is different from other scholars (Mir-Hosseini, 2003, p. 14). According to Sirri, she uses this terminology to draw a parallel between early Islamic scholars from the 8th and 9th centuries and the scholars who profiled their engagement in the time of colonialist hegemonic rule over the Arab countries (Sirri, 2020, p. 27). The women's uprising for demanding the improvement of their status and their rights occurred in parallel with the arrival of the colonial powers on the territory of Arab countries. Throughout the period of the colonial rule, women started publishing academic and journalistic works containing outspoken feminist demands and ideas. However, Badran claims that the rise of political Islam affected the development of *Islamic feminism*. She goes even further saying that *Islamic feminism* was actually conditioned by the political Islam during the anticolonial struggle, since it promoted the creation of the society which would be based on firm patriarchal principles and understandings of Islam (Badran, 2009, p. 34). Moreover, it can be concluded that Leila Ahmed agrees with Badran saying that *Islamic feminism* experienced its blooming period as a direct response to the strengthening of the Islamist fundamental movements (Ahmed, 1982, p. 526).

Sirri (2020) argues that Islamic feminists propagate to a great extent the same values that Islamic modernists fight for (p. 37). Therefore, it can be said that Islamic feminists and Islamic modernists share the same common ground. Namely, Islamic modernists deal and propose an adaptation of Islam to the needs of modern times. This point is particularly important for the purpose of this work since the Republican Party is considered to base its ideology on the Islamic modernist principles. Questioning the compatibility of Islam and modernity, the goal of Islamic modernists was to synthesise and join features of the modern society and its values and immutable values of Islam (Taji-Farouki, 2004, p. 9). The concept of Islamic modernism draws its inspiration from the concepts of the Enlightenment movement which occurred in Europe in the 16th and 17th century, since Islam and modern sciences go hand in hand with one another. With this claim, they approached the understanding of the sources of Islam in a rational manner, while still managing to stay authentic to Islam (Sirri, 2020, p. 37).

The Islamic modernist approach is considered to incorporate questioning of the superstitious, metaphorical, and allegorical understandings of the Qur'ānic text. With the help of a rational scientific interpretation, modernists tend to eliminate all the flaws that they connect to the human limitations, since the text of the Qur'ān itself is flawless. By doing this, Islamic modernists offer a new understanding of the Qur'ānic text and also provide possible adaptations and corrections that should be incorporated in the modern system which would suit the needs of the contemporary societies. Therefore, this new discourse does not bring the religion into question. Religion is constant and unchangeable. On the other hand, the understanding of religion is not, due to the existence of the human factor which provides the understanding of religion. This is the part that should be reevaluated and transformed.

One of the most important topics for the Islamic modernists is the status of women in Islam. In other words, they are interested in and engage with the analysis of the change in women's roles. The solutions that they bring to life are also based on the rational understanding of the Qur'ān and the involvement of women in the modernist movements increased in the time of the anticolonial struggle. Therefore, women were finally given the opportunity to speak for themselves and to vocalise the problems that women had been facing for a long time. They empowered the discussions around the

discourses that were affiliated to the questions of the female identity and female roles in Islam.

Nevertheless, modernist movements in Islam continued to develop during the second half of the 20th century and continue to this day. However, Sirri notices that a change of the terminology that describes these movements and ideologies happened at the break of the 21st century. Because of the innovational character that these movements cherished in their approach, the common adjective that is in use in 21st century is “reformist” (Sirri, 2020, p. 38).

In her work *Islamic feminism* (2020), Sirri claims that the modernist approach questions the orthodox and fundamentalist interpretation of the religious texts (p. 40). In order to explore and explain the principles of the Islamic feminism, Sirri introduces two terms: *feminist ijtihād*⁴ and *feminist tafsīr*⁵. These two terms are important for the religious character that *Islamic feminism* cherishes, or better said, the religious ground on which it is based.

3.2.1. Feminist ijtihād

Generally, *ijtihād* is interpreted as striving, exerting and is also understood to be a personal and individual effort (Muftić, 2004, p. 245; Campo, 2009, p. 346). Within Islam, *ijtihād* is considered to be independent reasoning by an expert in Islamic jurisprudence - *fiqh*. In Islamic jurisprudence, *ijtihād* is defined as an interpretation of issues not examined and answered by other primary and secondary sources of Islam which include Qur’ān, ḥadīth⁶ and *ijmā’*⁷. This kind of original or independent thinking was allowed to be practiced by Islamic jurists who were adequately qualified through a form of *ra’y*⁸ and *qiyās*⁹ (Campo, 2009, p. 239; Britannica, T. Editors of

⁴ The word is derived from the Arabic root *j-h-d* and it bears the meaning to endeavour, strive, put oneself out, work hard (Muftić, 2004, p. 245).

⁵ The word is derived from the Arabic root *f-s-r* and it bears the meaning to interpret or to explain (Muftić, 2004, p. 1120).

⁶ written traditions concerning the Prophet Muhammad’s life and his authentic practices (Campo, 2009, p. 238-239).

⁷ consensus between Islamic scholars (Campo, 2009, p. 239).

⁸ personal judgment (Campo, 2009, p. 239).

⁹ analogical reasoning (Campo, 2009, p. 239)

Encyclopaedia, 2018). Ijtihād, as an activity, is considered to be practiced by the Muslim jurists and there is a consensual agreement that ijtihād finished around the 9th century, after the four Sunni schools of Islamic law¹⁰ were profiled (Sirri, 2020, p. 39). Even though it was widely accepted that the so-called gate of ijtihād was finished in the 10th century, there followed constant discussions about whether ijtihād should be continued (Campo, 2009, p. 346-7; Britannica, 2018; Sirri, 2020, p. 39). These discussions gained prominence especially in the discourse that arouse within the circles of Islamic modernism and *Islamic feminism*. The scholars of the late 19th and early 20th century insisted on re-initiating the activity of ijtihād, since they loudly criticised the Islamic schools of law and demanded the legal reforms were carried out. The critics were mostly concentrated on adapting Shari‘a law to the standards of modern society (Campo, 2009, p. 347). Since religious practices were based on the interpretations of the sources of Islam (Qur’ān, ḥadīth, sunna) which originated from the early Islamic period, the contemporary scholars shared an opinion that the aforementioned interpretations were essentially not in favour of women. Consequently, a major number of Islamic institutions, laws, regulations, and penalties were established at the same time which means that they also did not tend towards the female part of the population. This therefore ignited the insistence on gender equality in every possible sphere of life. Islamic feminists were firmly radical in their demands for the establishment of gender equal rights (Sirri, 2020, p. 40-42).

3.2.2. Feminist tafsīr

The term tafsīr translated from Arabic means “interpretation; discovering of something that is hidden” (Muftić, 2004, p. 1120). In the context of Islam, this term is used to describe the science of explanation of the Qur’ān, the sacred scripture of Islam, or of Qur’ānic commentary. Tafsīr is the elicitation of the exoteric meanings of the Qur’ān (Campo, 2009, p. 652; Britannica, T. Editors of Encyclopaedia, 2019). Normally the commentaries are arranged with the sūras, verse by verse. According to Campo

¹⁰ Sunni madhhāhib (singular madhab, or legal school) are named after their founders - the Hanafi madhhab (Abu Hanifa, 700–767), the Maliki madhhab (Malik ibn-Anas, 715–795), the Shafi’i madhhab (Muhammad ibn-Idris al-Shafi’i, 767–820), and the Hanbali madhhab (Ahmad ibn-Hanbal, 780–855) (Muftić, 2004, p. 488; Campo, 2009, p. 238).

(2019), every standard book of tafsīr incorporates the following information: place of revelation (Mecca or Medina), the reason of revelation, grammar, rhetoric, vocabulary, variant readings, legal implications of the verse (p. 652).

Therefore, Islamic feminists consider that they are also able to offer a new tafsīr which would be based on the gender-inclusive interpretation of the Qur'ān. In other words, their goal is to improve the situation of women redefining their status on the basis of the revision of the Islamic sources (Sirri, 2020, p. 43). By revisiting the sources of Islam, Islamic feminists coin new interpretations which help them achieve their goals. They claim that different readings of the Qur'ān lead to numerous different interpretations and therefore, they state that the inequality is not rooted in the Qur'ān, but it stems from its interpretations. They attempt to reevaluate the existing interpretations which were a product of strictly male scholars.

According to Sirri (2020), contemporary Islamic feminists, such as Barlas and Wadud, take a stand that the Qur'ān is the only tool able to fight the injustice and inequality which are deeply rooted in Islamic societies (p. 43). They focus themselves on the hermeneutics which incorporates the holism and the textual unity of the Qur'ān. Therefore, they claim that all the patriarchal injustice is actually a product of the external sources, and they cannot be associated with the Qur'ān. Furthermore, Sirri (2020) points out that Aysha Hidayatullah presented a set of feminist textual approaches:

- linguistic analysis;
- historical contextualisation - historical, social, and political environment;
- intra-textual reading - interpreting the Qur'ān with the Qur'ān itself;
- and tawhīdic paradigm - incomparability and supremacy of God (p. 43).

Nevertheless, intersectionality is nowadays a vital paradigm of research in the field of gender studies. Therefore, the study of *Islamic feminism* has the potential to contribute to its theory and methodology from within this paradigm and vice versa (Sirri, 2020, p. 23). Especially because of the intersectional character, *Islamic feminism* is often brought to the close connection with the Fourth-wave feminism in the West. This obstacle is arguably the reason many people consider that *Islamic feminism* is a new emerging concept. This way of thinking can be understood as completely ignorant or

Europocentric, since it ignores and eliminates the historical path of the Islamic feminist development that we explored and presented in this chapter.

Finally, we must point out a considerable link between *Islamic feminism* and the Republican movement in Sudan. Considering the methodology of the Islamic modernism and feminism, one can notice that Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha clearly represents this political stream. With his works, but foremost *The Second Message of Islam – Al-risāla al-thāniya min al-islām* (1967), he offers potential changes and adaptations which would enable the overlapping between Islam and modernity.

3.3 A Brief Overview of the Sudanese History in 19th and 20th century

Before going into any further detail related to our topic, we must describe and contextualise the political situation in Sudan throughout the 19th and the first half of the 20th century, given that the existing social and political systems strongly influenced the emergence and the existence of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's Republican Party itself. Firstly, an especially important characteristic of the Sudanese society, even today, is their tribal organisation. Secondly, the diversity of Sudanese society is also mirrored in their ethnical background – Arabised and non-Arabised or African population (Cockett, 2010, p. 42-43). Thirdly, another characteristic that points out the differences in Sudanese society is religious identity and affiliation. Oevermann (1993) points out that an important aspect of Islam in Sudan is its Ṣūfī character and the affiliation of the tribes with Ṣūfī orders (Ar. *tariqa*) (p. 20-21). Ṣūfī orders had, and still continue to have, a strong impact on the social structure in Sudan. The tribal organisation of the people who inhabited the region played a significant role in social events throughout history of Sudan. There is a visible distinction between the tribes of the northern and southern parts of Sudan, which is still noticeable today. The tribes who resided in the northern parts of Sudan were mostly Arabised, both linguistically and culturally, and Muslim, with a small fraction being Arabic Christians. On the other hand, the population of the southern parts of Sudan are non-Muslim and in general, they do not claim Arab descent (Holt, 1961, p. 5). There is also a third group, namely the western part of Sudan – Darfur, which is inhabited by a Muslim population with African ethnical background (Cockett, 2010, p. 43).

After the fall of the Islamic sultanates¹¹, the territory of modern Sudan was under foreign rule from 1820. At the beginning of the 19th century the downfall of the sultanates caused the economic instability in the region which allowed the influx of the fundamentalist ideas directly from Hijaz (Oevermann, 1993, p. 23-24). This development of events led to the establishment of the new order – *Khatmīya*, which was highly influential in the Sudanese political life. The order rapidly gained extreme

¹¹ In the period between 1500 and 1821, there were several Islamic sultanates the area. Most prominent of them were Funj and Darfur. The Funj rulers of Sennar established their hegemony over the Gezira and the main Nile (Holt, 1961).

popularity, especially among the tribes of the northern and eastern parts of Sudan, who mostly engaged in handler business. This provided the economic stability to the order, which they used to secure their religious authority (Oevermann, 1993, p. 25).

In the period¹² between 1820 and 1885 Sudan was under the rule of the Ottomans. In fact, the autonomous viceroy of Egypt Muḥammad ‘Alī Pasha conquered Sudan in 1820 and added it to his dominion, even though he officially fought in the name of the Ottoman sultan (Holt, 1961, p. 37). Therefore, this period is known as Turco-Egyptian Sudan. In order to legitimise its rule over Sudan, the Turco-Egyptian administration managed to gain the loyalty of the *Khatmīya* order and used them to propagate Turco-Egyptian interests (Oevermann, 1993, p. 26). This favouring of *Khatmīya*, or better said, some influential tribes within the order, caused a marginalisation of the other tribes which led to the emergence of dissatisfaction among the people. These tensions in the society led to the establishment of a new group concentrated around Muḥammad Aḥmad b. ‘Abdullah b. Faḥal. He proclaimed himself as a *mahdī* – “[...the divine leader chosen by God at the end of time to fill die earth with justice and equity...]” (Holt, 1961, p. 76-77). He was stationed in the city of Kordofan and in 1881 started gathering his followers. His supporters are known under the name *Anṣār*, after the Medinan helpers of the Prophet Muḥammad. Mahdī and his *Anṣārs* believed that the social injustice created by the Ottomans can only be erased through an imposition of Sharī‘a law, and a return to the faith of the Prophet Muḥammad which was based on the Qur’ān and ḥadhīth. On the 26th of January 1885 Mahdist troops managed to overthrow the Turco-Egyptian administration and seized power over Sudan, establishing a theocratic state with the capital in Omdurman. Oevermann (1993) claims that the Mahdist movement was the first sign of the Sudanese nationalism (p. 28). To support this claim, Sudanese people referred to Mahdī as *Abū-l-istiqlāl* (father of independency). Unfortunately, Mahdī contracted typhus and passed away soon after seizing power over Sudan on the 22nd of June 1885. After Mahdī’s death, one of his *Anṣārs*, ‘Abdullāhi b. Sayyid Muḥammad Khalīfa, ruled over Sudan from 1885 until 1898, when he was defeated and killed by Egyptian and British troops.

Egyptian rule over Sudan was renewed in January 1899. However, this time it was a part of a condominium, or joint authority, exercised by the United Kingdom and Egypt

¹² This period and the foreign regime were named by the Sudanese *turkiya*. (Holt, 1961, p. 37)

(1898–1955) through an Anglo-Egyptian agreement. Horatio Herbert Kitchener was credited for having won the Battle of Omdurman in 1898 and securing control of the Sudan, for which he was given the title of Baron Kitchener of Khartoum. In order to consolidate their power in Sudan, the British used the already established pattern from the Ottomans. Namely, they started supporting the influential religious groups, such as *Khatmīya* and *Anṣārs* (Oevermann, 1993, p. 28-29). To secure their position among the people, the British started giving several economic benefits to these groups, for instance: tax exemption and land allocation. At the beginning, only the members of *Khatmīya* enjoyed these benefits, but eventually, the British decided that it was also an effective way to neutralise the Mahdist opposition - *Anṣārs*. Therefore, the British managed to establish a solid support in the Sudanese society, which was also highly beneficial, economically speaking, for the aforementioned orders. With their support of the religious groups, the British played a key role in the process of transformation of these groups into political parties, who were extremely important at the political scene of Sudan.

As the taxes were kept low, the process of modernisation was consequently slow. Nevertheless, the British rule invested in railway and irrigation systems, especially in the al-Jazīra region in the northern part of Sudan, for the purposes of cotton production, which is still the main export good of Sudan today. On the other hand, the main product of exploitation in the south throughout the 19th century was ivory. With the expansion of cotton production in the north, slaves were gathered from the south and brought to work on the fields in the north. Therefore, the north was economically and technically better developed than the south. In addition to the previously stated differences between the northern and southern parts of Sudan, the British administration began the Christianisation of the population in the south, encouraged the usage of the tribal languages and, even declared South Sudan as a distinct district in 1922 (Oevermann, 1993, p. 39). All these measurements resulted in a creation of a bigger gap between the population in the south and the population in the north and brought the separatist tendencies of the south into reality.

Since the beginning of the Condominium rule there were disputes between Great Britain and Egypt concerning the administration of Sudan (Holt, 1961, p. 139). The British administration established Gordon Memorial College in Khartoum in 1910, where new generations of Sudanese scholars were educated. In the second and 3rd

decade of the 20th century, these scholars were employed in the lower and middle cadres of the public service after their graduation. This also resulted in the presence of the Sudanese newly formed elite in politics, which caused the emergence of the idea of Sudanese nationalism. A shift among the Sudanese educated elite happened after the Anglo-Egyptian Treaty¹³ of 1936. The educated Sudanese, who felt the need to represent the will of their compatriots, were not satisfied that the agreement was reached without them. This consciousness of Sudanese nationalism was expressed inside an organisation, created in 1938 as alumni of Gordon Memorial College in Khartoum - Graduates' General Congress. The general secretary of the organisation was Ismā'īl al-Azharī, the mathematics teacher at the Gordon College (Holt, 1961, p. 140). Beside him, the other prominent figures among the educated elite, especially thanks to their connection to the *Anṣārs* and *Khatmīya*, were 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mahdī and 'Alī al-Mīrghānī (Oevermann, 1993, p. 33). Because of their influence, these two individuals managed to attract and gather other intellectuals around them. Consequently, there were two different intellectual cliques among the educated elite, i.e. two political streams standing in striking contrast with each other.

Their different political views clashed in 1943, when Ismā'īl al-Azharī, backed up with the *Khatmīya* order, established the first secular political party in Sudan – al-Ashiqā'¹⁴. Their political goal was the establishment of an independent Sudan in union with Egypt, which went in accordance with *Khatmīya*'s aspirations (Oevermann, 1993, p. 34). On the other hand, the group concentrated around 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mahdī saw the future of Sudan as a completely independent state. Therefore, they established their own political party in 1945 – the Umma Party. They intended to achieve independence under British patronage (Holt, 1961, p. 148).

However, there were others among the educated elite who were opposing the political intentions of the two leading orders – *Khatmīya* and *Anṣārs*. They were essentially against the political influence of the foreign powers – Great Britain and Egypt. There were two prominent groups with an Islamic political background who actually supported these opinions, and they are the Republicans of Maḥmūd

¹³ This treaty formally terminated the British occupation of Egypt and provided for Egyptian entry into the League of Nations and allowed the presence of Egyptians in Sudan equalling them with British in terms of commerce, immigration or the possession of property (Jankowski, 1992, p. 87).

¹⁴ In 1952 it was renamed as National Unionist Party (NUP) (Holt, 1970, p. 161).

Muḥammad Ṭaha and Muslim Brotherhood (Ar. *al-Ikhwān al-muslimūn*)¹⁵ (Oevermann, 1993, p. 36). Nevertheless, these groups did not have any real political influence until the 1960s in the time of al-Numayrī's regime.

The Sudanese independence appeared to be possible in 1952, when the Egyptian King Fārūq I was overthrown in a coup d'état, led by Jamāl 'Abd al-Nāsir and general Muḥammad Najīb. The new Egyptian government, which was represented by Arab socialist regime, gave up on the idea of unification between Egypt and Sudan and supported the establishment of self-government in Sudan and eventual full independence (Natsios, 2012, p. 31). The Self-Government Statute was accepted by the Anglo-Egyptian Agreement of 1953 (Holt, 1961, p. 162). The agreement proposed the unity of Sudan as a single territory and limited the duration of the transitional self-government to 3 years. The elections were held at the end of 1953 and al-Azharī's NUP won the majority of the seats in the parliament. The Umma Party was the largest opposition. Even though the NUP was propagating the union with Egypt, al-Azharī changed his politics after general Najīb was ousted by 'Abd al-Nāsir in 1954 (Holt, 1961, p. 166). According to the Agreement of 1953, the parliament passed a resolution demanding the departure of the Condominium rulers from Sudan in August 1955 and Sudan declared independence on the 1st of January 1956 (Holt, 1961, p. 167-168).

¹⁵ Officially, the Muslim Brotherhood entered the political scene in Sudan in 1964 as Islamic Charter Front under the lead of Ḥasan al-Turābī (Natsios, 2012, p. 70).

4. Research findings and data analysis

In this chapter, I will present the findings of my detailed research, analysing and discussing them. Since the topic is wide, I intend to divide all the information gathered into several different sections. There are five divergent levels which represent the main point of my interest. Therefore, the research findings and the information gathered through my exploration of the topic will be presented and discussed in five thematically divided chapters.

4.1. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and the Republican Party

To start thinking about the discussion on the life and work of Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, we must introduce the lifework of her father Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and the activities of his political party. It must be noticed that the literature referring to the topics on the Republican Party, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and his daughter Asmā' is quite obscure. Therefore, the works of Stephen W. Howard, Annette Oevermann, Edward Thomas and Mohamed Mahmoud are in the first line of importance for this work.

The person responsible for the creation of the republican stream on the political scene in Sudan was Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha. He was an eminent Sudanese Islamic scholar and university-educated engineer, who founded an Islamic social and republican reform movement, known by the name Republican Brothers (Ar. *al-Ikhwān al-jumhūrīyūn*). Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's followers called him "teacher" (Ar. *ustādh*) which they still refer to him as today (Lamaḥāt min al-sīrat al-'ustādh Muḥammad, n.d.). There is no exact information on the year of his birth, but according to various sources, it can be placed either in 1909 or 1911 (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 2). The place of his birth is a small town named Rufā'a, located precisely in the central Sudanese region of al-Jazīra. It is important to point out the fact that Sudan at that time was in its post-Mahdist period, and it was dominated by the Condominium rule of Britain and Egypt. Thus, he grew up and was educated during the turbulent period which witnessed the uprise of nationalism, the rise of the Graduates' General Congress and political parties, and the

intensification of the struggle against Anglo-Egyptian Condominium rule over Sudan (Holt, 1961, p. 125-158; Mahmoud, 1998, p. 105).

Unfortunately, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha lost his parents when he was still in the early stages of childhood. After the death of his mother in around 1915, his father moved together with his children to al-Hajīlīj, a nearby village (An-Na‘im, 1987, p. 2). During the time they spent in this village, they all engaged in farming which was their source of income. His father died in around 1920, leaving behind his four children. However, he did not lack the support of his extended family, the children were adopted and raised by their aunt in Rufā'a who also managed to provide them with an education. Thankfully due to this external support in his life, mainly provided by his relatives and his academic aptitude, he managed to attend the Gordon Memorial College (now the University of Khartoum) where he studied engineering. Eventually, he graduated with a degree in engineering in 1936. After his graduation he was shortly employed by Sudan Railways until 1941. His resignation was due to the regulations of civil service, which were in power back then, that did not allow him to parallelly engage in political activity while also working as a public servant (Oevermann, 1993, p. 35).

As stated previously, this was the time of the nationalist struggle for Sudanese independence, of which Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha was an active participant from the beginning of the movement in the late 1930s (Holt, 1961, p. 139-158). He was not satisfied with the engagement and the efforts of the representatives of the Sudanese educated elite in the political activities which would eventually lead to the independence of Sudan. Moreover, he criticised the newly formed Sudanese opposition for supporting and following the traditional religious leaders of the orders who enjoyed an extremely wide popular support in the country - *Anṣārs* and *Khatmīya*. Consequently, he was not amused with the ideologies and intentions of the available political parties - al-Ashiqā' and Umma Party. Considering his opposition to the Condominium powers, his political aspirations included the creation of the independent republic of Sudan. These were the key reasons why he did not go along with the activities of the aforementioned political parties (Oevermann, 1993, p. 35).

Due to his political beliefs, attitudes, and principles, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, alongside other intellectuals who agreed with his critical thought and ideas, decided to establish the Republican Party (Ar. *al-ḥizb al-jumhūrī*) in October of 1945 (Mahmoud,

2001, p. 68). In order to represent their political program, the organisation invested in the consecutive publication of the pamphlets and leaflets where they presented their modernist Islamic orientated ideology. However, the ideology was yet to be deepened and profiled. From the start of the political activities, Ṭaha's party openly showed their dissatisfaction and opposition to the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium rule. In 1946 Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha was arrested because of his political work and activities (Oevermann, 1993, p. 49). After his first arrest, he was sentenced to a year in prison because he refused to hold back from carrying out the political activities against the Condominium rule (Oevermann, 1993, p. 50). Immediately following his imprisonment the members of the Republican Party, as a response to the decision of the Condominium government, organised and orchestrated numerous protests. This resulted in him being pardoned and excused by the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium authorities and released after spending almost two months in prison (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 3).

However, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's freedom did not last long. In the same year he was charged once again, but this time he received a sentence in duration of two years. The reason for his second arrest was his interference and leadership role in the demonstration against the Condominium rule which broke out in his hometown Rufā'a. During this revolt he even called upon a *jihād*¹⁶ against Great Britain in one of his *khuṭbats*¹⁷ in the Rufā'a mosque (Oevermann, 1993, p. 51).

Namely, in the period between 1946 and 1951 Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha devoted himself to the Islamic methods of worship (praying and fasting) which resulted with his understanding of the meaning of the Qur'ān. At the same time, he retreated himself into a religious seclusion¹⁸ (Ar. *khalwa*) (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 4). There is no doubt that Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha was firm in the belief that the Qur'ān as the literal word of God was the final God's revelation. On the other hand, he pointed out that individuals are also able to acquire the understanding of the revealed God's word, through their personal devotion to God (Mahmoud, 1998, p. 107). This instance depicts Ṭaha's approach to this matter to be similar to the ideas of some Ṣūfīs. In order to

¹⁶ a meritorious struggle or effort. The exact meaning depends on the context and in this case can be understood as "holy war" (Muftić, 2004, p. 245; Campo, 2009, p. 397-398).

¹⁷ publicly delivered oratory during diverse ceremonies, such as Friday prayer or the two Islamic holidays (Campo, 2009, p. 612).

¹⁸ spiritual retreat (Muftić, 2004, p. 405).

justify and clarify his point of view on this particular thing, he called upon a verse of the Qur'ān:

“O ye who believe! When ye deal with each other, in transactions involving future obligations in a fixed period of time, reduce them to writing Let a scribe write down faithfully as between the parties: let not the scribe refuse to write: as God Has taught him, so let him write. Let him who incurs the liability dictate, but let him fear His Lord God, and not diminish aught of what he owes. If they party liable is mentally deficient, or weak, or unable Himself to dictate, Let his guardian dictate faithfully, and get two witnesses, out of your own men, and if there are not two men, then a man and two women, such as ye choose, for witnesses, so that if one of them errs, the other can remind her. The witnesses should not refuse when they are called on (For evidence). Disdain not to reduce to writing (your contract) for a future period, whether it be small or big: it is juster in the sight of God, More suitable as evidence, and more convenient to prevent doubts among yourselves but if it be a transaction which ye carry out on the spot among yourselves, there is no blame on you if ye reduce it not to writing. But take witness whenever ye make a commercial contract; and let neither scribe nor witness suffer harm. If ye do (such harm), it would be wickedness in you. So fear God; For it is Good that teaches you. And God is well acquainted with all things. If ye are on a journey, and cannot find a scribe, a pledge with possession (may serve the purpose). And if one of you deposits a thing on trust with another, let the trustee (faithfully) discharge his trust, and let him Fear his Lord conceal not evidence; for whoever conceals it, - his heart is tainted with sin. And God knoweth all that ye do” (Ali, 2014, p. 30). Q 2:282

Sudan gained its independence on the 1st of January 1956. In that period, there was a committee which was briefly established in order to create a manuscript for a constitution proposal. The new Sudanese parliament had to review and examine this manuscript and rule on its adoption. The parliament was, as expected, dominated by the political parties who had the support from the Şūfī orders - *Anşārs* and *Khatmīya* (Oevermann, 1993, p. 52-53). Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha was a representative of the Republican Party in the committee, even though the Republicans did not take part in the elections. After a few months, he gave up his position on the committee (Oevermann, 1993, p. 53). The committee created its manuscript for a constitution,

mainly influenced and derived from Sharī'a law, respecting the will and desires of the traditional religiously oriented parties. However, before that manuscript could be accepted by the parliament, the military led by general Ibrāhīm 'Abbūd¹⁹, commander in chief of the Sudanese military, seized power in November 1958 through coup d'état. This culminated with the dissolution of the political parties in Sudan, including the Republican Party (Holt, 1961, p. 180; Natsios, 2012, p. 36).

The 'Abbūd's regime contested an already unstable relationship with the population in South Sudan, which was in a complete contrast to the federal policy that was expected by the South, highly supported by Ṭaha himself. 'Abbūd intended to undertake an integration between North and South Sudan through a forced process of Arabisation and Islamisation of the South (Natsios, 2012, p. 36). The existing gap between the two parts of the country continued to expand and led to the creation of a southern Sudanese separatist rebel army – Anya Nya in 1963.

At the beginning of this military regime, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha faced no obstacles during his public lectures (Lamaḥāt min al-sīrat al-'ustādh Muḥammad, n.d.). However eventually Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's public lectures were banned after two years. With the help of his followers and sympathisers, Ṭaha succeeded in continuing to spread his reformative ideas, but in this period the teachings were held in private property. In 1960, he published his book *The Islam* (Ar. *al-Islām*), as a respond to the widespread opposition to his reformative ideas and efforts in Islam (Lamaḥāt min al-sīrat al-'ustādh Muḥammad, n.d.).

Beside the military escalation in the South, the student protests at the University of Khartoum were the onset for the October revolution of 1964. The protests intensified after the regime officers killed a student in an attempt to silence them (Oevermann, 1993, p. 56). The Communist Party played a vital role in mobilising the students, workers, and farmers for the protests against the regime. The civil disobedience made 'Abbūd step down and hand power to the civil government led by the Umma Party (Mahmoud, 2001, p. 76). After the reestablishment of the multi-parliamentarism rule, the Republican Party was reestablished. However, the political activities of the party were not continued and they started operating only as a religious organisation. Therefore Ṭaha focussed himself on presenting his reformist ideas to the public. Ṭaha

¹⁹ He was the head of state of Sudan between 1958 and 1964 (Holt, 1970, p. 180-188).

however, was not satisfied with the new government, which can be examined through his antagonism towards the political parties supported by the Şūfī orders (Oevermann, 1993, p. 56; Mahmoud, 2001, p. 76).

The political parties who represented the Şūfī orders, together with the Muslim Brotherhood movement, succeeded to oust the Communist Party out of the Sudanese parliament. Eventually, the Sudanese Communist Party was banned and dissolved in 1965. Even though Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha opposed the communist ideology, he considered this action to be in a complete disbalance with the basic principles of democracy (Oevermann, 1993, p. 56.; Mahmoud, 2001, p. 76-77).

In a feverish atmosphere whipped up by Ḥasan al-Turābī's Ikhwān and their allies, to adopt a proposition of an Islamic constitution, two Islamic scholars (Ar. *ʿālim*: singular of *ʿulamā*) in collaboration with the Ikhwān led by Ḥasan al-Turābī decided to undertake drastic action against Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and his Republicans (Oevermann, 1993, p. 60). According to Mahmoud (2001), al-Amīn Dāwūd Muḥammad and Ḥusayn Muḥammad Zakī, who taught at the Islamic University of Omdurman, took a *ḥisba*²⁰ against Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha in November of 1968 (p. 77). These occurrences culminated in an attempt – only the first one – to accuse him of apostasy (Ar. *riḍḍa*) in November 1968 (p. 77-78). Apostasy is the fall from Islam, which was in theory punishable by death (Campo, 2009, p. 48). Their petition also requested that the court not only take legal actions against Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, but also declare the dissolution of the Republican Party, order the confiscation of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's assets, dissolution of his marriage with his Muslim wife. Nevertheless, these measures affected also his followers, because they faced the same consequences, if it could have been proven that they had engaged in spreading his teachings or if they had shared his beliefs (Mahmoud, 2001, p. 78).

However, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha declined to appear before the court, citing his constitutional right of freedom of speech. Moreover, he did not recognise the jurisdiction of the court. Still, Khartoum Supreme Sharī'a Court investigated the allegations raised by the litigants accusing Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha of apostasy. The death penalty, confiscation of his assets, dissolution of his marriage and the

²⁰ is a concept and personal practice profiled in Islam which directly stems from the Qur'ānic suggestions to "promote good and combat evil" (Campo, 2009, p. 302–303).

dismantlement of his party and movement were the punishments demanded by the accusers, but the judges only ordered Ṭaha to repent his ideas (Mahmoud, 2001, p. 78).

On the other hand, Mahmoud (2001) points out that this prosecution created some advantages for the movement too (p. 78). The most important one he counts is the subsequent wide publicity of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's movement among the young intellectuals and students who were dissatisfied with the traditional Islamic thought. The court fulfilled only the first request of the litigants, charging Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha for apostasy and ordering him to denounce his ideas and actions. Meanwhile, the Ikhwān who were engaged in the political sphere attempted to draw the public support to their side in the issue by trying to incorporate Sharī'a law in the final and permanent version of the future constitution. They went as far as intending to bring this question to the public and organise a referendum on this matter. In the end, these attempts led to wide dissatisfaction among the army officers. Some of these officers organised themselves in the "Free Officers Movement" which was led by Ja'far Muḥammad al-Numayrī (Oevermann, 1993, p. 71).

Al-Numayrī and his Free Officers seized power through the coup d'état in May 1969. They pursued socialist, Nasserist and Pan-Arabist ideology (Oevermann, 1993, p. 71). In other words, this upsurge was triggered by the discontent of the politically left-oriented population. Persistent attempts of the right-wing parties to reform the constitution in the manner of Sharī'a law and the ban of the Communist Party were the triggering points for the military putsch (Oevermann, 1993, p. 58). The proposed constitution would be highly discriminatory, especially towards the communists and South Sudanese population, since it would affect the freedom of speech and belief, forbidding communism and atheism. From the beginning it was quite obvious that the new military regime gained support and loyalty of the Communist Party and the Arab Nationalists. Therefore, the support also came from Egypt along with the support the socialist block which was by the Soviet Union.

However, this new government banned all political parties, which included the Republican Party, which was nonetheless able to continue with their practices as a religious association – the Republican Brothers (Ar. *al-ikhwān al-jumhūrīyūn*) (Mahmoud, 2001, p. 79). Despite having some major discrepancies in the bases of

their political ideologies, the Republicans felt some ease after the new government came into power. The fact that al-Numayrī pursued socialist policies and was against the hegemony of the Ṣūfī orders was enough to ensure the support of the Republicans (Oevermann, 1993, p. 71). Most importantly, the new government revealed its intentions in achieving the goals of the October 1964 Revolution. One of the first steps that had been welcomed and supported by Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha was the signing of the Addis Ababa Agreement in February of 1972. This agreement was meant to secure peace in the South of Sudan by recognition of the southern autonomy and English as its official language (Natsios, 2012, p. 52).

Even though Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha did not directly oppose the new regime in this period, he did not cooperate with it as well. Oeverman (1993) states that the number of the Republican publications was greatly increased in the first years of the al-Numayrī's regime and that the Republican authors were allowed to publish their articles in the magazine of the Sudanese Ministry of Information - *Sudanow* (p. 70). Therefore, Ṭaha continued to hold his teachings until 1973 when his public lectures were prohibited by the Al-Numayrī's regime. After the ban of the public lectures in 1973, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and his disciples experienced some obstacles while operating throughout most of al-Numayrī's rule (An-Na'īm, 1987, p. 7). The Republican activities continued to cause numerous and intensive critiques from the traditional streams on the Sudanese political stage. For example, al-Azhar University in Cairo and the Muslim World League issued *fatwā*²¹ about the apostasy of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha (Oevermann, 1993, p. 66-69).

In July 1976, al-Numayrī's regime experienced the first attempt of ousting. The major opposition united forces at that time which consisted of the members of the Umma Party, the Democratic Unionist Party, and the Ikhwān, managed to orchestrate an attack in Khartoum. This event led to a drastic change in the politics of the President al-Numayrī (Oevermann, 1993, p. 80). Namely, al-Numayrī dealt with the raising opposition in an unexpected way – turning to the Islamic political agenda. Al-Numayrī released political prisoners and forged peace with Ṣādiq al-Mahdī²², stopping the prosecution of the *Anṣārs*, and al-Turābī. Even the Addis Ababa Agreement was

²¹ a legal opinion or decree handed down by an Islamic religious leader (Muftić, 2004, p. 1095; Campo, 2009, p. 233)

²² Grandson of 'Abd al-Raḥmān al-Mahdī head of the Umma Party and Imam of the *Anṣār*.

endangered because al-Numayrī proposed the renegotiation of it. However, the leader of the Democratic Unionist Party, al-Sharīf Ḥusayn al-Hindī, did not participate in this reconciliation. On the other hand, the Ikhwān took advantage of this reconciliation, with al-Turābī becoming Attorney General in April 1978, initiating efforts to “Islamise” the Sudanese laws (Natsios, 2012, p. 46). Additionally, the Ikhwān used their alliance with Al-Numayrī's regime to establish the Faysal Islamic Bank, which bolstered their economic power in just a few years (Natsios, 2012, p. 75).

Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha had already been arrested several times, together with other members of the Republican movement. For example, he and some of his Republicans were detained for one month in 1976 without any charge in particular, after Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha published a book in which he criticised the Wahhābī movement of Saudi Arabia. It is also already mentioned that the Republicans experienced a total ban on their public activities and teachings from 1973. Even though they suffered repeated repercussions, harassment and bans for over ten years, the movement did not oppose the regime of the President al-Numayrī (An-Na‘im, 1987, p. 7-8).

During the 1970s and early 1980s, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and his followers were faced with numerous challenges and obstacles in their efforts to spread their message. For example, the previously mentioned *fatwās* issued by the two important international Islamic organisations, encouraged Ṭaha's opponents in Sudan. The members of *jamā‘at ‘ulamā’ al-Sūdān*, mostly al-Turābī's Ikhwān, demanded from the president in 1976 to completely forbid Ṭaha's teachings and destroy his books (Oevermann, 1993, p. 69). From that point on, the Republicans were often denied access to mainstream media, which was completely controlled by the state during that period. For that reason, they had to find alternative ways to reach the public. They resorted to speaking in public spaces like street corners and parks, but even then, the police would sometimes intervene and disperse their gatherings, accusing them of disturbing the peace. Despite their protests, these restrictions on their right to freely hold their teachings were not lifted. However, even with these obstacles, the Republicans continued to support the president al-Numayrī's regime during this time. They believed that as long as the regime maintained its policies of national unity and did not impose strict Sharī‘a law that would negatively affect women and non-Muslim Sudanese population, it was a better option than a civilian government, led by the

political parties influenced by the leading Şūfī orders and the Ikhwān (An-Naʿim, 1987, p. 8; Mahmoud, 2001, p. 76).

It is important to mention that Sharīʿa law was actually imposed by presidential decrees in September of 1983 (Oevermann, 1993, p.83). With the change of state law, the national unity between the Muslim north and non-Muslim south was endangered to be destroyed, because the law led to strict and repressive policies throughout the whole country. This was the first time the Republicans declared their direct opposition to the president al-Numayrī (An-Naʿim, 1987, p. 9).

However, in the time of Al-Numayrī's decision to impose Sharīʿa law, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and around fifty his disciples were imprisoned. They were arrested in the mid-1983 and the possible cause of their arrest was a pamphlet published by the Republicans. In this pamphlet they criticised the chief of national security, for failing to prevent the attacks on the Republicans from an Egyptian scholar. In his speeches the Republicans were characterised and referred to as a heretical group. Because al-Numayrī announced his intention to impose Sharīʿa law only a few weeks after the detention of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and his Republicans, An-Naʿim, (1987) claims that an obvious conclusion could be drawn (p. 9). He considers that the Republicans would have actively and directly opposed the Islamisation policy, if they had been free. Al-Numayrī's decision was in stark contrast to the Republican ideology, especially because they insisted that Sharīʿa law must undergo radical reform before it could be implemented into modern society.

When Sharīʿa law was officially accepted and imposed in September 1983, the Republicans started an opposition campaign even though their leadership was still in prison. On the 19th of September 1984, after nineteen months spent in prison, the Republican leadership including Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha were released without any additional conditions (An-Naʿim, 1987, p. 10). Mahmoud (2001) states, that this sheds a light on a possibility that the regime was plotting against the Republicans. He adds that it was expectable from the Republicans to engage in immediate protests and anti-Islamisation campaigns and that could be used against them (p. 80). The regime created a trap to the Republicans and lured them into prosecution which was entirely legitimate under the new laws (Mahmoud, 2001, p. 80-81).

After his release from prison, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha immediately joined the opposition campaign started by his followers in 1983, even though he was well aware that the regime targeted him (Mahmoud, 2001, p. 81). On the 25th of December 1984, the Republicans published a leaflet *Either This or the Flood* (Ar. *Hadha aw al- ṭawfān*). In this leaflet, they firstly demanded a repeal of the freshly imposed September 1983 laws. Secondly, they wanted a guarantee of democratic civil liberties and the ending of the civil war in the South. Finally, they called for a debate about the principles and process of Islamisation (Mahmoud, 2001, p. 81).

The initial response from the police regarding the leaflet was quite reserved. Only in some districts were a few Republicans arrested, and only for distributing the leaflets. They were charged with only minor offenses like disturbing the public peace. The leaflet itself was written in a peaceful manner and could be interpreted as mere advice without any questioning of the regime's legitimacy (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 12).

However, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha was apprehended at his residence in Omdurman on Saturday, the 5th of January 1985 and charged with numerous offenses, such as "[...]charges of sedition, undermining the constitution, inciting unlawful opposition to the government, and disturbing public tranquillity" (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 12). Only two days later, in the morning of the 7th of January, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and the four Republicans who were previously captured faced trial before a special criminal court. The president of the republic, al-Numayrī, allowed the court to apply *hadd* punishments²³, which basically meant that Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and the other Republicans could be charged for apostasy (Mahmoud, 2001, p. 82).

Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and the other four accused Republicans chose to boycott the trial due to several objections. First, they opposed the September 1983 laws governing the court. Second, they objected to the qualifications of the presiding judge (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 13). Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha made a short statement when announcing their decision to boycott the proceedings and the trial concluded in less than two hours (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 14).

The judge delivered his finite verdict on the 8th of January 1985, mainly relying on the statements made by the accused during their interviews with police officer who

²³corporal punishments provided by Shari'a law which implied that there is a divine will behind their executions (Campo, 2009, p. 174).

led the investigation. An-Na'im (1987) states that the judge noted that the accused held unconventional interpretations of Islam (p. 14). Both An-Na'im (1987) and Mahmoud (2001) agree that the discussion about the thoughts and beliefs of the main accused, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, suggested that the judge was considering the Islamic offense of apostasy (p. 15; p. 87). It was concluded by finding "[...all five accused guilty of all charges such as sedition, undermining the constitution, inciting unlawful opposition to the government, disturbing public tranquillity, and being members of an unlawful organisation" (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 15). The judge imposed the death sentence on all five accused, with the condition that they could be spared if they repented and renounced their beliefs. This made it evident that the judge was essentially convicting them of apostasy. Considering Sharī'a law, the repentance and disavowal of heretical views can lead to reprieve (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 15).

In Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's case, the court of appeal ruled that his persistent apostasy denied him the chance for reprieve through repentance and renunciation. On the other hand, the court allowed the other four accused one month to reconsider their stance, with the offer of their pardon if they recanted (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 15).

Subsequently, the President of the Republic publicly confirmed this decision two days later and ordered the execution of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha by hanging for Friday, 18th of January. After the execution, his body was taken down from the gallows and covered with an old blanket. The place of his burial is not known as the body was immediately taken via helicopter to an undisclosed location. Later reports suggested that his body was buried somewhere in the desert west of Omdurman (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 17).

The execution of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha caused fear amongst the convicted Republicans. This led to their repentance of the Republican ideas and consequently, they were pardoned and released. Nearly four hundred Republican men and women detained in Omdurman and in other towns across the country were all set free within a week of agreeing to disband their movement and abstain from further propagating of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's ideas. An-Na'im (1987) claims that the Sudanese authorities apparently believed that after Ṭaha's execution the Republican movement

would fade away from the Sudanese public scene, assuming he was its sole substance and driving force (p. 16).

However, president al-Numayrī's was not head of state for very long, since he was ousted by a popular revolt on the 6th of April 1985 (Natsios, 2012, p. 59). Interestingly, al-Numayrī's ousting happened only seventy-six days after Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's execution. After his overthrow, Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha filed a constitutional lawsuit in which she demanded the court to overturn the verdict and repeal its consequences. This lawsuit was based on several procedural irregularities during the trial which she claimed were unconstitutional (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 17). Ultimately the Supreme Court decided that the trial and the verdict were invalid (An-Na'im 1987, p 17-18).

The following decades were not easy for the Republicans. After the dissolution of the movement, they mostly lived abroad in exile. In this period, Stephen W. Howard examined (Howard, 1998; 2006; 2016; 2016) the topic around the Republican movement. He also focused himself on the feminist character of the movement and therefore, he examined the role of the Republican Sisters within the movement. This part of his work is of a great importance for the cause of this work. Only after Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's eldest daughter, Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, returned to Sudan in 2009, the Republican movement appeared once again on the political and social stage in Sudan. First, they were organised around Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha Cultural Center, but later with the rise of demonstrations in Sudan, Asmā' and her fellow Republicans became active in Sudanese political sphere. As her political life developed, she enjoyed increased popularity among the mainstream media. In her interviews for numerous Sudanese newspapers and tv channels, Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha managed to present her political and spiritual ground to a broader public.

4.2. The Republican Party of Sudan and its ideology

For the most of his life, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha focused himself on guiding the activities of the organisation known as the Republican Brothers. This group, despite its name, included an increasing number of female members. Therefore, both men and women in the organisation continued to spread Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's *Second Message of Islam* (Ar. *Al-risāla al-thāniya min al-Islām*) which could be understood as the manifesto of Ṭaha's movement, despite facing harassment from certain officials and security forces. In the times of active interference in the political life of Sudan, the organisation was known as the Republican Party. Ṭaha established a party which was based on Islamic modernism in 1945 (Mahmoud, 2001, p. 68). However, his version of Islamic modernist thought incorporated the ideas of Sufism, evolutionism, Marxism, liberalism, and psychoanalysis (Mahmoud, 1998, p. 122).

By October 1951, after a period of isolation, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha had developed a comprehensive new understanding of Islam. He summarised this understanding in his first book published in 1952 titled *This is My Way* (Ar. *Qul hadhihi sabīlī*) (Lamaḥāt min al-sīrat al-'ustādh Muḥammad, n.d.). From this point on, the Republican Party started undergoing a transformation from a conventional political party to an organisation focused on propagating this new concept of Islam. Some members of the party who wished to engage politics on a more secular level, left it to join alternative political groups. Even though it was officially a political party until 1969, the people who stayed viewed the organisation more as a spiritual environment under Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's guidance. In 1955 and 1956 Sudanese political representatives worked on the preparations of a new constitution, since the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium rule agreed on the independence of Sudan. In the same period, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha presented his ideas for the new constitution in his book, titled *Usus dustūri-l-Sūdān* (1955) (Lamaḥāt min al-sīrat al-'ustādh Muḥammad, n.d.). According to his recommendations, the independent Sudan should be federally structured and led by a president. Furthermore, he recommended that the new constitution should be based on the socialist and democratic principles. As it already pointed out, he stood firmly against the idea of creation of a constitution based on Islamic Sharī'a law which occurred later, as he saw it as a misuse of true Islam. He believed that implementing Sharī'a law would create intensification of the conflict

among non-Muslim and non-Arabised Sudanese citizens in the South and some parts of the North. The situation in Sudan was already feverish, since armed rebellions had already started escalating, demanding a federal rule and a level of autonomy of the South (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 8).

In terms of foreign policy, he was one of the first people to propose a direct dialog for a peaceful solution to the Palestinian problem. In 1967 he published two books in which he examined that issue: *The Middle East Problem* (Ar. *Mushkilāt al-sharq al-awsaṭ*) and *The Challenge facing the Arabs* (Ar. *Al-Ṭahaddī al-ladhī yuwājihu al-ʿarab*). In these works, he expressed his opinions on the peaceful coexistence of the Israelis and Arabs. Furthermore, he was not supportive of the Nationalist Arab Movement. This movement was established and led by Egypt's president Jamāl ʿAbd al-Nāsir. Furthermore, he also opposed the traditional and radical understandings of Islam propagated by the Muslim Brotherhood Movement in some Arab countries (Lamaḥāt min al-sīrat al-ʿustādh Muḥammad, n.d.).

Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha reached the absolute peak of his reformist thinking and teaching in 1967, when he published three of his crucial literary works. These works include *Muhammad's Path* (Ar. *Ṭarīq Muḥammad*), *A Treatise on Prayer* (Ar. *Risālat al-ṣalāt*) and *The Second Message of Islam* (Ar. *Al-risāla al-thāniya min al-Islām*) (Lamaḥāt min al-sīrat al-ʿustādh Muḥammad, n.d.).

Throughout the period of the Republican Party's active years of existence, there were several moments when the name of the party was questioned. According to Mahmoud (2001), Mansour Khalid correctly points out that the Republican Party was the first Sudanese party that could be understood as "genuinely republican in stance" (Khalid, 1990, p. 87 as cited in Mahmoud, 2001, p. 68). Mahmoud therefore continues, saying that after Sudan gained its independence a problem about the name came up since the epithet "Republican" did not carry its significance. As a result of that, the members of the Republican Party thought that it was meaningful to coin a new name in the 1970s. The idea behind it was to rename the party in order to reflect their ideology. Consequently, the Republicans stumbled upon the name "the New Islamic Mission" (Ar. *Al-daʿwa al-Islāmiyya al-jadīda*) and for a brief period they presented themselves under this new name (Magnarella, 1980, p. 14). However, this did not last long, because they realised that this new name could easily be used against them in

the political arena. Namely, their opponents could argue that this new name suggests a call for a new version of Islam which would immediately lead to the cancellation of the complete movement by the broader public. In the end, the Republicans decided to stick to their original name, without any changes (Mahmoud, 2001, p. 68).

It is of crucial importance to point out the significance of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha for the cause of the Republican movement itself. He played a central role in the movement and is the key factor to understanding the nature of the Republican Brothers. Therefore, Mahmoud (2001) claims that Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha was not only the central organisational factor of the movement, but he was also the spiritual centre (p. 85). His life mostly depicted the image of his Ṣūfī ideal of asceticism. According to Mahmoud (2001), Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's life was modest and simple and everything in his life proved it (p. 85). For example, his home, his clothing, and the fact that he did not carry any money on him, were all indicators of the simplicity that he followed. Even though Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's ideas were Ṣūfī -oriented to some extent, he personally, was not a member of any Ṣūfī order (Ar. *ṭarīqa*), and the movement did not resemble a traditional Ṣūfī order. Nevertheless, he was unquestionably exposed to the Ṣūfī traditions through his family, as some of his ancestors were member of the *Qādiriyya* Ṣūfī order (Oevermann, 1993, p. 43). On the contrary to the traditional Ṣūfī practices, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha belonged to a neo-Ṣūfī stream in which it insisted on eliminating the role of *shaykh* (Mahmoud, 1998, p. 114). In other words, his role was to be a replacement of a direct relationship with the Prophet Muhammad. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's opinions were based on his personal experience - *khalwa*, so he expected his fellow Republicans to follow the path of the Prophet Muhammad by imitating it (Ar. *taqlīd*). In essence the Republicans had to experience the spiritual path of the Prophet in order to get acquainted with the salvation and freedom.

Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha was dedicated to practicing what he preached and aimed to establish a community that adhered to the core principles of his Islamic vision. While this community, known as the Republicans, was relatively small within the Sudanese society and could not fully implement their beliefs in the organisation of the Sudanese state, and influence the Sudanese political reality. However, they made efforts to organise their personal lives in accordance with their beliefs. By doing so they

managed to establish a community on a microlevel which was based on their principles (Magnarella, 1982, p. 24).

The Second Message of Islam could be understood as a unique manifesto of the Republican movement and the Republican Party. Undoubtedly, their ideology was at its core, before everything else, inspired by Islam. The Republicans saw Judaism, Christianity, and Islam as the three final monotheistic messages of God with divinely inspired Books, i.e. a complete God's message presented in three different dimensions (Taha, 1987, p. 117; Magnarella, 1982, p. 16). However, Islam was depicted by the Republicans as a final meeting point or integration of God's previous messages, integrating the qualities of the previous two (Taha, 1987, p. 122). On the one side, the Republicans consider Judaism to be a reflection of the materialistic aspects, while on the other side, Christianity is, according to the Republican ideas, a reflection of the spiritual aspects of God's message (Taha, 1987, p. 120-121). Thus, Islam incorporates the qualities of both Judaism and Christianity, achieving a unique equilibrium of the two previous divine messages. In some aspects Islam is closer to Judaism, and in other aspects it is closer to Christianity. Therefore, Islam reflects a unique middle ground between the two extremes, materialistic and spiritual. Ṭaha justifies this claim by citing the Qur'ān:

“Show us the straight path, The path of those whom Thou hast favoured; Not the (path) of those who earn Thine anger nor of those who go astray” (Ali, 2014, p. 12). Q 1:6-7

saying that the straight path is the middle path – Islam (Taha, 1987, p. 122). Since there are two “ends”, one closer to Judaism and the other closer to Christianity, Ṭaha uses this as a spring from which his idea of the two messages of Islam stems. He says that both messages were delivered by the Prophet Muhammad, but only the first one was elaborated in Sharī‘a law, the second one stayed unexplained, except for the aspects which are the same in both messages (Taha, 1987, p. 123).

As a starting point of unfolding his ideas, Ṭaha draws a line of distinction between two terms – *madaniyya* (civilisation) and *ḥaḍāra* (material progress) (Taha, 1987, p. 51-52). Ṭaha uses this claim as a basis for a discussion about the Western civilisation. There, he also uses the polarised approach, putting on one side the capitalistic-liberal ideology and on the other the communist-totalitarian model.

However, he does not take a critical stance only towards the ideology, he also criticises the Western civilisation on a philosophical level. According to him, Western civilisation failed to provide and secure peace and managed only to create an extreme polarised division of the world. He says that the failure of the modern society is “[...due to the fact that its material development was not supplemented by proper moral growth that clarifies the confusion...] This is true today of socialism as well as capitalism” (Taha, 1987, p. 54). Furthermore, Ṭaha brings the concept of individual freedom into discussion about the failure of Western civilisation, pointing out that Western civilisation is unable to explain the relationship between an individual and society and between an individual and the universe from a philosophical point of view. Not succeeding in answering these questions, Western civilisation hinders the achievement of individual freedom (Taha, 1987, p. 55). As a main problem in the relationship between an individual and the society, Ṭaha sees a general misunderstanding of the thinkers that the individual freedom and society’s interest are not compatible. Because of that, the needs and interests of society are put in front of the individual freedom, which is also the case in contemporary societies (Taha, 1987, p. 59). Ṭaha raises an even bigger concern while discussing the nature of the relationship between an individual and the universe. He openly opposes the philosophical stand that the scientific development throughout history erased the humanity’s need for religion and God. At this point he severely criticises the communist materialistic approach to life, since he considers Marxism to be the leading progressive Western social philosophy (Taha, 1987, p. 61). However, Ṭaha claims that the capitalistic-liberal West is not better in understanding the issue of the relationship between an individual and the universe, claiming that even though there is a difference between these two ideologies, the belief system of the capitalistic-liberal West is not stable, and it could easily drift into communism. Therefore, he points out that every religion must face the issues of the modern world and adapt to them, providing answers to both physical and spiritual needs of an individual and society. He concludes that his intention is not just a pure and open critique, but rather the acknowledgment of the advantages of these ideologies and scientific approaches which would lead to a reform towards a true civilisation combining socialism and democracy (Taha, 1987, p. 61).

Therefore, Ṭaha proposes his idea of an Islamic alternative since the individuality is the end in Islam where the Qur’ān and faith are just means of getting

to. He argues his idea supporting it with numerous verses from the Qur'ān²⁴ (Taha, 1987, p. 62). Furthermore, he introduces the concept of absolute individual freedom (Ar. *al-ḥurriyya al-fardiyya al-mutlaqa*) saying that it is regarded a fundamental importance in Islam and that every person regardless of their gender, race, or religion can achieve it through a proper use of it, as long as it is in accordance with total social justice (Taha, 1987, p. 64-65).

To elaborate on the concept of the *second message of Islam*, which is important for the incorporation of his Islamic alternative ideas into society, and to clarify the features of the first message, Ṭaha draws a line of distinction between *al-mu'minūn* (the believers) and *al-muslimūn* (those who submit themselves to God) (Mahmoud, 1998, p. 116). According to Ṭaha (1987) his difference is only the matter of a degree because "Every mu'min is not necessarily a muslim, but every muslim is (in the sense explained above) necessarily a mu'min as well" (p. 124). This distinction is based on the Qur'ānic text and its internal division on Meccan and Medinan sūras. However, the difference does not lay in the time or place of revelation, but in fact, the difference appears when it comes to the audience (Taha, 1987, p. 125). Since Meccan sūras were revealed first and they represent an invitation to accept the ultimate Islam, Ṭaha regards them with a higher standard as carriers of the second message of Islam. On the other hand, Medinan sūras were revealed in accordance with the abilities of the believers and represent a descent from the higher level (Taha, 1987, p. 130). Moreover, he refers to the Meccan sūras as "original" and to Medinan sūras as "subsidiary", saying that the people of Arabia in the time of the Prophet were not mature enough to fulfil the standards of the "original" revelation and therefore the "subsidiary" revelation was in accordance with the historical context of that period (Taha, 1987, p.131-132). Thus, the ultimate goal is the "original" precept. To justify his claims that "subsidiary" revelation cannot meet and fulfil the needs of a modern society, Ṭaha elaborates on several specific issues, such as jihād, slavery, capitalism, and gender inequality, etc (Taha, 1987, p. 133-164).

²⁴ "[...no bearer of burdens can bear the burden of another" (Ali, 2014, p. 74). Q 6:164; "Then shall anyone who has done an atom's weight of good, see it! And anyone who has done an atom's weight of evil, shall see it" (Ali, 2014, p. 353). Q 99:7-8; "To Us shall return all that he talks of and he shall appear before Us bare and alone" (Ali, 2014, p. 154). Q 19:80; "Not one of the beings in the heavens and the earth but must come to (God) Most Gracious as a servant. He does take an account of them (all), and hath numbered them (all) exactly. And everyone of them will come to Him singly on the Day of Judgment" (Ali, 2014, p. 154). Q 19:93-95

Howard (2006) points out that from the sociological point of view, the biggest contribution of Ṭaha's complete work and activities is mirrored in his approach to the women's status in Sudanese society (p. 23). Thankfully, due to the implementation of his beliefs into the Republican community, his female followers had an opportunity to enjoy religious and political rights on an advanced level. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha was the establisher of the Republican movement, a program where he also managed to incorporate the question of women's rights. On the other hand, the male members of the organisation were able to understand the importance of the women's inclusion in the movement. Firstly, it was their obligation from the religious perspective. Secondly, feminist agenda is presenting possible solutions which can lead to men's liberation. These claims are also supported by Mahmoud (1998), because he says that the gender equality has a central role in Ṭaha's reformist movement (p. 118). Ṭaha bases his stand on the issue of gender equality on the claim that complete gender equality between men and women is an original precept of Islam (Taha, 1987, p 139). Moreover, he calls upon the Qur'ān to support his stand citing several Qur'ānic verses which indicate that. For example, he points out: "That Day will every soul be requited for what it earned; no injustice will there be that Day, for God is Swift in taking account" (Ali, 2014, p. 245). Q 40:17

Another remarkable achievement of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's reformatory thinking is the new understanding of *'ibāda*²⁵. To clarify this, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha said that a religious society for women before the Republican community never existed in Sudan and that women had neglected their human and religious potential, and Shari'a did not let them progress and develop their potential. Notably, the Republicans successfully promoted gender equality within their own community, with women participating fully in all group activities. Women often took on leadership roles in activist groups on university campuses, in public parks, and on street corners, challenging the patriarchal norms of Sudanese society. This commitment to gender equality was so prominent that when the organisation's leadership was detained in mid-1983, among those detained were four women (Mahmoud, 2001, p. 80).

Nevertheless, the intention to completely include women in the Republican mission in Sudan was a colossal hindrance for the entire movement. From the

²⁵ personal spiritual conduct (Muftić, 2004, p. 918).

beginning, this attempt was not embraced without objection by some of the male members, but it was welcomed with a tremendous degree of enthusiasm and vigour by the female sympathisers. Therefore, this effort represented a remarkable step in the educational project of the Republican male emancipation.

The best way to describe these problematics is to metaphorically compare it with the resistance of the entire Republican movement to the imposed authority of Islamic orthodoxy on one side, and the imposition of authority on the Republican women by their male colleagues on the other side. The Republican opinion on women's rights in Islam and in general was constantly the target of numerous critiques from every side. For instance, Sudanese and Egyptian ulema issued several *fatwās* against the Republicans, they were annoyingly harassed in the streets of Khartoum which manifested thorough the sisters having their hair and clothing pulled, etc. The oppression of the Republicans went even further and even Sharī'a court in Khartoum in 1968 declared a dissolution of marriages. This meant that any woman married to a member of the Republican movement was divorced, because they were deemed to be unbelievers (Ar. *kuffār*) (Howard, 2016, p. 24).

However, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and his disciples endured in their commitment to their agenda and ideology with uncompromising dedication and a thorough view that to leave women behind was not even an option if they meant to succeed in their quest for absolute individual freedom. According to their understanding, if Sudanese women were not free, no one could be free. That was the core of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's teachings where he also managed to carefully include his female disciples.

Indeed, the position and situation of women in modern Islamic societies, primarily in the Sudanese, was one of the essential topics in his book *The Second Message of Islam*. While discussing philosophical views on the individual, he points out that social philosophy has not succeeded to understand the connection between community and individual in the best possible way. Ṭaha finds that the lack of community's appreciation of an individual's needs is rather concerning. The problem hides itself behind the complete disbalance and mismatch between the community's interests and individual's freedom. Since the community possesses a higher

importance in this hierarchy it consequently permits the individual to achieve and enjoy freedom (Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, 1987, p. 56).

Since equality between men and women is the universal rule of Islam, the individual of our particular interest for this research presented here is women. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha builds his work on the analysing the first message of Islam presented in the sūras from the Muhammed's time of prophecy in Medina and the development level of the community of that period, concluding that women back then were not yet ready to accept the responsibility of their freedom. Nevertheless, the complete equality with men had been granted to them in the "original" Meccan revelations of the Qur'ān. These "original" precepts of Islam that are granted to women, according to Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, were the following: rights to divorce, complete equality with men, no polygamy, no gender segregation, and no required veiling. However, all these rights were abolished during the time of the life and prophecy in Medina because it represented, in a way, a transitional period in the history of the Islamic community. From Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's *The Second Message of Islam*, it becomes clear that the reason for this outcome was the need for increased social control during the violent Medinan period (Taha, 1987, p. 140). The crucial verse of the Qur'ān which was revealed in the Medinan period, and which is incredibly relevant to this topic is from the sūra, "The Woman," (Ar. *al-Nisā*):

"Men are the protectors and maintainers of women, because God has given the one more (strength) than the other, and because they support them from their means. Therefore the righteous women are devoutly obedient, and guard in (the husband's) absence what God would have them guard. As to those women on whose part ye fear disloyalty and ill-conduct, admonish them (first), (Next), refuse to share their beds, (And last) beat them (lightly); but if they return to obedience, seek not against them Means (of annoyance): For God is Most High, great (above you all)" (Ali, 2014, p. 45). Q 4:34

Howard (2016) says that this verse is well known for the usage of the term "guardian" (p. 25). This verse is also the key to understanding the modern state of the male – female relationships in the Arab world since the term *al-qiwāma* is still used to describe those relationships male-female relationships in Islamic societies. Moreover, Muslim men are relying on this particular verse when they want to explain that their

wives obeying them is an essential part of women's *'ibāda*. Therefore, this verse is defined by Howard as: "the scriptural justification for gender inequality" (Howard, 2016, p. 25). As it is known from Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's biography, his teachings, and especially those connected to the understanding of the Qur'ān, were savagely criticised and described as blasphemous and on the border of apostasy, of which he was accused several times (Oevermann, 1993, p. 60). Therefore, he intended to provide the importance of the historical context in the passage stated above. Furthermore, his position on gender equality was not just the one that was served and advocated by the contemporary societies, but rather, he emphasised that gender equality was revealed and provided in the Qur'ān and denying it would represent defying Allah's will (Taha, 1987, p. 139).

As has been mentioned before, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha claims that even though the verse was revealed during the time when women were not at disposal of accurately carrying out the duties of freedom, he indicates that women had already enjoyed better status in the wake of Islam compared to their situation in the pre-Islamic period. However, Ṭaha points out that it was just a temporary state and that the ultimate goal, complete equality between men and women, was yet to be achieved (Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, 1987, p. 140).

There is definitely no doubt the verse Q 4:34 is God's word, but it is a revelation to the people of Medina, and it cannot be considered to be an operative verse for contemporary times (Howard, 2016, p. 28). According to Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's differentiation of the sūras on Mekan and Medinan revelations, it could be said that he approached this topic from deeper understanding of the historical facts and the social environment in the time of revelation. Therefore the sūra in question bears a message which meant for the community of that period, but there is also a message for the community of the contemporary times (Howard, 2016, p. 28).

In addition, there are other scholars and researchers who shared their opinion with Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha regarding the question of woman in Islam. As it is already mentioned, the main sources from which *Islamic feminism* stems are the Islamic sources: the Qur'ān, ḥadīth, and sunna. For instance, Asmā' Barlas supports the contemporary stand and contention of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's that engaging the texts of the Qur'ān will certainly lead to and secure not only the liberation of women,

but it would also liberate men. She deals with these issues in her book, *“Believing Women” in Islam: Unreading Patriarchal Interpretations of the Qur’ān*. In her work she implies that the sacred texts bear a message of liberation (Barlas, 2002, p. 3). Furthermore, she draws a line of distinction between the understanding of the sacred texts and the actual manner in which women are treated in everyday life. In conclusion she emphasises on the idea that this issue should not only concern women, because God’s message brings the ultimate liberation.

Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha strongly encouraged the notion that educating women would lead them to completely understand the Qur’ān’s timeless message and then allow them to use it as the method to achieve their freedom. Another feminist scholar who thinks that examining and analysing the texts of the Qur’ān has a central role in the approach in dealing with gender equality question and status of woman in Islam is Amina Wadud, realising the meaning and the message of the verse 4:34. This approach was characterised by Stowasser (1999) and Sirri (2020) as Wadud’s focus on essential leximatic terms (p. 40; p. 43). It should be also mentioned that such an approach is closely related to Islam and the need to find contemporary meaning in seventh century revelation, which is a direct representation of *Islamic feminism* in practice and goes in line with the work of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha.

In conclusion, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha established an Islamic movement and a political party which presented their vision of a good society that is based on the concept of three equalities:

1. economic equality (socialism)
2. political equality or (democracy)
3. and social equality (society without social classes and discrimination based on colour, faith, race, or sex) (Taha, 1987, p. 153).

Therefore, the question of gender equality in terms of social equality forms an important part of Ṭaha’s ideology. Ṭaha’s feminism, according to Mahmoud (1998), represents a mixture of traditional and modern aspects (p. 123). Even though he supports the idea of a complete equality between men and women, he also emphasises the existence of different societal roles for men and women (Taha, 1987, p. 163). However, he points out the importance of the maternal role within society, saying that women who are

trained to be mothers share the same value as men who are trained to be engineers. He goes further by implying that there is no limit on training for a good motherhood (Taha, 1987, p. 163). This implies his socialist values, since he claims that society can benefit the best from an individual who is well trained for a specific task, whether it is manual, intellectual, or a combination of both. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's niece, the leader of the Republican Sisters in the time when the movement was active in 1970s and 1980s, Batūl Mukhtār, said that the task of the Republican Sisters was to monitor the excitement that arose among the members of the movement, because of their new responsibilities (Howard, 2016, p. 29). However, the Republican sisters were not alone in their participation in the Republican campaigns. The development of female members was, indeed, a priority task for the Republican men.

The role the Republican brothers played inside the movement was of a profoundly serious level when it came to the inclusion of the female members in the movement's activities. They were proactive in the Republican campaigns, and they put in an enormous effort to reach a wider audience for their preaching and campaigns. Furthermore, Howard (2016) gives an example of the leading Republican public speaker, Aḥmad Dalī (p. 29). He shared his experience with persuading the male population to accept the new tendencies of the Republican movement and the appearance of women in politics. He uses female doctors and judges as an example to explain that women are able to earn economic independence from men. Moreover, he implies that in the contemporary times, with the technical developments, women do not depend on men's physical strength either and concluded that together with time, men should also evolve. In the Republican view, Sudan has to accomplish all these things for its women, because they are the core of the foundation for its modernity. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha clarified his opinions on gender equality discussing several issues that women face in Islamic societies, such as polygamy, divorce, veil in Islam, and the segregation of men from women, saying that these were not the "original" precepts of Islam.

4.3. The Republican Sisters and Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha

Even though Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha was quite vocal about gender equality and the issue of women's rights ever since the establishment of the Republican Party in 1945, the Republicans did not have a women's group like the other political parties, such as the Communist Party or the Umma Party. After Ṭaha's first trial for apostasy in 1968, and the publicity around it, his movement gained on popularity. On the other hand, the education of women was not a taboo topic for Sudanese society, and it started gaining broader acceptance. The number of women studying at the University of Khartoum increased, and therefore the Republicans were also able to reach them with their teachings. Howard (2016) insists that this emergence of female activism inside the movement was doubtlessly a product of education. Moreover, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha coined a new saying with which he referred to the Republican sisters - *banātī mu'alafātī*, which is translated as "my daughters are my writings" (Howard, 2006, p. 33; Thomas, 2011, p. 176). With the word "daughters", Ṭaha refers to the female members of the Republican movement. He used this expression to point out the importance of women's spiritual growth and with it he indicated that it was one of the key points in his project of Islamic revival. Howard (2016) points out that the expression itself is a paraphrase of the saying created by Egyptian Ṣūfī master, al-Shādhilī (d. 1258) who used to describe his apprentices as his knowledge (p. 84). However, in the case of the Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's usage of the saying, one can feel and notice the strong individual care which he brought in order to ensure the establishing of his ideology and eventually to secure the success of his reformatory project. On the other hand, this expression bears the importance of the recruitment process indicating that a serious educational process was also a crucial part of becoming a *Republican sister*. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's reformatory ideas, with which he vowed his teachings, were what drew women's attention and attracted them to the Republican ideology.

With this new development of the movement and its goal to establish a Republican women's group, women were not drawn into the movement from the outside, but they were rather the wives, daughters and cousins of the Republicans. This is, in fact, the life story of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's elder daughter, Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha. She was born in 1946 in Rufā'a where her mother Amna

retreated while Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha was in prison (Thomas, 2011, p. 71). Her story can be understood and observed as a perfect example of the real picture which shows the status of women and the conditions in which women lived during in the mid-20th century in Sudan. And yet her life is emblematic proof of how far the Republican ideology could have changed, carefully and gradually, those conditions and society. Asmā' Maḥmūd stated in her interview with Stephen W. Howard that during her childhood in the early 1950s she did not spend as much time with her father as she wanted (Howard, 2016, p. 34). While her father, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, was in Khartoum dealing with his political activities in the early stages of the Republican Party, the rest of the family lived in Ṭaha's hometown Rufā'a. In this interview, she shared some obstacles that she and other girls faced back in Sudan. Namely that except for going to school, they were not permitted to leave the house. Only in the night hours were they allowed to visit their relatives and friends. However these restrictions which she experienced, ignited her aspirations to be a member of the Republican movement. Furthermore, she recalls that she started spending more time with her father during her secondary school holidays, when she travelled to Khartoum. Consequently, she experienced glimpses of possible freedom and opportunities through her father's teachings (Center for International Studies, 2009). This leads us to the conclusion that Asmā's interests in the feminist activism stem from her early childhood, but they were rendered and shaped through her relationship with her father and her connections to the Republican movement.

In the late 1960s, female relatives of the Republican members, such as Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, Batūl Mukhtār, who were daughters of Muḥammad Faḍl, started joining the meetings and teachings that Ṭaha held in the movement's headquarters in Omdurman (Thomas, 2011, p. 172). However it was in the first half of the 1970's when the number of women increased, as the Republicans started recruiting women who studied at the University of Khartoum. In the time of Ṭaha's first apostasy trial, Asmā' was a student at the University of Khartoum where she studied, and later graduated, law. She was inspired by her father to choose law, but she claims that she did so independently and without any pressure from her father (Thomas, 2011, p. 138). One of Asmā' Maḥmūd's duties, when she started being involved in the Republican Party's activities, was the recruitment of the new female members (Howard, 2016, p. 39). She refers to the women's group in the Republican Party as

ḥarakat al-niswān – women's movement. From her personal interactions with Sudanese women who were interested in the Republican thought, she shared details on physical violence which the women experienced from their male relatives. Asmā's work included presenting the ideas of the Republican program which were focussed on women. The ideas were concentrated on the issues which women were exposed to in their everyday life and the Republicans offered possible solutions which would lead to women's liberation. According to her testimony in the interview, Asmā began seriously being involved with the movement and its activities in 1970 (Center for International Studies, 2009; Howard, 2016, p. 34). This was around the same time that Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha announced that it was time that the sisters should take part in the activities alongside with the male members of the movement. Those activities included book selling and leaflet distribution on the streets of Khartoum. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha considered that the Republican sisters should firstly join the brothers in the Republican book selling campaigns. This decision was not warmly welcomed by the Republican brothers, and they protested it, however the sisters were also afraid. They were well aware that they could easily encounter and be surrounded by fanatics, and they were also concerned about the questions and stares on the streets that they would prompt. Moreover, the brothers were primarily upset about the fact that they would be expected be more focussed on the protection of the sisters, than on the activities of the movement.

In order to be ready to participate in the new activities of the movement, and to eventually engage in selling the Republican books, the sisters had to spend their time at the home of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha reading and discussing the ideas that Ṭaha expressed in his books. Furthermore, they also practiced learning the Qur'ān and its meaning. The idea was to be fully prepared and armed with the necessary knowledge before going out on to the streets. According to Asmā Maḥmūd, they began their involvement in the street campaigns when they were entirely qualified to answer and discuss any possible question about Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's Republican teachings (Howard, 2016, p. 34). They wanted to differentiate themselves from other political movements in a way that each individual would be able to carry things out on their own without being dependent on their colleagues for information. Even though the sisters could execute the campaigns independently, they were accompanied by a team of brothers during the first sales.

As they expected, the first sales in which the sisters took part did not occur without incidents. Asmā' Maḥmūd and her cousin Batūl Mukhtār were the first women to participate in the activities on the Sudanese streets (Thomas, 2011, p. 174). The brothers were genuinely against the idea of the women being a part of the sale campaigns stating that they could not be able to protect the sisters. But that did not affect the firmly formed intention of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha who said: "You are not afraid for the sisters' safety; you are afraid of equality with the sisters." (Howard, 2016, p. 34)

From Howard's interview with Asmā' Maḥmūd (2016, p. 33-35) arises the discussion about the role of women in the ideology and agenda of the Republican Brotherhood. Women and their equality with men became a centrepiece of the Republican reformatory program. Asmā' Maḥmūd claims that Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's connection with the problematics of women's rights appeared through his spiritual path, but it was also influenced by the Sudanese reality. Thomas (2011, p. 72-75) and Howard (2016, p. 34) tell a story about a woman from Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's hometown who was arrested by the British authorities for circumcising her daughter, since the mutilation was banned under the British Condominium laws. This occurrence triggered Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha to embrace the question around women's rights into his political agenda, since he was in favour of women's self-determination that could only be achieved through a proper education (2011, p. 72-75).

By the mid-1970s, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha went deeper into asceticism and practised an ascetic way of life. His clothing was very modest, his eating habits were vegetarian, and he even stopped carrying and using money himself. Asmā' Maḥmūd and her cousin Batūl Mukhtār were already employed in government service, after their university graduation, and therefore took responsibility of Ṭaha and his wife Amna (Thomas, 2011, p. 175). Asmā' worked as a lawyer in the attorney-general's chambers (Thomas, 2011, p. 177). Since Ṭaha's house was also the headquarter of the Republican movement, his wife Amna lived in another house. While Batūl Mukhtār would take care and support Ṭaha, Asmā' supported and spent more time with her mother. This example depicts their sincere devotion to the movement, and it is a proof of their support of Ṭaha's project.

Asmā' Maḥmūd and some of her fellow Republican sisters were also among the first female political prisoners in Sudan. The time they spent in detention was eye-opening for them, since they experienced an important exposure to the reality of women in their own country. The Republican sisters were exposed to completely different circumstances in prison than those of the group of the Republican brothers and other male political prisoners during that period in Sudan. They were all detained together during the 1983–85 anti-campaign against the Republican movement. During their imprisonment the male members of the Republican movement were seen as political prisoners. Consequently Kober Prison, which is located in the north part of Khartoum, had distinct quarters for political convicts. On the other side, there was almost no experience of female political prisoners in Sudan and as such, there was no special section for them in prisons. Therefore, Asmā' Maḥmūd and her female companions were kept in cells together with prostitutes and brewers of *merīsa*²⁶. During this period, they spent 19 months and 9 days in prison without any charges (Howard, 2016, p. 35).

Asmā' Maḥmūd said that the Republican sisters, considering the situation that they were thrown in, were able to observe the circumstances of poor women's lives in prison. She even developed a high level of understanding of those women saying that they were obliged to engage in those doings which they were punished for, in order to take care of their families. She also points out the problem of domestic violence, which was present in the Sudanese families, saying that other women were in prison because they had killed their husbands after being mistreated and beaten. She concludes that the time which the Republican sisters spent in prison was of a great importance for them, especially in terms of *'ibāda*. In the time of this spiritual conduct, the sisters concentrated on self-reflection and spent it singing religious poetry, reading Republican books, and praying a lot. On the other hand, they managed to establish deep connection with their inmates and taught some of the other women how to read and write and educated them about their obligations as Muslim women. Asmā' Maḥmūd and the other Republican sisters were detained and prosecuted for speaking out against al-Numayrī's Sharī'a law which was established in Sudan in 1983. Asmā' identified herself as a feminist, but not a theosophist or reformist (Center for

²⁶ a mildly alcoholic sorghum beverage that had become illegal under Al-Numayrī's Sharī'a law (Thomas, 2011, p. 40).

International Studies, 2009; Equal Rights Trust, 2014, p. 41). She declares herself as a feminist who was inspired by the work of her father and who challenged and stood firmly against the discriminations which were imposed by the September laws of 1983.

After her father's trial and hanging in 1985, she was the initiator of a constitutional lawsuit against the verdict. In other words, she demanded a pardon of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha. In a lengthy judgment issued on the 18th of November 1986, the Supreme Court extensively discussed the numerous flaws in the entire process, including clear violations of fundamental, constitutionally guaranteed safeguards, and violations of the 1983 imposed September laws.

4.3.1. Who are the Republican Sisters?

The increased number of women joining the movement led to the establishment of a special space for their accommodation. It was a widespread social norm in Sudan that women were not able to live on their own, but rather they had to live under the guardianship of their fathers, brothers, or husbands (Thomas, 2011, p. 172). Even though the education in Sudan started being improved, it did not bring some crucial changes in the attitudes towards women living alone, even in urban areas of the country. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha could not easily ignore this social custom. Therefore, in contrary to the other religious organisations, political movements and parties in Sudan, the Republican Party established a unique institution which was reserved for their female followers, called Sisters' House (Ar. *bayt al-ukhwāt*). Even the numerous Ṣūfī orders, which were active in Sudan in the second half of the 20th century, were not involved in providing a place of residence which was explicitly intended for female members' purposes.

Since Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha organised a house for the Republican brothers in al-Thawra, a neighbourhood in Omdurman, a need for the establishment of such a facility for sisters emerged as well. Nevertheless, this place was different from the facility that was meant to be reserved for providing accommodation for the Republican brothers. Firstly, the sister's house was actually located at the home of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha (Thomas, 2011, p. 172). Secondly, his house represented the headquarters of the Republican movement as well. Therefore, this led to the very

different circumstances that shaped the life of Republican sisters in comparison to the life of Republican brothers, since it was not a place of their own and they had to share it with the entire Republican movement.

Considering these circumstances, the living space of the Republican sisters had to be transformed into the room for Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's teachings and meetings with other disciples during the day. Even though the sisters used this area for sleeping and praying, they were obliged to remove all their personal items early in the morning. Consequently, their daily routine was highly influenced by the events that would be held in the house every day.

Beside all of these challenging circumstances that the sisters had to face on a daily basis, there were some positive aspects of their living situation. The organisation of the brothers' House was different from that of the sisters'. Thus, the senior Republicans among the brothers were in charge of the questions related to the Republican ideology and understanding of Islamic texts. While the brothers had to rely on each other, the sisters were constantly accompanied by Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha. Therefore, the sisters, who were in general students or unmarried women seeking and highly interested in the Republican knowledge, could count on Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha himself for any explanation of the Republican conduct. While the Brothers' House gathered a male community and the atmosphere was not tense, the atmosphere in the Sisters' House was more serious considering the fact that it was also the headquarters of the Republicans. However, it was also Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's family home, and therefore it represented a safe haven for independent women.

Considering the fact that women in Sudan were not able to take part in public political matters independently and freely, it is important to explain who the first women that joined the Republican movement were. As time went by, the daughters of the already established Republicans that "were born in the movement", were raised and educated in the Republican manner, such as Asmā' Maḥmūd, Batūl Mukhtār, Nawāl Faḍl, etc (Thomas, 2011, p. 172). Therefore, they also became eminent members of the Republican sisters. At the beginning of their activism, the wives, and daughters of the male followers, mostly those who were students or teachers and educators as their vocation, began attending the movement's meetings. Thus, these women played another crucial role for the expansion of the movement, especially in the process of

recruiting new female followers. Since they were students and teachers, they could spread the Republican thought throughout schools and educational institutions in Sudan, managing to draw attention to the movement amongst the Sudanese students. Their role was in the first place of great value in the primary and secondary educational institutions, where they were able to influence and attract numerous students to join the Republican sisters. Nonetheless, the Republicans were also proud of their other women members who were in professions such as medicine, law, and economy. However, there were fewer of them (Howard, 2016, p.38).

The best way to demonstrate and clarify the importance of the female members and their education to Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, is the fact that he praised them and their educational successes during the regular Republican meetings. Particularly, he used to indicate the graduation of every Republican sister, describing it as a valuable mark on the movement's history (Howard, 2016, p. 36). Their academic achievements mirrored the literary diversity of the Republican sisters, which, in my opinion, had a great influence on the movement's image in the Sudanese public sphere.

Nevertheless, it is also important to point out that the Sisters' House was not only the residual place of the female members, but it was also a Republican training academy for women. The sisters who lived there, as well as those who were just visitors, could gain and improve their knowledge of the Qur'ān and the writings of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha. It was also a place where they were able to learn and practice their oratorical skills in order to be able to participate in the debates of the Republican meetings or to lead the campaigns throughout the country.

Thomas (2011) and Howard (2016) provide the information about the personal experience of some Republican sisters, such as Nawāl Faḍl, Selwa Ahmad al Badawi, Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, Asmā' Jizūlī, 'Awātif 'Abd al-Ghādir (p. 173-174; p. 35). Their testimonies point out the importance of the oratorical skills, because women got a chance to present their opinion and beliefs to the public in the Republican campaigns. Since the women were strictly oppressed in the Sudanese public, their monologues and discussions during the campaigns had to be thoughtful and practiced to perfection. They were in the front rows of the movement, and they could not allow themselves to make any mistakes whilst speaking about the Republican ideology or the values of Islam. The sisters agreed that the education that they were able to acquire

during their stay at the Sisters' House, provided them with the necessary knowledge about the Republican ideology, but moreover those practices in the home of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha made it possible for them to articulate their attitudes. Moreover, in this place Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha enhanced his thinking on *the Second Message of Islam* and shared it directly with the sisters, for example he taught them how to properly follow the Prophet's Path. This included not only the intellectual side of his teachings which concentrated on education, but also everyday activities such as prayers, meals, ablutions, etc. (Howard, 2016, p. 37-38).

The Republican women also succeeded in standing up for themselves in other spheres and societal fields. Often they were pioneers who stood alone in the front lines, enduring indignities, representing, and fighting for Republican ideals which were in a constant clash with the majority of the Sudanese society. For example, the story of Nawāl Faḍl, a Republican sister and daughter of an eminent Republican Muḥammad Faḍl, is a strong testimony of the struggles that the Republican sisters had to face. When she attended a course in the Sudanese Embassy in Germany, there was an event to which all the Sudanese students were invited (Howard 2016, p. 84). At the end of this occasion it was time for the evening prayer. The imam refused to shake her hand, saying that he had already performed his ablutions. With such behaviour the imam implied that he was not to break his purity by shaking a woman's hand (Howard, 2016, p. 35). This situation depicts the perceived impurity or distractive powers of women which were firmly accepted throughout the society. Moreover, traditionalists and conservatives commonly use these understandings and transfer them into the firm arguments for mandatory veiling, women's exclusion from praying with men, and for limiting their participation in the public events.

As a contrast to these acts of discrimination, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's emerged with the postulates of his reformatory project to develop the status of women in the Sudanese society. The Republican agenda enforced the following concepts:

1. that women's spiritual competence was independent and definite;
2. that women are free to speak in public on the topics which they were educated about;
3. that women were equal and, therefore, shared their responsibilities with the male members of the movement;

4. that women's growth in learning and professions becomes multi-layered over time and eventually this proficiency cannot be separated from one another. Their growth in knowledge and professional life starts to make one strong chain of activist faith.

The experience of women within the Republican movement often involved rapidly advancing social change in response to various circumstances. A significant moment that showcased the Republican perspective on women's roles in Islamic society occurred during the funeral of Muḥammad Faḍl (Howard, 2016, p 29-32). He was a long-time associate of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, a follower from the beginning of the Republican activism, and also the father of two Republican sisters. As his body was transported from the hospital to his home for the customary washing and preparation for burial, Republican brothers and sisters began to gather at his residence to attend the funeral and mourn his passing.

Upon the arrival of the truck carrying the deceased's body at the front of the house, female family members who were not Republicans were present. They were following the traditional Sudanese custom of engaging in ritual reclamation, where women express grief by wailing and attempting to lay claim to the deceased's body, symbolising their refusal to accept the death. This practice was tolerated within traditional norms of women's roles in Islam, where women were not expected to fully adhere to all Islamic beliefs and obligations. On the contrary, Sudanese tradition portrayed men as strong Muslims who accepted death as a part of God's plan. To address the situation at Muḥammad Faḍl's funeral and uphold the teachings of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, the Republican sisters took a proactive stance. They began chanting the name of God, known as *dhikr*, as the body was brought in for washing, raising their voices above the wailing women. This created a stark contrast in the women's roles in society, and it was witnessed by the entire neighbourhood.

Although women in Sudan, but also in Islam, customarily visited graves after burials, they did not typically participate in the burial itself. However, the Republican sisters joined the burial of Muḥammad Faḍl. When the group prepared for the funeral prayer (Ar. *ṣalāt al-janāza*), the prayer over the deceased which occurs just before burial, men lined up for the prayer with Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha serving as the prayer leader. The sisters who had joined the funeral formed discrete lines behind the

men to participate in the prayer. This act was a departure from traditional norms, not only because women did not attend burials and did not participate in funeral prayers, but also because they did not pray in mixed groups with men.

Unfortunately, some men who were also present at the cemetery were upset by the deviation from social conventions and responded by throwing stones at the praying sisters. The Republican sisters did not view their participation in the burial as an act of defiance but rather as a religious duty that had been denied to them for too long. From these happenings it can be concluded that the Republicans were firm in their belief and wanted to show to the public that they are also assured of the eloquence of their female companions. In other words, this depicts one of the Republican main ideas towards women's status according to which women were ready to carry out their duties of practicing their faith, just as men did. Ṭaha dealt with the issue of segregation of men from women in his work *The Second Message of Islam*. Once again, he indicates the importance of the historical context and the maturity of individuals and society. He claims that the original precept of Islam in this case is desegregation, and that the first message had to take in account the weaknesses of the humankind from 7th century and lower the standards (Taha, 1987, p. 145).

Both, Thomas (2011) and Howard (2016) present an interesting case of 'Awāṭif 'Abd al-Ghādir (p. 174; p. 88). Namely, her brothers sparked her interest in joining the Republican movement when they presented her with Republican literature. Although she showed curiosity for the feminist topics during her teenage years, it was the Republican publications that she received from her brothers that ignited her aspiration to become an active member of the Republican sisters and started her activism in the domain of the woman's rights. She officially became one of the Republican sisters in 1975. She was a student at the University of Khartoum, where she managed to contribute to the Republican sisters and their cause with her activism. In 1975 the Brotherhood published a year-long series commemorating the first International Women's Year²⁷ which received wide circulation (Thomas, 2011, p. 174). During her studies, she engaged with extracurricular activities and earned a member position in

²⁷ The year of 1975 was labelled by the United Nations (UN) as International Women's Year. In order to gather the representatives of the UN member states and discuss the status of women a world conference was organised in Mexico City. The conference concluded with the set of ten-year plans on improvement of women's rights on the worldwide level which were obligatory for the member states (United Nations, n.d.).

the Student Union. Even though this student organisation was almost exclusively controlled by Muslim Brotherhood, she was elected as its representative (Howard, 2016, p. 35). Thankfully due to her involvement in the organisation, she got a chance to publicly discuss and promote the Republican ideas. However, these activities were not welcomed by the other representatives of the union.

Republicans cherished their extremely close relationship with Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha. This could be concluded from the fact that he was often referred to as "my father" or "ustādh Maḥmūd,". The mutual admiration between Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and the Republicans created a strong learning environment based on profound spiritual connections.

Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha highlighted another important aspect which can bring one closer to the understanding of the subliminal taciturnity that the sisters experienced. She said that they had to be aware and cautious while representing themselves as Muslim women, because the Sudanese society was not at all comfortable with seeing women and the activities that they undertook in public (Howard, 2016, 42). They were directly responsible for the image that the public would perceive about the Republicans.

On the other hand, the Republican sisters were allowed and managed to practice Islam in its fullness. None of them exercised their religion because it was a custom that they inherited, they did it because of their true conviction and personal wish to walk the spiritual path, soaking up as much spiritual knowledge as they could. Therefore, it does not seem odd that for many sisters the main reason why they followed Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha was freedom – the freedom they were offered, and they could enjoy (Thomas, 2011, p. 173).

4.3.2. The clothing issues

The women's veiling in Islam is a topic that is widely spread in the modern world, both in the contemporary East and West world. Moreover, this question is often discussed in both left- and right-wing political circles. Without any doubt the clothing issue could be understood as a controversial matter.

Therefore, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and Republican sisters also engaged with this topic. Ṭaha approached this topic from the theoretical corner through his writings, but Republican sisters did it in a practical way. Not only did the sisters approach the issue of Muslim women's veiling in a practical manner, but they added a symbolic prism to it with their clothing. To better illustrate this, the collective identity of the Republican sisters has to be examined, since the clothing represented the starting point of it, when it was observed superficially. In other words, the clothing was a mark that instantly caught the attention of the public. Consequently, it became an inseparable trait of the Republican collective identity.

The white thūb represented and even nowadays still does, a characteristic piece of the clothing of the Republican sisters. It is a thin, sari-like piece of garment that in a way depicted the Sudanese tradition (Thomas, 2011, p 172). A modern thūb can be around nine meters long and made of polyester, but it represents a modernised version of the traditional piece of clothing worn by women in rural parts of Sudan, which was originally made of domestically produced cotton. This garment was also a part of the uniform of Sudanese female office employees and teachers. Besides, it was a common for the mourners in Sudan.

A proper way of wearing a thūb would be wrapping it freely around the body and over the dress. The thūb is used also to cover one's hair, but only partially, surrounding one's neck, over the shoulder, from where it falls down usually below the knee. According to Sudanese customs, it was expected for women to dress themselves modestly. But the main change in the clothing tradition in Sudan came with the wide and thorough internationalisation of Islam, as Howard (2016) implies (p. 100). This occurrence led to the infuriated campaigns that aimed to make women dress more humbly and in a more Islamic manner thoroughly. This meant that women in Sudan should cover themselves up meticulously in spite of the enormously warm Saharan climate characteristic for this part of the world.

On this topic, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha had a firm stand that veiling was not an original precept of Islam. Hereby, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha dwells on to the issue of clothing, explaining the meaning of the word *al-sufūr*, saying that it represents a covering piece of garment that allows more exposure of a women's face and body, but it does not exclude wearing of a modest and decent dress. By doing so, he

differentiates *al-sufūr* from *al-hijāb*, since *al-hijāb* was obligatory clothing by Sharī‘a law in Sudan and it was stricter than *al-sufūr*. The hijab represents the covering of all of the women’s body leaving out only her face and hands uncovered (Taha, 1987, p. 143). Besides, Ṭaha points out also that the concept of chastity in Islam refers to both men and women. Internal chastity cannot be reached only through the coverage of body, but it also requires personal discipline (Taha, 1987, p. 143). Therefore, this interpretation of the term *al-sufūr* contributes to the approval of the Republican manner of clothing. Considering the meaning of the term that Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha provided in his work, I dare to draw a conclusion from everything aforementioned that the thūb is a legitimate, proper, and sufficient covering garment, even in the sphere of fulfilment of the religious demands.

The diversity of Muslim women’s clothing in Sudan was influenced by the veiling traditions imported from other Muslim countries. Back then, but also today, Sudanese women can be seen in public wearing different types of coverage, such as: hijāb, niqāb, and burqa‘, etc. Some of them are tight fitting, bright-coloured veils fastened with glittery jewellery – or with a tightly-tied scarf around the head, others are one-coloured, mostly black, loose garments with veils that cover everything from one’s head to the toe trying to mask the silhouette and any contours of a body. This goes even further because the tradition, which is akin to the Gulf states, was also adopted in Sudan and it represents a completely black veiling that covers the whole body, including one’s face and hands. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha claims that *al-hijāb* represents a penalty which is imposed for the abuse of freedom of an individual, since it is a consequence of a sin (Taha, 1987, p. 144). To elaborate on this matter, Ṭaha draws his conclusions from the Qur’ānic verses Q 7:19-27²⁸. He claims that the veil was God’s original

²⁸ “O Adam! dwell thou and thy wife in the Garden, and enjoy (its good things) as ye wish: but approach not this tree, or ye run into harm and transgression.” Then began Satan to whisper suggestions to them, bringing openly before their minds all their shame that was hidden from them (before): he said: “Your Lord only forbade you this tree, lest ye should become angels or such beings as live for ever.” And he swore to them both, that he was their sincere adviser. So by deceit he brought about their fall: when they tasted of the tree, their shame became manifest to them, and they began to sew together the leaves of the garden over their bodies. And their Lord called unto them: “Did I not forbid you that tree, and tell you that Satan was an avowed enemy unto you?” They said: “Our Lord! We have wronged our own souls: If thou forgive us not and bestow not upon us Thy Mercy, we shall certainly be lost.” (God) said: “Get ye down. With enmity between yourselves. On earth will be your dwelling-place and your means of livelihood,- for a time.” He said: “Therein shall ye live, and therein shall ye die; but from it shall ye be taken out (at last).” O ye Children of Adam! We have bestowed raiment upon you to cover your shame, as well as to be an adornment to you. But the raiment of righteousness,- that is the best. Such are among the Signs of God, that they may receive admonition! O ye Children of Adam! Let not Satan

punishment for Adam and Eve's interaction with Satan which caused them to lose their fundamental and original innocence – unawareness of the private body parts. Consequently, *al-hijāb* is also a way of punishment for moral impurity – a misconduct short of adultery.

The clash of the variety of clothing traditions created a conflict, as Howard (2016) explains (p. 90). He points out that the *thūb* (Ar. *al-thūb al-sūdānī*) is the only garment that is unquestionably domestic and indigenous to Sudan, which was one of the reasons why the Republican sisters adopted it as a crucial part of their clothing. The *thūb* is simple and therefore, very convenient for business occasions. At the same time, it portrays not only the expected modesty in the Sudanese society, but also the needed simplicity for the women who wear it whilst going out, and professionalism for the work environment. It is also a good example that indicates the asceticism practiced by Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and which he also expected from his disciples. In this sense, the *thūb* resolves the clothing conflict that a modern woman faces in Sudan. To picture it more clearly, the *thūb* meets all the requirements of the society, both religious and practical. On one side, it depicts the Islamic modesty, whilst on the other it serves a contemporary woman with its practicality.

Nevertheless, Howard points out from his extensive contact with the members of the Republican sisters that all these previously discussed virtues which the *thūb* represents, were of a secondary importance for them. He draws his conclusions about the significance of the *thūb* from his personal interviews with the members of the movement who lived in exile after the Sudanese coup d'état in 1989. There are two stories which he uses as examples for illustrating his point of view (Howard, 2016, p. 41). Firstly, Naziha Muḥammad al-Hassan witnessed the situation that the sisters faced in their exile in Doha, Qatar. There the sisters wore colourful *thūbs* which were not typical for the Republicans, but for other women on the Sudanese streets. The symbolic value of the *thūb* was the bond between the sisters and traditional customs of Sudan that it represents. The meaning of this symbolic value is lost outside of Sudan. As we can realise from Howard's work, people in Qatar, for example, cannot see and understand the meaning of the white *thūb* and therefore, wearing it loses the

seduce you, in the same manner as He got your parents out of the Garden, stripping them of their raiment, to expose their shame: for he and his tribe watch you from a position where ye cannot see them: We made the evil ones friends (only) to those without faith" (Ali, 2014, p. 75-76). Q 7:19-27

significance. Secondly, the situation that happened in Cairo, Egypt, supports these claims as well. Even though Egypt is a neighbouring country of Sudan, people mistook the white thūb for a wedding veil and therefore drew a connection between the Republican sisters and brides. In conclusion, the symbolic status of the thūb was meaningful only in Sudan, because it undoubtedly was a mark of the Republicans.

This clothing manner of the Republican sisters played an important role in their appearance on various public events, such as: book selling campaigns throughout Khartoum, Republican lectures at the University of Khartoum, and *dhikr* customs in front of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's family home, etc. The sisters had a chance to even attend funeral processions which is not common for women in Islam. As they improved their knowledge on the Republican ideology and matured their public speaking skills, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha gave them the tasks which were crucial for promotion and representation of the movement. The Republican sisters were also able to freely discuss the movement's matters equally to the male members during the meetings of the general Republican congregation. With all these actions, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and the whole Republican movement sent a strong message regarding gender equality and solidarity with Sudanese women. Considering the public character of these activities, the thūb-veiling was of a crucial significance, sending a strong message of Republican progressiveness to the Sudanese public while at the same time preserving the image of Islamic modesty.

4.3.3. Marriage in Islam

Another very important aspect of the Republican movement's feminist activism was their stance on the question of marriage. This topic, the question of modern marriage, was a matter of crucial meaning to the Republican teachings. It could be said that the way the group approached marriage illustrated their determination to reform prevailing social customs in Sudan.

On the ground of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's literary works, the Republicans established and pursued an extensive aim to rearrange the concept of marriage. It is of foremost importance for us to acknowledge that marriage was a social institution of a basic meaning for every individual. To support these claims, Maḥmūd Muḥammad

Ṭaha considered and often pointed out that the relationship of marriage possesses a crucial meaning for society (Taha, 1987, p. 153). Consequently, it comes without any surprise that the members of the Republican movement put the marriage of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and his wife Amna Lotfi, on a pedestal – referring to their marriage as a “role model”. Moreover, the Republicans went even further in representing their respect and honest belief that they addressed Amna Lotfi as “our mother” (Ar. *ummunā*) (Howard, 2016, p. 92). Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and his wife Amna Lotfi married in 1940 or 1942 (Thomas, 2011, p. 60).

Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha says that: “The criterion of social equality is that marriage [the most fundamental and intimate relation] is possible between any man and any woman. This is the accurate test of social equality” (Taha, 1987, 153). Once again, one can notice that Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha refers to marriage as “the most fundamental and intimate relation” which justifies the previously discussed importance of this social relation for the Republicans. This statement from Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha ignited critical thinking amongst the Republicans and served as a ground philosophy for the marriage reforms that Republicans believed in and fought for. According to Howard (2016), the changes in the concept of marriage included:

- simplifying the marital ceremony;
- elimination of polygamy;
- approval of divorce;
- elimination of the Islamic dowry²⁹ (p. 43).

This would eventually lead to the complete abandonment of the guardianship - here concretely referring to the verse Q 4:34.

On this, the Republican concept of marriage would lead to reducing the gap in rights between men and women. Moreover, it would provide women with the gender-equal rights which are the core of every modern democratic society and secure them. The Republican marriage as such should represent a role model for equality between a man and woman on a, for the Republicans, core societal level. Life between a husband and a wife can be understood as a model of a micro-society inside the community, i.e., the smallest element that defines a male-female relation. Thus, the

²⁹ According to Shari‘a law *mahr* represents a gift that is given to a bride during the marital ceremony. It is an obligatory part of the contract of marriage (Muftić, 2004, p. 1439).

marriage represented the first environment where Republican sisters could practise their equal rights in their entirety. This also means that women were able to practically exercise the knowledge that they gained through the teachings of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha. This leads us to the conclusion that marriage was a social institution which was used as a ground for accomplishing the goals of the Republican ideology. In other words, it was primarily the terrain to question the succession of the Republican views on the problem of gender equality. Therefore, that role model should reflect on the other aspects and levels of a modern society.

As it is discussed before, *The Second Message of Islam* dwells on the differences in the first and second message of Islam. Therefore, it also includes the questioning of three elements that were a controversial part of Islamic marriage according to the Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's thinking - polygamy, dowry, and divorce. On this matter, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's opinion shows that these three components of the marital relationship were only transitional. Since they stem from Sharī'a law which was outlined from Medinan sūras in the Qur'ān and it served its purpose in the early Islamic community. However, the second message of Islam is revealed in Meccan sūras and they indicate that these three concepts are not original precepts of Islam (Taha, 1987, p. 140-143).

Considering the jurisdiction of the Sharī'a courts in Sudan, the Republicans had to steadily and cleverly approach the process of bringing their ideas to life. However, Howard (2016) points out the importance and jurisdiction of Sharī'a law in Sudan (p. 44). Even though Sharī'a law was not the official state law in Sudan before 1983, Sharī'a courts had, in fact, some level of jurisdiction. However, their jurisdiction was limited mostly to the questions under family law. These issues were also the same ones which were addressed and criticised by Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and they include polygamy, dowry and divorce. Therefore the Republicans had to be cautious with the implementation of the changes suggested by their leader, since they could face serious consequences, such as their marriages being declared illegitimate.

Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha stresses that: "Islam's original precept is marriage between one man and one woman, without dowry or divorce" (Taha, 1987, p. 140). Hereby, the Republican stand on polygamy is identified, since marriage is clearly a relationship between one man and only one woman. In Ṭaha's view the fact that Islam

limited a man to four wives was already a step forward for women in comparison to the pre-Islamic period. Ṭaha implies that polygamy was caused, and influenced, by the historical circumstances. Since there were more women than men in the wake of Islam, banning polygamy would leave a great number of women unprotected. Therefore, this limited polygamy was only a transitional step towards monogamy. He concludes that polygamy stands in a direct conflict with the equality between men and women. However, some of the Republican brothers were in polygamous marriages in the time when they decided to join the Republican movement (Howard, 2016, p. 45). Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha did not insist that they divorce, since that would be highly inappropriate and unjust to both those men and women. On the other hand, despite this strict opinion against polygamy, taking a second wife was allowed in the Republican circles under some circumstances. One such example was infertility.

The next concept which is a characteristic of a marriage in Islam and which Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha severely criticised was dowry. Following the Islamic Sharī'a law, marriage is, in fact, a very simple relationship where dowry is an indispensable regulated component. However, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha opposed it and wanted to exclude it. In his exploration of the topic, Ṭaha engages historical facts. According to his approach, dowry emerged and has a direct connection the practices that were common in the 7th century. Dowry labels women with a price tag which in a way corresponds to the fact that women were acquired as spoils of war. Namely, he claims that dowry highlights woman's insignificance and as such cannot be considered as an original precept in Islam (Taha, 1987, p. 142). On the other hand, Sharī'a law was the ruling law in Sudan and in order to justify their marriages in front of the actual law and make them legal, the Republicans agreed to pay a small symbolic amount as a dowry. The amount was only one Sudanese pound, because it was considered by the Republicans that this amount equals the small amount that the Prophet Muhammad paid in his time. (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 7)

The final component which Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha wanted to exclude from the marital contract, or rather modify, was divorce. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha begins his discussion on the problem of divorce claiming that according to Islam, marriage should originally strive to the unbreakable flow. Husband and wife represent each other's corresponding parts. Moreover, Ṭaha claims that husband and wife are external representations of each other's self (Taha, 1987, p. 142). This opinion outlines the

Republican stance towards the problem around divorce, rendering it and putting on it a label of poor choice. Ṭaha considers divorce to be a corrective measurement for an individual's poor choice. Since women are equal to men according the Qur'ān, it would be out of faith or even heretic to deny them an equal right to divorce, like men enjoyed this right throughout the history. Besides, the Republican praised their compassion and practicality, and they considered divorce to be a second chance for each individual. If the first marriage did not work out, it would be only logical, acceptable, and fair for both spouses to have the same chances after it (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 7).

In order to present the key elements of the Republican concept of marriage in Islam, the ideas were summarised and published in a booklet titled *Steps to Marriage in Islam* (Ar. *Khuṭwāt naḥwa 'alā zawaj fī-l-Islām*). The booklet came out in 1971 and it was distributed by the members during their regular street campaigns. Since the Sharī'a courts were responsible for family in Sudan, the Republican marriage ceremony had to cover all the obligations prescribed by the Sharī'a in order to make the marriages eligible and compliant in the Sudanese law (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 6-8). Alongside the rest of the information in the booklet, there was a pull-out paper marriage certificate. This certificate was to be signed at the wedding ceremony by the parties involved.

To understand why marriage held such an important role in Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's reformist process, his views on marriage in Islam must be explained. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha considered that marriage in Islam represented the ultimate goal, it is the criterion of social equality (Taha, 1987, p. 153). In this sense, the understanding of the already mentioned verse 4:34 is challenged by a marriage. Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha claimed that marriage in Islam leads to the complete elimination of guardianship of man over woman, which was presented in the above-mentioned verse. Therefore, the equal rights and equality in a marriage could be easily understood and achieved by following the Path of the Prophet to the second message of Islam. In other words, one could enjoy all these rights thankfully to his reformative thoughts presented in his life work.

The Republicans worked unselfishly and, in several ways, when spreading the Republican ideas on marriage and propagating them throughout the Sudanese society. One of the ways in which the Republicans propagated their believes was through

marriages within the movement. Quite often, the Republican sisters married Republican brothers, since they had numerous opportunities to get to know each other and communicate not only during their activist work, but also in the time of their communal gatherings at the residence of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha. Moreover, they were able to listen to one another's monologues at those meetings (Ar. *jalsa*), which was an even better chance to get to know each other more thoroughly. Furthermore, they all witnessed each other's spirituality since they practiced *dhikr* together. Consequently, all this provided each person with a widened knowledge about other members i.e., they could perceive the various levels of one's personality. On the other hand, the Republican sisters as well as the Republican brothers married men and women who were not members of the movement. As a result of those marriages, the movement expanded by accepting those people as new members of the movement. Ergo, the children from those numerous marriages were also raised in the Republican manner.

4.3.4. Ceremonies

Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's teachings and criticism also ignited changes to some ceremonial customs. Republican ceremonies had a special meaning for the members of the movement. It can be said that the Republican ceremonies were, in a way, a stage for presenting Republican values and principles to the public. The crucial changes that the Republicans wanted to introduce were connected to the rituals. They propagated a deemphasis of the rituals (An-Na'im, 1987, p.7). This departure from the Sudanese customs was characteristic for every each one of the Republican ceremonies, such as: weddings, funerals, and infant naming (Ar. *simāya*), etc (Howard, 1987, p. 47). The other alteration of the traditional way of celebration was the inclusivity i.e., that men and women participated equally not only in the organisation, but also in the ceremonies. This also meant that in contrary to the Islamic and Sudanese tradition, there were no customs and rituals organised only for women or only for men. This gender-equal share of the engagement in the ceremonies was supported by the Republicans in the same way they supported the women's involvement in the matters of the movement. The other characteristic custom that was common for every

ceremony was reading of the Qur'ān. The other customs that were included in the ceremonies were: singing of spiritual poetry, and light refreshments.

The Republicans established a set of rules which had to be followed during each and every one of the wedding ceremonies. First, a bride and a groom-to-be were obligated to request a special meeting with Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha. Through the course of this meeting, they would inform Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha of their intentions. Nevertheless, these personal meetings did not only have a performative character, the weds also had to seek the approval of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's. Only if the marriage was approved by Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, would it be allowed to move on the next step. Second, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha would reveal the engagement and the wedding during that days' Republican gathering. Finally, he would endorse the date for the wedding ceremony. The ceremony would normally be scheduled two weeks after the approval of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha had been received. To justify and explain the alacrity between the approval and the wedding, Howard (2016) calls upon two reasons (p. 47). Firstly, he indicates on the verse of the Qur'ān 24:33 - "Keep themselves chaste, until God gives them means". Secondly, he draws attention to the amount of the dowry which was almost annulled. In conclusion, there were no other reasons that would postpone the wedding or make the weds wait longer than these 2 weeks.

The wedding ceremonies were undoubtedly the most prominent and the most communal of all Republican ceremonies and therefore it has to be specially observed. Republican marriage symbolised one of the pillars of Republican feminism since it is a metaphor of gender-equality. To emphasise, Republican marriage implied the signing of a contract which cemented the equality between husband and wife. Consequently, the wedding ceremony deepened its importance by spreading Republican spiritual ideology further into the community.

Wedding ceremonies were held predominantly at the house of the bride's family. On the other hand, if the bride's family had opposed the Republican ideology and the Republican ceremony manner, the wedding would be organised at the groom's home or at the home of relatives who were Republicans. To be able to realise the difference brought by Republican movement and their style of celebration, one has to observe and understand common contemporary, urban wedding parties in Sudan. In

fact, they were transferred into very expensive and noisy events which required a feast, a popular, big-name singer alongside a band for a party (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 6). Such parties lasted the whole night, often until dawn. On the other hand, the Republicans kept the celebrations quite modest. Keeping the focus on the spiritual elements of the ceremony, the Republicans managed to almost completely eliminate all the bells and whistles. The only thing that they left was light refreshments served to the guests on their arrival which was approximately an hour before the sunset prayer. These refreshments consisted of fresh lemonade and dates which symbolised Sudanese hospitality (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 7).

Since wedding ceremonies in Islam generally represent the connection of two families thorough the signing of the binding contract, the weds did not have, in fact, some prominent roles during the ceremonial part of the wedding itself. Even though the Republican ceremonies praised the gender-equality, female and male guests were segregated while seated. However, Howard (2016) implies that this was more a matter of convention than it was connected to any kind of discrimination or segregation (p. 48). Quite often, the family members opposed the marriage because of their intolerance to the Republican ideology, so they did not attend the ceremony. Therefore, the members of the Republican movement played the most eminent role in the showing the support to the new couple. The ceremony officially started with the reading of several chapters of the Qur'ān but done so in the Republican style and performed by a prominent person from the Republican leadership. The reading of the Qur'ān was followed by the interpretation of the previously mentioned document which was to be signed by the witnesses of the two families. This document contained the information on the Republican marriage highlighting the gender-equality through the details on the right to divorce and the prohibition of the polygamy. Another interesting point, in my opinion, which relates to the question of gender-equality and feminism, was the choice of representatives – witnesses. Even though the Republicans strongly propagated the equality between man and women, representatives were always either fathers of the bride and groom or elder male relatives. After the signing of the contract, the symbolic dowry in the amount of only one Sudanese pound was given by the groom's witness to the witness of the bride. The next step of the ceremony was the reading of the Fatiha³⁰ and then the involved parties would shake hands. Occasionally, several odes

³⁰ the opening sūra of the Qur'ān

from the Republican repertoire of Şūfī -inspired poetry would be recited. Finally, the last step of the ceremony would be pulling down the *sirwān* and using them as prayer mats. Therefore, the wedding would be concluded with the communal sunset prayer.

The wedding ceremony, free from traditional elements, was marked by simplicity. It included few guests and relatives, a calm and ordinary atmosphere, and a departure from the customary role of guardians. After a brief religious gathering and lemon drink, invited guests left. Simplicity was the hallmark of this marriage, which left the couple responsible for furnishing their house according to their preferences and capabilities.

Batūl Mukhtār, the niece of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, emerged as a significant leader among the Republican sisters during the active phase of the movement. In 1989, she took a groundbreaking step by transcending the traditional steps to marriage in Islam and considered herself married in Islam through a unique ceremony – the Republican ceremony. She documented this unconventional marriage in her own words in a newspaper article which was published in *Sudan Times* on the 21st of April 1989 (Howard, 2016, p. 49).

This extraordinary union united ‘Imād al-Dīn ‘Alī Idrīs from the Ministry of Agriculture with Batūl Mukhtār Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, associated with the Graduate College at the University of Khartoum (Howard, 2016, p. 50). What set this marriage apart was its adherence to the original teachings of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, emphasising complete equality in rights and responsibilities between the couple. The marriage contract allowed each partner the freedom to initiate divorce, with both parties entitled to the moral provisions of the wedding contract. These new measures did not exempt the marriage from legal obligations. This revolutionary approach also diverged from the customary practice of dowry payments by the groom. Instead, it symbolised a destiny-driven union where the intrinsic value of an honourable woman was deemed beyond material worth. The marriage contract explicitly rejected polygamy, adhering to the principle of one man being married to one wife. Furthermore, there was no hierarchy or boss-subordinate relationship regarding family income. If the wife had to oversee family finances due to a foreseen eventuality, her claim to the husband's support was a matter of right rather than charity.

Howard (2016) states that Batūl Mukhtār's act of documenting and publicising this unconventional marriage in a newspaper, especially one known for its liberal stance, was in line with the Republican tradition of taking pride in the exemplary quality of their activities (p. 51). This also reflected her leadership style within the organisation, where she boldly initiated conversations with men and played a pivotal role in implementing the principles outlined in Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's work *The Second Message of Islam*. She recognised that gender segregation was not an original Islamic precept, as emphasised by Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, and she led the way in promoting gender integration. Her interactions with male members of the organisation, her guidance on its direction, and even her corrections of Arabic language usage were all conducted with dignity.

Other Republican sisters followed her example to varying degrees, contributing to the cumulative impact of social change (Howard, 2016, p. 51). Batūl's leadership epitomised the boundless potential inherent in Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's post-colonial spiritual development philosophy. Her marriage in Islam stirred controversy and led to labels in the Khartoum press, suggesting that she had joined her uncle in his apostasy or was now living in sin due to the absence of dowry. This period was particularly challenging for the Republicans, occurring shortly after their teacher's execution and just before the ascent of a military regime to power. Despite these challenges, Batūl Mukhtār remained steadfast in her commitment to her principles and her lifelong association with the Republican movement. Her audacious step was notable because the Republican movement had refrained from public activities since the execution of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha. Nevertheless, being a Republican her entire life, Batūl was resolute in her personal development. She challenged her society to reevaluate the possibilities for women and acted as a trailblazer.

To conclude this topic, I would like to point out to the Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's interview with Stephen W. Howard (Center for International Studies, 2009). She says that the changes dealing with the question of marriage in Islam were of a great importance to the Sudanese women. The Republican marriage provided them equal rights with men, that women in Sudan could not enjoy before. The Republican marriage contract was a document that granted women all the rights that they lacked before, such as a right to divorce, and a right to be the only wife, etc.

Moreover, she highlights the fact that this document was a source of the equality in every aspect of everyday life.

4.4. 21st century – Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's return to Sudan

As it has already been mentioned, the Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha family and a great number of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's followers and members of the Republican movement were forced to leave Sudan after the 1989 coup d'état, which resulted with the establishment of a new military regime led by 'Umar al-Bashīr. All of them were exiled and they managed to apply for asylum in various countries around the globe. Many of them still live in exile today in the USA and Great Britain (Kramer; Fluehr-Lobban; Lobban, 2013, p. 369).

However, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's eldest daughter, Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, succeeded in her attempts to fight for her return to Sudan. Since 2009 she has resided in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan (Equal Rights Trust, 2014, p. 41). Ever since her return to Sudan, she has tried to revive the movement and officially clear her father's name. Even though the conviction of her father was overturned in 1986, only a year after his execution, to date he has still not been posthumously rehabilitated.

Even in her time of exile, Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha continued her activism and promotion of the teachings of her father. Before she returned to Sudan, Asmā' Maḥmūd was a guest at Ohio University where the Centre for African Studies organised the Progressive Islam conference "100 Years of Progressive Islam 1909 - 2009: In honour of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha" (Center for International Studies, 2009). The conference was held on the 17th and 18th of January and there Asmā' Maḥmūd had a chance to present the ideas of her father and clarify them to the attenders, showing clearly that she had never given up on the Republican ideology. After her return to Sudan she continued her human rights' activism. In the very same year of her return to Sudan, Asmā' Maḥmūd managed to organise and establish an institution devoted to the memory of her father and his progressive ideas. The institution was named "The Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha Cultural Centre". It was located in Khartoum's twin city, Omdurman, in a suburb called al-Thawra. She achieved her goal and succeeded to also register The Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha Cultural Centre within the Ministry of Culture in 2009 (Equal Rights Trust, 2014, p. 41).

People who were interested in the Republican thought gathered around the centre. Therefore the centre became, in a way, a safe haven for the newly formed followers of the work of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha. Asmā' Maḥmūd started organising meetings where she would talk and teach about her father and his reformist ideas. Furthermore, the newly established centre began printing and publishing the works of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha. By doing so, they fought for their beliefs and ideals, managing to keep the memory on Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha alive. To align with the needs of the modern society and to be able to reach a wider audience who would possibly be interested in the Republican teachings, the movement established a website which is fully devoted to the life and work of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha.³¹ On the website one can find a vast amount of information about the life of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, electronic versions of his works, numerous articles written by his disciples, articles about the Republican Party and movement composed by different academics, and video recordings of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's teachings, etc.

Nevertheless, the prosecution of and harassment towards the Republicans started occurring once again. Even though the Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha Cultural Center was officially registered and approved by the government, the Republicans experienced numerous acts of harassment by the police and Sudanese authorities. Despite being approved by the government, the centre's licence only allowed them to operate for one year. As such Asmā' Maḥmūd had to apply annually for the prolongation of the licence at the Sudanese Ministry of Culture (Equal Rights Trust, 2014, p. 41).

In addition to this, every event that was organised at the centre had to pass a special control by The National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS). Asmā' Maḥmūd commented to the Equal Rights Trust that she considers that all of these complications were unnecessary, because the Centre was already approved and registered by the Ministry of Culture. Often the officers of the NISS raided the events organised by the centre, even though all the requirements were fulfilled. For example, one such an event occurred in 2013. Namely, the Republicans organised an event to mark the anniversary of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's execution (Bashīr, 2013). They had organised these commemorations on the 18th of January since 2010. As had been

³¹ <https://www.alfikra.org/>

the case for each year before, the relevant permission for this event was acquired after detailed checks by the NISS, and thus, approval for the event was granted. However security agents of the NISS raided the event and started harassing and threatening the attenders. According to the words of Asmā' Maḥmūd, the agents intimidated those present to take them: "...into their cars, whip them and beat them." (Equal Rights Trust, 2014, p. 41) The organisers and people who came there to pay their respect to Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha resisted them and insisted on continuing the event. Meanwhile, the agents stayed outside the building for the next few hours before they left without taking any action. One of the reasons for this lays in the rivalry between the Islamic regime and the Republicans which was very well known since the 1980s (Bashīr, 2013). However, it seemed that this was just a part of the regime's campaign against cultural centres and civil society organisations in Sudan, which resulted in the closure of several cultural centres and organisations, namely the House of Sudanese Arts and Studies, al-Khātim Adlān Centre for Enlightenment and Human Development, and the IRI Organisation (Bashīr, 2013).

This situation was not a unique and isolated instance and Asmā' Maḥmūd was sometimes harassed by the police and security agents. The NISS was focussed on her individually which was due to a couple of reasons (Equal Rights Trust, 2014, p. 41). Firstly, she was the daughter of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha. Secondly, she was the founder of the Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha Cultural Centre. Because of these constant political prosecutions, a great majority of not only the Republican movement's members, but also former members and followers, chose to keep a low profile. It is completely clear and understandable that they were afraid of potential harassment or even arrest.

However, molestation by the authorities was not only concentrated on the Republicans and their followers. Namely, in January 2014 the Sudanese Writers Union organised an event dedicated to Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha (Equal Rights Trust, 2014, p. 41). Immediately after that the organiser of the event was summoned for questioning by the NISS. During the questioning he was told that he violated a newly established order which prohibited any mention of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha.

In her interview with the Equal Rights Trust (2014), Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha highlighted the Republican beliefs and ideology once again (p. 41). She spoke

about the way her father thought and taught people, pointing out the need of updating Sharī'a law inside the Islam. Furthermore, she used women's rights as an example of changes from contemporary world that Sharī'a law should reflect on. Asmā' Maḥmūd goes even further in her critique of religious discrimination caused by the application of Sharī'a law in Sudan. She points out that besides non-conservative Suni Muslims, all other religious groups such as Baha'is, Shias and Christians are affected with this kind of discrimination. These examples are, according to her, the real proof why Sharī'a law should reflect on the modern world, and how she justifies the ideas brought up by her father.

Even though Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha profiled herself in the first line as a human rights' activist and feminist, she had an intention to revive the movement that her father created not only in the form of a cultural institution, but also to bring its' political character back to life. Therefore, she tried to transform her organisation into a political party. From December 2013 the Republicans repeatedly tried to officially apply for the registration of their party at the Political Parties Affairs Council (PPAC). However, unfortunately, yet expectedly, their admissions were denied. Not only were they denied an official registration, but they were also banned. The PPAC argued that the Republicans violate the principles of Islamic faith, social peace, and basics of democratic activity, and as such the ban was appropriate. However, Asmā' Maḥmūd argued this and the Council granted the Republicans preliminary approval, but eventually the legit permission was not given after the revision of the preliminary decision (Sudan's PPAC rejects Republican Party's registration request, 2014; al-qiyadiya bil-hizb al-jumhuri lil-mijhar, 2014). The Republicans attempts to revive the party was not welcomed positively by the conservative Islamic government. Even though the Sudanese government proposed potential greater freedom for the multipartyism, the conservatives strongly objected the possible approval of the application, implying that the Republicans were apostates (Sudan's PPAC rejects Republican Party's registration request, 2015). However, Muḥammad Adam Ismā'īl, secretary general of the Council, claimed that the Council did its job properly, taking into consideration and following the legal grounds in their fullness. He also justified the Council's decision by insisting that the Republicans did not meet all the necessary requirements (al-ḥizb al-jumhūrī yusalim wazīr al-ʿadl mudhakiratan tuṭālib bi ilghā' haẓr al-tanzīm, 2016). However, this drew attention, and therefore the media coverage

was thorough. Asmā' Maḥmūd openly criticised the ideas of Political Islam, blaming the representatives for presenting Islam in a very distorted way. With these stands, the Republicans showed their firm opposition to the ideas of the Muslim Brotherhood (Al-Qiyādiya bil- ḥizb al-jumhūrī lil-mijhar, 2014). Asmā' Maḥmūd and the Republicans were also accused of being influenced and supported by the USA (Bashīr, 2013).

Despite experiencing these difficulties, the Republicans continued their activities. Meanwhile, the NISS interrupted another commemoration of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's death anniversary in January 2015. On this occasion they cleared the Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's Cultural Centre and closed it (Al-amn al-sūdānī yaghlaq markaz al-ustādh Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha al-thaqāfī, 2015). The centre was not even close to giving up on their fight for official recognition, and as such they undertook legal measures, taking their case to the Sudanese Ministry of Justice (Sudan's Republican Party pushes for its ban to be lifted, 2016). They demanded the lifting of the ban and also the abolishment of the death penalty in cases of apostasy. According to the Article 126 of Sudan's Penal Code of 1991, any person found guilty of apostasy is prone to be punished by the death penalty (Sudan: The Criminal Act 1991, 1994, p. 64). Since the authorities refused to receive them, they held a peaceful protest in front of the Ministry of Justice. The protest depicted the pacifist and peaceful ideas of the Republicans. It resembled the protests the Republicans had held in the 1980s, only this time it was led by Asmā' Maḥmūd instead of her father. She ordered her colleagues to peacefully sit on the ground and in that way express their opposition. This way of protesting was common for the Republicans, they had also engaged in such protests during Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's apostasy trial in 1985 (An-Na'im, 1987, p. 14). Eventually they succeeded in their attempts and the authorities decided to accept their memorandum and put forth their case for further examination (Al-Ḥizb al-jumhūrī yusallim wazīr al-adl mudhakiratan tuṭālib bi iilghā' ḥaẓr al-tanzīm, 2016).

Even though the Ministry of Justice rejected the Republicans appeal, and even though they had not received confirmation of their registration by PPAC, they decided to resume their political activities in 2017 (Sudan's Republican Party announces resumption of its activities without registration, 2017). At the same time, the secretary-general of the party, Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, and the political secretary, Ḥaydar al-Ṣāfī, announced their political aspiration to take part in the 2020 planned elections. Al-Ṣāfī stressed that the Republicans plan was to be the main opposition to

the ruling party - the National Congress Party (formerly known as NIF). Once again, the Republicans showed their disapproval of the Political Islam, but Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha claimed that the Republican Party was not fully supportive of the election plans. She said that the main goal of the Republicans is changing the political awareness of the Sudanese people through various free platforms (Sudan's Republican Party announces resumption of its activities without registration, 2017). Thus this was proof that disagreements inside the Republican Party started occurring and that the unity of the Republican Party was unstable. This would later result in the divergence of the Republican Party and Ḥaydar al-Ṣāfī (Mubārak, 2022).

In parallel with this part of their struggle for the revival of the party, Sudanese society witnessed another unpleasant event. A Christian woman named Maryam Yahya, who was only 27 years old at the time, was sentenced to death (Van Dyke, 2014). She was convicted for apostasy, the same crime as Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha had been sentenced to death for in 1985. It is interesting that this case was the first one with the same outcome since Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's sentence. Ms Yahya was born to a Muslim father and Christian mother, and after her father left the family, her mother continued to raise her in a Christian manner. Eventually, she married a Christian. However, she stood accused of apostasy since the conversion of faith was strictly forbidden for Muslims under Sharī'a law. What made this case even more severe was the fact that Ms Yahya was pregnant at the time of her conviction. During the trial in Khartoum, the woman was offered the chance to repent, which she denied. The death sentence was not the only penalty which Ms Yahya was exposed to, the sentence was accompanied with the conviction for adultery, and for that she received the penalty of whipping with a hundred lashes.

This case played a significant role for the Republicans for several reasons. Firstly, it was in a way connected to the case of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, since he was the last person in Sudan who had been convicted and sentenced to hanging for apostasy. Secondly, it reflected the validity of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's ideas according to Asmā' Maḥmūd. She pointed out again the problem of discrimination that Sudanese people faced under Sharī'a law. Furthermore, she used this case as proof of the need to adapt Sharī'a law to meet the needs and situations of the contemporary world and modern society. Asmā' Maḥmūd did not stop herself with the potential changes to the law, she also argued that the past abuses of power, which had caused

numerous discriminatory acts, should be also condemned and brought to face justice. Thus, she wanted to retroactively fight for and provide rehabilitation for all the individuals who were the victims of discrimination on grounds of gender, religion, and ethnicity etc. Managing to fulfil her intentions, the victims would receive compensation for the moral damages that they had suffered in the past. In other words, every single person who allegedly perpetrated any violation of the human rights, such as sexual torture and ill-treatment, should be convicted for their doings. Moreover, she proposed that the victims of the discriminatory violence should be involved in the process and consulted about the possible penalties. This was also a fight for the name and work of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha because it included an insistence on an official rehabilitation of him. This requirement was also supported by the previously mentioned court decision from 1986, when Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's conviction was described as illegitimate. Asmā' Maḥmūd also insisted on permitting the Republicans the allowance to practice their freedom and rights without any kind of discrimination. In addition to Asmā' Maḥmūd and the Republicans, the international community and several human rights organisations criticised and vehemently condemned the conviction. Even Sudanese legal experts claimed that the conviction was strongly severe, saying that the death sentence should at least be postponed, because the convicted was bearing a child (Van Dyke, 2014).

4.4.1. Post al-Bashīr Sudan and the 2019 coup d'état

After three decades spent in the presidential office, 'Umar al-Bashīr was ousted in 2019. Heavy protests and civil uprisings began in late 2018 and culminated with the 2019 coup d'état (Seri-Hersch, Vezzadini and Revilla, 2023). Sudanese politicians and the whole Sudanese society refer to these events as the December revolution of 2018. The December revolution of 2018 resulted in the former Sudanese president, 'Umar al-Bashīr, being put on house arrest as of the 17th of April 2019. At the beginning of the protests and demonstrations, the political opposition created a wide coalition – Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC). Following his ousting, the former political opposition (FFC) started negotiations with the Transitional Military Council. Lieutenant General Aḥmad 'Awaḍ b. 'Auf initially led the council, however he resigned shortly

after the arrest of a-Bashīr. The new leader was Lieutenant General Muḥammad Ḥamdān Daqlū, referred to as Ḥamīdtī (We recognize Hamdok as leader of Sudan's transition: EU, Troika envoys, 2021). Therefore the FFC, together with the military back up created a transitional means of legislature dissolving the National Legislature. In August of 2019, the FFC and the Transitional Military Council managed to ratify an interim constitution which did not contain any mention of Sharī'a law (Abdelaziz, 2019; Reeves, 2019).

The Republicans took part not only in the demonstrations but also as a member of the FFC, even though Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha said afterwards that her party was not an official member of the coalition (Mubārak, 2022). On the other hand, the Republicans supported the ideas and proposals of the FFC. The changes of the law were undertaken gradually throughout the course of 2019 and 2020. Some of the law changes reflected the political attitudes and views of the Republicans (Mubārak, 2022). For example, the abolishment of the apostasy penalty, public flogging and alcohol ban for non-Muslims in July 2020 coaligned with the Republican ideology (Sudan abolishes strict Islamic legislation, 2020). Furthermore, the adjustments that impacted gender equality and women's rights bear a great importance after 30 years of discrimination and they were completely in line with the Republican ideology. On this behalf, female genital mutilation was criminalised, and women did not need to obtain permission from a male relative to travel abroad with their children anymore (Walsh, 2020). On the other hand, there were no adjustments to the clothing issue, whereby women were still not allowed to wear trousers in public and the wearing of hijab stayed mandatory (Sudan scraps apostasy law and alcohol ban for non-Muslims, 2020). Finally, as of September 2020, Sudan officially abolished Sharī'a law separating state and religion. After a thirty yearlong rule under Sharī'a law, Sudan became a secular state, since the agreement also included an article which provided that there would be no official state religion (Sudan scraps apostasy law and alcohol ban for non-Muslims, 2020).

However, Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha criticised the members of FFC and the Transitional Military Council for their failure to achieve the goals of the revolution. Moreover, she denied the Republicans had any affiliation with the FFC and further pointed out that the group organised around Ḥaydar al-Ṣāfī does not represent the political will of the Republicans (al-Intibāha: Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha: kul

āthār al-inqādh yajib an tumhā min manāhijina, 2020). Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha called out the military leaders, Muḥammad Hamdan Dagalo, and General Shams al-Dīn al-Kabāshī, blaming them for the failure of the December revolution (al-Intibāha: Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha: kul āthār al-inqādh yajib an tumhā min manāhijina, 2020). She stressed that the Generals failed to protect the citizens which was their duty according to the constitution. Moreover, she demanded that they had to apologise to the public and seek forgiveness for their mistakes. In the same interview, she also turned to the civil leaders of the FFC criticising them for their inability to achieve the goals of the December revolution.

The Republican Party began to rearrange its position and moved at a steady pace to achieve its goals after the December 2018 revolution. Furthermore, the Party began to open up to the people in its weekly lectures that dealt with many political issues. The Republicans based their work, and promotion of their ideology, on the methodology established by their founder, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha. Organising the lectures, publishing books and pamphlets that presented the Republican ideas, and leading the street campaigns for the distribution of their literature were once again the means of the Republican propagation. However, the Revolution and the political events that emerged after, revealed some troubles and disagreements inside the Republican Party (Tāj al-Sirr, 2022). Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha was extremely vocal when discussing these issues in her numerous interviews, especially in the interview that occurred after the “failure” of the revolution and the coup d'état in October 2021.

4.4.2. 2021 coup d'état and the aftermath

The Sudanese revolutionary acts and the transition towards democracy were interrupted and stopped by yet another military coup. On the 25th of October 2021, General Lieutenant 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Burhān, backed up by the Sudanese military, organised a coup, seized power, and took control of the government (Sudan coup: Military dissolves civilian government and arrests leaders, 2021). However, the public did not support the coup, which was also the case with the Prime Minister, 'Abdallāh Ḥamdūk, and the FFC. As such, the FFC encouraged the public to refuse to cooperate with the coup organisers and called for the public disobedience, whilst Prime Minister

Ḥamdūk was put on house arrest which lasted until the 21st of November 2021 (Sudan army chief names new governing Sovereign Council, 2021).

The coup also faced the resistance of the international community, since Sudan was banned from the African Union, and the USA and European Union had stopped the investments of the development programs for the Sudanese transition to democracy. With the lack of the international support, the military leaders, ‘Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Burhān and Muḥammad Ḥamdān Daqlū, released Ḥamdūk from house arrest and re-instated him as prime minister (Sudan’s Hamdok reinstated as PM after political agreement signed, 2021). They had also made a promise that all the political prisoners would be freed. However In January of 2022, Ḥamdūk stepped away from the position prime minister position (Sudan’s Hamdok resigns as prime minister amid political deadlock, 2022). Meanwhile, the protests against the military regime continued on a daily basis. Since the military government received no support from the international community, they turned their focus to strengthening their ties with Russia, especially after the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This development of events hindered the negotiations with the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission Sudan (UNITAMS)³² (International Crisis Group, 2023).

After the Sudanese public spent months on the streets protesting against the military regime, the military leaders finally started negotiating with the FFC and other civil groups from Sudan in December of 2022, in attempt to form a new development plan and program of the transitional government. The plan for the transitional government was similar to the one from the 2019, namely that the transitional government should last two years, and its rule should end with the free democratic elections. Unfortunately, the agreement was not finalised which ignited new protests and demonstrations. In fact, everything that happened in 2022 is proof that the attempted coup was a failure (International Crisis Group, 2023).

Once again, Asmā’ Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha elaborated on the disagreements that occurred inside the Republican Party, clarifying that they were not a part of the FFC, even though they supported, but with reservations, the agreement that was reached between the FFC and Military Council in 2019. According to her words, Ḥaydar al-Ṣāfī disassociated himself from the Republican Party and abused

³² <https://unitams.unmissions.org/en>

the party's name to ensure his participation in power (Mubarāk, 2022; Tāj al-Siri, 2022). The Republicans referred to him as a dissident from the Republican Party who stole the party's name. When al-Ṣāfī was accused of cooperation with the putschists, the Republicans became increasingly vocal in their criticism towards him and their dissociation from him. Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's critique revealed that the FFC did not put forth enough effort and did not make sufficient sacrifice for the sake of the Sudanese people, comparing their sacrifice to the one made by her father. She pointed out that her father was martyred on the execution platform as a sacrifice for the people of Sudan and for the sake of Sudan (Mubarāk, 2022).

Nevertheless, the Republicans stood firmly against the October 2021 coup. Their stand is completely clear, because they considered that everything that al-Burhān did, such as: amending the constitutional document without legal justification, the arrests of the civil prime minister and some of his ministers in the transitional government, the arrests of political activists, and the subsequent arbitrary measures in imposing a state of emergency and restricting public freedoms, can only be characterised as a proper revolution and definitely not as an attempt of corrective measures (Mubarāk, 2022). They also still believed that the recovery of the Sudanese people from the tyranny and oppression of the former dictatorship to which Sudan was exposed for three decades was possible, and that a proper recovery only needed more time. According to the Republicans, the October coup caused a constitutional vacuum since the country had no constitution throughout 2022. Al-Burhān's acts were not in line with the constitutional document from 2020 and they also endangered what the December 2019 Revolution had attempted to achieve in terms of demands for freedom, peace, and justice.

Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha said that the events that occurred as a result of the October coup, throughout 2022, represented one of the most dangerous stages of Sudan's path to a civil state (Mubarāk, 2022). The only way to finish this path was the continuation of the December revolution and achieving full extent by creating a new reality where the society and military would work together on the establishment of a civil government. This would allow the army to run its own constitutional duties - protecting the constitution, the borders of the homeland, its security, and the security of the citizens. If the army is preoccupied with politics, it can lead only to the creation of another tyrannical, military dictatorship. This was a crucial reason why the

Republicans joined the protests against al-Burhān. According to Asmā' Maḥmūd, the people protesting on the street shared the goals of the Republicans which were freedom, peace, justice, and the rule of law and institutions (Mubarāk, 2022).

Besides, the Republican Party approved of the work of the UNITAMS. As Sudan is a member state of the United Nations and is affected and influenced by the course of the regional and international political reality, it was only logical to the Republicans to cooperate with the UNITAMS. In order to eliminate the military influence on politics, the Sudanese people needed international support (Mubarāk, 2022).

Unfortunately, the situation in Sudan did not stabilise. On the contrary, it deteriorated further and ultimately led to the start of a civil war. On one side is 'Abd al-Fattāḥ al-Burhān, the head of the military government in Sudan, and also the leader the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). On the other side is the Janjawīd³³ leader Muḥammad Ḥamdān Daqlū who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF). The rivalry between these two factions escalated and a civil war began on the 15th of April 2023 and is still ongoing to date.

³³ Janjawīd is the name of an Arab paramilitary troop. This paramilitary group was established in the 1980s and mainly operates in the Darfur region in Sudan (Ray, 2024).

4.5. Republicans then and now

To conclude the topic on the Republicans, I would also like to point out on some similarities between the activism in the 1970s-1980s and the activism from the 21st century. Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha stayed loyal to the ideology that she believed in and that she represented in the time when her father was alive and was leading the Republicans. One good example that highlights her political views and attitudes occurred in June 2021 (Weekly Press Columns Digest, 2021).

A Sudanese journalist and human rights activist, Amal Habbānī, addressed the issue of polygamy in one of her posts on social media³⁴ (Weekly Press Columns Digest, 2021; Faṭḥī, 2021). In her post, she made a controversial statement, which raised a lot of attention. According to her, any woman who is married to a polygamous man should be able to engage in relationships with other men. Namely, she said that the phrase “seek help from a friend” was highly provocative and that her intention with it was to shock the audience and by doing so, draw attention to the problem. Amongst the people who decided to react on the statement of Amal Habbānī was also Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha (Ṭaha, 2021). She wrote an extensive comment on the statement which was published on the website of the Sudanese newspaper *Sudanile*³⁵. In her comment, she declared her support to Amal Habbānī, even though she fundamentally disagreed with her. On the one side, her support here stems from the ideas which were discussed by her father in his work *The Second Message of Islam*. Since a good society should be based on political equality (democracy), Asmā' Maḥmūd claims that Amal Habbānī only practiced basic constitutional rights which should be granted by every democratic country – freedom of opinion and freedom of speech. Furthermore, she points out that in a democratic society there should be a place for various opinions and that no individual should ever face accusations of treason or a threat of excommunication, which is, according to her, a common

³⁴ "النساء المسكينات المقهورات المذللات بنار التعدد وليس لديهن أي مقدرة على الطلاق خوفا من "بشتة" الأطفال وزيادة القهر بالطلاق .. ممكن تستعيني بصديق يوم ان يذهب زوجك إلى زوجته الجديدة لأن فكرة التعدد لا يداويها سوى فكرة الاستعانة بصديق"

The original text of the post (2021)

Translation: "For the poor oppressed women who are humiliated by the fire of polygamy and who do not have any ability to divorce for fear of the "spreading" of the children and increasing the oppression with divorce... you can seek help from a friend on the day your husband goes to his new wife because the idea of polygamy can only be cured by the idea of seeking help from a friend" (Faṭḥī, 2021).

³⁵ <https://sudanile.com/>

response of Sudanese society on any matter that they disagree with. With this, she implies that Sudanese society lacks an openness to diversity and understanding of different opinions. On the other side, Asmā' Maḥmūd states her fundamental disagreement with Amal Habbānī's post, and in her explanation, she uses the ideas also presented in her father's work. Namely, she stresses that polygamy is not an "original" precept of Islam which she explains through a differentiation of Meccan and Medinan sūras – first and second message of Islam. Hereby, she points out the importance of the historical context as well. She concludes that the goal should be the achievement of a socialist democratic society that guarantees justice and equality for every individual.

Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha resembles her father in some other respects as well. One such example is the way he opposed the political parties backed up by the Ṣūfī orders and Muslim Brotherhood (Umma Party, DUP, NIF). Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha declared often that the Republican Party represents the main opposition to the Political Islam, especially the ruling party in Sudan until 2019 – the National Congress Party, which was led by the Sudanese branch of the Muslim Brotherhood (Sudan's Republican Party announces resumption of its activities without registration, 2017).

The Republicans preserved their peaceful and pacifist character whilst practicing their politics and propagating their ideology. From the establishment of the Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's Cultural Centre they continued relying on their already practiced means of spreading their ideas, such as the organisation of lectures in the Centre, and the publishing of books, booklets, and leaflets with the Republican topics etc. However, with the development of technology the Republicans started engaging with a more contemporary means of information in order to reach a wider audience. Their official website is mostly an online archive of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's life and works and the Republican thought. Therefore the Republicans use every chance to promote and present it to the audience (Ṭaha, 2021). Since there is information about the life of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, electronic versions of his works, numerous articles written by his disciples, articles about the Republican Party and movement composed by different academics, and video recordings of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's teachings, etc., it could be a nice starter point to spark al-intithe interest of the people.

Even though the Republicans went through a difficult period when their safety and lives were endangered, especially after the execution of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and in the time of the regime of ‘Umar al-Bashīr and the National Congress Party, they succeeded to reorganise, even without Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha in the picture. However, Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, his teachings and the ideology that stems from them, are still at the core of the Republican Party.

The historical path of the Republicans was turbulent, and it is interesting that they first existed as a political party and then as a movement. However in the 21st century their existence had a reversed destiny – from a cultural centre they managed to establish a political party. As it is already mentioned, the Republican Party was established in 1945, however they did not take part in any elections that occurred in the 1950s. Because of the ban on political parties that was imposed in 1969 by Ja‘far Muḥammad al-Numayrī, the Republican Party was disbanded, and the Republicans operated as a religious organisation and a civil movement. They existed as the Republican movement until 1989, when the Republican movement was banned by the regime of ‘Umar al-Bashīr and the National Congress Party. On the other hand, Asmā’ Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha succeeded in her attempts to transform her organisation into a political party and put the Republicans on the Sudanese political scene once again. This course of action was dictated by the different political situations and climate in Sudan, as it was thoroughly explained. Even though the situation in Sudan today is far away from a stabilised and functional sovereign country, the Republican Party still operates and engages in Sudanese politics. Not only it is active, but the Party is led by a woman, none other than the daughter of the movement’s creator, Asmā’ Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha.

5. Conclusions

The reformist work of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha offers an interpretation of Islam which should fit into the modern, contemporary society. He advocated that it would be possible for the modern society to achieve a mutual understanding and equality through a revision of Meccan verses of the Qur'ān, which according to him represent the “original precepts” of the God’s message to the people. Not only did he propose a possible solution of this new interpretation, but he also lived his life on the postulates of his teachings. Even though his ideology was at its core Islamic and stemmed from the Qur'ān, he also engaged with modern science and modern social disciplines. Therefore, in his vision, a good society should be based on socialistic economic equality, democratic political equality and social equality without class-differences and discrimination. He strongly believed in the principles that he preached about, to an extent that he paid for his beliefs with his life. Despite being accused of apostasy and consequently sentenced to death and hanged on the 18th of January 1985, he never abolished his teachings and beliefs.

It could be drawn into conclusion that Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha’s work and legacy was and still is deeply feminist. His teachings are not only feminist from a logical point of view, but they also had some similarities with other contemporary Islamic feminists, such as Barlas and Ahmed. It could be said that his ideology was purely feminist, since the vast majority of Islamic feminists also consider that engaging with the Qur'ānic texts leads to the complete human liberation. Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha clearly states in her Interview with Stephen W. Howard that her father’s movement is defined as progressive Islamic modernist movement (Center for International Studies, 2009). To support this claim that the Republican movement possesses a feminist character, Sirri (2021) argues that *Islamic feminism* and the Islamic modernist movements propagate the same values (p. 37). Therefore, it can be concluded that *Islamic feminism* and the Republican movement of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha share some common ground. Consequently, since they preach and fight for the same values and ideals, it could be said that the Republican movement is, at its core, a feminist movement too.

The Republicans, and foremost Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha himself, offered women the involvement into public and political affairs. Therefore, they created a new ground for the modernisation and evolution of the Sudanese society. Considering the fact that the Qur'ān propagates the common equality between men and women, the Republicans claim that during the contemporary times women should be able to take part in every sphere of life equally, the same way it was always possible for men. Since the civilisation evolved throughout the course of history, the Republicans believe that the Islamic Sharī'a law should also evolve for the purposes of the modern life. Basing their belief and attitudes on the Meccan verses of the Qur'ān, they managed to offer the interpretations that support gender equality. They support the idea that in today's world acquiring knowledge through education is and should be accessible to everybody. Therefore, if women are well-educated, they are also able to deal with the problems that are in the sphere of their education. If a woman could be a doctor or a lawyer, a woman could also deal with and practice the questions surrounding religion. On these grounds, the Republicans included the Republican sisters in all the affairs and campaigns that were happening in the 1970s and 1980s. The Republican sisters earned their position in the campaigns, and they worked devotedly on spreading the Republican thought through the Sudanese community. Consequently, Republican women succeeded in standing up for themselves with the strong back-up and support from the male members of the movement in other spheres and other societal fields as well. Often, they were pioneers who stood alone in the front lines, enduring indignities, representing and fighting for Republican ideals which were in a constant clash with the majority of the Sudanese society. The Republicans strived to implement the postulates that they followed in their movement into the complete community. They believed women were spiritually independent and definitely competent; women should freely speak in public, referring to the topics they are educated about; women are fully equal and, therefore, as the Republican sisters shared their responsibilities with the male members of the Republican movement, so it should be in everyday life. Through their activism in the movement the sisters acquired the knowledge and skills necessary to actively engage in a dynamic community facing existential challenges. The sisters gained confidence to confront the challenges of life equipped with methodology that led to inner peace and a secure Muslim identity.

The Republican also proposed solutions for some practical problems that women faced in everyday life, such as the veiling issue, the question of marriage, the wedding ceremony. These issues were examined theoretically by Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, but the Republicans practiced his proposed solutions. For example, the Republicans brought the clothing issue under question. Considering the public character of these activities, the thūb-veiling was of a crucial significance, sending a strong message of the Republican progressiveness to the Sudanese public while preserving the image of Islamic modesty. Furthermore, they started practicing simplified version of wedding ceremonies, which also included signing of a marital contract that in a way eliminates dowry and allows both husband and wife the right for a divorce.

However, the information on the Republicans during their life in exile are mostly vague. Since Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha returned to Sudan in 2009, she showed her devotion to the thought and ideology of her father. With the establishment of the Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's Cultural Centre, she brought the Republican ideas back to Sudanese everyday life. Throughout the second decade of the 21st century, Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha proved her belief in the postulates set by her father's life work. She has never given up on the attempts to seek the official rehabilitation of her father. Nevertheless, she wanted to challenge and oppose the Political Islam cherished by the Sudanese ruling regime in the time of 'Umar al-Bashīr. After the revival of the Republican political activities in 2017, Asmā' Maḥmūd claimed that her party would be the main opposition to al-Bashīr's regime, which they manifested in the 2018 demonstrations. With the revival of the Republican Party, she kept alive the Republican thought on the Sudanese political scene. However, the ongoing crisis in Sudan limits the possibilities of direct political influence, but the Republicans are there to at least address the actual situation.

I would also like to point out some possible limitations of this work. Firstly, the absence of the field work and direct contact with Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and the current members of the Republican Party could arise and create potential problems with the legitimacy of the information. Unfortunately, I could not succeed in reaching out to Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, because the contact information that I found seems to be false. However, main sources of information about the current situation in the movement were gathered through several personal interviews that could be found, either in written or video format. Secondly, the ongoing crisis in Sudan

represents a great obstacle for acquiring more necessary information. Ever since 2018, there has been one coup after another, which escalated in a state of civil war and created an unsafe environment for further academic research. Thirdly, a possible problem could arise with acquiring the information from government-controlled media or specially financed media which are used to spread the propaganda. These obstacles are an everyday occurrence in every society who deals with an unstable political and social situation. Therefore, the sources without personal involvement of the Republicans were avoided in order to minimise and hinder the flow of untrustworthy and unobjective information. Since there was no direct contact to the Republican movement, I focused myself on the sources where the members of the Republican movement or Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha were personally involved. Fourthly, an absence of the public opinion about the Republican movement is also one of the limitations. The opinion of the Sudanese community could bring an attitude of the public and voters towards the Republican ideology. Consequently, it would lead to better understanding of the spread and reach of the Republican thought. Finally, the lack of proper academic research on the topic is another hindrance for this work. Unfortunately, the amount of the scientific works dealing with the Republican movement in Sudan is highly limited. Luckily, Mahmoud (1998, 2001, 2007), An-Na'im (1987, 2008, 2016), and Howard (2006; 2016) provide a sufficient amount of the information which were of a great importance for the cause of this work. From their works and reliance on the works of Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, I managed to extract the crucial clues about the historical development and ideology of the Republican movement. Therefore, this work highlights the historical milestones of the Republican movement since its beginning in 1945 until modern days. Furthermore, it presents the core of the Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha's ideology based on his work *The Second Message of Islam* and draws a line of connection between the mentioned ideology with the contemporary feminist activism. Finally, it brings to attention the work of Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha and the struggles that she had to face after her return in Sudan in her attempts to revive the Republican movement and the Republican Party in Sudan. Thanks to her lasting endurance and devotion to the Republican ideology, the Republican Party is once again on the political stage of Sudan. The fact that precisely Asmā' Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭaha, the daughter of the creator of the Republican thought, is a leader of the Republican Party nowadays is also a great proof of the feminist character of the movement. Even though they are not as influential as

some other political figures and despite all the indignities and difficulties that they have faced, the Republicans are still here today to share their opinion with the public, to address particular problems in the society and to leave a footprint in the history.

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