



Protests in Sudan - History and Demands (Part 1): Elfadil Ahmed & Tag Elkhazin

Logan Cochrane^{1,2} Elfadil Ahmed³ and Tag Elkhazin^{2,3}

- 1 Hawassa University, Ethiopia
- 2 Carleton University, Canada
- 3 Consultant, Ottawa, Canada

The Nokoko journal is committed to a world where people are free from all forms of oppression and exploitation, where respect for individuals' varied differences is maintained, and where everyone can realise their full potentials. NokokoPod is a companion to the journal, covering current African issues. It aims to bring forth new perspectives that broaden, trouble, complicate and enrich current discourses. Edited and annotated versions of the conversations will be made available on the journal website.

This issue of NokokoPod discusses the history of protest in Sudan and the demands of the current protest movement. The podcast for this discussion is available on the Nokoko journal website. This conversation took place on May 5th, with Logan Cochrane, Elfadil Ahmed and Tag Elkhazin in Ottawa. This version of the PDF has been reviewed by Logan Cochrane, Elfadil Ahmed and Tag Elkhazin. In addition to the conversation, a set of annotations have been added as footnotes so as to strengthen the value of these publications and enable them to act as a resource for listeners and readers who want to have additional context and/or find additional resources on the topics discussed.

Logan: This week we are joined by two guests: (1) Elfadil Ahmed, a former diplomat at the Sudanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs who worked in China, Romania, USA, Morocco and Canada, currently a Consultant, a free-lance writer and an activist based in Ottawa and, (2) Tag ElKhazin, an adjunct professor at Carleton University and consultant. They will speak with us about what is happening in Sudan - its roots and potentially where it may be going. Thank you both for joining me today.

Tag & Elfadil: Thank you.

Logan: For our first question, can we look to the history of this protest movement and also the deeper history of citizen engagement and public protest in Sudan, which some people may not be aware of. Could you tell us a little bit about the history of public protest in Sudan?

Elfadil: It is very natural that people, as individuals or as groups, revolt whenever there is something that they do not understand, do not like or see as a threat to their values, interests and well-being. For Sudanese people, they have been revolting collectively as a nation, and they have been revolting separately along regional, ethnic or interest lines. We can trace revolts of collective nature in Sudan back to the Mahdist revolution against the Turkish-Egyptian colonization of Sudan in the 1800s.¹ The Sudanese people revolted also collectively in the 1950s of last century against the condominium British - Egyptian colonization which led to the independence

¹ The conflict lasted between 1881 to 1899. It was an uprising led by Muhammed Ahmad ibn Abd Allah. The Mahdists were successful in their struggle to end the Turkish-Egyptian rule.

of Sudan in 1956.² There were also a series of revolts against national "governments" in Sudan, which were mostly military governments. There was an uprising in 1964³ and another one in 1985.⁴ There was also huge protests in 2013⁵ as well as the one we are currently witnessing both against the same regime lead by Omer Elbeshir and both characterized by youth and women playing a major role. On another spectrum, the Sudanese people occasionally revolted against each other. The major revolt was the one which led to the separation of southern Sudan.⁶ People of southern Sudan were not satisfied with the relations with the north. There were so many

² Anglo-Egyptian Sudan rule in Sudan lasted from 1899 to 1955. While the Egyptians were granted some authority over Sudan, the condominium effectively granted British control over Sudan. Several of the border disputes between Sudan and Egypt, that continue to this day (as discussed below), have roots during this period.

³ 1964 Revolution was against General Ibrahim Aboud, the first military leader to govern Sudan. It (re)gained attention following the Arab Spring, as observers drew parallels to the public demand for military governments to hand over power and restore democracy. See: <https://www.nytimes.com/2012/02/24/world/africa/echoes-of-an-arab-revolution-that-rocked-sudan-circa-1964.html> and <https://africanarguments.org/2014/10/20/50-years-on-remembering-sudans-october-revolution-by-willow-berridge/>

⁴ The spark of the 1984 revolution also has parallels to the current protest. Long-term economic problems had built up, with specific triggers, such as the increasing cost of basic goods, were the enabling factors that coalesced a movement. The revolution would eventually lead to the downfall of Nimeiry. For some commentary on the parallels, see: <https://africanarguments.org/2019/01/07/sudan-protests-learn-1964-1985/>

⁵ Protests occurred between 2011 and 2013 in Sudan, which were connected with the broader Arab Spring. Like the 1964 protests, students played a critical role in protesting austerity and rising prices. In 2013, the price of fuel was the trigger that reignited protest. Amnesty International reported thousands of arrests and hundreds of killings as the government worked to put an end to the movement (<https://www.hrw.org/news/2014/04/21/sudan-no-justice-protest-killings>).

⁶ South Sudan gained independence from Sudan in 2011. This took place following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, which ended the war between the north and south and paved the way for the independence of the south in the 2011 referendum. For additional information, see:

Johnson, D. H. (2016). *South Sudan: a new history for a new nation*. Ohio University Press.

Thomas, E. (2015). *South Sudan: a slow liberation*. Zed Books Ltd.

Voll, J. O., & Voll, S. P. (2016). *The Sudan: Unity and diversity in a multicultural state*. Routledge.

Zambakari, C. (2015). Sudan and South Sudan: identity, citizenship, and democracy in plural societies. *Citizenship Studies*, 19(1), 69-82.

grievances: political, ethnic, religious and cultural and that led to what can be called a revolution that became a civil war and ended with the Secession of South Sudan. People in the regions of Darfur, Nuba Mountains, Eastern parts of Sudan, and South Blue Nile are revolting also and expressing dissatisfaction with the relations with the Center of the country and what they see as its continued monopolization of power and wealth. Given this history, we can say that revolting, for different reasons, with different magnitude and with different results in Sudan is not something new. People have been doing it for centuries, in different times and places for different reasons and with different results and that will eventually continue until people achieve what they revolted for or there will be in the country means and institutions that enable people to express their opinions freely and peacefully communicate their concerns and aspirations.

Tag: We need to differentiate between peaceful protests and military uprisings. If you look at the template of the recent uprisings - be it the 40s during the British colonization or be it during the three revolts that followed. If you take the geographic center of Sudan, the revolts are normally peaceful, like what we see now. In the rural areas, in the distant areas from the hub along the Nile, it is generally by military means. Eastern Sudan rose, and they took up arms. Darfur rose, and they took up arms. South Kordofan rose, and they took up arms. South Sudan rose, and they took up arms. However, in the center - other than the days of the Mehdi - in recent history it has generally been peaceful. Probably one of the reasons for this is that the people know their rights and that this is the hub of the security and that it is the hub of the armed forces. As a result, it is very difficult to take up arms in the geographic center of Sudan.

Logan: Do you think it is also because there is a deeper history of institutions that might be responsive to citizen demands in the

center, as opposed to the rural and remote areas where those institutions have not really existed?

Tag: One of the statements that Elfadil used some years back is to differentiate between the geographic center and the political center. In Sudan, the geographic center actually coincides with the political center. You are quite right about institutional history. The first university that was established in Sudan in 1903/04 by Lord Kitchener, was in Khartoum; the second university, which was established by the Egyptians, was also in Khartoum. There is quite a bit of alignment between the center, the institutions, and the center of gravity of all the government institutions. It is also the geographic center.

Elfadil: If Sudan happened to have, or if it would have in the future, genuine and properly functioning institutions guided by appropriate rules and laws, there would be no need for revolting. Sudanese people - at least in the center - are politically cultured. Unfortunately, the political institutions, be it the political parties or the bodies established by the successive regimes and governments, need a lot of defining and refining. When such institutions are totally functional and when they are totally capable of providing the people with the means to freely and peacefully conveying with civility their ideas and the opinions to the ruling elites or to the government, people would not need to revolt, in the same mode they have been doing for centuries. To avoid revolting in ways people are forced to do now with all its cost in lives, properties and agonies, the remedies will be genuine laws, genuine rules, a genuine constitution, and a drastic reform of political parties and political life.

Logan: Before we move to discuss the current movement, could you give us a brief summary of the 1985 uprisings and the rise of Omar al Bashir? This will give us a context of who the current government is, when they began and how long they have been there.

Tag: The 1984 uprising was against Nimeiry.⁷ They managed to oust the entire regime, almost peacefully. We did get quite a bit of help from the Americans. They are actually the ones who invited Nimeiry to go to the United States. They are the ones who held them there. They are the ones who instructed Hosni Mubarak⁸ not to allow his plane to fly back to Sudan. De facto, the Nimeiry regime collapsed because he was not there. That was a little bit different than what we have now because back then the army saw that the streets and the people were the majority, so they sided with the people. The leaders were very honest in sticking to the one-year mandate of the transition. Bashir came after.⁹ The total force that actually staged the National Islamic Front¹⁰ coup were not more than 400 or 450 people, but they knew what they were doing. Sadiq al-Mahdi, the Prime Minister at that time, was very weak. There were allegations that he was actually the Imam¹¹ of the Ansar,¹² and that he was actually a member of the National Islamic Front. One point mentioned to support such claims is that Sadiq al-Mahdi's sister is married to Hassan al-Turabi. All of this resulted in a lot of confusion. Bashir was not really in the driver's seat. Bashir was a military choice, but he was not

7 Jaafar Muhammad al Nimeiry was the president of Sudan from 1969 to 1985. His rise to power followed a military coup d'etat, which ended the civilian government of Ismail al Azhari. The military takeover of Nimeiry has been called the 'May Revolution'. In 1985, when Nimeiry was on a trip the United States, a military coup d'etat removed him from power. Elections followed, resulting in the rise of Sadiq al-Mahdi, who became Prime Minister in 1986.

8 Hosni Mubarak was the President of Egypt from 1981 to 2011. Mubarak became president after the assassination of Anwar Sadat, in 1981. Mubarak stepped down as a result of the protests of the Egyptian Revolution in 2011.

9 Sadiq al-Mahdi was Prime Minister of Sudan briefly in 1966/67, and again from 1986 to 1989. He was overthrown in 1989, which began the reign of Omar al Bashir.

10 The National Islamic Front was founded in 1976 by Hassan al-Turabi

11 Imam means leader in Arabic.

12 The Ansar are a Sufi movement that follow Muhammad Ahmed, who led the revolts of the late 1800s.

a member of the National Islamic Front. He was a practicing Muslim. They chose him because they thought that they could steer him wherever they wanted. He outsmarted them and he took over power. I was a witness to a message from Bashir to Sadiq al-Mahdi, where he said that if you cover the streets for me, if you cover the popular movement, I am willing to get rid of the Islamists. Sadiq al-Mahdi refused, and Bashir went on.

Logan: Since 1989 Bashir has been there, in the lead, until now. This is one of the underlying concerns that people on the streets protesting are raising - they want a government that responds to, or reflects, the demands of the citizenry.

Elfadil: There are many differences between the revolution against General Jaafer Nimeiry (1969-1985) and the revolution against Bashir now. There are huge quantitative and qualitative differences. The number of the people who felt the urge to revolt was then not as huge as it is now. The people who were engaged then were different as in their absolute majority they were cities and urban centers dwellers, mainly motivated by harsh life conditions and they were less sophisticated in the means they used to revolt and more modest in the aspirations of their revolting. Then, there was no internet nor mass media. Whatever happened in Sudan would remain in Sudan without global interest or exposure. When revolting today, people are asking for total, drastic change in all aspects of life. Their revolting is enormously different not only in ways and means but also in aspirations.¹³ The aspirations at that time were much lower than they are now. Even the regimes against whom the people would be revolting, would be more sympathetic and open to apprehend the motives of the revolution against them than the present regimes. Hence, they would be less repressive and their succumbing

¹³ For a more detailed comparison of the 1964, 1985 and 2019 revolutions, see: <https://africanarguments.org/2019/01/07/sudan-protests-learn-1964-1985/>

to the people will would be faster and more peaceful. The Bashir regime believed that it was ruling through a divine right and there was a radical extremist dogma behind it. It believed that it was mandated by God to govern and that it was its holy duty to crush its enemies. As a result, dealing with them would be harder than dealing with regimes that ruled for the lust of power or those who failed to realize that, no matter how genuine they were, they failed to deliver and that people wanted change.

Tag: We can also differentiate between state building and nation building. The former is not all that difficult. Once you have the basic parameters and the basic framework, you can have a state. However, do you have a nation? Since 1956, none of the political parties, none of the political regimes, actually attended to nation building. This would work to forge an identity for people to say 'this is who we are.' The tension between Arabism and Arabization and Africanism and Africanization has done quite a bit of harm to Sudan. If you ask someone: Who are you today? They look somewhere into history, other than the Nubians, the Nuba Mountains people and the indigenous groups. Sudanese from the center cannot say: "This is who I am, and I trace myself four or five or six thousand years back." Part of it is the physical linkage, even just building roads or building highways, which helps the nation to integrate, to amalgamate, and come together. Nation building has been extremely weak, and I think this is one of the main reasons why we have these fractured political set ups.

Logan: I was in South Sudan last year and this remains one of the key divisions for the country. There is little that unites what is now South Sudan because the primary identity that people align with is not one of the nation, but others. This makes it difficult for a government to bring people together. Is that similar in Sudan?

Tag: That is similar, but not to the same degree. South Sudan is a little bit unique in that area because people in the international community were deceived that all these are black people (and by the international community I mean the West; we do not see any involvement of the wider international community, that is where the money is and this is where the attention is, and this is where the five members of the Security Council are coming from, together with China). It was said or thought that they are all either Sudanic or Nilotic and hence there is a natural bond between them. That is not correct. The enmity between the Nuer and the Dinka is unbelievable. The enmity between the Shulok around Fashoda and the Dinka who are there is unbelievable. An Eastern Dinka might not know that the Western Dinka in Bahr el-Ghazal even actually exist. This was raised by the World Bank. I was hired by the World Bank for a while in South Sudan. It was actually the Americans who said: "Let us build roads linking the ten capitals of the ten states [at that time], and let us create the physical linkage in the hope that it could foster that human linkage." There is something similar, but tribalism in South Sudan is much stronger than tribalism in northern Sudan. It is there. It is one of the elements actually of nation building. If you ask Sudanese or South Sudanese: Who are you? Other than a few, the main, initial frame of reference is that "I am a Shaigi" or "I am a Dinka" or "I am this or that". If you look at Tanzania, it was the Germans¹⁴ who actually quashed tribalism. If you look at Rwanda now, Paul Kagame¹⁵ made it his primary objective to quash tribalism. Unless there is a united, national frame of reference for people, I do not see that nation building will be possible.

14 Modern day Tanzania was part of German East Africa, which was a colony of Germany that lasted until WWI. Burundi and Rwanda were also part of Germany East Africa. A League of Nations mandate after WWI divided the German colony between other colonial powers.

15 Paul Kagame became the President of Rwanda in 2000. Before that he was the Vice President from 1994 to 2000. Kagame has led Rwanda during a time of strong economic growth, although he is criticized for repressing freedoms.

Elfadil: Translating the very name of the country 'Sudan' into English, the closest will be: 'land of the blacks' or 'land of black people'. Despite this fact, half to two-thirds of Sudanese people identify themselves as Arabs. Not only that, large numbers of them identify themselves as descendants of the Prophet Mohammed. Despite the fact that the Arabs came to Sudan in the 7th century and started mixing with the Africans, Sudanese people are not pure Arabs nor are they pure Africans. It was not only that the people of central and north Sudan felt that they are, if not superior, different from the rest of the country, but they also for many factors dominated the political scene and controlled the wealth of the country. People in Southern Sudan felt alienated, marginalized, oppressed and denied access to power and wealth. They revolted and got engaged in a severe protracted civil war that resulted in dividing Sudan into two. Same grievances are currently felt by citizens in Darfur, the eastern region, Nuba Mountains and the Southern Blue Nile province. People in those regions want to duplicate, or put to work the same template of the South. They advocate for embodying in the charter of the current revolution self-determination right for those regions to continue supporting any change. Unless the citizens who are revolting now, and those who are leading them, together with those who will rule Sudan after the culmination of the current uprising succeed to put in place a social, economic and political contract that satisfies all minorities, tribes, religions and factions, this revolution is going to break Sudan and not make it. People from the marginalized regions had no sympathy with Bashir regime that launched against them brutal wars that resulted in huge losses in lives and property and humongous displacement of people. They leaned forward to be part of the current revolution but they will watch with a mixture of hope and skepticisms how it will unfold and proceed. Their attitude towards the anticipated changes in Sudan will be determined by the

attitude of the new guards in Khartoum toward their issues and their sincerity, practicality and success in addressing them.

Logan: Let us move to the current protest movement and the concerns that are being expressed in Khartoum where we see most of the protesters. What are the origins of this of this protest?¹⁶

Tag: I would divide the origins into two. I would put them as the root causes and then I will talk about the ignitors; they are probably two different things. After 30 years, it became very clear that political Islam was not working, it was against the grains of people because the template that was prevalent in Sudan was Sufi Islam.¹⁷ Sufi Islam is very soft. It is non-violent. If you are sitting with Sufi Chief you can put a bottle of whiskey in front of him and drink; he is not going to tell you "Don't drink." He might say: "May God give you the right path." That is it. There is no exclusion. Political Islam is different. There is no violence in Sufism. The current leaders actually came with something different. They followed people to their bedrooms. People were lashed simply because a young man and a woman was walking along the Nile, not even holding hands. They could be taken and lashed just for doing that.¹⁸ I am not talking about the beliefs of Islam, that is not my business. You cannot take a social order that is 1,400 years old and apply it to the social life and the societal practices of people in 2018 and 2019. It just does not

16 For two other podcasts on the protests in Sudan, see the UN Dispatch Podcasts: (1) <https://www.undispatch.com/will-protests-in-sudan-bring-down-the-genocidal-regime-of-omar-al-bashir/> and (2) <https://www.undispatch.com/a-revolution-in-sudan-what-comes-next/>

17 Sufism is an approach of Islam, sometimes referred to as Islamic mysticism. There are diverse manifestations of Sufism throughout the world, and throughout time.

18 In one well know case, a girl was lashed 50 times for wearing a skirt in 2009 (see: <https://www.nytimes.com/2009/11/28/world/africa/28briefs-Sudan.html>). Protesters in the current movement have also been given the punishment of lashing. In one case in May, nine female protesters were sentenced to 20 lashes and one month in prison. See: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-sudan-protests/sudanese-women-protesters-sentenced-to-20-lashes-month-in-jail-idUSKBN1QQ0KW>

work. There is no way. The simple theory of social evolution does not allow that. That is the general background. People were actually getting sick and tired of being driven against the wall. The ignitor was the economic situation.¹⁹ I would not take the economic situation to be, what I call, the manifestations; the bread prices and so forth. The core of the economic problem is that the balance of trade was short four billion dollars in 2017. The exports were 7 billion and the imports were 11 billion.²⁰ Until that is corrected, all these are manifestations of that issue. The background was that people were sick and tired of the backbone of the political approach that was governing them, and that was political Islam. Then, you had the ignitors, which was the hardship of the people who could not actually buy enough bread or put fuel in their cars. Another element was the rampant corruption that drained resources. When this uprising took place, there was not even a single one million dollars in the bank of Sudan.

Elfadil: There were shortages of commodities, problems with electricity and fuel, and people were not able to access their own money at banks. Unemployment among youth, most of them with high education, was and is staggering. These were all elements that triggered the most recent revolution. Though, the anger had been building for almost 20 or 30 years, and for good reasons. Despite the fact that Bashir regime could be considered as the worst of Sudanese regimes, the problems of Sudan didn't start with nor will they miraculously end with its end. As Tag mentioned, there was a lot of corruption.²¹ In the end, the regime became nothing but a gang. It was

19 For a UNDP assessment of Sudan in 2016, see: <https://www.undp.org/content/dam/unct/sudan/docs/Sudan%20CCA%20April%202016%20-%20DRAFT.pdf>

20 For an analysis of imports and exports of Sudan in 2017, see: <https://atlas.media.mit.edu/en/profile/country/sdn/>

21 Although data is sparse, see a report by Transparency International on corruption in Sudan: <https://knowledgehub.transparency.org/helpdesk/sudan-overview-of-corruption-and-anti-corruption>

rotting from inside out. It made Sudan a failing state. There was no reason or justification for that regime to continue. It would not only continue to do more harm to the Sudanese people but also to the region and the international community at large as it harbored terrorists and supported global terrorism. Another element - thanks to the West, and I hope this will not come to haunt it one day - is that globalization, the overall enhanced approach to human rights issues and the vast impact of media in augmenting and propagating that, made people more aware of their rights, especially of their rights to express themselves, have better lives and contest any form of oppression or exploitation. Things were different 10 and 20 years ago in Sudan. Now the most disenfranchised sections of the society, the women and the youth, are more aware of their rights and are more willing to defend them. That is why they took to the streets and why they are going to influence how things can proceed from now onwards. They have the stamina and by virtue of their age they have the longevity to pursue their cause and chase their dreams. They have the backing of the world that cannot any longer support, at least openly, dictators and totalitarian regimes against the will of the people just to serve the interests of some of its hegemonistic member states.

Logan: You see the bread prices, for example, as an expression, but underneath this there is a systemic economic issue related to quality of life, employment, macroeconomic issues, import-export and so on, that just needed a trigger. I think we see that in the region. Across North Africa, there were high levels of unemployment and youth were frustrated. They wanted a decent quality of life. They wanted an opportunity to work and provide for their family. But it was not there. I suppose one of the challenges for any government is trying to manufacture so many jobs for a growing youthful population.

Tag: I do not like to use the term innovation because if you talk to ten people about what innovation is, they would give you 10 different answers. For me, innovation is an approach, a concept, a device that works and yields positive results. Sudan was bankrupt in that area. I talked to one of the leading politicians in the country, who is quite enlightened in his own right, and he said that because of the load, because of the mass of issues, politicians wake up in the morning and cannot look beyond their feet. I think that was a very good expression of the state of stagnation, of the state of bankruptcy, of having even the possibility of innovation to solve people's problems. I agree with you. I think that the issue of the bread and the fuel were not more than ignitors or catalysts for people to look at the bigger picture. To see that, you cannot live with the manifestations and forget about the root causes.

Elfadil: To blame all the problems of Sudan only on the Islamist government of Bashir we would be committing a big mistake. That will be sheer denial of facts, a wrong diagnosis of Sudan problems that will lead to giving a wrong medicine. As indicated before, the problems of Sudan started before the Islamist regime and they will not end with the end of it, unless they are properly addressed. No doubt that the Bashir government made many bad situations even worse, but the economic and political issues, and the issues of national identity and citizenship were all there before the Islamists seized power in 1989. No government has been very serious about addressing these issues or successful in solving them. Speaking about the economic part of it, since its independence Sudan has been relying on a very primitive economy. It was very much farming and husbandry, with the exception of the very short-lived oil era. Nothing serious has been done about modernizing the economy of Sudan. Even what was inherited from the colonial era, in agriculture as an example, has deteriorated drastically to the extent of being almost non-existent. Creating jobs and giving more economic opportunities

for Sudanese people has to start with a serious and major economic reform that takes out of the modes of economy of the 18th century. Achieving that, coupled with political reforms might lead to less uprisings and enable the country to devote its resources, energy, assets, including the human one towards having a better life and brighter future.

Tag: Sudan needs to build some resilience. The structures to support resilience in Sudan are those that Sudan inherited from the British. Even those are being eroded; either by nature-made crises or by manmade crises. Right now, there is no economic resilience and there is no political resilience. Just look at Canada, because it is a rich country, if there is a storm or whatever catastrophe it will take one or two or three months, but that resilience is drawn upon. On the contrary, see what happened in South Sudan, there was little to no resilience. The reserve was very limited. That is why as soon as people started fighting, South Sudan collapsed.

Logan: Those are some of the big issues. What do you hear from the people on the streets? What are they demanding when they go out to protest, and they stay on the streets? What are they chanting?

Elfadil: Expectations are very high. Some of them are not realistic, taking into consideration the element of time, resources, capabilities and the nature of challenges facing the country. There is too much of a rush to address so many things in a very short time. Unfortunately, some of the uprising leaders were raising the expectations of the people who are not calling for bread anymore. They are calling for rights and for building a better Sudan which means so many things. Among them is dealing with the question of identity, the question of citizenship, building proper institutions, writing a more appropriate constitution that sets frames for dealing with

Sudan numerous complex issues, reforming the political life and genuinely addressing the disastrous state of the economy. Now many of those protesting are in their 30s, and who will be there for another 30 to 40 years, those who are uprising now are different from past generations. They are revolting now and will continue to do so for decades if nothing changes. Whilst the expectations are high and the issues are complex and diverse, most of them are genuine. They need to be addressed and that requires strong will, resolve, and creativity and a wise dynamic honest leadership that knows how to prioritize and plan for moving forward in a way that convinces and motivates the masses.

Tag: I would differentiate between chanting slogans like freedom and justice or whatever have you, and building the pillars for a political project. In all what we see now, I do not see an inkling of a political project. The fact that people are chanting very basic slogans says something. If you were to go to the Canadian parliament today and demand freedom, people would laugh at you because freedom is there. This is also an indication of the frustration of the people - that somebody has to stand up in 2019 and ask for justice, ask for freedom, ask for democracy. One of our colleagues here at Carleton University said that democracy is a process and democratic governance is an outcome. There is no way that you can have democratic governance tomorrow or after tomorrow, even if everyone from the Islamic Front is in jail or removed. It is a process that has to be adapted and nurtured by the nation. Only then, can democratic governance really emerge.

Logan: Do you think there is a way that those two things can come together? When the public protest on the streets wants to see change now, and, as you are saying, this is a process that may take years, or longer. How did they come together?

Tag: That is the job of a doable political project and that requires astuteness. It requires knowledge and it requires perception. I do not see that happening now. That is why I am not very optimistic about quick change and about the matching of the slogans of the people and translating them into doable political projects.

Elfadil: I am carefully optimistic. The resolve and stamina of the protesters, mostly youth and women, resulting from how strong they feel about their rights, is promising. The road moving forward is going to be very hard and very complicated. How to marry the aspirations of the youth, or of the masses at large with the realities, with what is possible and what is not at present attainable will be a real challenge. There is a huge responsibility and a tough burden on the shoulders of those who will be leading Sudan now and for some time to come. They have to find a way to address the masses in a way that will convince them that not all can be done nor perfection can be attained overnight. They need to acquire the broad masses trust and support. If people see a genuine, serious, honest government they will put their efforts behind it. They have done that before. They did not revolt against Generals Aboud, Nimeiry or Bashir from day one. They offered the three regimes all their support. But when they felt betrayed and the regimes did not deliver, they revolted and toppled them. Nonetheless, if the same people sense and witness that their coming government(s) is genuine and serious about changing Sudan and addressing its issues in the right way, they will be fully understanding and all supportive.

Tag: We should also be mindful of the status of the military in the developing world. I met with General Colin Powell²² when he

²² Colin Power was the US Secretary of State from 2001 to 2005 under President George W. Bush. Previously he held positions of National Security Advisor, Commander of the US Army Forces Command, and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff.

was chair of the joint chiefs of staff of the American army, when he was still a soldier, shortly after the Gulf War.²³ He shared a document with me in which he labelled the military in the developing world as a political power. Since they are educated and organized, that there is no reason why we should exclude them from political life. Was that because of his friendship with General Ibrahim Babangida,²⁴ who was the president of Nigeria at that time? They went to West Point²⁵ together. The military has had quite a number of interventions in political life in Sudan. They were invited in 1958, by the then Prime Minister, to take over. As Elfadil said, people actually rejoice when there is a *coup d'etat*. However, these do not always have the desired effect. It is human nature; absolute power corrupts absolutely.

Tag: We need, very quickly, just to go into the current status of the Sudanese Armed Forces.²⁶ It is 240,00 strong. They are the fourth strongest army in Africa. The West and the United Nations are dreading if this disintegrates. What would be the effect on the regional security, let alone just Sudan? To answer part of your question: when you have such political upheaval, people need to measure the what with the how. You do not just make these demands. Are they executable? What is executable? What can actually be implemented? We always tend to forget the how.

23 The Gulf War occurred in 1990/01, in which the US led a coalition against Iraq following its invasion of Kuwait. This war has also been called the First Gulf War, the Persian Gulf War and the First Iraq War. A second component of the war included the strengthening of US military forces in Saudi Arabia.

24 Ibrahim Badamasi Babangida was President of Nigeria from 1985 to 1993, leader of a military junta. Previous to that role was chief of the army. He has played a key role in multiple government takeovers in Nigeria.

25 The United States Military Academy of West Point, commonly called West Point.

26 For additional reading on the Sudanese Armed Forces, see: El-Battahani, A. (2016). *The Sudan Armed Forces and Prospects of Change*. CMI Insight.

Elfadil: The military is an important figure in the equation of the Sudan of now. I want to add one or two points about the role and the place of the military in Sudan as now there are serious discussions and heated debates about that. Due to the lack of proper institutions in Sudan and due to the lack of understanding of democracy and how it works, General Aboud²⁷ was invited by the Prime Minister of Sudan, Abdallah Khalil,²⁸ to take over when he felt his opponent was going to win in the next election. General Nimeiry, was cajoled and supported, if not encouraged or used, by the Communist and the leftist groups in Sudan (Baathist, Arab Nationalists) to take over the government in Sudan. when he did, they were working with him hand in hand. The regime of Bashir was fully supported by the Islamists in Sudan. As Tag mentioned, Bashir was not the main character, he was invited by Turabi²⁹ to appear and the Islamists were behind it. The military has always been invited and engaged in politics in Sudan. Some elements justified that by calling them a manifestation of the new petite bourgeoisie and middle class. Even the people who are protesting now and who are sitting-in at the Headquarters of the Military Leadership, are there because they wanted to give the military a role and now they are denying it that completely. They claim they needed the army to protect them against the Islamists and their forces, but now, they want the army to just stand by until called on again, which is not going to be easily understood, appreciated or applied by the military right now. The army had been invited in the past and it has always been engaged. It is not only in Sudan. In the Third World there is a lot of research and literature about the involvement of militaries in politics, especially in Africa. They are there because they are the only standing

27 Ibrahim Abboud lead Sudan from 1958 until 1964. He resigned to allow for citizen rule.

28 Abdallah Khalil was Prime Minister of Sudan from 1956 to 1958

29 Hassan al-Turabi, leader of the National Islamic Front, which became the National Congress.

organized body. There are no genuine solid parties, no civil societies, nor institutions or constitutions; as a result, when there is chaos, when things go bad, the people turn to the military. The military would be the only body that is standing and capable of doing things. As indicated above, some parties recognized that they were too small and weak to gain power by themselves so they sought the support of the army. Armies ruling is not the normality, nor should that be sought or tolerated. But putting the army where it belongs and where it is mostly needed should be part of the whole reform of political life in Sudan and establishing proper institutes, including the army, governed by appropriate constitution.

Logan: We have spoken about the youth, could you speak to the role of women in the protest.³⁰ They have been quite prominent as leaders on the streets. Could you speak to the prominent role that women have played in the protest?

Tag: If you take the group of ten from the representatives of the current movement who went to meet with the military council, there were ten of them. Nine were men. There was only one woman.³¹ The one woman was from the Umma party.³² The only reason that she was there is that she is the daughter of Sadiq al-Mahdi. There is quite a difference between lip service and actual space created or to be

30 Examples of international coverage on the role of women in the protests include the BBC (<https://www.bbc.com/news/av/world-africa-48027451/sudan-protests-the-women-driving-change>), the Washington Post (https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/04/09/symbolism-behind-viral-photo-protesting-woman-sudan/?noredirect=on&utm_term=.665ec3cd14c1), Al Jazeera (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/sudan-women-protesters-leading-pro-democracy-movement-190423134521604.html>), amongst many others.

31 While there has been coverage of these meetings, little attention has been paid to the limited role that women have played, despite the attention paid to female protesters on the streets. For example, coverage does not mention this on the BBC (<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48196336>) or Al Jazeera (<https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/talks-sudan-opposition-military-council-resume-190429071117155.html>).

32 The National Umma Party is led by Sadiq al-Mahdi.

created for women. Women have played a role, but we need to be careful about measuring and gauging the strength of women and women's movements in Sudan, and in a good number of other countries. The number of women in Sudan now out of the 40 million people,³³ they are probably are a little bit more than 50 percent. In academic institutions, female students are 55, 56, up to 60 percent of the study body. However, if you look at the ministries that women ministers have been assigned to during the last 50 years, it is always Women's Issues, Social Affairs, whatever have you. What I call either marginal or service ministries. Compare that with Ethiopia: until recently the Minister of Defense was a woman until she was replaced;³⁴ out of a cabinet of 20 ministers, 10 were actually women and six of them were from marginalized areas, such as the SNNPR and other parts of Ethiopia.³⁵ That is the kind of shock impact that you want to create. Regrettably, this shock impact is not there now.

Elfadil: One of the questions you asked at the beginning, was that the West is reviewing or looking at the revolts and uprisings in Sudan, to see if that is part of the Arab Spring, is it something new or something that people have learned from the West. You asked about

33 The 2017 population of Sudan was 40.5 million. For demographic and economic data on Sudan, the World Bank's Data Bank offers a range of data sets: <https://data.worldbank.org/country/sudan>

34 Aisha Mohammed was Ethiopia's first female Minister of Defence. She is from the Afar Regional State, a marginalized area of the country. In 2019 she was shuffled to Minister of Urban Development and Construction. See: <https://www.africanews.com/2019/04/19/ethiopia-appoints-new-defense-and-foreign-ministers/>

35 For additional information on the political changes in Ethiopia, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/16/women-win-half-of-ethiopias-cabinet-roles-in-reshuffle>

Also see past *NokokoPod* issues:

Cochrane, L. and Zewde, B. (2019). Discussing the 2018/19 Changes in Ethiopia: Bahru Zewde. *NokokoPod* 2019(1): 1-16.

Cochrane, L. and Mandefro, H. (2019). Discussing the 2018/19 Changes in Ethiopia: Hone Mandefro. *NokokoPod* 2019(2): 1-24.

Cochrane, L. and Kefale, A. (2019). Discussing the 2018/19 Changes in Ethiopia: Asnake Kefale. *NokokoPod* 2019(3): 1-16.

how powerful were the unions in Sudan. Unions in Sudan are very old, very powerful, and very well organized, including the Women's Union.³⁶ The first female parliament member in the whole of Africa and in the whole of the Arab world was the Sudanese Fatima Ibrahim.³⁷ Since then, women have played a major role in changes in Sudan. So were the farmers and Labourers' trade unions and what was called "Graduates Congress" that all played major roles in politics of Sudan even before its independence. One of the reasons why I say I am optimistic, is the role women have taken in the current uprising as well as the way they are bracing to have a say after things settle down. I will not go as far as saying: "Give them 50%" as happened here in Canada. We have to take into consideration so many factors such as the percentage of educated women in Sudan compared with men. It is true that we currently have a majority of female students in higher education institutes, and they are the best performers and achievers and so they should be given a role, proportional, or even over-proportional filled by those capable so that they would be able to contribute more in addressing various issues in Sudan. They should be represented in the ongoing discussions, the State Council, the Cabinet, and in the legislative body and that should be horizontally and vertically taking in consideration the different classes and regions of Sudan. However, it is more imperative to following some

³⁶ Little research is available on unions in Sudan, however for some background, see:

Abdel-Hameid, S. O., & Wilson, E. (2019). Gender, Organization, and Change in Sudan. In *Gender and Diversity: Concepts, Methodologies, Tools, and Applications* (pp. 1671-1684). IGI Global.

Assal, M. A. (2016). *Civil society and peace building in Sudan: A critical look*. Sudan Working Paper.

Hale, S. (2018). *Gender politics in Sudan: Islamism, socialism, and the state*. Routledge.

Kargwell, S. (2015). The Push and Pull Factors Influencing Women's Development in the Sudan: Historical Perspective. *International Journal of Business and Social Science*, 6(10).

³⁷ Fatima Ibrahim passed away in 2017. For a biography, see: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/aug/21/fatima-ahmed-ibrahim-obituary>

instances the example of Canada³⁸ that is to pay more attention and make it a priority to deal with issues relating to women and girls which are enormous in Sudan. Educating women is one of those issues and when we speak about women education, we don't mean women in the center and the urban areas only as the majority of women in the rest of Sudan are illiterate. Issues of women and girl's health are to be addressed. Health conditions of women are terrible, there are a lot of deaths, is especially in delivery.³⁹ Addressing the issue of women and girls and enabling those who are qualified to play a more significant role in all domains of life are not exclusive. They can be done simultaneously.

Tag: The Sudanese people need to address the conflict, the confrontation, and the tension between women and Islam. It is a delicate issue. In the current child law, a father has the right to consent to the marriage of his daughter when she reaches the age of 10. That is in the Sudanese laws.⁴⁰ Such hard issues, to me, are more important than getting a portfolio in a ministry or becoming a vice president or whatever have you. This is because the social fabric is not really giving due rights and advantages to women, as they deserve them. I am not talking about respect. Women in Sudan are very well respected. The outlook of the general society toward a woman going to work in a bank or traveling, or whatever have you, there are no issues there. It is in empowering them in a way that is equitable to the population share of the general population of the country.

38 Examples of this include Canada's Feminist International Assistance Policy (https://international.gc.ca/world-monde/issues_development-enjeux_developpement/priorities-priorites/policy-politique.aspx?lang=eng) and Gender Budgeting (<https://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-17.2/page-1.html>).

39 The United Nations Human Development Index provides data on education and health indicators in Sudan, see: <http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries/profiles/SDN>

40 12% of Sudanese girls are married before the age of 15, which is much higher in certain parts of the country, such as Darfur. See: <https://www.girlsnotbrides.org/child-marriage/sudan/>

This is the end of Part 1. See Part 2 of the Podcast for a discussion of the role of international actors in Sudan and reflections on what the future holds.