‘You Arrogant Racist, We are All Darfur’; Human Rights Protests as

Nation-Building in Sudan

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Abstract

On April 11th 2019 the Sudanese people succeeded in ending the 30-year presidency of Omar Al Bashir. This paper discusses the transformational impact of months of protest on conceptions of Sudanese national identity within the revolutionary community. It is argued that a human rights state was created in the Sudan, comprised of revolutionaries practicing and embodying human rights, which transcended deeply entrenched ethnic, gendered, regional and religious divides and engendered a more inclusive national identity in its wake. Focusing on the revolutionary experiences in Khartoum, Nyala (Darfur), Kadugli (Nuba Mountains) and Atbara, this paper explores the oft-neglected and mischaracterized relationship between human rights, revolutions and nationalism. By focusing on protester testimony and the artistic artefacts of the revolution, the westerncentricity and elitism of conventional human rights approaches is challenged as the experiences of non-elite and non-western actors in Sudan are foregrounded and the localization of human rights through revolutionary protest in these spaces elucidated.
To the indomitable spirit of the Sudanese people who struggled for our freedom.
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I would like to thank each and every protester who shared their story with me, especially because the events of the revolution weren’t always easy to talk about. To all those who helped facilitate my travels across Sudan (to the places I had always dreamed of visiting but had been unable to under Al Bashir’s regime) I am eternally grateful. I’d like to thank Nisrin El Amin for giving me guidance when I desperately needed it. Lastly, I owe extreme thanks to my friends, but especially my family for encouraging me/putting up with me over the past six months and my singular focus on all-things-revolution. A special thanks to my aunt Dina who kept me close to the revolution even when I was in New York. They say it takes a village and, sitting across from my mother as she proof reads yet-another of my papers, in my case that’s certainly true.
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Part One

Chapter 1. The Revolution

On the 19th of December 2018, following a three-fold rise in bread prices, protesters in Atbara city set fire to the headquarters of the Sudanese National Congress Party, burning it to the ground.¹ This act of civil disobedience sparked protests across Sudan calling for the end of the three-decade dictatorship of serial genocidaire Omar Al Bashir. Over the next eight months, and despite the often-fatal retaliation by security services, millions of Sudanese risked their lives protesting the repressive government.

Unlike previous uprisings, in 2011 or 2013, protesters took to the streets in equal measure in both the nation’s historically privileged riverain core and its marginalized peripheries, coming together to demand the end of the racist, corrupt and ruthless regime. Repeatedly shutting down the internet, the government cut protesters off from one another and hid bloody reprisals against peaceful protesters from the international community. Over the course of the revolution, more than 250 people were killed, thousands detained and countless others subject to psychological and physical torture.² Yet, in spite of almost non-existent international attention or support, and facing live ammunition, tear-gas and beatings, Sudanese protesters put their lives on the line for their home-grown revolution.

Adopting a non-violent approach, protesters established sit-ins across Sudan from April 6th. These sit-ins not only ousted Al Bashir on April 11th 2019, but also, as this thesis will argue, became human rights beacons, symbolizing hope and progress by fostering a never-before-seen sense of community and awareness amongst Sudan’s diverse but historically divided population.

Hundreds of thousands of Sudanese protesters maintained the sit ins, demanding that the newly-formed Transitional Military Council (TMC) transfer power to civilians. Instead on June 3rd 2019 rogue militias destroyed the sit ins, murdering, raping and maiming over 400 people in the process. However, in spite of this brutality, the atmosphere of fear spread across the country and blocked communications, protesters continued to organize, coming together for the biggest protest of the revolution, a million-man march on June 30th, forcing the military to transfer power to civilians.

When in April 2019 the Sudanese uprising received long-overdue international attention, the Western press fixated immediately on the prominence of women protesters. The image of student Alaa Salah, stood atop a car in a white thoab (national dress) wagging her finger and leading protesters in chant, sparked Western interest and quickly went viral. Falling back on Orientalist tropes of the submissive African/Muslim woman, the Western press sensationalized women’s involvement and soon iconized Salah as ‘The Woman Who Toppled the Tyrant’. This singular focus not ignored the long tradition of women’s protest in both Sudan and the broader region, but failed to contextualize it as part of the uniquely trans-Sudanese movement.

This thesis will argue that the Sudanese revolution was novel because the revolutionary movement transcended ethnic, religious, tribal and gender divisions across the country for the first time. It will be shown that what sets this revolution apart from the popular uprisings of 1964 and 1985 (both of which overthrew dictators) was that, a truly nationwide movement in pursuit of human rights took hold and bridged the divisions emphasized by previous regimes.

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4 Popular British magazine ‘Grazia’, hailed Salah as such on the cover of their April 16th 2019 cover.
Described as a ‘microcosm of Africa’ Sudan’s unique diversity has been both politically and academically cited as a root cause of its problems. Some estimates hold that following independence in 1956 the one million square mile country held 570 tribes with almost 600 different languages including the people of Nubia, Kush, Fung, Fur, Nuba, Dinka and Nuer.

Due in part to the politicization of identity, there is a lack of reliable census information on Sudan. Current figures suggest that Sudan, which covers almost two million square kilometres, has a population of approximately 26 million people, the median age for whom is 18.7% and approximately 20% of whom are unemployed.

6 John Garang asked the attendees of the 1986 Koko dam conference, “(are) we are an Arab country, (are) we… an African country. Are we a hybrid? Are we Afro-Arab, are we what?” as he identified the lack of a single national identity encompassing Sudanese diversity as a root cause of the continued civil war between Northern and Southern Sudan; Amir Idris, Identity, Citizenship and Violence in Two Sudans: Reimagining a Common Future, (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 98.

7 While Mohamed Omer has more conservatively cited 590 tribal groups and 250 languages, it is critical to note that the lowest estimate of 100 languages (Bell 1989) nonetheless points to a plethora of sociolinguistic traditions and groupings; Sharif Harir, “Recycling the Past in the Sudan; An Overview of Political Delay.” In Shortcut to Decay: the Case of the Sudan, Scandinavian Institute of African Studies, 1994, 18.
This tribal pluralism is further complicated by Sudan’s position at the crossroads between the Middle Eastern and African worlds, both African and Arab and home to substantial populations of Christians and Animists alongside its majority Muslim population.8

While ‘it is said that if national integration could work here, it could work anywhere’, central Sudanese-dominated governments have rejected diversity in favour of forced assimilation into a strictly Arab-Islamic identity mould.9 As a direct consequence of the state’s refusal to pursue an inclusive nationhood, Sudanese people have suffered four decades of racialized civil war, genocides in Darfur and the Nuba Mountains, the loss of South Sudan in 2011 and secessionist conflicts on every border.10 Successive dictatorships have fostered racial, ethnic and tribal hierarchies, pitting different groups against one another to bolster their own power and inciting violence and national apathy in place of cooperation and unity. As a consequence of the government’s failure to promote a convincing national identity and consciousness, in the words of late Southern liberation leader John Garang (1986) ‘Sudan has been looking and is still looking for its soul, for its true identity’.11

Theoretical Frameworks: The Human-Rights State and National Identity

According to the United Nations, human rights are those ‘rights inherent to all human beings, regardless of race, sex, nationality, ethnicity, language, religion, or any other status’.12 Premised upon our shared humanity and innate equality, beginning with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1945), the international human rights regime worked to enshrine

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10 While this study focuses on the mistreatment of Darfuri/Nuba Sudanese peoples by the racist Arabization and Islamization of successive postcolonial regimes and their exclusion from official national identity, they are not the only groups to be marginalized by the regime on the basis of their identities. Many groups in Eastern Sudan have been similarly disregarded by the government including the Beja.
and enforce universal protections which would safeguard humans from oppressive conditions, conflicts and discriminations.

Recently however the conventional human rights approach has been criticised by scholars such as Samuel Moyn (2018) and Stephen Hopgood (2015), warning that we are living ‘the end times of human rights’. These criticisms stem from the fact that the international human rights regime continues to marginalize non elite/western actors and fails to reimagine itself alongside the localization of human rights across the globe in a way that might protect its continued global relevance. The Sudanese case study will be used to demonstrate the urgent need for the conventional human rights approach to adapt to changes in the global landscape since 1945.

The elitism of the human-rights superstructure stems from the nation-state model through which it operates, relying on the active cooperation of states, (which in Sudan was notably absent) resulting in cavernous gaps between state-ratified human rights and people’s tangible access to them. Indeed, Oche Onazi has argued that the ‘statist human rights discourse (has) constrained the subaltern voice’ which remains ‘missing in dominant tales of human rights’ as a consequence of the expression of human rights concepts in terms that credit only the state as the justifiable source of their legal validity’. While Hannah Arendt (2017) critiqued stateless people’s marginalization by this state-centric structure, the conventional human rights framework also problematically assumes that members of the state have equal access to their rights, failing to take into account that in states such as Sudan, subcitizenship

14 Oche. Onazi, “Towards a Subaltern Theory of Human Rights.” *Global Jurist* 9, no. 2 (2009): 1, accessed September 10th, 2019, [https://doi.org/10.2202/1934-2640.1307]; Hannah Arendt (2017) critiqued that the ‘right’ to have rights was limited to members of states, leaving stateless people for example vulnerable.
based on ethnicity has deprived large portions of the population from their rights, which become the preserve of the elites.\textsuperscript{15}

Moreover although human rights are celebrated for their universality conventional human rights approaches have fixated on western paradigms, methods and epistemologies.\textsuperscript{16} While the allegedly ‘international’ human rights regime has pushed for the globalization of human rights, it has failed to reimagine human rights based on new global understandings and interactions. The western-lens of the conventional human rights approach has encouraged reliance upon methods, such as legalism, which are central to Western polities but are not necessarily meaningful (nor effective) in traditional or non-democratic societies. Indeed, despite minimal evidence that, as Posner argued (2014) ‘human rights treaties have improved the wellbeing of people, or even … respect for the rights in those treaties’, the human rights regime continually metes out universalizing legislation to states, relying upon an approach which leaves foreign-imposed human rights to the discretion of state-elites instead of engaging with local populations.\textsuperscript{17}

In short, fearing that the localization of human rights might undermine their universality the international human rights discourse has historically neglected to recognize non-western and non-elites as legitimate \textit{authors} and \textit{actors} (as opposed to subjects) of human rights. This approach fell short in Sudan, where the international human rights regime was limited to treating the victims of state-sponsored ethnic violence without challenging the racist ideologies underpinning these conflicts.


\textsuperscript{16} Owen Brown argued that this western-centricity stems from the fact that the conventional human rights discourse traces its genesis back (through the Euro-American historical experience and events such as the French and American revolutions), to the European enlightenment; Owen Brown, “Rights from the Other Side of the Line.” \textit{Politikon: The IAPSS Journal of Political Science} 25 (2014): 6, accessed November 19\textsuperscript{th}, 2019 \url{https://doi.org/10.22151/politikon.25.1}.

Western-centric ‘universalizing’ legalism has been undermined by the government’s refusal to sign treaties such as the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination Against Women (1979). Even where it has ratified treaties such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (1976) successive governments have dismissed its requirements, restricting freedom of movement, thought, conscience, religion or speech. Indeed, the fatal shortcomings of this approach has long been apparent to the Sudanese people, who, for example, in 2006 continued to suffer genocidal violence in Darfur despite the fact that Sudan had signed the International Convention on the Elimination of all forms of Racial Discrimination in 1965.18

Not only are western-sanctioned modes of human rights acquisition endorsed, but the conventional human rights approach fails to recognize the ‘practice and policies of human rights that do not fit the Euro-American template’, including nationalist revolution.19 Despite the centrality of the French and American revolutions to the conventional genesis story of human rights, modern protesters in the global South are often dismissed as ‘rioters’, as opposed to active agents of human rights, while revolutions are ‘no longer seen as catalysts for historical progress, much less the agents of human rights’.20 This euro-centric vantage point fails to appreciate the mobilizing possibilities that revolutions bring to a hitherto divided and thus powerless people and in part explains the marked lack of active attention to or support for Sudanese revolutionaries by the international human rights regime prior to the overthrow of Omar Al Bashir.

18 The weakness of the legal international human rights framework was perhaps most glaringly obvious in the fact that dictator Omar Al Bashir was wanted by the International Criminal Court, on charges of genocide and crimes against humanity, for nineteen years before he was overthrown by the people, flaunting the powerlessness of the ICC by travelling the world in the meanwhile, most recently publicly attending the World Cup 2018 in Moscow.
19 Brown, “Rights from the Other Side of the Line.”, 7.
20 Benjamin Gregg, The Human Rights State: Justice Within and Beyond Sovereign Nations (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), 192
This approach has led human rights and nationalism to be repeatedly juxtaposed (Cheng), with the former’s universality contrasted with the latter’s divisiveness. In reality the dichotomization of nationalism vs human rights falsely assumes that disempowered people have access to either option, when in reality the inaccessibility of the nation-state framework of human rights left the Sudanese people with little choice but to overthrow the status quo themselves.²¹ Although nationalism is often dismissed as the ‘ideological justification for exclusion- and sometimes extermination of others’, this will be challenged here as it is shown that in Sudan, over the course of the revolution, a reciprocal relationship between nationalism and human rights emerged, critically transforming the socio-political landscape and giving meaning to official human rights formulations. ²²

In order to redeem human rights, the conventional framework must be reimagined and expanded to include global conceptualizations of human rights. There is an urgent need for scholarship which demonstrates the successful localization of human rights (human rights from-below), which can counter the status quo. This study will show that over the course of the Sudanese revolution, protesters from across the country were brought together to form a ‘human rights state’, transcending ethnic, gender, regional and religious divides, which in turn engendered a nationalism vocally founded upon equality.

Benjamin Gregg (2016) conceptualized a ‘human rights state’ as a non-territorial entity of ‘activists united in promoting human rights within the corresponding nation state, activists who mutually recognize each other’s human rights, activists who practice human rights among

²¹ Without a national identity or nationalism uniting the people no amount of foreign aid can overcome the alienation dividing Sudan’s regions, nor permanently protect those that the regime’s schema leaves vulnerable, undermining the sustainability of peace-keeping measures and other human rights mechanisms. Indeed, this revolution happened in spite of the international human rights regime and its “protections”. Instead, the movement was protected by the nationalist solidarity which was imbued in protesters and which created a national community visible in the care that strangers took for one another.

themselves in relation with others’. Refuting the conventional emphasis on institutionalization and legalization, he argued that human rights as ‘social constructions can only be valid for their addressees if those addressees freely, self-reflexively come to embrace them’, endorsing bottom-up localizations of human rights through means including collective action. In keeping with this argument, it will be shown that by bringing people across Sudan together in pursuit of common rights and the desire to create a rights-based society, a human-rights state was created in the ‘minds and behaviours’ of the revolutionary community in Sudan.

The reciprocal relationship between human rights and nationalism will be elucidated. By bridging the ethnic, religious, regional and gender divides that successive governments had utilized to separate the Sudanese people, the revolutionary human rights state provided the people with an unprecedented opportunity to come together. In so doing it created a platform across which hitherto alienated people engaged with each other, encouraging newfound understanding which in turn provoked protesters to question official exclusive racial and ethnic hierarchies and national identities, and to organically replace them with inclusive nationalism instead.

Although the revolution began over rising bread prices, by coming together to demand rights, such as access to an adequate standard of life, a common ground was formed across the divided Sudanese people, not only equipping them to fight for other rights including the freedom of speech or belief, but also creating a common basis for a new nationalism. The human rights state, then, encouraged protesters to not only associate with one another as common human rights actors, but to transformatively reconceptualize notions of self and of national community in a way that, as Onazi argues, ‘enriches the true and underlying intentions

24 Ibid.,
25 Ibid.,
of mainstream (human rights) discourse’. Conversely, this inclusive nationalism has survived the formal end of the revolution and has maintained feelings of fraternity and connection across Sudan, creating space wherein conversations surrounding human rights can continue to be had.

Chapter 2. Situating the Sudanese Revolution

In order to understand the significance of the trans-Sudanese human rights state and corresponding nationalism engendered by this revolution, this moment of unity must be contextualized against the history of violent divisions and bifurcations evident in Sudanese history and scholarship.

Sudanese History: ‘A Nation in Turbulent Search of Itself’

Although the Sudanese state is a recent British colonial creation, the construction, politicization and hierarchialization of race in Sudan has taken centuries. Despite (western) Sudanese histories placing disproportionate focus upon, the 20th century Anglo-Egyptian period, accredited with creating racial animosity between ‘Northern’ and ‘Southern’, ‘Arab’ and ‘African’, ‘Muslim’ and ‘Christian’ Sudanese people, in reality, the colonizers administered a land with a legacy of racialized violence and trauma.

While we are conditioned to defer to the West African transatlantic experience when it comes to slavery, as Mamdani shows in the case of Sudan, the existence of domestic African slavery and its implications have been seriously overlooked. In reality, local slavery had long poisoned regional relations and ‘in turn impacted the initial stage of racial identities formation’, as Amir Idris has discussed comprehensively. Domestic slavery generated racialized distinctions and hierarchies between the Sudanese people through the exploitation of people on the basis of their perceived race.

28 Mamdani, Mahmood, Saviours and Survivors: Darfur, Politics and the War on Terror (Lagos, Nigeria: Malthouse Press, 2010), 108.
Traceable back to the Ancient Nubian period (2500 BC), slavery in Sudan was gradually racialized, with the domestic slave trade relying predominantly on the capture of slaves from the most phenotypically ‘black’ areas of Sudan, namely the South, the Nuba Mountains and the Blue Nile region.\textsuperscript{31} Over the ‘premodern’ period, the Sudanese experience was gradually dichotomized as those in the North were increasingly exposed and attached to Arab-Islamic culture brought in by the Arab merchant class, particularly following the collapse of the Christian Kingdoms of Sudan in the 13\textsuperscript{th} century.\textsuperscript{32} Meanwhile Southerners were targeted by Arab slavers (and their Northern Sudanese accomplices) for being ‘unbelievers and blacks’.\textsuperscript{33}

Brought under Turkish rule in 1821, Sudanese regional experiences diverged further, with the hitherto almost impenetrable South intensely plundered for ‘non-Muslim’ slaves by Arab administrators and Arabized northerners.\textsuperscript{34} Given that the physical landscape had previously made difficult the socialization across the natural swamp barriers off the South, that initial contact was made through the bringing of Southern slaves through the North negatively coloured Northern racialized conceptions of the Southern ‘other’.\textsuperscript{35} As Idris has shown, ‘slaves who were mostly obtained from the southern and western regions were marked by demeaning cultural and social attributes and relegated to the bottom of the social hierarchy in the North’.\textsuperscript{36}

\textsuperscript{31} It is not a coincidence that these are the same regions that have continued to be subjected to racialized violence emanating from the Sudanese center, repeatedly taking on genocidal proportions.

\textsuperscript{32} Muddathir has shown that Sudanese contact with Arab World goes back thousands of years before Christ, with contact predominantly through migration and trade. As a consequence ‘Arab traders settled in Sudan and integrated themselves with the indigenous populations in the North, where Arab culture was valued and began to take root; Muddathir. ‘Arabism, Africanism and Self-Identification in the Sudan’, 36.

\textsuperscript{33} Idris, \textit{Identity, Citizenship and Violence in Two Sudans}, 41.

\textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 45.

\textsuperscript{35} While this study does not directly concern modern South Sudan, and is looking at the bridging of gaps within what remains Sudan, one cannot discuss Sudanese history and racial identity formation without discussion of the construction of the Southern Sudanese other. While there is a dearth of research on the peoples on Sudan’s other peripheries, the relatively extensive academic treatment of the Southern peoples provides critical insight into attitudes towards non-Arabized peoples in the Sudan.

\textsuperscript{36} Idris, \textit{Identity, Citizenship and Violence in Two Sudans}, 46.
These associations have proved difficult to break, with central Sudanese still referring to more phenotypically black Sudanese as ‘abd’ or slave.

Although the domestic Mahdiyya movement (1885-1898) was able to free Sudan from Turco-Egyptian rule, uniting (predominantly Northern) Sudanese under the banner of Islam, this period saw an intensification of racial identification and violence as power was centralized around the new seat of authority in Khartoum and associated with the northern/central Arabized Islamic Sudanese elite. Slaves were increasingly identified as nonbelievers, creating a racialized hierarchy of identity as non-Muslim ‘Africans’ were literally dehumanized. Instead of the respite that its non-Arabized/non-Islamic supporters had hoped for, the Mahdiyya government upped slave raiding and captured thousands of slaves from Sudan’s peripheries.

To many non-Arab and non-Muslim peoples, as Dunstan Wai explained in the Southern case, the ‘scars of the brutality inflicted … still remain’.

Thus by the time the British came to power in Sudan in 1902, heading the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium, domestic notions and experiences of race already existed, with blackness tied to dispossession, landlessness and violence. The British moulded and institutionalized racialized differences, racially indexing the people through a reductive colonial schema. In keeping with the divide and rule tactics employed across the British empire, rather than prepare Sudan for independence, the British encouraged divisions between ‘Northern’ Sudan, which they demarcated as Arab and Islamic, and Southern Sudan, delimited as African and Christian. There was no room in this essentialist colonial logic for the people to have complex, complementary, intersectional identities. Going so far as to physically bar Muslim ‘Arab’ Northerners from entering the South without permission in 1922, the British

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38 Ibid., 47-48.
40 Due to the fact that the British presence in Sudan was technically a ‘condominium’ as opposed to an official colony, Sudan has been neglected by colonial and empire studies, and the Sudanese experience has failed to impact academic discussions on and understandings of the British Empire.
cut people off from one another. Furthermore, investing in the development of Khartoum and Sudan’s riverain core at the direct expense of the rest of the country, the British sowed the seeds of a legacy of uneven development that is clear to anyone who travels thirty minutes outside of Khartoum.\textsuperscript{42}

The British administration brought together peoples with a history of hostility into a framework of one state, while also keeping them apart and entrenching inequalities by giving certain regions more access to state power, resources, services and development opportunities’ as Idris explained.\textsuperscript{43} Diverse peoples together with a history of hostility into a framework of one state, while also keeping them apart and entrenching inequalities by giving certain regions more access to state power, resources, services and development opportunities’ as Idris explained.

For example the British set out to replace the ‘horrible jargon’ Arabic in the South, declaring English the region’s official language in 1928, in a blatant attempt to prevent the spread of ‘Arab thought, Arab culture and Arab religion’.\textsuperscript{44} In this way the British promoted the essentialist understandings that that the ‘Arab’ and ‘African’ Sudanese existed as two distinct groups. According to this logic, it was neither desirable nor possible to be both Arabized and African, to be Northern and non-Arab or to be Southern and Muslim. This ‘mistaken’ British ‘policy of developing Sudan as two nations’, as British contemporary Colin Legume criticised, poisoned Sudanese relations post-independence.\textsuperscript{45}

Although Southern policy was reversed in 1946, half a century of colonial North-South, African-Arab ‘othering’ and Northern preferential treatment undermined the possibility of successful post-independence multicultural integration.\textsuperscript{45} In the absence of a national anti-


\textsuperscript{42} Mamdani for example has shown that by ‘1944 there were only two primary schools in the whole province of Darfur …(and) by 1956 the situation had only improved marginally’; Mamdani, \textit{Saviours and Survivors}, 165.


\textsuperscript{44} Ibid.,

\textsuperscript{45} Ricardo René Laremont, \textit{Borders, Nationalism and the African State} (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2005), 38.
colonial struggle that might have united the people, a Northern-centric nationalist movement took power in Sudan and promoted a national identity in its own Arab-Islamic image.\textsuperscript{46} Meanwhile those on the peripheries were immediately marginalized, with, for example, Southerners receiving only six former-colonial government positions (in stark contrast to Northerners who received eight hundred).\textsuperscript{47} Not only did this Northern elite ‘continue to operate within a neo-colonial ideological framework’ founded upon the ‘concept of one nation-state with one or a dominant national identity’, but their disregard for the social, cultural and political rights of those on the peripheries, left many concerned that ‘our fellow Northerners want to colonise us for another hundred years’.\textsuperscript{48}

Such fears were warranted. Successive postcolonial dictatorships have (increasingly violently) set about building a monocultural state based on their versions of Islam, Arab identity and central-Sudanese supremacy. Given that in reality the singularly Arab-Islamic identity of even he Northern region is a gross oversimplification (produced by colonialists who understood differences between the North and South to be greater than the differences within each region), the state has had to rely on ‘coercion and hegemony’ to Arabize and Islamize Sudan.\textsuperscript{49-50} While under General Abboud (1958-1964), Sudan’s first dictator, this project focused on linguistic policies and the Arabization of education, under Sudan’s second dictator

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{46} Douglas H. Johnson, \textit{The Root Causes of Sudans Civil Wars} (Oxford: James Currey, 2007), IX.
  \item \textsuperscript{49} Hariri, for example, has argued that “the cultures of the Nubian groups in the north (mamas, kunuz, dangle and Halfawiyyin) and the Beja groups (Hадendowa, Bishartiyyin and Amara) culturally, ethnically, linguistically and regionally are clearly different from the so-called standard Sudanese culture with its strong emphasis on Arabism and Islam.”; Hariri, “Recycling the Past in the Sudan; An Overview of Political Delay.”, 45.
  \item \textsuperscript{50} Elsadig Elsheikh has argued that while coercion has consisted of the ‘physical domination of the police and army’, hegemony has surrounded ‘ideological control’ and manipulation; Elsadig Elsheikh, \textit{Darfur-Domesticating Coloniality: The Failure of the Nation-State Model in Post-Colonial Sudan} (Saarbrücken: VDM Verlag Dr Müller, 2008), 32.
\end{itemize}
General Nimeri (1971-1985) Islamic laws (sharia) were introduced and Sudan was brought politically closer into line with the Arab world.\(^{51}\)

For many on the peripheries there has been little ‘post’ colonial about this situation, subjected to long histories of unrepresentative powers that refused to include them in a meaningful way and which have attempted to dictate their identity.\(^{52}\) Nowhere is this clearer than in the Nuba Mountains and Darfur. The Nuba have long suffered external attempts to subjugate and deteritorialize them.\(^{53}\) Indeed, as Leif Manger argued, the Nuba share with indigenous people world-wide that ‘their human rights are denied and political persecution, ethnocide and genocide continue even after European colonialism has ended’.\(^{54}\) Rather than being brought into the national fold, the Nuba people have been alienated by colonial and post-independence governments. The British physical separated the region from the rest of the country by establishing the Nuba mountains as a separate province in 1914, even restricting movement in and out through the 1922 Closed District Ordinance.\(^{55}\)

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\(^{51}\) Criticism of this national project were criminalized. For example, in 1957 when a Southern federal party manifesto demanded that English be recognized as an official language alongside Arabic (as well as Christianity alongside Islam) and the ‘transfer of Sudan from the Arab world to the African’, the government sent the author to prison for seven years; Sharkey “Arab Identity and Ideology in Sudan: The Politics of Language, Ethnicity, and Race.”, 35 ; Arab-Islamic supremacy has moreover been prevalent in the brief democratic windows (such as 1983-1985) during which democratically elected Prime Minister Sadiq Al Mahdi stated that “the dominant feature of our nation is an Islamic one and its overpowering expression is Arab, and this nation will not have its entity identified and its prestige and pride preserved except under an Islamic revival”; Elsheikh, Darfur- Domesticating Coloniality, 28.

\(^{52}\) See Frederick Cooper ‘Africa Since 1940: The Past of the Present’ for discussion of the problematic colonial-postcolonial praxis.

\(^{53}\) Karen Jayazeri argued that the outbreak of particularly virulent protests during the Arab Spring was most prevalent in ‘states with large populations of politically discriminated ethnic and religious groups experienced greater volumes of protest and revolution’, which is certainly applicable to the Sudanese case; Guma Komey, “The Nuba Plight – An Account of People Facing Perpetual Violence and Institutionalised Insecurity.” In Conflict in the Nuba Mountains, From Genocide by Attrition to the Contemporary Crisis in Sudan, ed. Samuel Totten and Amanda Grbryz, (Routledge, 2014),15.

\(^{54}\) Guma Komey has shown that long before the colonial period, the Nuba suffered invasions by Fung-Arab groups who seized their land and forced them to retreat into the surrounding hills and mountains. Indeed, Arabized slave raiders targeted these African peoples, a practice which was then heightened under both the Turkiyya (1821-1885) and the Mahdiyya periods (1885-1902). By the start of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium (1902), the Nuba Mountain’s had suffered wide-scale dispossession, subjugation by local Arab Baqqara (through suzerainty) and the traumatic legacy of slavery. Komey estimates that by 1839, 200,000 Nuba had been sold as slaves often by ‘Arab’ groups in Sudan; Guma Kunda Komey, Land, Governance, Conflict & the Nuba of Sudan (Oxford: James Currey, 2010), 36.

\(^{55}\) Natives could not leave a designated area without acquiring an exit/entry permit and those on the outside were barred from entering without British permission. This was not abolished until 1947.
resources on the riverain centre, the Nuba mountains was left politically and economically underdeveloped on the eve of independence, alien to those in the centre and from the national identity that northern nationalists were forming in their own image. Post-independence, the Nuba people have suffered from attempts to force them into this identity mould. For example, as early as 1956-8, Nuba children were barred from attending school unless they adopted Arabic names and singularly spoke Arabic at school.\textsuperscript{56} This discrimination against the Nuba people has not been confined to spatial boundaries of the region, with those who have migrated to Khartoum frequently confronted by discrimination, for example by the ‘brutally humiliating and inhumane’ forced deportation campaigns (‘Kasha’), launched against those without identification cards, but most frequently ‘the Nuba, and all those with obvious African features’.\textsuperscript{57}

While studies have shown that in precolonial Darfur ‘the distinction between ‘Arab’ and ‘African’ did not arise. Darfurians had no difficulty with multiple identities’ this situation quickly changed with the arrival of the British. \textsuperscript{58}Darfur was subjected to native administration which implanted a new hierarchy of tribal administrators, while simultaneously subjecting Darfuris to Nilo-centric Khartoum governments that cared little about those on the peripheries. The consequent of underdevelopment is obvious today, in, for example, the fact that Darfuri primary school enrolment rate (31%) falls far behind that of Northern Sudan (88%).\textsuperscript{59} As Darfuris have been forced to become Sudanese on ‘terms foreign to them’, subjugated by the

\textsuperscript{56} Komey, \textit{Land, Governance, Conflict & the Nuba of Sudan}, 70.
\textsuperscript{57} According to Kadouf they were taken ‘against their will to the area of their respective ethnic origins or otherwise to agricultural schemes in central Sudan as forced labour’; Komey, \textit{Land, Governance, Conflict & the Nuba of Sudan}, 76.
\textsuperscript{58} The Darfur Sultanate (1604-1874 and 1898-1916) was the size of modern-day Nigeria and comprised many different groups including the (settled) African ‘Fur’ and the (nomadic) Bedouins such as the Zaghawa. While hierarchies existed within this polity, with for example the Africans on the southern border labelled the Dar ‘Fertit’, signifying their enslavability, Mamdani argued that we must not project onto Darfuri history modern axioms including the ‘Arab-African’ dichotomy, propagated by Save Darfur Lobby (as well as much of the Western media coverage); Mamdani, \textit{Saviours and Survivors}, 300.
national Arab-African schema, ‘complex identities have been radically and traumatically simplified, creating a polarized ‘Arab versus African’ dichotomy that is historically bogus but disturbingly powerful’, actually contributing to violence, as argued by De Waal.\(^\text{60}\)

The human rights regime proved powerless at combatting these divisions and unable to prevent the most violent manifestation of the Arab-Islamic supremacy in Sudan’s history, the Darfur genocide of 2003. The danger of exclusive national identity in relation to human rights most visibly manifested itself in this genocide which began as a conflict over resources but was quickly met by government retaliations so severe that they left 300,000 dead and 1.2 million displaced.\(^\text{61}\) Sending the self-identifying ethnically Arab ‘Janjaweed’ on a lethal mission to suppress the phenotypically ‘African’ Western Sudanese, whose rebels were demanding greater inclusion into the national project, it was made clear to Sudanese people across the state that as far as official imaginings of national identity were concerned, no concessions would be made to those on the peripheries.\(^\text{62}\) Similarly, in both the 1990s and since 2010 uprisings in the Nuba Mountains, against decades of marginalization were brutally put down leaving thousands dead, with legitimate arguments that the disproportionate response of a seven-yearlong campaign of blockading and bombing the Nuba people into submission constituting ‘genocide by attrition’.\(^\text{63}\)

\(^{60}\) Alex De Waal, ‘Who are the Darfurians, Arab and African Identities and External Engagements’ in Darfur and the Crisis of Governance in Sudan, ed Salah Hassan and Carina Ray (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2009), 137.


\(^{62}\) It has been argued by scholars including Mahmood Mamdani that by labelling the 2003 crimes against humanity in Darfur as Arab versus African ‘genocide’, the human rights regime has contributed to this bifurcation of identity in Darfur and the tensions this subsequently created.

\(^{63}\) These figures remain approximate due to the territorial blockade and government censorship. Komey, Land, Governance, Conflict & the Nuba of Sudan, 82.
Indeed, under Sudan’s third and longest dictatorship the ascendency of Arab-Islamic identity was most violently enforced and codified. Coming to power in 1989 through a military coup, Al Bashir’s Muslim Brotherhood regime was notoriously intolerant of ‘African’ ‘Christians’ in Sudan.64 From closing the National Museum’s Christian exhibition and bombing Nuba churches, to hanging Coptic pilot Girgis for ‘money laundering’ and arresting Lubna Hussein for wearing trousers, Al Bashir’s regime used fearmongering and intimidation to enforce its identity and circumscribe the freedom of nonconforming minorities and women.

The tenet of human rights upholding ‘the will of the people shall be the basis of the authority of government’, rang hollow as the government’s notion of who the ‘people’ were was narrow and their strategy inherently paradoxical.65 From national syllabi to dress and morality codes, the regime has used every weapon in its arsenal to enforce a unifying monolithic Arab-Islamic identity on the people. Yet, this reductive nationhood has failed to take root because it is so detached from the complex Sudanese reality. Indeed, as a consequence of Bashir’s refusal to make space for other Sudanese identities, South Soudan seceded in 2011. For decades, the government had waged war on the South, publicly portraying the conflict as an Islamic mission or ‘jihad’.66 Despite the appeals of Southern leaders, including the late John Garang, for a New Sudan that would be ‘united, secular, democratic, multi-racial, multi-lingual and multi-religious’, the government’s refusal to inclusively re-imagine the Sudanese nation, led 99% of Southerners to vote to secede and encouraged many others on Sudan’s peripheries to rise.67

64 For example, in the 1980s the Minister of Culture and Information decreed that all pre-Islamic representations in the National Museum (Khartoum) be replaced by Islamic historical artefacts; El Tom, “Darfur People: Too Black for the Arab-Islamic Project of Sudan”, 86.
65 Despite the influx of those from Sudan’s peripheries to the riverain core and particularly Khartoum, these regimes refused to reconceptualize themselves or their power, instead steadfastly upholding the reductive colonial core-periphery paradigm; Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) Article 26.
66 Komey, Land, Governance, Conflict & the Nuba of Sudan, 83
67 Sharkey, “Arab Identity and Ideology in Sudan: The Politics of Language, Ethnicity, and Race”, 42; Although promising to protect Southern cultural, religious and regional autonomy in the Addis Ababa agreement of 1972, Nimeri reneged on these conditions in 1983 when he implemented Sharia law across the Sudanese state and outlawed opposing political parties. However far from simply discriminating against Southerners, the infamous
In short, the repeated use of divide and conquer by pre-and post-independence Sudanese governments discouraged the formation of an inclusive national consciousness. Faced with limited intra-national infrastructure, a lack of free press and an education system co-opted by the regime, for more than half a century post-independence, no Sudanese nationhood emerged. Although revolution is dismissed as a method of human rights acquisition, it will be shown that the pursuit of human rights linked hitherto disconnected regions and peoples and provided them with a shared value-system and platform, from social media to protests and sit-ins, in which to reverse this legacy of division. The human-rights state created by the revolution not only engenders a nation based on equality, mobility and unity but also creates the antidote to the decades of colonial and neo-colonial rule.

**Sudan Studies: ‘Sudan not only fell on the margins, but between the cracks’**

Sudan is an under-investigated nation having been ignored by most postcolonial African studies and falling between the gaps of African and Middle-Eastern academia. A lack of free speech has circumscribed domestic research and international Sudan-specialized academics remain rare. As such remain resounding gaps in Sudanese studies endure.

Due to its contemporary, ongoing nature the revolution has yet to be academically researched, meaning that there is no current work on which this study can draw. Furthermore, because of the extreme censorship of Al Bashir’s regime, Sudanese literature critical of the

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Black Book of 2000 exposed postcolonial favouritism of three ‘Arab’ central Sudanese tribes, the Shagiyya, Jaalyeen and Dongolawis, who have dominated political and economic power in Sudan, holding 79.5% of national offices in the first decade of Al Bashir’s rule, despite making up just over 5% of the population (64). While Non-Arab Northern regions held 70% of the pre-2011 Sudanese population, they provided only 4% of representation within governmental institutions, demonstrating that power has long been accessible to a small and tribally selective central Sudanese elite as opposed to all ‘Northern’ Sudanese; “These books claim that the Northern Region has controlled Sudan throughout its independent history, and that this control has remained the same irrespective of the nature of the government of the day”; El Tourn. “Darfur People: Too Black for the Arab-Islamic Project of Sudan.” 92; Laremont. *Borders, Nationalism, and the African State*, 57.

government is rare, leaving this study heavily dependent upon scarce foreign literature that often fails to grasp the complexity of the Sudanese identity landscape. This foreign bias will be combatted by illumination of Sudanese voices through fieldwork interviews as well as an interrogative reading of the secondary literature, mindful of essentialist western conceptions of Sudanese identity. This study hopes to intersect and build upon Sudanese protest, identity and nationhood studies, while demonstrating the transformative impact of the revolutionary human rights state in Sudan on protesters’ senses of self and community.

Nationhood and Identity

I argue that nine months of protest in Sudan created a human-rights state which in turn engendered a newly inclusive nationhood. But what is a nation? Academics have struggled to agree on a universal definition, with Charles Tilly arguing that the nation is ‘one of the most puzzling and tendentious items in the political lexicon’.69 Perhaps nationhood is particularly difficult to define because of its emotivism. As Arthur Waldron put it “the term ‘nation’ captures something that the term ‘state’ misses, a feeling, a passion, a legitimating power that the word nationalism possesses to an unequalled degree”.70 While German Romanticists historically argued that humanity was naturally divided into nations, from the 1970s constructivist scholars put forth a conception of nations as artificial social creations. Indeed, Ernest Gellner (1970) famously distinguished between states and nations, arguing that the former were fixed polities delineated by borders whereas the later were fluid artificial constructions defined not by actual homogeneity, but rather by communities of self-perceived communal belonging.71

70 Ibid.,
Nations, as Benedict Anderson (1983) countered, are ‘cultural artefacts of a particular kind’, that are not innate, but rather ‘imagined political communities’. They are imagined because, although members of the nation cannot possibly know all of their compatriots, they imagine a ‘deep, horizontal comradeship’ that binds them together. In this way, nationhood lies not in empirical commonality, but rather in the imagined commonality which demonstrably emerged over the course of the Sudanese revolution. Anderson sought to distance nationhood and nationalism from its mid 20th century associations with Nazism and Fascism, arguing they are not intrinsically problematic and ‘inspire love, and often profoundly self-sacrificing love’. This thesis will demonstrate that the emergence of such feelings of love can be birthed by common pursuit of, and sacrifice in the name of, human rights and equality.

While on the one hand modernist scholars including Anderson have credited the forces of modernity including capitalism and print technology with birthing nationhood, others including Walker Connor and Anthony Smith have argued that ethnic homogeneity is critical if nations are to endure. This work aims to show that these models are outdated and fail to account for the recent emergence of new nationhood’s across much of the Middle East and North Africa. Anderson’s modernist account will be disputed by showing that no nation existed in modern Sudan.

Nationhood in Africa has been studied since the second World War, with notable interventions from Hodkin (1956), Lonsdale (1968) and Smith (1983). Within Sudan studies, Ann Mosley Lesch (1998) critically relates civil conflict in Sudan to the broader debate

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73 Ibid., 7
74 Ibid., 141
between civic and ethnic nationalism, describing the ‘acute tension between proponents of ethnic nationalism whose Arab Islamic paradigm has dominated political life since independence and the proponents of territorial nationalism, who seek to restructure the system to respect minority rights and create an overarching common political identity’. Although this work is limited because it predates the Darfur genocide and Southern secession, it will be shown that this model of territorial nationalism has been taken up by Sudanese revolutionaries.

More recently however, Amir Idris’ (2013) has demonstrated the existence of a ‘curse of exclusive nationalism’ in Sudan and concludes that ‘postcolonial state has failed to devise a policy of inclusive citizenship with a capacity to transcend existing racial and ethnic categories through a national framework for unity’. Idris adds much needed nuance to the conversation, challenging the assumption that the state-sponsored nationhood was equally Arab and Islamic by arguing that ‘in reality, racial identity of being ‘Arab’ is more important than religion…because many (Muslims) from Darfur, South Kordofan and Southern Sudan are excluded from the centre of political and economic power due to their non-Arab origins’.

However such studies have focused disproportionately on the top-down government policies regarding nationhood and like the conventional human rights discourse, marginalize the voice of the subaltern. Idris seeks to demonstrate that the government has excluded the Sudanese people, but fails to investigate how the Sudanese people perceive themselves and implicitly takes agency away from the people by positioning them as passive victims. There is little discussion of the extent to which different Sudanese collectives internalized this official national identity, or how changes, such as the mass migrations from the peripheries to the centre or rise of inter-marriage have affected those understandings.

78 Idris, Identity, Citizenship and Violence in Two Sudans, 62.
79 Ibid., 27.
In exploring protesters ideas of the nation, this study seeks to rectify discussions of Sudanese nationhood that have fixated on the notions of nation proffered by ‘Great Men’ such as John Garang or Hassan Turabi, at the expense of understandings how ordinary Sudanese people relate to the nation and to their fellow countrymen. While building on this work, given that nations are constructions of imagined feelings of fraternity between citizens and, as Gellner argues, two men are only of the same nation if they recognize each other as such, this study will take a qualitative approach and root itself in protesters perceptions. Indeed, in exploring the ways in which the revolution and human-rights state created a pluralistic nationhood at the grassroots level, this study will investigate the ways in which protesters conceive of their ethnic, regional and gender counterparts as being equally important members of the nation and take the bottom-up approach missing from the literature.

Sudanese Identity

Given that Al Bashir’s regime perpetrated ethnic cleansings against the non ‘Arab’ peoples of Darfur, South Sudan and the Nuba Mountains, it is unsurprising that within the limited field of Sudanese scholarship, race and ethnicity have garnered substantial attention. Unfortunately, after four decades of civil war and South Sudan’s secession in 2011, Sudan’s racial issues have been historically over simplified, reductively described in terms of The North vs The South, Arabs vs Africans and Muslims vs Christians. The dichotomous colonial narrative has been perpetuated within academia as identity politics research has been dominated by Southern Sudanese scholars, traditionally supported by international academic communities. This Southern focus pushed marginalized communities of eastern and Western Sudan to the peripheries of research, but reaffirmed the depiction of the Sudanese people as comprising two distinct identity groups, suggesting such identities are fixed, singular,

80 Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, 7.
unchangeable and objective, a contention this thesis seeks to challenge.

While Roessler (2016) more broadly studied the ethnopolitical exclusion of minorities in Sudan, tracing the role of ethnicity as a group identifier throughout Sudanese history and showing how it has ‘crowd(ed) out’ other sources of ‘collective mobilization’ including ‘nation or ideology’, much of the literature on Sudan has reverted to reductive North-South dichotomies.81 For example, Dunstan M. Wai (1972) similarly depicted the ‘North and ‘South’ as ‘two culturally and denominationally different regions’.82 Southern scholar Francis Deng (1995) similarly argued that the ‘Northerners see themselves as Arabs and deny the strongly African element in their skin color and physical features. They associate these features with the Negroid race and see it as the mother race of slaves, inferior and demeaned’, ascribing to ‘Northerners’ a single mindset and juxtaposing this alleged block to its Southern counterpart.83 Although Deng’s book is named ‘Conflict of Identities’ in reality it is only the North-South conflict and corresponding identities that he recognizes.84

The rise of conflicts on the Western and Eastern borders has more recently pushed Sudanese scholarship away from the over-simplistic portrayal of identity. For example, as early as 1997 (and in spite of titling his work ‘Struggle in Sudan; Arab versus African’) ‘Southern’ scholar Jacob J. Akol conceded that ‘in reality it does not make sense to take the ‘north-south or African Arab dichotomies as our units of analysis for studying Sudan. Neither the people of the North nor those of the South constitute a distinct cultural and racial group with a distinct history’ but rather political categories ‘produced through specific discourse and practice’. Indeed, Akol conceded that many northern groups such as the Western Fur or Eastern Beja

82 Dunstan M. Wai (ed) The Southern Sudan; the problem of national integration (New York, 1972), 18.
83 Deng, War of Visions, 3.
84 Wai, The Southern Sudan, 1.
were only marginally influenced by Arabization and Islamization’, while others such as Abdel Hay (2011) more recently concluded that these ‘concrete and mutually exclusive categories arose as a consequence of orientalising colonial and postcolonial policies’.

Outside of the South, regional studies of Sudan remain limited. The Darfur genocide inspired scholarship including Elsadig Elsheik’s (2008) *Darfur: Domesticating Coloniality, the failure of the nation-state model in post-colonial Sudan* and Prunier’s (2005) *The Ambiguous Genocide*. Yet by focusing exclusively on Darfur these works failed to appreciate the extent to which this genocide was symptomatic of the broader violent refusal by the government to share its ethnically exclusive power, similarly experienced by other groups such as the Nuba peoples. Moreover, focusing on the mistreatment of people within the physical region of Darfur, as opposed to Darfuri people across Sudan, these works failed to investigate the discrimination faced in urban centres.

As this study concerns the power of inclusive protest to transform nationhood and bridge social gaps, it will discuss gendered divides. Scholars are in broad agreement that nations are gendered (Nira Davis Floya Anthias), yet such discussions have rarely been extended to the Sudanese case. Sudanese women’s studies are extremely limited, being almost non-existent until the 1990s, and focusing disproportionately on iconic women such as Fatima

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85 Ashraf Abdelhay, Busi Makoni, Sinfree Maokni and Abdel Rahim Mugaddam, ‘The sociolinguistics of nationalism in the Sudan: the politicisation of Arabic and the Arabicisation of politics’ *Current Issues in Language Planning* 12, no 4. (2011): 458; Although outdated, having been written before the secession of South Sudan in 2011, Heather Sharkey’s (1965) *Arab Identity and Ideology in Sudan: The Politics of Language, Ethnicity and Race* examines the post-colonial construction and enforcement of an Arab-Islamic national identity. Alex De Waal (2005) similarly traced the Islamization of governance and the tribal exclusivity of power structures, describing what he found as the ‘ascent of Arab supremacism’. While these studies predate important developments including the South’s secession, they make useful contributions by making clear that Sudanese ‘identity has been moved from the realm of selfhood to the politically contested stage of national symbolism’ and where it informs power and wealth hierarchies.

Ibrahim Ahmed, and the Khartoum dominated women activism movement.\textsuperscript{87} While historically the ‘Sudanese women’s movement is dominated by well-educated women in Khartoum’, sole focus on this movement has occurred at the expense of understandings of women’s experiences and issues on the peripheries and perpetuated the marginalization of the activism and politicism of those outside of the capital.\textsuperscript{88} This thesis seeks to redress this imbalance by illuminating the revolutionary role of women across Sudan and the impact this had on nation-building.

\textbf{Protests, Collective Action and Crowd Psychology}

As Reicher argued in 1996, the crowd is a ‘privileged arena for studying social and psychological processes’, including identity formation and change.\textsuperscript{89} Scholars have studied crowd psychology since the late 19\textsuperscript{th} century, most controversially with Gustave Le Bon’s \textit{The Crowd} (1896) which called for the study of crowd mentality, arguing that ‘the memorable events of history are the visible effects of the invisible changes of human thought’.\textsuperscript{90} He asserted that a transformation took place in every individual who participated in a crowd as ‘whoever be the individuals that compose it, however like or unlike be their mode of life, their occupations, their character, or their intelligence, the fact that they have been transformed into a crowd puts them in possession of a sort of collective mind which makes them feel, think, and act in a manner quite different from that in which each individual of them would feel, think, and act were he in a state of isolation’.\textsuperscript{91} In short, Le Bon believed that crowd participants lost

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item For more on the history of women’s activism see Balghis Badri (2006), Leah Sherwood (2012), Asma Abdel Halim (2009).
\item Ibid.,
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\end{footnotesize}
their individuality upon entering the crowd and were overcome by a new, singular, crowd mentality that was inherently inferior and barbaric.

The power of crowds will be looked at in the Sudanese context, with particular focus on transformative crowd activity at the sit-ins. However, far from inherently violent or barbaric as Le Bon suggests, it will be shown that these revolutionary crowds were spaces wherein people learned about different Sudanese cultures, customs, histories and struggles in a way that left them with a more holistic understanding of the country and its people. Le Bon’s belief that crowds are ‘incapable both of reflection and of reasoning’, will be countered by showing that sit-ins had an illuminating impact on visitors, for example providing informal educational experiences through awareness campaigns about the historical and contemporary conditions of Sudan’s peripheral regions for the first time. While Le Bon depicted the crowd as an irrational force to justify its violent suppression by the state, it will be shown that by bringing Sudan’s diverse peoples together and providing them with an organic opportunity to work alongside one another, individuals were made (even if temporarily) more tolerant and left with a broader conception of Sudaneseness than when they entered the crowd.

Rejecting the ‘irrationality and destructiveness’ of crowds, scholars including Drury and Reicher have instead argued that crowds are capable of creating and developing new social meanings. Challenging Le Bon, they posit that individuals ‘in crowds … shift from behaving in terms of disparate individual identities to behaving in terms of a common social identity’, social identity here being conceptualized as the way in which people understand how they are positioned relative to others. Critically this study posits that crowd action can cause ‘not only a change in the content of identity (who we are) but also changes the content of the collective

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self may mean changes in its boundaries – who counts as in group and who counts as outgroup’ which has been the case in Sudan.94

This thesis reveals noticeable deficit in scholarly attention paid to nonviolent rebellion in both Africa (which Naimark-Rowse has pointed out is particularly disappointing given one third of nonviolent campaigns between 1945 and 2006 took place here) and Sudan. Although, in the wake of the Arab spring, substantial literature was produced on protest in the Middle East and North Africa, scholars such as Jazayeri (2016) mention Sudan only fleetingly.95 This is especially surprising given Jazayeri focused on uprisings which targeted governments that visibly manipulated tribal, religious and ethnic identities, of which Sudan provides one of the clearest examples on the continent. This is symptomatic of broader exclusion of Sudanese revolutions from studies of regional non-violent action, which is remarkable given the 1964 peaceful popular overthrow of General Aboud was the first of its kind in Africa.

Sudan-specific literature on protest is equally limited. Sudanese scholars Hassan (1967), El Affendi (2012) and El Seddon (1985) have written on the 1964 and 1985 revolutions, outlining how they speedily deposed military dictatorships.96 While they claim that these revolutions were ‘national’, they pay little attention to protesters shifting conceptions of the nation and the relationship between the revolution in the centre and the peripheries, with non-elite actors remaining invisible in these accounts. Whilst in Khartoum, as El Effendi has argued, the revolution (briefly) brought people together from ‘every class, ethnicity and neighbourhood’, as W.J. Berridge has more recently (2015) shown, those outside of Khartoum

94 Brady Wagoner, Jaan Valsiner, and Fathali Mogghaddam. “Towards a Psychology of Revolution.” In From Rage to Revolution. (Denmark: Aalborg University, 2018); 17.
95 Scholars continue to study the relationship between protests and communal identities. For example, Francesca Polleta and James Jasper noted the power of social movements to attract participants even ‘in the absence of prior identities and networks’ as was undoubtedly the case in historically divided Sudan (93);
96 These revolutions were much shorter than the contemporary uprising, lasting less than a fortnight in both cases.
played a minimal and secondary role, limiting the opportunity for any organic national re-
identification. 97

Lastly, this thesis seeks to problematize two conclusions drawn by long-time Sudan
specialist Alex De Waal. De Waal characterized Sudanese collective action as ‘bifurcated into
non-violent civil mobilization in the central part of the country and violent insurrection in the
peripheries’. 98 In reality, not only has the current revolution on the peripheries been remarkably
organized and peaceful, but this dichotomy suggests that those outside the capital are
intrinsically more violent and incapable of rational organization, as opposed to recognizing as
Jazayeri has, the historical exclusion from power of such regions. In fact, although desperately
under-researched, Sudan’s peripheries have a long history of nonviolent resistance and
organization that has been overshadowed by the conflicts which have taken root in these areas.

Amir Idris argues that in regions such as Darfur, there were repeated attempts by both
elite and non-elite actors to peacefully protest their exclusion, forming bodies such as the Front
for the Renaissance of Darfur. 99 Jok has similarly shown how the Nuba people attempted
peaceful organization, establishing groups such as the Kwomo movement to protect their
cultural and political identity. 100 In both cases, Khartoum governments have responded to
concerns about marginalization with military force. Further undermining De Waal’s division,
the Nubian people of Sudan’s northern periphery have never resorted to armed resistance,
choosing peaceful protest instead, such as during the construction of the Aswan Dam that

97 Abdelwahab El-Affendi, “Revolutionary Anatomy: the Lessons of the Sudanese Revolutions of October
https://doi.org/10.1080/17550912.2012.662614. 300 ; Berridge has also shown how the government attempted
to blame immigrants from Sudan’s peripheries for the protests, and rounded up thousands from these groups,
taking them to holding camps outside of Khartoum and subjecting them to summary trials; W.J. Berridge, Civil

98 Alex De Waal, “Sudan’s Elusive Democratisation: Civic Mobilisation, Provincial Rebellion and Chameleon

100 Similar organizations were established in the Nuba Mountains such as the Kwomo movement.
flooded the Wadi Halfa area in 1972. It is critical not to implicitly support the central government’s narrative that, on account of their race, those on the periphery are trouble makers.

Moreover, De Waal dismissed the potential for a third Sudanese uprising on the basis that ‘today’s demonstrators may possess cellphones and Twitter feeds but they do not have a fraction of (the) organizational capability (of earlier Sudanese uprisings).’\textsuperscript{101} It will be shown that De Waal underestimated this generation, which was able to use these channels to organize an unprecedentedly large and methodical revolution. De Waal was unable to foresee how in 2019, lacking any formal human rights education, the Sudanese people might unite in pursuit of a more fair and equitable society, in a way that makes the potential impact of this revolution far greater than that of 1964 or 1985. Like Hale and Kadoda, who surveyed the changing nature of political activism in Sudan but focused almost singularly on activism in the capital, he underestimated the breadth of Sudanese activism, and of this generation’s readiness across Sudan to take to the streets in the name of freedom, peace and justice.\textsuperscript{102}

### Research Design & Methodology

#### Location

This study focuses on the protests and sit-ins in the four locations of Nyala (Darfur), Kadugli (the Nuba Mountains), Atbara and Khartoum. Hotbeds of resistance since December 19th/20th 2019 these regions are geographically and ethnically distinct enough to allow for comparisons between regions and peoples. While Atbara and Khartoum are part of the historically advantaged riverain core, the more ethnically ‘African’ Darfur and Nuba people


\textsuperscript{102}Hale and Kadoda, ‘The Changing nature of political activism in Sudan: Women and youth ‘activists’ as catalysts in civil society’, 72.; They trace the rise of this dissident movement and draw parallels between campaigns in Egypt, such as the 2011 ‘we are all Khalid Saeed’ campaign and those in Khartoum such as the 2013 ‘we are all Salah Sanhouri campaign’.
are undeniably among the most marginalized and brutalized in Sudan. These locations allowed the study to investigate both the ways in which, within the human rights state, central Sudanese protesters are rejecting or transforming the official Arab-Islamic nationhood as well as how the sense of belonging and relationship to the Sudanese center has changed for those on the peripheries. As nation-building involves, as Gellner argued, a reciprocal imagining of community, and particularly given the Sudanese history of one-sided nationhoods, it is critical that this study examines the impact and breadth of this new nationhood by investigating different group perceptions of one another.

Nature of Research

This is an ethnographic study, informed by interviews, visual evidence and documentation of the protests and sit-ins as spaces. The strength of the study lies in my unique first-hand experience of the protests and the sit-ins and my ability to access protesters and record their stories, experiences and thoughts on identity as the revolution unfolded. I was in Sudan throughout the revolution, including its start in December 2018 as well as the critical months of April, May and August 2019. I immersed myself in the sit-in on a daily basis, experiencing all that the space had to offer, from the nightly lectures, to the socialization of protesters gathered around tea women sharing stories, to the murals of the sit-ins walls and the sharing of revolutionary music. This research was very much born out of this experience. Witnessing, for the first time in my life, the creation of a space wherein people of different groups relied on and supported one another, led me to my research question which investigates the impact of these experiences on senses of identity.

Being present at the sit-in was critical to this research as I was able to experience first-hand the transformative feeling that fellow protesters tried to articulate to me, and for which perhaps there are no words in the English dictionary to accurately describe. I immersed myself
in the revolution both before Al Bashir was overthrown and as the revolution came up against new and unexpected challenges, and was able to interact with protesters at each stage. Visiting the previously blockaded Nuba Mountains as well as Darfur provided me the unique opportunity to illuminate the voices of those long marginalized by Sudanese discourse and studies. Moreover attending protests in both London and New York as well as Khartoum, I was able to engage with the Sudanese diaspora in a way that also provided me with a more holistic understanding of the revolution’s multifaceted nature.

Given that this study seeks to make a critical theoretical intervention with regards to the conventional top-down approach to nationhood and human rights, it will instead foreground non-elite and non-western actors. In order to do so it takes a bottom-up methodological approach, relying heavily on qualitative data as I surveyed not only how different groups protested, but also the ways in which protesting made them feel about themselves in relation to others within Sudan.

I conducted in-depth semi-structured interviews with people who partook in protests in the four aforementioned regions. I spoke to 20 protesters in Khartoum and 10 in each of the outlying regions, dividing my research into ‘Khartoum’ and ‘Outer Khartoum’. This study focuses disproportionately on Khartoum because it is Khartoum-centric power structures that have repeatedly refused to endorse more inclusive national identities, and it is where mindsets must primarily change if Sudan is to maintain the inclusive nationhood engendered by the human rights state. Utilizing the strong kinship networks across Sudan allowed me a level of access to and legitimacy in the eyes of protesters which facilitated candid and in-depth conversations. While I used snowball sampling, pre-arranging meetings through existing contacts and their connections to people in different regional and ethnic groups, time constraints in the Nuba Mountains and Darfur led me to conduct group interviews which, although providing me with interesting insight into group dynamics, on occasion detracted
from the detail provided by individual interviews. The data from these interviews was then critically analysed and organized under the identity themes which emerged.

As with any research, my positionality, as an Anglo-Sudanese young woman raised in Khartoum, undoubtedly affected the study. It was my personal desire to learn about the (oft-ignored) social changes yielded by the protests, that propelled this work. Yet, far from a biased desire to characterize the revolution as a success, being Sudanese provided me with local understanding of the depths of racism, sexism and classism within Sudanese society that any inclusive nationhood would need to overcome. Less obvious to the Western gaze, which often fails to acknowledge racisms that are not literally black and white, having been on the ground for much of the revolution, I am acutely conscious of both the positive and ugly sides to the uprising.

Any concern that my gender, along with the elite western institution this research was done on behalf of, might have discouraged protesters from engaging with me, quickly dissipated, as I found protesters to be extremely willing to share their stories of the revolution, there being a prevalent anxiety that evidence would be lost and memories forgotten particularly following the break-up of the sit ins on June 3rd.

Non-conventional human rights evidence

When physically unable to be in Sudan, I remained occupied with the revolution, spending on average six hours a day submerged in the critical social media side of this revolution, viewing artwork, discussions and updates through platforms such as twitter, Instagram and Facebook live videos. With many friends and family on the ground, several living at the sit-in, Whatsapp was a critical medium (encrypted so as to make it safe from the

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103 I predominantly followed the accounts of journalist Yousra Elbagir, and Sudanese Instagram accounts BsonBlast, Mona Bashir, EhabtheBeast, as well as revolutionary update pages Sudanese Uprising, Sudan Revolution Daily.
government) through which I received daily updates, predominantly in the form of video footage. In many ways this revolution was predominantly organized using social media and technology, and I was exposed daily to news reports, television programs and ongoing conversations with family and friends in Sudan about the progress of the revolution.

While these interviews provide a cross-section of protesters experiences, the sample remains small and selective, not including non-protesters for example, and thus while indicative of changing attitudes, not necessarily a definitive indication of state-wide perspectives. Moreover, as many of the interviews were conducted in the aftermath of the establishment of the civilian-military government the interviews must be approached as retrospective reflections on occurrences which took place over several months. To combat these limitations, the interviews will be buttressed by other sources, and in particular revolutionary art produced by protesters in each region, which will be used as evidence for a visual political analysis of representations of the new-nationhood.

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This study will help to fill the academic void surrounding Sudanese revolutions and to compensate for both the strict local media censorship and its Khartoum-centeredness, which has precluded the systematic recording of other protesters experiences, jeopardizing their historical memory. Given that the conventional human rights framework, along with scholarship on Sudanese nationhood, has taken a top-down approach, this research aims to examine grassroots communal identity formation through human-rights-evoking protest. In assessing evidence for the emergence of an inclusive nation, the relationship between nationalism, revolutions and human rights will be explored both within Khartoum (Part Two) and outside of the capital (Part 3).

Joseph Massad has argued that many postcolonial contexts experience a moment of ‘internal implosion’ which is ‘characterized by civil war or revolution calling for an identarian
redefinition of the nation-state itself or for secession from it'.

104 It will be shown that this moment is undoubtedly unfolding in Sudan, where, it will be argued, a revolution in pursuit of common human rights has brought the people together into a new Sudanese nationalism which rejects the national identity forced upon the people by unrepresentative dictatorships. Given this genesis, post-liberation, this nationalism seeks to redefine the status quo by engendering a nation that embodies the equality and inclusivity fundamental to human rights.

Yet, this study does not claim that this newly inclusive Sudanese nationhood will necessarily translate into newly inclusive governments or that it will permanently heal the trauma of the Sudanese peripheries. It is too soon to tell. This study simply seeks to record the unity felt by protesters within the revolutionary human rights state during this moment in time, and demonstrate the ways in which the shared values and experience of revolution has, even if only temporarily, altered protester’s individual and group identities, and in this process, the boundaries and imaginings of the Sudanese nation too.

Part 2 The Revolution in Khartoum

“The December 2018 Revolution came as the crowning glory to an arduous national struggle that started on the day of the anti-democratic coup of 30th June 1989; a struggle that our people from all across the country fought against the former regime. Our people deserve to feel proud that they neither gave up, nor did they wave the white flag of submission. Rather, they continued to fight for the cause until, in December (2018), light shone through and the darkness lifted.” Mohamed Naji Al Assam, Spokesperson for the Forces of Freedom and Change, Speaking at the Power-Sharing Ceremony of August 21st 2019

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Chapter 3. Protesting in the Capital

Encouraged by protests outside of the capital, the revolution in Khartoum began on December 21st 2018. Initially these protests were relatively local and spontaneous, largely organized by university students and youth groups through social media. Most often, these protests were spatially confined to neighbourhoods, rarely managing to venture beyond their origin point before being violently dispersed by the infamous National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) and riot police. Unplanned protests were a recurrent feature of the revolution in Khartoum, responding to events on the ground. For example, following the murder of 27-year-old Dr. Babiker Salama in January, who was reportedly killed during a demonstration as he, with his hands held high, pleaded with the soldiers to evacuate the wounded, protests were triggered both outside his home and across the city.

105 Khartoum is Sudan’s premier city, with an estimated population of 4.3 million people (approximately ¼ of the state’s urban population) and being 8 x larger than the second largest city Nyala. The composition of Khartoum has shifted over the past three decades, due largely to the large influx of internally displaced people produced by the state’s civil wars and conflicts, with one 2008 report estimating between 1.3-1.7 million IDPs in Khartoum. ; “Sudan: Issues in Urban Development Phase 1 – Overview of the Urban Landscape. Report No. 63785.http://documents.worldbank.org/curated/en/231021468119365554/pdf/637850ESWOP1130Phase010FINALREPORT.pdf

106 Sudan’s National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) was given an extensive mandate by the National Security Acts of 1999 and 2010 including the power to detain individuals without a warrant for up to 45 days, granting it impunity to act without judicial oversight or accountability, in violation of international laws on arbitrary arrest and detention.
While protesters in Khartoum were unanimously peaceful, they frequently risked detention, injury and death. Indeed, according to the Central Committee of Sudan’s doctors association, over 246 protesters were murdered and 1300 activists injured, including several of my interviewees.\textsuperscript{107} The government’s attempt to mask these atrocities by banning social media (December 21\textsuperscript{st}) proved futile as evidence quickly spread detailing, for example, the torture of protesters in ‘ghost houses’.\textsuperscript{108} Footage, spread via social media, exposed the brutality of the regime, which was caught shooting tear gas into hospitals, dragging students out of universities, whipping protesters, shaving women’s heads and running down innocent children in the streets.

Just as Gregg argued that the human rights state is ‘guided by certain rules’, nonviolent protest became a central tenet of protest, as demonstrators chanted ‘Silmiya’ (Peacefully) alongside ‘Tasgot Bas’ (Just Fall).\textsuperscript{109} Under the leadership of the Sudanese Professionals Association, the revolution became increasingly organized, with strikes and weekly protests becoming a new norm in Khartoum. Typically, for example, starting after Friday prayers, protesters would inconspicuously gather at an agreed destination.\textsuperscript{110} Following a signal, often woman’s ululation, protesters would converge, forming a revolutionary crowd and begin chanting. When the security services inevitably arrived and began to fire tear gas, or live ammunition, into the crowd, protesters would flee in different directions, frequently being hidden in stranger’s homes throughout the neighbourhood.

\textbf{A Revolutionary Space: The Sit-In}

\textsuperscript{109} Gregg, \textit{The Human Rights State: Justice Within and Beyond Sovereign Nations}, 15.
\textsuperscript{110} While towards the start of the revolution these marches were largely planned by neighbourhood resistances committees, over the course of the revolution the SPA provided strategic direction, streamlining these demonstrations and maximizing their impact.
The events of April 6th changed the nature of protest in the capital. Commemorating the 1985 revolution, a million-man march was called by the SPA, with protesters directed to march on the core of Al Bashir’s regime, the Presidential Palace and the Nation’s Military Headquarters. Not only was the turnout far greater than anticipated, with droves of protesters flooding the streets and bringing the capital to a halt, but unprecedentedly, once occupying the streets around the Sudanese military complex, a sit-in was formed that would last until June 3rd 2019.111

Figure 2 Map of the Sit-In, Human Rights Watch (June 19th 2019)112

111 This was the first sit-in of this scale in Sudanese history with no comparable occurrences taking place in the 1964 or 1985 revolutions.

Located in downtown Khartoum, the heart of the capital, the military headquarters was an important symbolic and strategic choice. This complex, comprised of three expensive looking buildings shaped like an airplane (the air-forces), a ship (the navy) and a tank (the land forces), along with the nearby police club, symbolized the powers used by Al Bashir’s regime to brutalize and repress the people. In seizing this space, protesters brought the city to a halt and placed incredible pressure on the military (who were visibly surrounded) to side with the people, which is exactly what happened.

This visible manifestation of mass revolutionary discontent undoubtedly encouraged those within Al Bashir’s regime to acknowledge the severity of the situation and many within the military to abandon their positions, risking the death penalty by protecting protesters following April 6th. Continued occupation of this space also meant that protesters could more easily unite to oppose developments such as the short-lived appointment (30 hours) to the presidency of Al Bashir’s (equally complicit) usurper, Vice President Awad Ibn Naouf. The fact that the sit-in was maintained despite fatal sniper attacks (documented on social media) by government forces in its first few days, starkly contrasted the peacefulness of protesters with the bloodiness of the regime.

The sit-in was cordoned off several layers of home-made barricades, constructed of bricks removed from nearby pavements and other scrap materials. Volunteers wearing hi-viz vests guarded each entrance in shifts, convivially singing ‘Arf3a Yadak Fawg, Al Taftish Bel Zog’ (Lift your hands up, our search is respectful) as they searched each individual.

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113 The sit-in sat north of the airport and was nestled between the neighbourhoods of Haiel Matar (east) and Burri (West) the latter of which in particular experienced frequent protests.

114 Protesters symbolically hung the uniforms of military officers who abandoned their positions to protect them, with sit-in visitors frequently taking selfies with officers, indicative of a sense of reconciliation between the military and the people.

115 When it was announced that Vice President Awad Ibn Naouf would be the new President, sworn into office soon after this announcement, protesters took to the streets en masse demanding a transfer of power to civilians causing Ibn Naouf to resign only 30 hours into his presidency.

116 One evening, even the Oreos I carried into the sit-in were checked, with searchers explaining that spoiled products could make people sick.
Even outside of the multiple check points, it was quickly clear that sit-in was both a physical space and an experience. Protesters could be seen draped in flags, chanting and carrying supplies. Those in cars flew flags out of their windows or stuck their hands out in ‘peace’ signs, signalling to other protesters their revolutionary connection. What was immediately visible, and maintained the case across my experiences of the sit-in between April and June 2019, was the ways in which the space, and the revolution it embodied, brought together Sudanese from all walks of life. The sit-in was inhabited by infants and the elderly, by women and men, by poor people and rich, by people from every ethnic background and from across both Khartoum and Sudan. Coptic Christians mixed with central Sudanese Muslims, Sufi processions were cheered on by Western animists. The sit-in was a melting pot which embraced those who visited it and did not distinguish between those who had protested since December 2018 and those who had just joined in the revolutionary moment. In this way the sit-in was a point of convergence for the human rights state formed over several months of protest and held within its boundaries those ‘united in promoting human rights’.

On April 20th, I came across artists who had begun painting the walls of the sit in which stood directly opposite the police club entrance. As will be discussed, over its course, art became a central element at the sit-in, one that no visitor could possibly avoid engaging with. This street art was not simply an ‘aesthetic product’ of resistance, but it performed resistance in its own right. While in the first few days of the sit-in wall-art was created by artists, art soon became a communal activity in which non-artists could share, coming together to more amateurly paint the walls and streets of the sit-in with revolutionary images, messages and motifs, as seen in Figure 2. These surfaces became platforms through which protesters communicated their frustrations, aspirations, and conceptions of self and nation.

117 Gregg, The Human Rights State: Justice Within and Beyond Sovereign Nations, 14.
The sit-in teemed with art. Revolutionary Music, such as Ayman Mao’s anthem ‘Dam’ (Blood) was blasted from speakers across the sit-in and there were often live performances by artists like Mao and Abu Araki Albakheet. Music was most frequently experienced at the sit-in in the form of protest chants and songs which were reflexively adapted as the revolution unfolded. Formerly unbeknownst old patriotic Sudanese songs were revived by the (largely) young protest crowd. There were permanently protesters stood atop the central overpass, using its metal frame as drums, and providing the whole sit-in with a constant rhythmic pulse. Visitors at the sit in were drawn into song, creating repeated experiences of simultaneity with strangers which heightened senses of solidarity and fraternity. The shared experience of this singing created an image and feeling of ‘uni-sonance’ that reverberated throughout the sit-in.119

It was such experiences of unanimity, within the human rights state, that encouraged protesters to challenge the artificial identarian divides which had foreclosed such connections prior to the revolution.

In April, these chants largely targeted Al Bashir and his regime, for example mocking his infamous tendency to dance at political rallies by chanting ‘Talateen Sana Targoos, Alela Rasagna’ meaning ‘For thirty years you danced, today its our dance’. Protesters both aimed at the divisive Muslim Brotherhood regime and affirmed the people’s power, chanting ‘Aya Koz, Nadoosoo Dos, Ma Bna Khaf, Ma Bna Khaf, Ma Bna Khaf’, or ‘Any Muslim Brother, we will push you out, we aren’t afraid, we aren’t afraid, we aren’t afraid’. Unfortunately, such chants do not translate well into English, the power of their rhyme and rhythm lost in the process.

Other chants were more ominous, such as ‘Al Dam Gosad Al Dam, Ma Hanagbil Al Diya’, meaning ‘Blood for Blood, we won’t be paid off’, which, swept up in the shared revolutionary moment I often found myself chanting. Chant circles brought strangers together for repeated shared and empowering experiences, with unfamiliar onlookers able to participate by interjecting ‘Tagot Bas’ (just fall) between each line of the revolutionary song, making it a collaborative experience. Indeed, chant circles frequently drew in such large crowds that new chants would have to be started in different sections in order for people to be able to hear and remain connected.
The sit in was at once the site of much violence (both in early April and during the massacre of June 3rd) but also joy. In the evenings I frequently witnessed the crowd turning on their mobile phone flashlights while singing en-masse the (originally football) anthem ‘Fawg
Fawg Sudana Fawg’ (Up Up, Our Sudan, Up) or the national anthem. Families visited the sit-in, parents bringing their children to experience the revolutionary moment. From face painting (often of the national flag) and food vendors to live concerts, the sit-in often felt more like a festival or ‘theme park’ celebrating a new era of freedom than a strictly political space. But perhaps this type of public fun was, in and of itself, revolutionary. Al Bashir had long policed Sudanese gatherings, using for example the Public Order Act (1996) to restrict music at public and private parties. In a country with very few public spaces, and fewer still opportunities for fun, the sit-in became the revolution’s Tianamen or Tahrir, but also a space for communal celebration of the victories, both big and small of the revolution. I will never forget the image of protesters at the sit-in, in the run up to Al Bashir’s ousting, gathered in their thousands

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120 Salma Omar (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
121 For example on the day of Ibn Naouf’s overthrow (April 13th) protesters danced in the street/atop cars, embraced each other in congratulatory hugs and sang revolutionary songs en-masse.
around a large donated TV screen, watching Barcelona and Man United play football a world away.

The sit-in was remarkably organized, becoming a city within a city. There were areas for sleep, with basic provisions available to those spending the night. There were areas dedicated to education, from reading corners to avenues lined with civil society organization’s tents, with everyone from women’s emancipation groups to Southern Sudanese cooperation groups represented. Medical tents were erected, and volunteer doctors provided medical care not only for injured protests, but for any Sudanese person (access to medicine across the country is extremely poor), demonstrating the communal spirit of the sit-in. In keeping with this self-sufficient spirit, dentist clinics and informal hairdressers were set up. The sit-in bridged class divides by bringing together the ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’, with food and water provided to those who needed it by both private individuals and corporations. Although the sit-in was run by volunteers, who ran security, cleanings and resource distributions, a sense of
collective responsibility for all those within the sit-in existed which I repeatedly witnessed, for example when a homeless boy collapsed and protesters rushed to take care of him. In this way, the human rights state, as seen at the sit-in, constructed the type of society which it wished to create across Sudan, one founded upon equality and shared responsibility.¹²²

Within the sit-in, one could engage with the revolution by joining discussion groups, organized throughout the sit-in to discuss critical developments of the revolution and societal issues such as sexual harassment and domestic abuse. One could sing, dance or paint the revolution. One could gather around tea ladies, with friends and strangers alike, to debate and discuss. Debate and disagreement were welcomed. One could break their Ramadan fast with strangers at the sit-in. One could watch, or join, processions, which often memorialized

¹²² It should be noted that particularly during May and June, protesters had to maintain the sit-in and demonstrate in temperatures reaching 47 degrees Celsius.
martyrs, represented trade unions or marginalized groups. One could sleep over, joining the night shift of ‘Sawar Al Lel’ (Revolutionaries of the night). The protesters I encountered at the sit-in were eager to tell their stories and explain how at the sit-in they ‘lived in freedom in Sudan for two months’.\textsuperscript{123}

The sit-in embodied the human-rights state across Sudan and, as the following chapters will show, created a platform upon which the Sudanese people could be brought together, creating a common space for the discussion of issues pertaining to human rights, but also for activists to practice human rights among themselves, providing a shared experience and a utopian model which encouraged egalitarian reimaginations of the nation.

\begin{figure}[h]
\centering
\includegraphics[width=\textwidth]{protesters_collect_food.png}
\caption{Protesters collect food to break their fast. Original Photograph. May 29\textsuperscript{th} 2019.}
\end{figure}

\textsuperscript{123} Protesters names have been changed for the purpose of protecting their privacy; Omnia Hassan (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
Chapter 4. The Sit-In and Ethnic and Religious Pluralism

By bringing protesters together in pursuit of common rights, protester testimony and visual evidence suggest that the sit-in encouraged a shift in Khartoum protester’s attitudes towards marginalized ethnic/regional groups and, thus, their conception of the Sudanese nation, which increasingly came to mirror the equality seen at the sit-in and across the human rights state.

Awareness, Darfur and the Nuba Mountains

Racism in Sudan is often associated with governmental genocide and violence when in reality racism exists among much of the Sudanese population, present for example in the ‘unprintable slurs for Sudanese of non-Arab stock, all reflective of semi-concealed prejudice’ discussed by Mansour Khalid.124

This racism historically manifested itself in the disinterest of those in Sudan’s center with the more phenotypically African peoples on peripheries. For example, while the Darfur genocide was an international cause celebre, many protesters in Khartoum admitted to having been apathetic to these atrocities and peoples. Protesters’ conceptions of the nation were narrow, with many such as Salma Omer explaining that Khartoum dwellers ‘never cared about anything outside of Khartoum, outside of Atbara. Maybe as far as El Obeid, but anything West or South of that we just wouldn’t care…we knew about this but we were turning a blind eye’.125

Far from the current championing of Darfuri rights, Salma distanced herself from the Darfuri struggle, insisting in conversations with foreigners not to ‘worry about them, we’re in Khartoum and we’re fine’ while others including Ahmed admitted to lacking the interest to

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125 Salma Omar (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
‘follow up or read the news on what’s happening. I blame myself for not actively seeking out (information)’. 126

While government propaganda and censorship limited understandings of the peoples, places and problems outside of Khartoum, with Mohamed arguing that ‘I knew that there were militias in Darfur that wanted to govern but I didn’t know about the massacres, that people were killed, burned, that children were dying. We had a completely different image’ protesters with access to foreign information nonetheless cited a lack of awareness about the atrocities, pointing to the depth of disconnection with which any new nationhood must contend. Yasmin Tariq for example, lamented that ‘300,000 people were killed in Darfur and none of us realised it until right now during the protests. I mean, I was one of the people that had never read about Darfur in my entire life’. 127

Crucially, starting with the nation-wide chant ‘You Arrogant Racist, We are all Darfur’ (Ya Ansoory Wa Maghroor, Kol Al Balad Darfur), adopted in January following the imprisonment of 32 Darfuri students, the human rights state began to address these gaps. 128 This chant not only chastised the government’s racism, but countered historical division by popular identification with Darfur, laying the foundation for a more holistic conception of Sudaneseness. Whereas ‘in the past when Darfur had issues, the echo in Khartoum was very small’, as activist Nazar Daoud explained, Darfur and the legacy of human rights abuses in this region were brought by those in Khartoum both into the national discourse and the attention of the human rights state. 129

126 Salma Omar, Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019; Ahmed ElNijab (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
127 Yasmin Tariq (Khartoum protestor) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
129 Nazar Daoud ((Khartoum protestor) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
By uniting activist in pursuit of human rights, the revolution provided central-Sudanese Khartoum protesters with protracted exposure to marginalized peoples (at protests, the sit-in and social media platforms), making visible the hidden legacy of human rights violations outside of Khartoum. Indeed while Mohamed learned ‘things we didn’t know about or …knew but according to the perspective the government wanted us to have’ by sitting with Darfuris, for the first time, at the sit in, Rula Ibrahim heard about ‘what happened in Darfur’ from a ‘procession of Nuba’ people, whose account left her ‘amazed, shocked and crying, questioning how we didn’t know about this’.130

In keeping with Reicher’s argument that crowd action *can* create and develop new social meanings, contact within the human rights state better informed Khartoum protesters not only of the legacy of human rights abuses in marginalized regions but also of Sudan’s diversity, leading them to challenge the government’s version of national identity as well as their own self-held conceptions and behaviours. As is typical of the human-rights state, such exposure encouraged protesters such as Mohamed to recognize other members’ rights, joining Darfuri ‘protests within the sit-in because I wanted to oppose what people thought about different ethnicities coming together (and) I wanted to show that the struggles they went through are also my struggles…we might have different languages and religions but we are united by the fact that we’re all Sudanese’.131 Herein lies the relationship between nationalism and human rights, with contact across the human-rights state encouraging protesters to protect one another and, as a consequence of this unity, to push back against the exclusive boundaries of official national identity.

There was a focus within the human rights state, embodied by the sit-in, on bridging regional disconnects through spreading awareness, from formal speeches and lectures, to tents

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130 Rula Ibrahim (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
131 Mohamed Eltayeb (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
run by marginalized revolution groups (such as the Darfur Revolution Front or the Marginal
Alliances, who presented photo evidence of historic atrocities). Le Bon argues that ‘by the
mere fact that he forms part of an organized crowd, a man descends several rungs in the ladder
of civilization’, the experience behind the barricades in Khartoum suggested that exposing
people to different backgrounds and cultures for the first time encouraged a newly inclusive
consciousness. Awareness also came through socialization, as Ahmed ElNijab explained
‘Some people made a job of it, to spread awareness by going around different tea lady stalls.
They’d come and sit with you and chant and they’d have something new to say each day.
History, current events, basically everything…Every day you learnt something new’.133

The consciousness revolution made space for conversations about human rights and
made clear to those in Khartoum that their historic inaction made them complicit in the
marginalization of their counterparts on the peripheries. These conversations extended to social
media, where Khartoum protesters tweeted #WeareallDarfur and circulated ‘I am the Sudan
Revolution’ videos which flashed through close-up portraits of hundreds of protesters,
highlighting their different appearances but their common Sudaneseness (via the revolution).134
Such campaigns are indicative of the ways in which contact across the human rights state
engendered a nationalism conceived of as an antidote to the divisive racism of the old-order.

It is important to acknowledge that notions of shared responsibility and inclusive
Sudaneseness were also as a consequence of the violence experienced in Khartoum throughout
the revolution. Indeed, many protesters expressed that this violence made comprehensible the
historical Darfuri/Nuba Mountains/ Blue Nile experiences. Ali, for example, explained that the

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132 Nazar Daoud (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
133 Ahmed ElNijab (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019
134 Sudanese protesters used platforms including twitter to discuss their historical distance from the Darfuri
plight. For example @leenparpamouns tweeted (June 10th 2019), ‘We are all Darfur, For 16 years we did ignore,
massacres outside our door, but silent we’ll be no more, their blood my blood and yours ashamed of what
happened before, eyes on Darfur means more for we are all Darfur. There are years of wrong to be righted. This
is the bare minimum we owe’.
June 3rd massacre in Khartoum ‘made it very clear (that) what happened in Darfur was really true’ with protesters left shocked ‘as people began to realize that they did this here in the centre, with all the media…with the internet, and the NGO HQs and embassies…if they can do it here then what are they capable of doing over there? 135

Contact across the human rights state heightened awareness of different Sudanese cultures too. For example, at the sit in, which Mohamed described as a ‘learning process’, protesters ‘from Western Sudan had come together to make food that Northerners don’t usually eat, so I was able to try them and we used to come together and hear about stories from Darfur. Then I’d meet people from Atbara, Al Darushab and everyone was speaking. We all used to sleep next to each other, no divisions. People from Al Gazeera, the Arabs, the westerners, those from Halfa, all of us together” adding “this is the true Sudan, this is what it’s supposed to look like. This is what the new Sudan will be like”.136 Just as Mamdani has argued that Tahrir square came to ‘symbolise the basis for a new unity’, there was a repeated insistence among protesters that the new nation would model itself upon the unity of the sit-in and the human rights state it represented.137

Contact across the human rights state at the Khartoum sit-in caused protesters to re-evaluate their biased understandings of Sudaneseness in a way that has allowed for the promotion of a more inclusive nationhood in its place. For example, Salma recalled getting offered a ride home by a stranger at the sit in. The very fact that prior ‘I would have never gotten into a car with a stranger…but I got in as if he was a long-time friend’ points to the safety felt within the human rights state.138 Salma described noticing that the driver’s keys were decorated with a Christian Cross and asked him why this was. When he explained that he was

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135 Ali Nazar Daoud (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
136 Mohamed Eltayeb (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
138 Salma Omar, Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
a Christian, Salma recounted how “I said what, you’re Sudanese how are you Christian? And he asked me if I’d heard of the Nuba Mountains. When I responded ‘yeah the area where the war is’, he said ‘Shame on you! That’s all you know about Nuba. He started to tell me about how beautiful the Nuba mountains were, and told me that a big chunk of people are Christians there. I told him he must be kidding, that the only Christians in Sudan were in the South, because that’s how it had always been in my head”.139

Demonstrating the internalization of the colonial dichotomy, Salma confessed to once believing that ‘The South are Christians and anyone North are Muslims’.140 She continued, ‘he told me that I was wrong and explained that he and his family were mixed. He told me that he fasts Ramadan with his cousins but they also celebrate Christmas together…I’m not trying to be all romantic about the sit-in but…if it weren’t for the sit in I don’t think I’d ever know that’.141 For protesters like Salma then, the sit-in was a space in which the nuances and complexities of Sudanese identity, long refuted by the regime, were brought to light. That said, the breaking down of the social barriers remain a slow process, with Salma for example admitting that although increasingly open to these possibilities was still not “100% okay” with the idea of marrying someone from the Nuba Mountains.142

Gradually improved understandings of Sudaneseness were not limited to discussion of the present, with the human rights state providing a unique opportunity for many ‘learn to learn…unwritten political history’ for the first time, as protester Amir Malak put it.143 As the state infamously neglected pre-Islamic history in favour of the Mahdiya, this exposure led protesters to complain that ‘we were never taught about the history of Kandakas, the Nubas and the great history of Sudan’ as understandings of the breadth of Sudan’s rich history were

139 Salma Omar (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
140 Ibid.,
141 Ibid.,
142 Ibid.,
143 Amir Malak (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
heightened. Undermining the hold of the African-Arab or North-South divide, historical erasure was not limited to Africanized histories, but even those in Northernmost Sudan, with Mohamed complaining of his previous ignorance of ‘the history of our relationship with Egypt, the heritage sites, the potential, what happened with the dam in Halfa, and the amount of flooding that happened in the past All the heritage sites we lost’. Given that scholars of nationalism frequently point to the centrality of (often imagined) shared histories to nation-formation, it is thus important that the human-rights state created space in which this history could be informally re-written and reproduced communally in a way that counteracted the marginalization of certain Sudanese experiences by the state and which provided protesters with greater understandings of what it means to be Sudanese.

Shifting national consciousness was both informed and performed by the art of the sit-in, where visual representations of these regions and peoples enacted resistance against their marginalization and marked their presence in both the evolving revolution and national consciousness. For example, the sit-in murals shown Figures 9 and 10 depict the green mountainous landscapes typical of western and southern Sudan. These regions are topographically distinct from the desert surrounding Khartoum and alien to the Khartoum protesters whom I showed images to from my trip to these Western regions, indicative of narrow conceptions of Sudanese identity and land.

While protesters repeatedly described the role of Nuba people at the sit-in, from ‘making porridge’ for the revolutionary community to leading ‘huge processions’ which demonstrate that ‘this is their space, and their area and they are so involved’ so too were such messages conveyed through art. Figure 8 in particular equates such these regions with

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144 Yasmin Tariq (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
145 Mohamed Eltayeb (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
146 It should be noted that travel between regions is extremely limited, particularly due to poor infrastructure which makes movement extremely dangerous in the rainy season as well as government-required travel permits.
147 Mohamed Eltayeb (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
Sudaneseness, by portraying the (likely Nuba) mountains within the outline of the Sudanese state. Similarly, at the McNimir entrance of the sit-in a large (but since-obstructed) wall-mural read ‘We are all Darfur and the Nuba Mountains too’, as this moment of unity and association was made, through art, to feel both omnipresent and permanent.

*Figure 9 Wall Art at the Sit-In. April 25th 2019. Photograph by Makki Obeid.*
Communal Survival and the Sit-In/Protest Community

Although Khartoum is colloquially described as a melting pot (bringing together Sudanese from across the country), in reality the revolution provided many protesters with their first opportunity to directly engage with this diversity. With very few public social spaces, protesters explained that prior to the revolution ‘you never found two different classes together at one time’ and opportunities for candid conversations were minimal given ‘there was no place where we could sit and share our different points of view with each other, and that’s what the regime wanted. The regime didn’t want us to accept one another’.

In stark contrast to this, at the sit-in ‘it didn’t matter where you came from’ as ‘high class, low class (and) even street children’ shared both the space and membership of the broader revolutionary human rights state. This platform gave visibility to oft-neglected groups within society, with Yasmin

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148 Yasmin Tariq (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019; Fatima Khalid and Ibrahim Omer (Khartoum protesters) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
explaining how sitting with homeless children for the first time made clear to her ‘that the protests really united everyone’.149

Grassroots nation-building occurred across the human rights state, and most visibly at the sit-in, when strangers were forced to rely upon one another, often for survival. The sight of different Sudanese groups working harmoniously in pursuit of a better shared future had an undeniable impact upon protesters. For example, Halim Osman explained how ‘there were people from everywhere, Coptics, Southern Sudanese, everyone…they were there to help. Each person had something to offer. Before the revolution, I didn’t think anyone cared about this country, but through the revolution I saw people tried to do everything they could. The Coptics brought us sugar and water for the people fasting and they held the prayer mats above us so that we could pray under the heat, it was amazing. The South Sudanese were helping, Darfuris were helping, we were all one. No one said that they were from the West, or East, or North, we were all just Sudanese’.150 Thus not only were people brought together as members of the human rights state, but they worked to support the broader revolutionary community in a way that encouraged protesters to more inclusively broaden their conceptions of Sudaneseness.

Indeed, photos of Coptic protesters forming protective human-barriers around their praying Muslim counterparts quickly went viral in Sudan and represented the bridging of religious divides. These photos symbolized the atmosphere of tolerance and cooperation that became synonymous with a revolution that, as Amir Malak put it, ‘united people and made them feel respect’ for one another.151 This atmosphere of tolerance extended to the discussion of the position of religious minorities in the state and nation, as mirrored in Figures 11 and 12. In Figure 11 a landscape of Sudan is shown in which mosques and churches are purposefully

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149 Yasmin Tariq (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
150 Halim Osman (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
151 Amir Malak (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
placed next to one another, pointing to the shared belonging of religions both in the Sudanese landscape and the Sudanese imagination. Figure 12 depicts a whirling dervish at the sit-in, staking a claim for different types of Islam which had been marginalized under the Bashir’s brand of Islamic fundamentalism. Indeed, it was on April 20th, watching a procession of whirling dervishes whom I had never before seen outside of the cemetery in which they perform their rituals, that it became clear to me that everyone was staking a claim to the revolution.
Whilst the 1964 and 1985 revolutions were middle-class central-Sudanese affairs, the contemporary human rights state embodies and valorises trans-Sudanese efforts and sacrifices. Thousands of people worked together to maintain the sit-in. When it was threatened by the government, tens of thousands of people turned up en-masse to provide back-up. Those unable or unwilling to face NISS forces at protest prior to the sit-in, such as the elderly, were able to play a role in the revolution by supporting the sit-in, bringing supplies and volunteering. Indeed, upper middle-class, well-educated and employed Sudanese people such as Mohamed, gave up their time to clean toilets and clear the streets of rubbish, doing their part for the revolutionary community. Ahmed Omer and Umayma Osman volunteered as doctors while others, like Randa provided counselling at the sit-in, reflecting on how the people were bonded by this space where they ‘would sleep next to each other, eat together, they’d see death together’.  

152 Randa Hatim (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, May 2019.
The human rights state at the sit-in encouraged egalitarian support and communality, in turn engendering a nationalism founded upon equality. Ahmed, for example, recalled how men at the sit-in walked around with buckets labelled ‘law 3andak 7ot, law ma 3endak sheel’ (if you have put, if you don’t have take). Far from just those marching alongside her, Salma recounted feeling supported by the broad human rights state during the 30th of June demonstration (the first mass demonstration following the June 3rd massacre), describing how ‘on our way, the houses were setting up huge containers of water and cups, telling us to come and drink. Bread shops were giving out bread for free, and let’s not forget that this was a revolution that began over a lack of bread…Neighbours were inviting us in to eat’. During the protests activists climbed up neem trees and cut off their branches for strangers, providing them with natural antidotes to teargas and strangers opened their homes to protesters fleeing the police. Such acts of communality left protesters feeling like ‘we weren’t just protected, we were helping each other out…Yet its unity, but its more than that. It’s feeling protected, it’s feeling indestructible’.

Communal reliance across the human rights state undermined racialized distinctions and hierarchies. As revolutionary artist Alaa Satir explained, ‘at the sit-in specifically, people were living there (together), so the people you basically (once) discriminated against, you lived life with them, ate, drank and chanted together and were unified under one cause’. Whereas prior to the revolution people fixated on local experiences, the revolution brought these strands together into a single human rights state in search for common rights and dignities including access to basic provisions such as food but also more broadly the right to hold their own identities, religions and opinions. While the conventional human rights framework looks down upon protest as a means of human rights acquisition, as Frantz Fanon famously argued that

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153 Ahmed ElNijab (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
154 Salma Omar (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
155 Salma Omar (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
156 Alaa Satir (Revolutionary artist Khartoum) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
‘when it is achieved during a war of liberation the mobilization of the masses introduces the notion of common cause, national destiny, and collective history into every consciousness’.\(^\text{157}\)

While not the type of violent uprising Fanon anticipated, the revolution had a similar effect on those in Khartoum, with several activists reflecting on how ‘the sit in changed everything. The problems happened to all of us together, we had the same goals, the same worries. In the sit-in it didn’t matter who you were, where you were from or what tribe you belonged to, you just belonged. These two months were so intense, 100 things happened each day, good things, bad things. To be at the sit-in was a revolution in itself. It was its own institution. It was multiple lives wrapped into a single life…this exposure created a great deal of connection.’\(^\text{158}\)

**Rejecting Tribal and Arab-Islamic Supremacies**

By working alongside and learning from members across Sudan’s diverse population within the confines of the human rights state, Khartoum protesters began to challenge the monolithic Arab-Islamic official national identity and tribal hierarchy which successive governments had promoted.

Protesters unanimously identified that Al Bashir’s regime had enforced a monocultural Arab-Islamic identity upon the state. As Ahmed stated, the regime ‘focused on the Northern man and tried to reflect that the Sudanese man is an Arab in every sense of the word. All Muslims, all Arab speaking. They gave us one identity and tried to force it on everyone. When they couldn’t force it, they resorted to genocide’.\(^\text{159}\) Similarly, following extensive contact with Western-Sudanese protesters, Mohamed realized that contrary to the government’s reductive dichotomization of Arabs and Africans as naturally warring parties, ‘they all lived in peace for

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\(^\text{158}\) Halim Eltayeb (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.

\(^\text{159}\) Ahmed ElNijab (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
over 500 years’, arguing that ethnic violence occurred because the government “weaponised people and made people hate each other”.

In this way collective action began to create new social meanings as Khartoum protesters began to adapt their conceptions of self in relation to ever-expanding understandings of Sudaneseness. For example, protesters across the revolution and at the Khartoum sit-in began to adopt Sudan’s original (pre-1970) flag and used its colours of blue yellow and green in much of the public artwork. The process of national re-identification started from the flag, which was rejected as protesters realized that modelled on Arab prototypes, it was one of many mechanisms used by the government to Arabize Sudan despite the fact that, as Alaa put it, ‘there are tribes that don’t identify with that, they don’t identify with being Arab’. Awad and Wagoner have argued that national flags take up novel symbolic meanings during times of turbulence, symbolizing the character of the nation and becoming the ‘condensation symbol’ and ‘focus for sentiment about society’. In keeping with this argument, the use of the old flag by Khartoum protesters signals a symbolic distancing of the Sudanese nation, and these individuals, from the simplistic Arab-Islamic identity pushed upon them by previous regimes.

If the revolution became a form of ‘visual theatre’, then the flag became a stage upon which the complexities of Sudanese identity were worked out. The sit-in wall mural shown in Figure 13 uses the colours of the flag to present a united Sudan (including the seceded South), a message conveyed both by the use of the old flag, the old map and the caption ‘we will not let them divide us’. If the modern flag has come to symbolize Arab-Islamic supremacy and division, the old flag has come to symbolize healing and unity. The mural in Figure 14 similarly equates Sudan with the old flag and the inclusivity it symbolizes, telling protesters ‘Hanabniyhu’ or ‘we will build it’, putting the onus on the people to maintain the unity.

160 Mohamed Eltayeb (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019
161 Alaa Satir (Revolutionary artist Khartoum) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
embodied by these colours. Repeated use of the old flag is thus a symbolic representation of an emerging nationhood which mirrors the inclusivity and equality of the human rights state.

Figure 13 Wall Art at the Sit In. Original Photography, May 18th 2019.

Figure 14 Wall Art at the Sit In. Photograph by Makki Obeid, April 25th 2019.
In painting the walls, protesters marked the space as revolutionary and gave the human rights state, and the unity it champions, an omnipresence. This art, much of which survived the revolution, provides a gold standard against which national identity can be continuously measured. Indeed, artists used their murals to reclaim the power of public narrative, long monopolized by the government, and signalled (and performed) the shift away from monolithic Arab-Islamism by highlighting Sudan’s Africanness. Figures 15 and 16 are wall murals that exemplify this effort, and encourage the viewer to engage with them, and with this element of their identity, irrespective of their regional/ethnic background.

These images signal a shift from acknowledging the rights of Africanized Sudanese peoples within the human rights state to reconceptualizing the character of broader Sudan and asserting Africanism as a core component of all Sudanese identities. This shift was mirrored by sentiments expressed by protesters including Ahmed, who described their sense of Africanness being heightened over the course of the revolution.163 If a truly inclusive nationhood is to emerge, this shift is critical among Northern Sudanese people, given that as Wai argued, whether the North is both Arab and Africa, or exclusively one or the other, is not crucial. The significant point is that those who wield political power, generally the educated elite, think the North is Arab’ in a racially dichotomous way that has perpetuated the ‘othering’ of non-Arabs and refused to acknowledge hybridity.164

163 Ahmed ElNijab (Khartoum Protester) In Conversation with Author, August 2019.
At the sit-in, Khartoum protesters realized that not only was ‘what united us bigger than the differences between us’ but that it was the ‘older generation that made it this way, the idea that certain ethnicities cannot marry into certain ethnicities and this is so stupid, we don’t need
to go by this anymore’. This testimony points to the human rights state’s demotion of ethnicity as a legitimate hierarchical structure, a shift that would pave the way for a more equitable national identity.

While protesters emphasized that ‘we went out because of bread, because of petrol’, the creation of a human rights state facilitated unexpected consequences of the revolution, such as the ‘Afro-Arab conversation’. The question, ‘What are we, African or Arab?’ was addressed by revolutionary art, which allowed for a reconstitution of the self and provided space for ‘alternative re-framings and narrations’. For example, in Figure 17 (a wall mural at the sit-in) on the left side of the image a prototypical Arabized man (dressed in a Jalabiya and an Imma) is depicted next to a prototypical Arabized woman (dressed in a thoob with her hair covered). To their right are their more African Sudanese counterparts, depicted with bald or short hair, in traditional garments, including anklets and large earrings, the woman holding a cane connecting her to her agricultural roots. In so doing the artist signals the Arab and African sides of Sudanese identity, and their joint and equal belonging to the nation, and to the revolution. Figure 18, a more amateur wall mural at the sit-in, similarly depicts the plethora of Sudanese identities, including everyone from traditional Eastern Sudanese tribes to prototypical Southern peoples and Arabized Northerners. These images are intrinsically public and political, resisting the former narrowness of Sudaneseness by exposing plurality.

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165 Halim Eltayeb (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
166 Salma Omar (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
Figure 17 Wall Art at the Sit-In. Original Photography. August 10th 2019

Figure 18 Wall Art at the Sit-In. Original Photography. August 10th 2019
Rather than a total rejection of tribal identity protesters argued against their primacy. Conjoining human rights and national identity it was commonly held by protesters that loyalty to the nation might provide an antidote to the tribal and ethnic conflict which has beleaguered Sudan. Pushing back against Roessler’s idea of primacy of tribe, Mohaned explained how on the day that (TMC leader) General Burhan came to power ‘my dad asked me what ethnicity Burhan was and I told him that we went out to protest because of this question. We are no longer these questions. We don’t care what his ethnicity is. As long as he or she are good, qualified people, that’s all that matters. The idea of ethnicity being important is gone’. In so doing, a shift is being made from ethnic to civic nationalism, the latter of which seeks to construct an identity which transcends, but does not erase, other identity categories.

Lastly, the sit-in challenged the racialized or tribal lens through which protesters previously viewed themselves and their society. Salma, for example explained how prior to the revolution “I’d look at my friends and think he’s Halfawiy, he’s from the West, he’s Sh3agiy…I don’t think a day has passed since the sit-in where I’ve thought in that way. I’ve just thought, these are Sudanese’. Whereas before ‘I never ever saw anyone as just Sudanese” as a consequence of the sit-in, where from “the moment you walked in, it was people from all backgrounds” and where “you’d look around and see black, see white, see the guy with the long nose, the guy with the wide nose, coarse hair, soft hair. Grandmas and grandads. All races, all ages and ethnicities together as Sudanese” now she’s “realized we really are all just one people, we’re all Sudanese” This is evidence of how, as Rula argued, the human rights state, as manifested at the sit-in, ‘changed people’, confronting them with new and often

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167 Mohamed Eltayeb (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019; Roessler, Ethnic Politics and State Power in Africa: the logic of the coup-civil war trap, 11.
168 Salma Omar (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
169 Ibid.,
uncomfortable understandings of Sudan which encouraged them to adjust the ways in which they viewed themselves and those around them.\textsuperscript{170}

While it was at the sit-in where people first threw off the chains of reductive and essentialist identities and championed more nuanced conceptions of Sudaneseness, protesters continue to introspectively reassess their understandings. For example, Mohamed explained how, before visiting El Obeid recently, ‘I thought everyone there would be from the west and look like people from the west, but I was wrong. There were people from all over the country living there, different shades, different languages. Sudan is not stationary, people move, everyone is mixed’, an experience which reaffirmed his newfound conviction that ‘Sudanese identity is made up of different things’\textsuperscript{171}

\textsuperscript{170} Rula Ibrahim (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
\textsuperscript{171} Mohamed Eltayeb (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
This introspection continues to colour understandings of the Sudanese past and present. For example, Figure 19 is a mural from the sit-in which addresses the loss of Southern Sudan. A lighter-brown hand from the North is seen clutching a darker-brown hand coming from the South against the background of both the old Sudanese map and flag. While at the time the response to this political tragedy was muted at best, and celebrated at worst, this mural points to a recognition of the complicity of Northern racism in the loss of the South and the belief that changes in these attitudes (‘yes we can) will bridge these divides and unite the Sudanese people once more.
Chapter 5. Women and the Khartoum Protests

Women dominated protests in Khartoum, with observers noting that they frequently comprised 2/3 of protesters. Some, such as Eiman Abdelhakam, organized anti-regime protests attracting thousands of students and leading Ahfad University to be surrounded by armed police men and teargassed so heavily several students collapsed. Some, like Randa, joined all-women’s groups such as Harisat (bodyguards) that planned marches and demonstrations. Others, and in particular older women, contributed to the revolution in other ways, adapting, for example Facebook groups, once used to discuss potential marriage suitors, to expose police brutality, with videos and pictures of abusive security forces posted, encouraging the local community to chase the agents out of town.

While the scale of this participation is unprecedented it must not be decontextualized from both the history of women’s activism in Sudan and the gendered repression that women have suffered under Al Bashir. Since coming to power in 1989, the Islamic fundamentalist regime legally circumscribed women’s rights. One of only six countries to not sign CEDAW, the regime instead implemented vague morality laws to proscribe women’s movements and activities, their dress and their role in the public sphere, threatening them with dehumanizing punishments such as lashings if they stepped outside of the regime’s boundaries of morality. From sentencing 19 year old Noura Hussein to death for killing her husband as he raped her, to lashing Lubna Hussein for wearing trousers, the state enforced purposefully ambiguous laws to control Sudanese women. As Satir put it, ‘the regime we have been trying to take down has oppressed us women the most so it’s normal that we’re the most angry and that we protest’.

173 Eiman Abdelhakam (Khartoum protester) in conversation with the author, March 2019.
174 Some of these groups contain over 340,000 members; Yasmin Tariq (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
175 The arresting officer argued that she was in contravention of the infamous Section 152 of the Criminal Law Act, which is frequently and arbitrarily used to prosecute women for their dress or public actions. The sentence for this alleged crime was a fine and 40 lashes. Despite her appeals, two courts upheld this sentence. Yet there is
Women have long resisted the states increasingly narrow gendered confines in both the private and public domains. While Fatima Ibrahim famously fought for women’s suffrage and political rights, Sudan’s civil society is full of women such as Dr Nahid Toubia who have publicly led crusades against Female Genital Mutilation and other gendered human rights abuses. Indeed, groups such as the Sudanese Women’s Union have championed women’s rights since the 1950s. Women have also taken to the streets throughout Sudan’s history, participating, albeit on a significantly scale in both the 1964 and 1985 revolutions which overthrew the dictatorships of General Abboud and Jaafar Nimeri. Women protested outside of these revolutions too. For example, following Lubna Hussein’s 2010 arrest, a woman’s rights coalition ‘No to Women’s Oppression’ was established and women took to the streets in peaceful protest, with over 60 being arrested. Unfortunately, this activism is often left out of the national narrative by those seeking to deny women’s existence as political beings.

Ann McClintock warned that ‘if nationalism is not deeply informed by an analysis of gender power, the nation-state will remain a repository of male hopes, male aspirations and male privilege’. Indeed, in many revolutionary contexts where women activists have adopted the ‘nation-first, woman after’ model, including the 1964 and 1985 revolutions, women (along with ethnic minorities) have been subsequently side-lined. Although the Sudanese revolution was not dedicated explicitly to women’s rights, evidence from Khartoum protesters suggests that women’s dominance of the revolution and participation in the human rights state effect

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176 In reality, as Jayawardena (1986) has shown women across the globe have partaken in political protest on both women’s issues and national issues for centuries. Unfortunately, subsequently pushed out of the liberational moment, these women’s activism is often forgotten or repackaged in keeping with the (patriarchal) national identity.

177 Described by Tonessen as ‘heroic and legendary’, similarly to in the current revolution, these women ‘faced different sorts of harassment and dangers including gunfire from live ammunition. Great numbers of them were wounded’; L. Tonnessen and H. Granås Kjøstved, The Political of Women’s Representation in Sudan: Debating Women’s Rights in Islam from the Elites to the Grassroots. (Bergen: Chr. Michelsen Institute, 2010): 3.


a shifting discourse surrounding gendered conceptions of the Sudanese nation. This shift has occurred as a consequence of the shared experience of women and men, brought together on equal terms in pursuit of common rights and must be acknowledged and built on during this critical transitional moment.

The role of women in the revolution was clearly ingrained in Khartoum protesters understandings of the uprising’s success. For example, Aamin, who attended protests starting December 25th 2018, explained that ‘there were more women than men in any protest that I’ve been to. I was proud and surprised but at each and every protest there were more women and they were also leading the protests….there was a strong female presence (at the sit-in) and they were in charge of so many things. They distributed water and food, they helped search people. One woman was distributing a flyer saying ‘be okay, we care about you. They did everything’. Other protesters similarly pointed to women-led processions protests and movements within the broader revolution and human rights state.

Women’s participation was hyper-visible because of the hardships and stigmas faced by female protesters, all of which stem from the patriarchal nature of the Sudanese nation. Indeed, while Azza described how her friend’s ‘parents wouldn’t talk to her after she joined the sit-in’, Ali reported that the police would often target women, arresting and beating them, so ‘so their parents wouldn’t let them out of the house’. Despite these obstacles, and the gendered violence they were subjected to, with mass rapes reported among the atrocities of June 3rd, women remained steadfast in their commitment to and active participation in the human rights state in a way that has since given them leverage through which to take ownership of the Sudanese nation and its identity.

180 Ahmed ElNijab (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
181 Amir Malak (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
182 Omnia Hassan (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019; Nazar Daoud (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
While Alaa Salah’s iconic image implicitly characterizes women as removed from the revolutionary crowd, in reality they were just as active as their male counterparts, jostling elbow to elbow with them at the sit-in and protesting just as vociferously, with one image of a young female protester throwing tear gas back at the riot police quickly going viral in Sudan. Wall murals (Figures 20-22) frequently represented the centrality of women to the Sudanese revolution. For example, one of the first murals at the sit-in was that by Satir (Figure 20) who uses the colours of the old flag to depict a revolutionary woman. Surrounded by writing which reads ‘the revolution is a woman’s revolution’, this female figure embodies both the uprising and the new era of freedom. Satir’s feminist murals across both the sit-in and greater Khartoum have not only inspired other artists, but have permanently created a reconstituted prototypical Sudanese female self, herein-depicted as a political, public being.

Figure 21, a wall mural by M. Deng, demonstrates male recognition of women’s leading roles in the revolution through the depiction of two women towering over, and seemingly-leading, the male-crowd. Critically, these women are depicted in the thick of the smoke and action. In a similar vein, Figure 22, another wall mural depicts a young female activist wearing a tear mask, showing how women shared in the risks of the revolution (and should implicitly share in the rewards, namely national inclusion). These murals are evidence that the revolution provided space for ‘hidden transcripts and backstage performances to be spoken directly and publicly in the face of power’. In this case, it brought to the centre-stage female activism as a critical component of the human rights state, encouraging the engendering of a nationhood which reflects this. If the walls of the sit-in came to represent the tenets of the emerging Sudanese identity, the fact that at least half of this art focused on women is in itself indicative of a national re-identification.

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Figure 20 Mural (by Alaa Satir) on the Burri entrance of the sit-in. Original Photo April 28th 2019.

Figure 21 Mural (by M. Deng) on the Burri entrance of the sit-in. Original Photo, April 28th 2019.
Given that gender is performance, by protesting female activists challenged gender norms and the hyper-masculine nature of the Sudanese nation. Within the human rights state, women and men had to rely upon another, best symbolized by the viral image of a female protester standing on a man’s back to climb over a wall and escape NISS forces. Women and men worked together throughout the revolution, from women’s ‘empowering and motivating’ zagrootas (ululations) signalling the start of protests, to male and female assembly lines passing rocks down to the frontline of protest groups to build barricades and defend themselves.\textsuperscript{184} Women’s brazen participation in the human rights state, and in collective action, led male protesters such as Ahmed to realize ‘what Sudanese women are capable of doing, how brave they are, how strong they are. Braver than men, stronger than men. They are much more passionate about the revolution. That did surprise me a little’.\textsuperscript{185} Not only did protesters such

\textsuperscript{184} Mohamed Eltayeb (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.

\textsuperscript{185} Ahmed ElNijab (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
as Ahmed and Halim explained that this precedent has led them to hereafter expect women to protest, holding them to the same standards as men, but the coverage of women’s participation (both domestically and internationally) has made women a central tenet to any national re-identification.

The sit-in became the sole public space in Khartoum wherein men and women could socialize freely, and the shared quest for common rights and dignity within the human rights state created an atmosphere of tolerance which, as Randa explained, increased space for conversations about women’s repression and the patriarchal nature of the Sudanese nation.\footnote{Randa Hatim (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019} Such conversations led protesters such as Mohamed to realize that ‘‘in the last 30 years, the women was just an image, she wasn’t actually represented. If you looked at women before that, they had all the freedoms’, highlighting the contrived deterioration of women’s position in society and making clear that national re-identification would have to shake up this gendered hierarchy.\footnote{Mohamed Eltayeb (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.}

Given that ‘the woman is standing next to you in the protests, she is fighting with you, she is fighting against the security forces’, female protesters were confident that their participation in the human rights state was engendering a nation in which they were, at a minimum, valued as more than passive (reproductive) subjects.\footnote{Randa Hatim (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.} Yasmin, for example, spoke of a video of a 14 year old girl stood ‘on top of a car chanting. She was wearing skinny jeans, a vest and a scarf around her shoulders. She was chanting and dancing. If something like that was to have happened before December, she would have been subjected to really awful comments on social media, but in the video you see so many males around her chanting and supporting her’ concluding that this was evidence of increased male respect, the unity of the human rights state making it newly irrelevant how people were dressed or whether or not their
hair was covered. Protesters also discussed instances of older Sudanese women, who at the start of the revolution opposed female involvement, changing their perspectives over the course of the revolution. For example, Salma told the story of one elderly lady, whose house she hid at during a protest, who confessed to having forbidden her daughters from protesting in January, but then explained that ‘during the course of the revolution she had changed her mind’, even standing up for one female protester who was being berated by her brother for joining the demonstration. 189

That the human rights state engendered a more inclusive nationalism is evident in the ‘Kandaka’ phenomenon. Throughout the revolution female protesters were celebrated as Kandakas, referencing the ancient Nubian queens who ruled Meroe singlehandedly, defeated imperial invaders and disassociated ancient Nubian culture from that of Egypt, notably embracing African cultural attributes instead. Massad has convincingly argued that nationalisms must position themselves as the links between tradition and modernity, constructing or selecting a national past to unite the people. 190 This was certainly the case during the Sudanese revolution where the ‘Kandaka’ represented a pre-Islamic glorious time. Having Kandakas as the common history uniting the people is indicative of a shifting national-self, where in lieu of male national heroes/histories such as the Mahdi/Mahdiya, the new era of freedom is being tied to a past in which women exerted more power than any other ancient civilization. Given that ‘even from the time of the Nubian kingdom, the Sudanese women always stands out…this is a heritage for us’, it followed that he national identity must not only include, but be shaped by women. 191

189 Salma Omar (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
191 Salma Omar (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019; Sara Hassabu (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
Upheld as Kandakas within the sit in, as well as at protests and on social media empowered female protester who were left feeling like ‘I could make a change’. This emerging nationalism embraced female power and imbued women with confidence in their ability to affect change. Figures 23-25 represent some of the many depictions of ‘Kandakas’ at the sit-in, all of which served to demonstrate female strength and power. Figure 23, for example, is a replica of the depiction of famous warrior queen Kandaka Amanishakheto on her pyramid tomb (Meroe).

Given that the word ‘Kandaka’ was never used colloquially prior to the revolution, the artist focuses on this historical figure and combats these women’s erasure from the national narrative. Figures 24 and 25 similarly emphasize the power and prestige of women, making the use of these figures as a connection to the past clear with the caption ‘We will return to the past with Kandaka’. While it is elsewhere argued by Massad that by tying women to the past, a burden is placed on women to remain ‘traditional’ while revolutionary forces take up the ‘modern’ mantle, this is not applicable to the case of Kandakas, who are celebrated because they break the assumed traditional mould of gendered behaviour and roles. 193

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192 No single ‘hero’ or leader of the revolution emerged over the course of the revolution. In many ways ‘Kandakas’ were celebrated the heroes of the revolution.
Figure 23 Wall Mural on the Burri entrance of the sit-in. Original Photo, April 28th 2019.

Figure 24 Wall Mural on the Burri entrance of the sit-in. Original Photo, April 28th 2019
Depictions of women not only sought to construct permanent reminders of their dominance within the human rights state, but also to intersectionally represents Sudanese diversity. Given that the Sudanese media is poor at representing non-Arabized Sudanese women, along with the racist connotations of Sudanese beauty standards (where skin-whitening is still commonly practiced), the representation of different type of Sudanese women is indicative of this national reidentification. Figure 26, an amateurly painted floor-mural positions two Kandakas next to one another. One is a farer skinned Arabized Sudanese woman, distinguished by her headscarf, while the other is a darker more phenotypically African women, distinguished by her features, skin colour and head-dress. In so doing, the artist asserts the power of women across Sudan as well as the phenotypical and ethnic plurality of Sudan.

This intersectionality is critical, as Malak explained that historically ‘when a feminist movement arises in Khartoum, women from Darfur for example would come and say you do
not represent us, why do you pretend to represent us?”

Indeed as Sherwood has discussed, the notoriously Khartoum-centred nature of the historic women's movement failed to bridge ethnic gaps. Revolutionary art, such as Figure 27, combats this historical legacy by depicting a phenotypically African Sudanese woman, and performing a perpetual ritual of belonging and inclusion by positioning her, with her Africanesque clothing and her afro-hair at the heart of the Khartoum sit-in. This diversity emphasized by artists such as Satir who was careful ‘to make them (the women) different, one with a headscarf, one with an afro etc’ and explaining that ‘we have always had an (racialized) issue with hair specifically’ leading her to try to ‘push boundaries and introduce different kinds of beauty’.

Lastly, Figure 28 depicts an array of Sudanese women, both Africanized and Arabized figures, on equal footing with one another, indicating both a new conception of Sudanese gendered and racialized identities.

Figure 26 Floor Mural on the central street of the sit-in. Original Photo. April 28th 2019

194 Amir Malak (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
195 Alaa Satir (Revolutionary artist Khartoum) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
Figure 27 Wall Mural on the Burri entrance of the sit-in. Original Photo. April 28th 2019

Figure 28 Wall Mural on the Burri entrance of the sit-in. Original Photo. April 28th 2019
As marginalized ethnic groups ‘uninvented’ the Arab-Islamic national identity, so too women’s protest started to ‘uninvent’ the hypermasculinity of Sudaneseness. Women’s high visibility during the revolution challenged Sudan’s patriarchal foundations. Live-shows traced Sudanese women’s political activism back to the 1950s.\textsuperscript{196} Women were often found at the sit-in ‘standing on cars…singing…(marching) with huge banners explaining themselves’.\textsuperscript{197} Tents were erected by women’s organizations, newsletters on women’s issues and priorities distributed, and women’s issues publicly debated on the main stage.\textsuperscript{198} This is not to suggest that the deep-seated sexism of Sudanese society was eradicated over-night. The fact that there were sexual harassment patrolling-volunteers at the sit-in points to the persistence of problematic gendered behaviours. Yet, there very existence points to a newfound societal acknowledgement of, and desire to combat, these issues.

Indeed, for the first time, the human rights state provided protesters with a platform upon which to challenge sexist behaviours. Social media began to re-appropriate and transform sexist sayings such as ‘Sawt al Mara Awra (A Woman’s Voice is Null) into ‘Sawt al Mara Thawra” (A Woman’s Voice is Revolutionary).\textsuperscript{199} Sexist chants at the sit in, such as ‘Go Home Kandaka, your father is waiting’, were quickly shut down by other male protesters. Protesters vocally challenged the sexism central to the chant ‘Today we will Mary, We Will Marry a Kandaka’ provoking conversations at the sit-in about the reduction of revolutionary women to wives.

Contact across the human rights-state at the sit-in, encouraged conversations about the incongruous official subjugation of women, and their lack of socio-political rights in particular, with their reality as brave revolutionaries. As a consequence, men began to acknowledge women’s roles in the revolution, and to familiarize themselves with the female experience in

\textsuperscript{196} Salma Omar (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
\textsuperscript{197} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{198} Amir Malak (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019
\textsuperscript{199} Salma Omar (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
Sudan. Comparing the Khartoum he saw prior to his arrest and that he was released into several months later, Malak described that whereas “before people used to act with women as if they were beings from a different planet’ soon ‘people became closer and started to know and understand each other more’. Thus although it was a ‘peoples revolution’, women’s membership of the human rights state, made visible by their protesting, challenged deeply-ingrained conceptions of the Sudanese nation, and as Ushari put it ‘just challenging a person’s thoughts is already progress’.

In Sudan women began to be artistically depicted as embodying the human rights state, and the nation. This representation was normalized by protesters who argued that women had always held ‘very important and very respected’, albeit ‘not always recognized or acknowledged’ private power. Figures 29-30 demonstrate the figure of a revolutionary woman dressed in the same white thoab as Salah. In so doing the revolutionary Sudanese woman (like the new nationhood) is positioned as the link between tradition and modernity, the past and the present, wearing traditional garments, while simultaneously breaking with the recent past by leading a revolution in the name of a new and inclusive nationhood. While in Figure 29 the woman is placed in the foreground of the old Sudanese flag, embodying a shift to more inclusive communal modes of belonging, in Figure 30 this woman is situated at the meeting points of the old and new Sudanese flags, and identities, embodying the plurality of Sudanese peoples while also representing a new era of freedom and change. This nationalist movement similarly created space and time in which women’s issues could be discussed and awareness of women’s sub citizenship ingrained in the national psyche.

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200 Amir Malak (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
201 Ibid.; Salma Omar (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.; Sara Hassabu (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
202 At the sit-in approximately 1/3 of the protest art included representations of women.
203 Amir Malak (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
Figure 29 Wall Mural at the sit-in. Photograph by Dena Latif, April 28th 2019

Figure 30 Wall Mural on the Burri entrance of the sit-in. Original Photo. April 28th 2019.
Chapter 6. Faith in the Nation

Critically, Khartoum protesters indicated that the revolution redefined boundaries of who constituted the nation and reinvigorated their desire to associate with the nation in the first place. As Ahmed explained ‘I feel more confident and proud just for being Sudanese and nothing else, the things that I have seen and experienced, I think I’m stronger now…in the future I’ll be someone that pushes for justice’. 204 This experienced combatted internalized negative Sudanese stereotypes, as Randa described how ‘people always used to think we were lazy, that we never spoke up for all the injustices we saw, that the people are cowards…it became clear though that we all fight for our rights, that we are brave. This shared experience will stop anyone else from getting in the way…I feel proud now’. 205 Protesters who had once been embarrassed to associate with Sudan, reflected on how following the revolution ‘I would say with all my heart that I am Sudanese’. 206

Crucially, participation in the revolution imbued protesters such as Mohaned with a heightened sense of ownership over the country. He described how at one protest he joined a woman and her daughter chanting outside their house and that soon ‘people started joining and slowly we had an entire protest and then we took to the streets. It was an amazing feeling to know that we had started this protest…You feel like you started with something small and watched it grow.’ As a consequence of these experiences, Mohamed was left with heightened respect for his country. He explained how ‘before, this cigarette box, when I finished with it, I used to throw it on the street, I didn’t care. At the sit-in, I used to clear everything and now I think about it differently’. 207 This attitude is evident in the Hanabniyhu (We Will build it) campaign which continues in Khartoum, wherein neighbourhood committees have set about

204 Ahmed ElNijab (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
205 Randa Hatim (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
206 Salma Omar (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
207 Mohamed Eltayeb (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
improving community infrastructure, cleaning and beautifying the streets and collecting and distributing provisions for those in need.

The human rights state made visible a commonality across Sudanese peoples and encouraged disaffected individuals to identify with the nation, with Riham explaining that ‘I relate to Sudan more because there are many values in myself that I never saw in Sudan. I feel like the new Sudan relates to my values’.208 Indeed, the sit-in both ‘made you believe in the power of love between strangers’ as Shaza put it, and led those who once felt disconnected to realize through revolutionary exposure, that ‘I blend in with these groups. I want to listen to Sudanese music, learn their meaning and connect to my culture. All of a sudden I could relate, I understand these people, I love Sudan’.209

Prior to the revolution young people with the means to do so largely left Sudan, with Halim explaining how, following his graduation from university ‘the fact that we had graduated wasn’t even celebrated, everyone was so preoccupied with leaving’.210 Yet this shared experience caused protesters to reorient their futures, newly confident that ‘if I believe in something, it’ll happen’ as they began to self-style themselves as agents of human rights capable of improving the country. For example, combatting the top-down conventional human rights approach, Sara explained that “what I learned after the revolution is that I don’t have to be part of these agencies (international NGOS), I can create my own, because I am not the only one who wants my country to develop. I am not the only one who wants to raise the people around me in the community, I can work with other youths, with the people I’ve seen and met during the sit-in”.211

208 Latifa Hussein (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
209 Rula Ibrahim (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
210 Halim Eltayeb (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
211 Sara Hassabu (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
Part 3. The Revolution Outside of Khartoum

“The former regime also, and very deliberately, destroyed the social fabric of communities by dividing, and discriminating between citizens on tribal, ethnic, regional, religious and racial grounds - a heinous process that the Sudanese people had never before experienced. The alleviation of the effects of all this requires the transitional government to work with extreme diligence towards mending and restoring the country's social fabric to ensure that the people of Sudan shall live in peace and harmony.” Mohamed Naji Al Assam, Spokesperson for the Forces of Freedom and Change, Speaking at the Power-Sharing Ceremony of August 21st 2019.

The human rights state extended far beyond the capital city, with collective action across Sudan in pursuit of common rights similarly inaugurating a process of national reidentification in the pursuit of a more equitable Sudan. Whereas the Khartoum centric-revolutions of 1964 and 1985 saw sporadic uprisings in the provinces in reaction to happenings in the capital, thus reinforcing the centre-periphery dynamic, the 2018-19 revolution was begun, maintained and guarded by protesters in the provinces, encouraging the emergence of a nationalism and nationhood inclusive of all within Sudan. While succeeding in overthrowing dictatorship, the brevity of the 1964 and 1985 revolutions in particular precluded opportunities for national re-identification, meaning that the supremacy of Arab-Islamic identity was never seriously reconsidered or challenged. As a consequence, and again demonstrative of the need for rights-based movements to address national identity, these revolutions remained strictly political, removing Nimer while Sudan’s racist dynamics remained unchanged. In both cases, soon after the liberation moment, Sudan quickly slipped back into racial division and ethnic violence.212

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212 For example, only two years after the 1985 revolution, the El Dein massacre occurred in which between 400-1000 Dinka refugees fell fire to the power of Baggara Arabs; Harir ‘Recycling the Past in the Sudan; An Overview of Political Decay’, 15.
This time around, the visible manifestation of peaceful peoples power across the human rights state, which extended far beyond the capital, not only challenged those within Khartoum to broaden their conceptions of Sudaneseness but it also provincial protesters’ sense of belonging and identification with the broader Sudanese people, encouraging the ‘comradeship’ that constructivists argue is central to nation-formation.

Chapter 7. Atbara

Atbara is located in the River Nile state approximately 310 kilometres north of Khartoum, at the juncture of the Atbara and Nile Rivers. Although small in population (approximately 139,264 people), known as the ‘railway city’, Atbara has historically been an important manufacturing center and is known for its history of workers movements and organizations. Against this background, this chapter will explore the identarian impact of current protest in Atbara, and in so doing demonstrate that increasingly inclusive nationalism was not limited to collective action in cosmopolitan Khartoum.

The revolution in Atbara

On December 19th 2018, secondary school students led thousands in Atbara in protest against the five-fold increase in bread prices and the food scarcity this threatened. Protesters such as 26 year old Tariq Ali took to the streets not because of the plethora of atrocious crimes against humanity enacted by the regime but because ‘a day before the revolution in Atbara there was not a single piece of bread in our city’ and the people were tired of standing in ‘queues all over the country…for bread that was not even there’. The human rights state was initially formed in response to the lack of basic rights such as that to life-sustaining food.

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213 Atbara was home to Sudan’s first trade union formed in 1946 among railroad workers.
214 Tariq Ali (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019
Not conforming to the standard binarization of non-violent/violent movements, the first day of the Sudanese revolution in Atbara was violent, as demonstrators burned down the local headquarters of the National Congress Party and attacked the home of the government wheat company’s agent (Seem). While many across Sudan, myself included, were taken aback by this escalation, it is retrospectively clear that this violence was not riotous, but rather rationally targeted as protesters sought to burn down ‘the space that symbolized all the corruption and injustice we faced’.°215 Those on the ground such as 27 year old lawyer Mariam El Zein, explained that ‘this was our way of saying we are done with this corrupt government’, and once this message was sent, protesters joined the emerging national human rights state which quickly defined itself by certain rules and behaviours including non-violence.°216

While Atbara’s position has been magnified in the national imagination as the ‘cradle of the revolution’, protesters repeatedly insisted that ‘for history and accuracy purposes, Atbara wasn’t the start of the revolution’, pointing to preceding protests in the marginalized Blue Nile State (Ad Damazein). While packaging Atbara’s role as ‘the changing element’ in which ‘there was a change in demands from general (economic) to social ones’, it is significant that protesters sought to acknowledge and give credit to these peripheralized peoples.°217

Over the course of the revolution, protests became a regular feature of life in Atbara, and several interviewees were imprisoned as a consequence of their activism. Similarly to Khartoum, albeit on a much smaller scale, a sit-in was established in Atbara in May 2019.°218 Ismail Abdelgader, described establishing the sit-in as an attempt to ‘create a space for the

°215 Mariam El Zein (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
°216 Ibid.,
°217 Omar Abubakr (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
°218 In comparison to the thousands of people who maintained the Khartoum sit-in over-night, protesters approximated that 50 people guarded the sit-in in the evenings.
movement to raise awareness about what was happening all over Sudan’, revealing of the use of the revolutionary moment to forge interconnectedness across the country.219

Unlike its strategic counterpart in Khartoum, in Atbara the sit-in was established in the aftermath of the President’s ousting, conceived of not as a political space but more a social platform for education and national re-identification. As such protesters described the sit-in as a ‘safe space (where) we discussed everything, from racism to the water issues in port Sudan, whatever issues were raised, we tried to cover all aspects of.220 While it ‘wasn’t as big as that in Khartoum’, which protesters experienced either directly or over social media, ‘all the people here joined and we all worked together to raise awareness and unify our goals’, as the sit-in provided a community-building function both locally and, in connection with the revolution, nationally too.221 In this way the Atbara sit-in was symptomatic of, and contributed to, the national moment of introspection that followed the overthrow of Al Bashir across the human rights state, which produced space and time in which discussions of Sudanese identity could be had across the country.

From Apathy to Empathy

Nine months of collective action in Atbara in the pursuit of human rights, from access to adequate supplies of food and medicine to freedom of speech, began to transform notions surrounding who constituted the nation and what Sudaneseness looked like. The ease of revolutionary cooperation across historic divisions highlighted the artificiality of social and regional hierarchies and encouraged protesters such as 37 year old Sumaya Salih, to target the regime for more than just its corruption, arguing ‘we were separated by the previous regime, and so there was no common identity to unite us all, each person cared about their own issues

219 Ismail AbdelGadir (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
220 Mariam El Zein (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
221 Ibid.,
and lived in their own world until this revolution united us all’. Articulating the position that has been taken up by identity scholars since the 1950s, protesters berated the former regime’s refusal to create a ‘collective’ or ‘shared identity’, instead encouraging an ‘us against them mentality that) excluded lots of people, starting with the South’. Indicative of the relationship between human rights, revolutions and nationalism, the protesters within the human rights state saw it as within their collective power to create this identity themselves, with for example, Eman describing how ‘the chants we used tried to negate this (divisive) sentiment’.

A crucial starting point in the national re-identification process, members of the human rights state distanced themselves from the racism of the old order and identity, acknowledging the internalization of racism that was a ‘disease here, not only towards Darfurians or people from the South and Western Sudan, (but) within each and every community on their own’. While making racism the reserve of the government would have been epistemologically easier, protesters like Tariq Ali, admitted that ‘racism wasn’t born with this previous regime, its rooted in our communities and how we deal with each other, you easily you can easily spot it in how we approach marriage, our families to this day don’t approve marrying from certain demographics’. In this way, he explained that while the ‘We are all Darfur’ chant was primarily used to express solidarity with the Darfuri people, it served a dual function, as ‘we needed this chant to remind ourselves that we are all one’ too. By gaining awareness of their internalized racism, citizens within the human rights state were able to critically ‘reflexively rethink and reconstitute human rights via socialization into assertive selfhood’.

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222 Sumaya Salih (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
223 Ismail AbdelGadir (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
224 Mariam El Zein (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
225 Ibid.,
226 Tariq Ali (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
227 Ibid.,
and the acknowledged pervasiveness of normalized racism, is precisely why bottom-up grassroots mobilization is a critical method of human rights acquisition, with local uprisings able to more organically challenge divisive mentalities.229

Similarly to Khartoum, contact across the national human rights state made clear to protesters their complicity in the regional detachment endemic across Sudan. Indicative of an emerging discourse, Mariam described how prior to the revolution ‘people didn’t feel for each other like they do now, but economic conditions united everyone’.230 Pre-revolutionary disinterest coupled with media censorship and the severe penalties associated with challenging the status quo encouraged an increasingly narrow conception of the Sudanese nation.231 For example, Omar explained how, “even before 2013, there was an incident where students from Nyala were killed and I tried to mobilize people and start protecting and raising awareness, but no one cared, it was brutal evidence of how disconnected we were’ leading him to write about how ‘people in the center didn’t see themselves in the marginalized communities.”232

Against this background, the emergence of the ‘We are All Darfur’ chant serves as a diagnostic of change. Going beyond simple solidarity with Darfuris (which might have been We are with Darfur) protesters re-identified themselves in keeping with a more inclusive Sudaneseness modelled on the breadth of the human rights state, which included the very Darfuri protesters the regime tried to scapegoat. Figure 32, a wall mural located on a central street in Atbara, is one of several visual representations of #WeareallDarfur across Sudan, with each representation contributing to the proliferation of the revolution as well as notions of unity. Protesters such as Amin used wall-art ‘as a way of documenting this movement and

229 Tariq Ali (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
230 Mariam El Zein (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
231 Ismail, for example, explained how ‘what we knew was only from stories shared by our friends and the people that we know there, but after the revolution we started to talk more about these issues and stories started to surface on the news’, Ismail AbdelGadir (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
232 Omar Abubakr (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
telling our story’, but also, as Taas showed elsewhere, in ‘an attempt to defy state-imposed marginalization and degradation’ by ‘transfer(ing) dignity to the dissenters and exalt(ing) their cause’ and constructing a more inclusive nationhood in the process.\(^{233}\)

Serving a double function, art became a community-building project, with individual artists quickly joined by protesters from the surrounding area, who would often bring ‘food and music and try to help us’ and leaving Tariq confident that it had ‘connected us all and stands to this day as a physical manifestation of the revolution’.\(^{234}\)

![A Wall Mural by ‘Alshask Mshakel’. Original photograph. August 29th 2019.](image)

The ‘world we created at the sit-in’, as Tariq described it, not only brought people together across gender, class and racial divides, but also championed awareness as a central tenet of the revolution.\(^{235}\)

Combatting the fact that ‘there wasn’t much interest in these issues’

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\(^{233}\) Amin Merghani (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019; Hakki Tas, ‘Street Arts of Resistance in Tahrir and Gezi’. *Middle Eastern Studies*, no 53, 5 (2017); 810.

\(^{234}\) Tariq Ali (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.

\(^{235}\) Tariq Ali (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
prior to the revolution, discussions were frequently held on the history of marginalization in Darfur and the Nuba Mountain in which, for instance, ‘we learned a lot about the horrific things that the Janjaweed did in Darfur, we started to dig more into what really happened there.’ Hearing about these regions, and seeing for the first time evidence of their bloody histories via both social media and revolutionary channels, connected protesters like Sumaya to the rest of Sudan by opening her eyes ‘to the reality of the situation there’. Importantly, as in Khartoum, this awareness went beyond issues of violence, with communality being performed when, for example the association of Christians held an event at the Atbara sit-in during Ramadan, bringing fasting Muslims their fatour and performing traditional dances for them.

Protesters saw the revolution not only as an opportunity for political change but as a ‘chance to make a national identity that includes everyone’, which revealed itself in much of the public art. For example, Figures 33 and 34 are wall murals located in central Atbara, both of which depicting a building embodying the Sudan. The left-hand pillar of these buildings represent a mosque/Islam (topped with a crescent) while the right-hand pillar represents a church/Christianity (topped with a cross). These murals perform resistance against the singularly Islamic character of Sudan, indicating the national belonging of both Christians and Sudan. Two hands clasp one another along with the Sudanese flag, the left hand being noticeably darker than the right, as this mural similarly enacts racial unity on-top of a banner which reads ‘religion is for God and the homeland is for all’.

Poletta and Jassper (2011) stressed the distinction between common ideological commitment (the human rights state) and common identity (nationhood), arguing that ‘one can join a movement because one shares its goals without identifying much with fellow members’, yet, portrayed as belonging to the same nation (building), such art suggests that this revolution

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236 Ibid.
237 Sumaya Salih (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
238 Ismail AbdelGadir (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
which originally brought people together in pursuit of common rights and shared grievances, soon shifted its focus to creating a nationhood inclusive of the whole human rights state. This shift is critical as while the revolutionary moment (and the broad human rights state) may be temporary, as seen by Sudanese history, the nature of the nationhood it leaves in its wake will affect the socio-political and human rights landscape for generations to come.

Figure 32 Wall Mural from within Atbara sit-in. Original Photo, August 29t 2019

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This unity was not only performed by the ‘chants and demands’ of the revolution, as Al Radi put it, but the actions taken by protesters.\textsuperscript{240} For example, in August Taghreed described how ‘people here in Atbara yesterday went out as a group to help people in Ali Jali’, who were suffering from extreme flooding, emphasizing that ‘while this wouldn’t have happened in the past, …we are more connected now, before the revolution no one would think that way’.\textsuperscript{241} Directly relating to human rights, broader conceptions of nations encourage people to care for one another and alleviate each other’s suffering. For example, when 7 school children were killed by the security forces in El Obeid, protesters in Atbara took to the streets, with Al Radi explaining how ‘the whole of Sudan went out to protest with us and for us, (because) we are more of one nation now’.\textsuperscript{242} Indeed, Osman similarly described his coming

\textsuperscript{240} Haitham Mustafa (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
\textsuperscript{241} Sumaya Salih (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019; Amin Merghani (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
\textsuperscript{242} Haitham Mustafa (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
‘from a small village where they are collecting things for an area in the North that was affected by the flood, this wouldn’t have happened before’.\textsuperscript{243}

Newfound regional unity was most visible during the iconic train journey of tens of thousands of protesters from Atbara to Khartoum on April 21\textsuperscript{st} 2019 (Figure 35). Identified by Khartoum and Atbara protesters alike as a highlight of the revolution, they were welcomed by hundreds of thousands of jubilant Khartoum protesters, who heralded them as heroes. The significance of this moment was not lost on protesters such as Ismail who explained that ‘the symbolism of the rural worker’s city sending a train to support the movement in Khartoum was unreal’.\textsuperscript{244}

These train journeys (repeated several times between April 21\textsuperscript{st}-August 22\textsuperscript{nd}) came to represent a new connectivity and contributed to the re-identification process by both encouraging feelings of belonging and pride amongst Atbara protesters and reinforcing to those in Khartoum (including international and domestic media) the breadth of the Sudanese revolutionary movement, and implicitly, nation. Khalid Mohamed Ahmed, the train driver described how on such journeys the ‘atmosphere was contagious. I remember entering Khartoum and passing by military forces, they all stood and saluted us, it was such a beautiful moment’, and the euphoria created by these moments only reinforced protesters determinations to protect this new-found unity on both ends of the trainline.\textsuperscript{245}

\textsuperscript{243} Sumaya Salih (Atbara protestor) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
\textsuperscript{244} Ismail AbdelGadir (Atbara protestor) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
\textsuperscript{245} Khalid Mohamed Ahmed, (Atbara protestor) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
Protesters in Atbara were acting on the basis of a new nationhood, or shared social identity (as argued by Reicher) which was forged across the human rights state and which actively celebrated the breadth of Sudaneseness. As demonstrated in the art (Figure 36) the human rights state (represented by the protester) was positioned by this new social identity as lexicon joining the Old and New Sudan, Arab and African identities. This positioning is indicative of the ways in which contact across the human rights state encouraged protesters to reject the reductive colonial/neo-colonial epistemological order which held that the Sudanese person (or subject) could be only one thing. Indeed, while Ismail reflected that the ‘revolution definitely strengthened our ties with our African roots’ recalling how although ‘back in school we would chant the famous poem “I am an African… I am a Sudanese” we only felt the truth of it (Africanness) during the demonstrations’, Haitham pointed to the pluralism of Sudanese identity explaining that ‘I take pride in my African roots but I identify as a Sudanese and I think

246 David Pilling, ‘Sudan’s Protests Feel Like a Trip back to Revolutionary Russia.’ Financial Times, April 24, 2019. https://www.ft.com/content/3b84079a-6684-11e9-a79d-04f350474d62.
it allows us to be more than one thing”.

The unity-in-diversity championed by this testimony is indicative of an unprecedentedly nuanced understanding of Sudanese identity which, being premised in inclusivity and equality, gives meaning to official human rights formulations.

As in Khartoum, this moment of national introspection has extended to, and been shaped by, the position of women vis a view the nation. In bringing women together in pursuit of common rights, the revolution challenged the patriarchal order central to the Sudanese nation. The revolutionary movement had no choice but to confront the question of gender given that women outnumbered men in many protests in Atbara, and there was a unanimous appreciation that they were a ‘huge part of why this revolution succeeded’. Indeed, here women like Nossible Ezzaldeen frequently led protests, upheld by her male counterparts as the

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247 Ismail AbdelGadir (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019; Haitham Mustafa (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.

248 Tariq Ali (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019; Unlike the Western Press, Atbara protesters were unsurprised by the dominance of women in the revolution, with protesters such as Osman explaining that ‘it was normal for us to see women at the forefront of this movement, because women were the most subjected to injustice during the past regime’.

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Figure 35 Wall Mural from within Atbara sit-in. Photograph by Dena Latif, August 29th 2019
‘backbone’ of the sit-in, both protesting and ensuring that the revolutionary space was provided for.\textsuperscript{249}

On the one hand the fact that protesters referred to her as ‘mama’ points to the deep seated patriarchalism which the human rights state continues to vocally challenge. On the other hand however, just as protesters looked to Kandakas for reference points of women’s power, such terminology sought to relate this activism to more familiar nodal point of women’s power. Far from intending to marginalize women, these male protesters emphasized that ‘most of the essential tasks were done by women (and that) if it wasn’t for girls this sit-in would have never succeeded’.\textsuperscript{250} This is indicative of, in keeping with Massad’s argument, the tendency of nationalisms to position themselves as the meeting point of tradition and modernity.

Indeed, protesters in Atbara were seemingly unsurprised by the magnitude of women’s participation, seeing it as a long-overdue reconciliation of women’s private power and public presence. Omar, for example, explained that ‘women carry the burdens of raising this society, in my own home 70% of the responsibility of the house lies on my wife, she is the one helping with the education, running the house and making sure that our budget is set for the month. Our house wouldn’t survive without her…changing the government wasn’t such an impossible task compared to everything they (women) do’.\textsuperscript{251} Haitham similarly explained how ‘for me it started in my home, my wife was very active, even in April when she was pregnant, she would go out to protest, so I am used to seeing women protest and raise their voices’.\textsuperscript{252} In this way women are being reimagined into the nationhood as protesters push for a nation more closely modelled on both the human rights state and the inclusivity of their private realities.

\textsuperscript{249} Tariq Ali (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
\textsuperscript{250} Ibid.,
\textsuperscript{251} Omar Abubakr (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
\textsuperscript{252} Haitham Mustafa (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
Of particular importance given the historical marginalization of women’s activism outside of Khartoum, protester rhetoric depicted women’s actions as not novel, and rather a reclaiming of their previous power. For example, Ismail referred to women taking ‘back their rightful space’ and ‘place’ while Sumaya described women as ‘reclaiming their positions’ and was proud of how ‘we took back our rights by ourselves’. This narrative helped to make it ‘more normal for women to be part of the political scene’ as Amin put it, and heighthened the centrality of women to the human rights state and, as a consequence, the emerging nationhood. This discourse was performed by street art, as seen in Figures 37 and 38 wherein women are linked to tradition through their dress but also to modernity through their public prominence. Figure 37 is one of many national examples of women heralded as ‘Kandakas’, with the female figure depicted as representing both the nation and the new era of freedom. The recognition of women as equal members of both the human rights state, but also the nation, is demonstrated by Figure 38 in which a female and male protester are linked by their common Sudaneseness (the flag).

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253 Ismail AbdelGadir (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
254 Amin Mohamed (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
Figure 36 Wall Mural from within Atbara sit-in. Original Photo, August 29th 2019

Figure 37 Wall Mural from within Atbara sit-in. Original Photo, August 29th 2019.
While protesters stressed that this was only a first step, female protesters described the revolution as a temporally transformative experience in which ‘awareness was increasing as we went out more’ and which reported began to ‘change perspectives and social norms’. For example, whereas Mariam reported having to sneak out of the house ‘fearing the backlash protesting might have on me’ during previous uprisings, ‘when we went out this time, my family was proud of my participation, they would ask me what happened and what we were planning to do. It was really astonishing. Even my friends, the ones whose families used to oppose it, were supporting them this time’. Male protesters identified a similar shift, with Haitham explaining how ‘this generation views women differently, they grew up in a society that mistreats women but they never picked up on that, instead they admire women’s role as a motivator and a leader’.

Largely supported by the human rights state, women’s participation in Atbara has extended beyond the protests, allowing them to continue to claim space within the national imagination. For example, Amin explained how, as a part of the Hanabniyhu (we will build it) campaign ‘we work in the streets now, as part of our neighbourhood committee doing wall art and cleaning the streets, and women feel very comfortable being part of these things now, it would have been very hard before’. The art here stands testimony to women’s dominance in the revolution but also to their dominance in the new nation. In Figure 39, the wall mural embodies the nation as a woman, indicated by the female side-profile. This is particularly interesting given that this art calls on protesters to take to the streets in the name of the (female) nation, it being written that ‘You are going (to protest), even if you die your country needs you’.

255 Mariam El Zein (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
256 Ibid.,
257 Haitham Mustafa (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
258 Amin Merghani (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
Protesters in Atbara, like in Khartoum, were confident that this newfound sense of unity would survive the break-up of the sit-in because the human rights state was not limited to its territorial boundaries and the inclusive nationhood it engendered had already begun to take root. Indeed, Amin explained how despite the tragedy of June 3rd, ‘we knew that we made real connections and break throughs that would last a lifetime’. This palpable increase in group pride, which is a form of identity work in and of itself, stemmed from the feeling among Atbara protesters that ‘the entire world was watching and supporting our revolution and Atbara was the birthplace, so history will remember that’. 

As in Khartoum, the successes of the human rights state in making clear common values shared across the Sudanese people led protesters to reposition themselves in relation to

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259 Amin Merghani (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
260 Ibid.,
the nation. Tagreed explained how ‘we used to carry so much sadness and bitterness when dealing with being Sudanese, now we want to fight for our country, we want to build it…we believe that this is the time to put in the work and build our country…we used to complain a lot about the lack of opportunities and how this country treated us, but the revolution showed us the good side of the country, the one we work for its betterment’ demonstrating the ways in which the human rights state tied people more closely to the nation and bolstered feelings of shared responsibility.261

![Figure 39 Wall Mural from within Atbara sit-in. Original phoot, August 29t 2019](image)

While protesters such as Mariam had planned on leaving Sudan at their earliest opportunity, the revolution caused them to re-orient their futures. Indeed, Yousef who had similarly planned to leave, described being ‘reintroduced to hope after this movement…I was leaving the country I thought there was nothing left for me here but now I get to be part of

261 Mariam El Zein (Atbara protestor) in discussion with the author, August 201
building the country I always dreamed of’. Embodied in the ‘we will build it movement’ (Hanabniyhu) movement, (represented in Figure 40) protesters in Atbara increasingly perceived themselves as agents of human rights, imbued with the ‘feeling that we have the power to change things now’ and acknowledging the grassroots role that needs to be played to ‘work towards the Sudan we want’, including the protection of the nationhood engendered by the human rights state, and its central tenets of equality and inclusivity.\textsuperscript{263}

\textsuperscript{262} Amin Merghani (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
\textsuperscript{263} Omar Abubakr (Atbara protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
**Chapter 8. Nyla and Kadugli**

“To western Sudan, Darfur, eastern Sudan, to southern Sudan - Kordofan, Blue Nile State, to northern and central Sudan, to rural Sudan and all its citizens, and to all (our) citizens who are living in poverty, sickness, insecurity and who are marginalized: This revolution is your revolution and you must be the first to reap its benefits” Mohamed Naji Al Assam, Spokesperson of the Freedom and Change Forces, Speaking at the Power-Sharing Ceremony of August 21st 2019.

The Atbara and Khartoum case studies have shown that the human rights state (created by the revolutionary moment) succeeded in bridging ethnic, gendered, religious and regional gaps to such an extent that it in turn provoked a national re-identification founded upon equality and inclusivity. Replacing ethnic and tribal hierarchies with a conception of Sudaneseness that encompasses people across the state, protest as a means of human rights acquisition left in its wake a nationhood which will add real meaning to official human rights formulations.

Yet, given that those on the Sudanese peripheries have repeatedly had to resist their neo-colonial exclusion from the national project, it is critical to now turn to Nyla (Darfur) and Kadugli (the Nuba Mountains) to assess the ways in the human rights state in these spaces provoked similar transformations as well as the provincial reaction to the emerging ethnic-pluralist nationhood across Sudan. While, unlike in Khartoum and Atbara, these peoples had long rejected the Arab-Islamic identity project in favour of a more Africanist/Pluralist model, it will be shown that the human rights state nonetheless transformed protesters sense of belonging to the Sudanese nation in a way that might end more recent violent rebellion in the name of inclusion.

**Conventional Human Rights and Resistance**

The Darfuri and Nuba people share a legacy of violent political, socio-economic and cultural marginalization by the center. Instead of integrating them into a multicultural nation, colonial and postcolonial governments alike have refused their identities and denied them
access to economic and political power. The shortcomings of the conventional human rights approach are made clear by the history of the Nuba Mountains and Darfur, where the state, which has been entrusted by the nation-state human rights model with providing their citizens with (and protecting their) human rights, has historically discriminated against these Africanized subjects on the basis of their race and waged campaigns of ethnic violence against those who challenged this the Arab-Islamic national project and central-Sudanese supremacy.

With non-elite human rights actors not given their due by this framework, the Darfuri and Nuba legacy of non-violent resistance to this marginalization has been largely emitted from studies, discussions and understandings of the crises in these regions. De Waal’s generalization about the violent nature of collective action in Sudan’s provinces is indicative of the historical erasure of peaceful group actions and the localization of human rights in these communities. In reality, as early as 1938 the Black Block was established with the stated aim of representing non-Arab Sudanese in Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, being seceded following independence by groups such as the Darfur Development Front and Darfur Renaissance Front which sought to protect the political rights of peoples in these increasingly marginalized regions. The Nuba people have similarly contested their peripheralization through peaceful means, promoting their identity and political rights in the face of Arabization and Islamization through the Nuba Mountains General Union (1957) as well as youth-led groups such as Nahnu Kadugli (We are Kadugli) and Komolo movements of the 1970s.

Excluded from power, Darfuri and Nuba peoples have frequently turned to protests as one of the few available mechanisms of contesting the erosion of their rights. For example, many protested in 1984 to demand the establishment of a regional government in Darfur as

264 Komey, Land, Governance, Conflict & the Nuba of Sudan, 75-7; Mamdani, Saviours and Survivors, 181.
265 For example, in an event celebrating World Day for indigenous people (year)?, Some 600 Nuba youth changed their names from Arabised ones to indigenous Nuba names; Kadoda and Hale. “Contemporary Youth Movements and the Role of Social Media in Sudan.”, 227.
well as in support of the 1964 and 1985 national revolutions. Unfortunately the brevity of the revolutions meant that in both cases contact and cooperation across the human rights state was too short-lived to meaningfully impact or broaden conceptions of Sudaneseness, nor to bridge the sharp divide between the centres and peripheries. As such Darfuri and Nuba people were pushed out of the post-liberation moment forcing these peoples back into fringe rebel groups and movements such as the SPLMA and Jem movements which had to take increasingly drastic, and violent, approaches.

The relationship between human rights and exclusionary national identities can be seen in the fact that the Arab-Islamic national identity allowed the government to portray these non-conforming movements as threats to the state’s exclusive character. Protecting the Arab-Islamic national-character was used as a justification to wage ‘jihad’ against the Nuba in 1992 for example, as the regime described the liberation movement as ‘propagating a ‘war against Moslems…desecrating mosques, burning and defiling the Quran and raping the Moslem Women’, in spite of the fact that the SPLMA included many Muslim Nuba.

This exclusive national identity has thus allowed the regime to peddle an ‘us versus them’ narrative which was used to justify flagrant human rights abuses against non-Arabized/Islamized populations. Under the banner of this national-identity the regime indiscriminately murdered Darfuris (using the Arab Janjaweed militia) and Nuba (cordonning off the region and bombing it mercilessly). While groups such as ‘Not on Our Watch’ have condemned the ‘genocide’ in Darfur, the ‘genocide of attrition’ in the Nuba Mountains has received substantially less attention, despite the fact that, ‘not only did the government aim to

266 El Tom, Darfur People: Too Black for the Arab-Islamic Project of Sudan”, 97; It should be noted that in 1985 the security agencies tried to deter those in the centre from protesting by provocatively suggesting that protesters from the peripheries then-living in Khartoum were hoping to provoke violence and anarchy. Berridge, Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan: the Khartoum Springs of 1964 and 1985, 209.
267 Komey, Land, Governance, Conflict & the Nuba of Sudan,84.
268 Ibid., 83.
defeat the SPLA forces but it also intended a wholesale transformation of the Nuba society in such a way that its prior identity was destroyed.’ 269

The Transformative Impact of the Human Rights State

Given this legacy of exclusion and resistance, and the failure of past revolutions to more inclusively reimagine Sudanese nationhood (in a way that might end the cycle of ethnic violence in Sudan), it is critical to assess the peripheral perspective of the emerging nationhood.

The Sudanese revolution took on different forms in Kadugli and Nyala than in Khartoum or Atbara. The heavy military and police presence in these spaces hindered protesters’ ability to publicly demonstrate, with protests not beginning until January 2019 in Nyala and (following the overthrow of Al Bashir) April 2019 in Kadugli.270 Whilst the June 3rd massacre was many in Khartoum’s first experience of violence, as protester Mohamed Ibrahim who was pre-emptively arrested explained, those in Nyala and Kadugli were long familiar with government violence and arbitrary arrest which ‘introduced fear to the souls of citizens (and) affected their participation in the current revolution’.271 Protests were further forestalled because, while in locations including as Al Gedaref, there was early evidence of soldier sympathy for protesters, Darfuri and Nuba protesters had little hope that this might be the case for them.

Challenging the western epistemological tradition that shapes the discourse surrounding both human rights and revolutions, in both Nyala and Kadugli, protesters saw the contemporary revolution not as an isolated event (the position more frequently taken by

269 Ibid., 85; It is important to note that there is an ongoing debate about whether or not the atrocities of 2003 in Darfur constituted genocide. For more see Mahmoud Mamdani, Saviours and Survivors. It is important to note that this was not the first time that Arab nomads were militarised and used against ‘African’ populations, which is what also occurred in the 1987 El Dein massacre where 1000 Dinka refugees were murdered by Arabized Baggara groups.

270 Large areas within the Nuba Mountains are still subject to emergency laws limiting citizens freedom of movement as well as their ability to protest.

271 Zaki Abdelhalim (Nyala protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
Khartoum protesters) but as another wave in decades of resistance. While Salah Babiker from Kadugli explained that ‘the revolution didn’t start nine months ago, the conflict here started in the 70s, and the armed resistance started from that time, so for most of us here that was the start of the revolution against systems that marginalized people outside the center’, Ihab Salih from Nyala described the revolution as a ‘collective effort from 1989, (as) people who opposed the coup from the start are the ones who built the momentum that led to this moment’.  

Rather than bifurcating Sudanese resistance into nonviolence and violence, protesters here explained that ‘the armed resistance that started here and (in) most of the marginalized areas was carrying the cause of this revolution, it just used the wrongs means and weapons’. This narrative is indicative of the attempt by protesters in these spaces, barred from initially partaking in the revolution as actively as they would have liked, to claim ownership over the revolution itself and assert recognition for the oft-forgotten resistance on the peripheries. More importantly however this testimony demonstrates that, in spite of the moralizing western human rights framework, protesters here did not conceive of armed resistance to be an illegitimate means of human rights acquisition. In this way it is clear that we must challenge the epistemological/moral lens and vocabulary through which we approach what amounts to a localization of human rights in these areas.

Similarly to Khartoum and Atbara, sit-ins were formed in Kadugli and Nyala during Ramadan (May 2019) although again on a significantly smaller scale. Activists like Salah emphasized that the smallness of the Kadugli sit-in, which was reportedly maintained by approximately 70 protesters, was because ‘if there was a 20% margin of freedom in other states, the percentage would by 7% here or less’, pointing to the marked difference of regional

272 Salah Babiker (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019; Ihab Salih (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
273 Daoud Elhadi (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
274 The extreme difficulty of protesting in these spaces (under the heavy military presence) was cited as a reason for the lack of public revolutionary art in Kadugli and Nyala.
experiences in Sudan and self-identifying as the citizens whose rights had been most comprehensively corroded by the regime. With their physical movement restricted by the (very noticeable) military presence, protesters were forced to find inventive ways of participating in the human rights state. While protesters such as Yousif Mohamed were forced to organise at night, those in Kadugli, such as Salah and Daoud Elhadi connected with the human rights state through online revolutionary spaces and platforms, raising local awareness by sharing ‘what was happening here and all around Sudan’ as well as distributing statements and information on behalf of the centralised Sudanese Professionals Association. Rather than relegate themselves to a secondary position, this awareness raising was conceived of as ‘just as important as going out in the streets’ to both the bridging of gaps within the human rights state and to the national-reidentification which this process engendered.

I. Race, Racism and the Human Rights State

In both Kadugli and Nyala protesters experienced first-hand the racism and tribalism that the regime’s Arab-Islamic nationhood encouraged and that central-Sudanese protesters were made aware of over the course of the revolution. Protesters pointed to the paradoxical nature of the regime’s national identity which ‘preached oneness’ while in reality ‘here in South Kordofan people are marginalized and have very little access if any to health services, education and many other things’. While some protesters such as Yousif discussed the racialization of Sudanese governance (pointing the requirement of tribal identifications on government-issued IDs) or institutional racial discrimination, which Salah argued ‘affected our opportunities in education, work and life in general’, protesters predominantly discussed

275 Salah Babiker (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
276 Daoud Elhadi (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019; Salah Babiker (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
277 For example, Hassan Mekki, the racist philosopher of Al Bashir’s regime portrayed Khartoum as a city besieged by black people.
278 Leila Halim (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
societal racism, pointing to the very grassroots mentalities that I argue only collective action can (self-reflexively) change.\textsuperscript{279} Indeed, pointing to the crux of Sudan’s identity crisis, Yousif explained how outside of Darfur people fixate on his tribal heritage, a phenomena he problematized because ‘I am Sudanese first’, arguing that ‘in order for peace to transcend us all the tribal and racial identity must be secondary to the Sudanese identity. One does not necessarily need to ask about another’s tribe to know them better, the question must end at which city are you from’.\textsuperscript{280}

Just as Khartoum protesters admitted to their historical indifference to the happenings in these regions, protesters in Kadugli and Nyala characterized the pre-revolutionary pre-human rights state landscape as being divided by apathy and conceptions of ‘the Sudanese’ that did not extend beyond people’s ‘small circle of family & tribe’.\textsuperscript{281} Protesters unanimously identified racism as a key cause of their marginalization and obstacle to their human rights, with Leila Hatim in Kadugli going so far as to state that she had ‘never met a Northerner that felt empathy for Kordofan…(because) they did not embrace us as their own’.\textsuperscript{282} From the perspective of such protesters then the revolution was about more than mere regime change, it similarly sought to combat the narrowness of ‘Sudaneseness’ which encouraged the marginalization of these peoples by their national counterparts.

Acute racism was clear to Darfuri protesters upon initial contact with central Sudanese people in spaces such as universities, which brought students together from across the country. On a personal level, protesters Huda Hassabu and Layal Khalid described feeling ‘excluded even from the people in my class (as) there was a lack of trust targeted toward us’, with Layal clarifying that even when ‘we tried to raise our voices and break the stereotype...we were

\textsuperscript{279} Salah Babiker (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
\textsuperscript{280} Yousif Mohamed, a protester in Nyala described his frustration at having been called for military service, a burden he was certain those in the centre were frequently able to avoid.; Yousif Mohamed (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
\textsuperscript{281} Salah Babiker (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
\textsuperscript{282} Leila Halim (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
constantly categorized as the people from the west, who liked to fight with each other’.\(^{283}\) Indicative of the apathy that more broadly divided Sudan’s regions, Yousra described how at university ‘I would talk about the genocide in Darfur and most people wouldn’t care or believe me. I remember being very upset about an incident in Nyala where 13 high school students were killed for protesting, and a man at my university was talking about how they deserved to be killed…this is just one example of the lack of empathy we faced’.\(^{284}\) Protesters then were actively aware of the racial divisions that the human rights state needed to bridge and that any successful nationhood needed to eradicate by engendering shared loyalty to a new ‘Sudaneseness’.

Crucially to both this study and Sudan’s future, protesters argued that regional and racial divisions had begun to be eroded over the course of the revolution. Protesters including Fatma explained how ‘this barrier was broken at the sit-in where for the first-time we were treated with trust from the start, it was heart-warming to say the least’ demonstrating the impact of the new-found inclusivity practiced within the human rights state. While some protesters reported ‘feeling nothing’ and others stressed that ‘simply chanting We are All Darfur won’t fix’ deeply rooted racial divides, the vast majority of protesters here celebrated this chant as indicative of a reflexive shift in national understandings. Protesters attributed this change to contact through the human rights state, with Mostafa explaining that ‘it felt as if the Sudanese people have finally opened up their eyes’.\(^{285}\) Although protesters cautiously insisted that tangible changes, such as swiftly build upon this progress dropping tribal labels from national ID cards needed to occur if this progress was to be built on and ways of thinking permanently changed, this chant was celebrated by protesters such as Huda as a critical first step which

\(^{283}\) Huda Hassabu (Nyala protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019; Layal Khalid (Nyala protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019; Unlike at the sit-in however, university campuses remained restricted spaces, with Layla’s activism leading her to be ‘targeted and investigated for ties with foreign countries’ with even her family pressured to silencing her.

\(^{284}\) Yousra Ibrahim (Nyala protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.

\(^{285}\) Daoud Elhadi (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 201.
‘changed the (national) narrative and showed the regime that we knew that they were trying to trap pup in their racist narrative’. 286

Given the historical legacy of the 1964 and 1985 revolutions, which quickly side-lined participants in these regions, protesters here were understandably more hesitant than those in Khartoum and Atbara to celebrate the end of old modes of identification. This cautiousness was particularly heightened given the uncertainty surrounding the continued military component of the transitional government. However, while protesters such as Mostafa prefaced their statements by explaining that ‘we can’t decide if things have changed so soon’ they unanimously recognized that across the human rights state ‘people are trying to reach out and understand each other and raise their voices, so we can all fix our social and political issues’. Although frustrated by his inability to physical join in the protests prior to Al Bashir’s overthrow, Daoud was nonetheless encouraged by the chants and discussions held across the human rights state (experienced via social media) that central-Sudanese protesters were ‘finally speaking up and changing things, they were finally catching up to what was happening to us…demanding we get the Sudan we deserve’ and ‘trying to repair ties with each other’. 287

Indicative of their common membership of the human rights state, protesters argued that connections were forged across Sudan as ‘people in Kadugli and Khartoum came out to demonstrate with the same enthusiasm because the problem was the same’, evidence of, as Gregg argued ‘activists united in promoting human rights within the corresponding nation state’. 288 As a consequence of this shared platform and experience, it was felt that whereas prior to the revolution, ‘if something happened to a protester here no one would care’, unprecedented levels of connection and visibility had ‘made us more accepting of each other and our true identity’, resulting in protesters’ increased confidence that others in Sudan would hereafter

286 Huda Hassabu (Nyala protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
287 Daoud Elhadi (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
288 Leila Halim (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
stand up for their human rights too. The solidarity created by this mutual recognition of each other’s human rights (which Gregg argues is central to any human rights state) was demonstrated when protesters in Kadugli and Nyala took to the streets following the massacre of protesters in Khartoum on June 3rd with many identifying this as the moment Sudan became ‘one nation’.

Protester testimony in Nyala and Kadugli thus contrasted the old wherein the central Sudanese power structure ‘identified (the) Sudanese as the centre only, neglecting other parts of Sudan’ and ‘took pride in their tribes and areas over their Sudanese identity’, with the revolutionary experience which ‘made us feel like one body’. Protesters such as Salah, who never visited the Khartoum sit-in, nonetheless argued that it embodied this feeling, and was a space wherein members of the human rights state visibly put country before the tribe representative of a new shared social identity/ nationhood in Sudan premised upon unity-in-diversity and inclusive Sudaneseness. While the constitutional equality promoted by conventional human rights approaches had long (and purposefully) failed to tackle racial and tribal hierarchies, protesters felt confident that contact through the human rights state had allowed people to self-reflexively embody and embrace these rights in a way which coloured their behaviour and engendered a new nationhood.

II. Gender, Sexism and the Human Rights State

Protester testimony in Darfur and Atbara similarly mirrored the views expressed in Khartoum and Atbara regarding the shift in the gendering of Sudanese nationhood. Women’s visibility within the human rights state left a lasting impression on protesters, who emphasized

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289 Salah Babiker (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
290 Ibid.,
291 Women in Darfur and Kadugli had both been long-repressed and suffered attempts to Arabize and Islamize the population, with for example the rise of female circumcision in Darfur in the 1970s and 1980s used to ‘Sudanize’ the women here, demonstrating how identity is frequently marked on women’s bodies.
that ‘women fought and were on the front lines demonstrating for the nation’s rights without fear and without restrictions’.292 While revolution is not a western-sanctioned human rights mechanism, protesting (and joining the human rights state) ‘gave the female voice in Sudan a widespread outreach to the world, whereas before this was restricted to people in the media or folklore artists and dancers’.293

While women protesters in Kadugli, such as Selma, were confident that ‘the woman has grown in the eyes of everyone because she has stood up bravely against the regime and broken the stereotypes of her own fragility’, in reality (as aforementioned) women had long stood up against their marginalization. What was different this time around was both the scale of this activism but more critically, the establishment of a human rights state which transcended regional divisions and thus made the breadth of women’s resistance visible on an unprecedented level. Indeed, while the image of Alaa Salah made women’s resistance (and potential human rights actor) visible to international audiences, combatting the marginalization of the subaltern by the elitist conventional human rights approach, the human rights state within Sudan created channels which facilitated the rising visibility of the women on Sudan’s peripheries.

This heightened visibility led protesters to repeatedly attribute the success of the revolution to women, with many such as Ihab arguing that ‘if it wasn’t for the women, the revolution wouldn’t have worked’.294 Interestingly, protesters conceived of women protesters in Nyala and Kadugli (as in Khartoum and Atbara) as embodying the nexus of modernity and tradition. Many protesters, such as Waleed Hassan naturalized their activism by reconciling it with the private power that women held, describing how they are the responsible entity in the family, so women taking leadership positions are the norm here’.295 Similarly to the Kandaka

292 Selma Khalid (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
293 Ibid.,
294 Ihab Salih (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
295 Waleed Hassan (Nyala protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
phenomenon elsewhere, protesters similarly traditionalized women's activism by arguing that 'historically Sudanese women had always been strong and influential...they always fight for what they believe in, they have done it time after time throughout history, so it wasn’t a surprise for me to see them at the forefront of this revolution'.  

By couching women’s activism in continuity and tradition, protesters were not relegating women to a lesser status, but rather emphasizing how *unnatural* the national identity and narrative that marginalized this female power was.

On the contrary, protesters emphasized the activity of women within the human rights state, with their revolutionary work (from organizing through Facebook group Thowri or ‘She Revolts’ to marching and fleeing NISS forces alongside men) particularly acknowledged *because* it broke with the conventional understandings of tradition and the status quo described by Abdelhakam, wherein ‘there is no clear role for women in politics, (and) the man’s view is that she sits at home only, especially after marriage’.  It is critical to recognize that while within the human rights state there was a notable level of tolerance and inclusivity, women protesters operated in environments in which sexist views prevailed, with Albager explaining how at the start of the revolution women protesters were labelled as ‘bad’ and men as ‘homosexual’.

Undeterred by this hostility, members of the human rights state remembered women protesters for ‘representing and mobilizing us at the sit-in…standing up to police and security forces and standing strong in the face of abuse and arrest’, encouraging them to subsequently challenge the gendered biases of the Sudanese national landscape and consciousness.  Indeed protesters such as Ismail were confident that ‘participation in the streets changed this (sexist) narrative’, taking it upon himself to continue to raise awareness on gendered issues, speaking

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296 Ibid; Salah Babiker (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
297 Abdelhakam Ismail (Nyala protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
298 Ibid.,
299 Albager Osman (Nyala protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
at local mosques about the problematic notion of male stewardship, and reporting changing attitudes towards this traditional custom. This is evidence of the effect of contact with women activists through the human rights state, which not only gave meaning to official gender-equality-promoting human rights formulations, but encouraged men to recognize women’s rights and centrality to the emerging nationhood.

While some protesters assessed shifts in the gendering of the nation based on the ‘narrative of the revolutionary forces’ which they argued ‘has been in favour of giving women their rightful leadership positions’, along with campaigns such as the 50/50 movement to secure women 50% of parliamentary seats, others pointed to other sources of evidence, such as ‘the narrative on social media has changed, the conversation has shifted from focusing on women’s looks and superficial things to their achievements and participation in protests’. While protesters were frequently unable to pinpoint exactly when or how their ideas on women had changed, they were certain that women’s dominance in the revolution and the bridging of gendered divides by the human rights state was engendering a nationhood founded in the equality of the sexes. If the human rights state was a prototype of the type of nationhood and society envisioned for the new Sudan, its dominance by women protesters left activists confident that ‘our women can lead this community, I saw it first-hand’.

III. Assertive Selfhood and the Revolution.

Of particular importance in Kadugli and Nyala, where historic marginalization has led to secessionist discourses, protesters here reported an increased identification with the Sudanese nation. The testimony of protesters like Salah, who expressed a heightened sense of his own agency in describing how ‘we definitely have a bigger chance now to build a country

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300 Ibid.,
301 Huda Hassabu (Nyala protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
302 Ibid.,
that we are proud of, the change that happened is a reason to take pride in our nationality’ is indicative of protesters socialization ‘into assertive selfhood’ equipping them with ‘the capacity to author his or her own human rights’.\footnote{Salah Babiker (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.} Whereas disillusioned prior to the revolution Salah ‘didn’t feel like I belonged to this country…(as) its hard to feel sentiment for a country that always excludes you’, newly self-confident in his capacity to affect change ‘I am more invested in making it a better country for all of us, and making it a country that all of us can be proud of’.\footnote{Ibid.,} Not only was the human rights state successful in toppling the regime, but it made visible a state-wide revolutionary community that valued diversity and inclusivity, leading many on the peripheries, who had long felt disconnected from the national identity and instead resorted to local forms of identity and belonging, reconciling themselves to the nation.

Although the sit-ins were destroyed on June 3rd, the shared experience of the human rights state and revolution had impacted protesters who sought to protect the identity shifts which they had witnessed over the course of the revolution, with Layal Khalid arguing that for the first time the revolution ‘made me feel hopeful that we can change perspective about identity and made me want to write and change the narrative about our identity’.\footnote{Layal Khalid (Nyala protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.} The transformative impact of the revolutionary human rights community and nation-wide-campaign was reflected upon by all interviewees, who reported not only that ‘my love for my country grew bigger’ or that the revolution ‘made me more accepting and understanding of other’s shortcomings’ but critically for Sudan moving forward, that the revolution ‘made me believe in one Sudan, in a solution that unites us all instead of only looking at our problems and the things that affect our lives.’\footnote{Daoud Elhadi (Kadugli protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019; Huda Hassabu (Nyala protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.}
While only a beginning, in both Kadugli and Nyala protesters identified the revolutionary moment and human rights state as inviting trans-Sudanese awareness and collaboration in a way which brought these people much-needed visibility and built bonds across historic divides and engendering a newly inclusive national identity in the process. In stark contrast to the aftermath of the 1964 and 1985 revolutions, they associated this revolution with actively targeting racism and tribalism and shifting notions of nationhood in a way that might, once and for all, truly tackle Sudan’s problematic, and violent, centre-periphery dynamic.
Conclusion

On December 19th 2019, trains from across Sudan converged on Atbara to mark the one year anniversary of the start of the revolution. The newly inclusive nationhood was embodied by this celebration, in which peoples from the Sudanese peripheries were symbolically seen, heard and embraced.307

Although the sit-ins were destroyed on June 3rd 2019, with the massacre in Khartoum making international headlines, there is clear evidence that the identarian shifts described by protesters survived the destruction. Unlike the sit-ins, the human rights state transcended the physical walls torched by security forces and forged connections which have deeply impacted the revolutionary community. The credibility of age-old stereotypes, whether racial or gendered, have been undermined by months of collaboration across historic divides. Although reduced to rubble, the sit-ins, and the sense of community exhibited across them, have taken on almost mythical proportions, with protesters continuing to discuss the unity they experienced there through photos and stories. Far from relinquishing power to the joint civilian-military transitional government, protesters continue to reclaim the narrative, from re-painting the walls of the sit-in, destroyed by soldiers on June 3rd, to frequently coming together in protest to remind those in government of the people’s desire for a government which mirrors the inclusivity of the revolutionary community.

Across the human right state understandings of Sudaneseness have shifted. This change has manifested itself in many ways since June 3rd. Change was evidenced from the Kassala revolutionaries marching 470 kms to Port Sudan (then experiencing tribal conflict) on September 1st, ‘in support of peaceful coexistence and social peace’, to Saamniya Sufis collecting tents, food and drink for Wad Ramble residents suffering from flooding, to people

307 Trains and demonstrators from Khartoum, El Obeid, Port Sudan and other regions of Sudan travelled to Atbara for celebrations. It was a symbolic reversal of the famous April 23rd train which brought Atbara protesters to the Khartoum sit-in.
across Sudan taking to the streets in their thousands when seven school children were shot in El Obeid on August 2nd. Historical apathy is being replaced by notions of collective responsibility as following the revolution people increasingly ‘think about everything that happens in Sudan, in any region, people now have an interest and awareness for what’s going on’. For example, contrary to the state-wide silence that was once customary, when violence broke out in Darfur in October 2019, a ‘Green for Darfur’ movement was begun on social media, bringing daily awareness to the unfolding tribal violence.

That said, it is both impossible and beyond the remit of this study to judge whether or not this nationalism will remain a productive and positive force of change. This study has focused on how the Sudanese nation has been reinvented by the revolutionary community, however, beyond its boundaries such change will take time and concerted effort. As Malak put it, unity is ‘like a tree, if you do not water it every day it will die’. Extreme challenges remain to nation-wide reidentification. Rebel groups exist on the Sudanese borders who, after half a century of exclusion, value the primacy of their ethnic identifications and tribal conflicts in the North and West continue to challenge peace. Sexism and racism endure, particularly among the older generations, as do many members of the former regime, who supported Al Bashir’s exclusive Arab-Islamic national identity. It is too soon to tell if this new nationhood will prove meaningful to those outside of the revolutionary community and become a focus of loyalty for those across the state. Similarly, only time will tell if this identity project will break the mould of civic nationhoods that champion multiculturalism and diversity while in reality enforcing homogeneity through citizenship.

308 Live videos provided by local media coverage as well as the Instagram account of @monabashirelnefedi
309 Layal Khalid (Nyala protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
310 Randa Hatim (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019
311 Amir Malak (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019
Yet despite these uncertainties, it is still important to acknowledge the ways in which this period of change has ‘socialized’ protesters into assertive selfhoods’, encouraging them to self-identify as human rights actors. Even if this revolution was to go the way of 1964 and 1985, which were quickly usurped by military coups, the changes being made across Sudan are setting important precedents for what is possible. Change is visible in the appointment of a Prime Minister from outside of the historically privileged riverain core. Change is clear in the unprecedented appointment of women to posts such as the Minister of Foreign Affairs as well as to the transitional leadership council (one of whom is Coptic Christians). Change is evident in the refurbishment of churches in Ad Damazin in time for Christmas and in the reading of the bible alongside the Quran at the power-sharing ceremony of August 21st. Change is evident in the abolishment of the public order laws which infamously policed women’s behaviours. These changes seek to mirror the inclusivity exhibited across the human rights state, with, for example, Prime Minister Hamdok tweeting that ‘the abolition of the public order law by the transitional government reminds me of the image of the brave young woman stepping on the back of a young man helping her climb the wall during one of the protests’. These changes, and the new Sudanese nationhood, should be recognized by the academic and international community, who should support the Sudanese people in tangible efforts made to reduce the inequalities that the ethnic-pluralist nationhood has historically sought to overlay.

Although the Sudanese political revolution has ended, and members of the human rights state have gone back to their ordinary lives, the nationhood which it has engendered has left protesters feeling that ‘we carry the revolution inside us’ and that ‘we have a good base right now to create a country that includes everyone’. In this way, the Sudanese revolution is demonstrative of the potential for reciprocal and productive relationships between human

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312 Gregg, The Human Rights State, 7.
313 Prime Minister Abdall Hamdok, @SudanPMHamdok, November 28th 2019.
314 Omar Degair (Khartoum protester) in discussion with the author, August 2019.
rights and nationalism. This case study demonstrates that we must restore agency and visibility to the subaltern by challenging conventional human rights frameworks, appreciating revolutions as methods of human rights localization with extraordinarily powerful transformative effects on participants. The inclusivity central to the emerging nationhood suggests we challenge those who summarily dismiss nationhood as a destructive force. Above all however, this study points to a unique moment of historical opportunity for Sudan, wherein for the first time, the people are engendering nationhood on their own terms, and perhaps that is the real revolution.

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