



**HAL**  
open science

## Supporting a revolution from afar: the construction of unity between generations of Sudanese exiles in France

Marie Bassi, Pauline Brücker, Alice Franck

► **To cite this version:**

Marie Bassi, Pauline Brücker, Alice Franck. Supporting a revolution from afar: the construction of unity between generations of Sudanese exiles in France. *Mediterranean Politics*, 2022, mediterranean politics, 27 (5), pp.210-234. 10.1080/13629395.2022.2132363 . hal-03843719

**HAL Id: hal-03843719**

**<https://hal.science/hal-03843719v1>**

Submitted on 6 Jun 2024

**HAL** is a multi-disciplinary open access archive for the deposit and dissemination of scientific research documents, whether they are published or not. The documents may come from teaching and research institutions in France or abroad, or from public or private research centers.

L'archive ouverte pluridisciplinaire **HAL**, est destinée au dépôt et à la diffusion de documents scientifiques de niveau recherche, publiés ou non, émanant des établissements d'enseignement et de recherche français ou étrangers, des laboratoires publics ou privés.

## **Supporting a revolution from afar: The construction of unity between generations of Sudanese exiles in France**

Bassi Marie, Brücker Pauline & Franck Alice

**Marie BASSI** is Associate Professor in Political Science at the University of Côte d'Azur (ERMES) and Research Fellow at Institut Convergences Migrations.

**Pauline BRÜCKER** is a post-doctoral fellow at Migrinter, University of Poitiers, France, and Research Fellow at Institut Convergences Migrations.

**Alice FRANCK** is Associate Professor in Geography at the University of Paris 1 Panthéon-Sorbonne (UMR Prodig) and Research Fellow at Institut Convergences Migrations.

Abstract:

Since December 2018, Sudan has been experiencing a revolution that has engaged the large numbers of Sudanese who live abroad in a political struggle from afar. Based on a case study of the Sudanese community in France and an analysis of their long-distance support of the political upheavals from three different cities (Paris, Lyon, and Marseille), this article assesses how times of revolution affect the sense of commonness of diasporic groups and reshape socio-political boundaries in exile. From our initial identification of two Sudanese generations in France, which we will call the *elders* and the *youth*, we assess how the collective identification process for exiles, which is initially determined by social and regional affiliations in Sudan and France, has been affected in recent times by the outbreak of the Sudanese revolution. Our article also aims to shed light on an emerging community in France on which few studies have been conducted. After presenting the two generations of Sudanese currently living in France, we show how the revolutionary context has affected their feelings of belonging and produced a temporary sense of diasporic unity. Finally, the article analyses how the stalemate in the revolutionary process during the summer of 2019 led to an erosion of this unified Sudanese consensus and resurrected political, regional, social, and generational divides, pushing the young generation to the forefront of protest from afar.

Keywords

Mobilisation from afar; revolution; generation of migrants; diaspora; Sudan.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

On 23 December 2018, the first rally in support of the nascent revolution in Sudan was held in Place de la République, in Paris. It brought together a group of two hundred Sudanese from different generations and with different political opinions who had been living in France for various lengths of time. A dozen women could be seen in the group, some of whom had their children with them. The demonstrators repeated the same slogans that had been chanted in the streets of Sudan: “*Tesgot bas!*” (“The fall, that’s all!”), and “*Horeya, salam wa ‘adala, el-thowra khyar el-sha’b!*” (“Freedom, peace, and justice, the revolution is the choice of the people”). These protests marked the beginning of a long series of events organised in several French cities. On each occasion, the demonstrators made the same demand – the fall of the regime – that gave an impression of political unity, at least for a while. The rise of a new social group, the “Sudanese of France”<sup>2</sup>, which acted to support the revolution from afar, represented a break from the previous sense of a fragmented national group. This sense of commonness faded as the revolution progressed, however, and old divisions based on regional, social, and political belongings (re)appeared. Using observations of mobilisations in three French cities (Paris, Marseille, and Lyon) and biographical interviews with Sudanese exiles, this article examines how the context of revolutionary uprising shapes and reshapes long-distance political action and the processes of self-identification of a diaspora. More specifically, it shows how this particular context prompts a diaspora to construct a narrative of political unity and leads to the emergence of diasporic political entrepreneurs.

Our perspective is based on the constructivist approach to the notion of diaspora, understood as a “*category of practice [...] used to make claims, to articulate projects, to formulate expectations, to mobilise energies, to appeal to loyalties*” (Brubaker, 2005:12). From this perspective, the formation of a united “Sudanese of France” group appears to be a kind of “tactic” (De Certeau, 1990) used by the different social groups that this article seeks to analyse over the course of time and amidst political fluctuations. This approach introduces a political dimension to the study of groups of exiles who find a means of framing and performing a political identity by claiming a diaspora identity (Adamson, 2012). In the same vein, in her work on Sudanese in Great Britain, Cathy Wilcock distinguishes three forms of “diaspora”: regional and ethnic, genocide, and national “Sudanese”. These groups are not exclusive: on the

---

<sup>1</sup> The authors thank the ANR project “Thawra-Sur” for its support in the English editing of this article.

<sup>2</sup> This expression was used by a Sudanese exile.

contrary, they reveal plural forms of organisation to which the same individual can belong simultaneously (Wilcock, 2018:375). From this standpoint, various studies of diasporic politics in times of revolution and popular uprisings have also emphasised the particularity of these political moments (Beaugrand and Geisser 2016; Müller-Funk, 2019; Moss, 2021). Sometimes they can be seized on by regional groups to assert specific political claims (Sharqawi 2020), and sometimes they result in a “simplification of identity leading to an exclusive focus on national belonging” (Lamblin, 2021:36). We then build on this theoretical background to assess how the rise of the “Sudanese of France” group reveals a narrative process that glorifies diasporic unity based on national belonging. By understanding both the senses of commonness and division that are created through the process of the revolution, we also study the construction of political narratives from a temporal perspective.

While our analysis relies on this fluid understanding of the notion of “diaspora”, we also seek to consider diasporic plurality in the light of the concept of the “migrants’ generation” conceptualised by Abdelmalek Sayad (Sayad, 1977). In his view, the actions and representations of migrants are profoundly affected by their “age of migration”: that is, their experience of migration and belonging between the two countries. Drawing from this concept, and located at the intersection of the sociology of collective action and the sociology of migration, this article examines how the diasporic construction and modalities of long-distance political engagement are affected by migrants from different generations and by the political context in their home country and host country. In our specific case study, therefore, we first identify two Sudanese generations in France, the *elders* and the *youth*, and then observe the impact of the revolution on their engagement.

This framework allows us to address the specific case of the Sudanese diaspora in France. Our article first seeks to shed light on an emerging community in France on which few studies have been conducted<sup>3</sup>, despite its consistent growth over the past few years. By doing so, we take stock of the major changes that occurred over the last ten years in the migratory scene in the Mediterranean area. Several factors have affected the migratory routes and strategies of Sudanese and led to their growing number in France. The post-2011 situation in many Mediterranean countries where Sudanese used to settle such as Libya and Egypt, and to

---

<sup>3</sup> With the notable exception of (Franck and Etienne, 2019) and (Etienne 2018). There has been far more extensive research in countries that have a longer history of migration from Sudan, such as Egypt (Brücker, 2020), the Gulf States (Saadia Izzeldin Malik, 2017; Shallal Musa, and Abdalla Hamid 2009), the United States (Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf, 2002), the United Kingdom (Wilcock, *op. cit.*; Serra-Mingot, 2018), and Australia (Marlowe et al, 2013; Macaulay and Deppeler, 2020).

a lesser extent Syria or Lebanon led them to undertake new journeys to Europe, involving the crossing of the Mediterranean and the arrival in the South of Italy. Acknowledging this new context, our article then questions the impact this new Sudanese diasporic configuration in France can have on the mobilisation capacities of the diaspora in a specific context, in which the host country of the diaspora is not linked to the home country by colonial or post-colonial ties. From this perspective, our case study highlights how the outbreak of the revolution in Sudan created a temporary sense of unity that was previously unseen, and looks at its effects on the diaspora.

This study is based on a combination of different methods. The first involved direct observation of events in support of the Sudanese revolution organised in three French cities (Paris, Marseille, and Lyon) between December 2018 and October 2019. These events included rallies, demonstrations, and cultural and political meetings. It is difficult to determine the chronological boundaries of the Sudanese revolution because of the numerous political fluctuations since it started in December 2018,<sup>4</sup> and so the dates we have chosen correspond to the first phase of the process: that is, from the beginning of the popular uprising (December 2018) that brought about the fall of Omar Al-Bashir (April 2019) to the establishment of the Transitional Council, which was made up of both military officers and civilians (August to October 2019). Together with these observations, our research also includes a study of digital materials published on social media (mainly Facebook) by several of the collectives that were behind the events we examine here.

Our second method was to use formal interviews (about thirty) and informal discussions (about twenty) to collect the narratives of Sudanese living in France who belong to the two identified generations. Most of these interviews were conducted between April 2019 and March 2021, as the revolutionary uprising was unfolding. Another part of our work, however, is based on interviews and conversations held throughout the 2010s, before the revolution; these offer a more in-depth understanding of the effects of time on the feelings and representations of political affiliation. Finally, our research is supported by a review of the ways the Sudanese

---

<sup>4</sup> There have been many political fluctuations since the beginning of the revolutionary uprising in December 2018. Some events, such as the first demonstrations, the organisation of the Qiyada sit-in in front of the presidential palace between April and June 2019, and the fall of Omar Al-Bashir in April 2019, are extensively discussed in this article because they help us understand the dynamics we are trying to uncover in what corresponds to the first phase of the Sudanese revolution. The post-2019 fluctuations, such as the signing of the peace agreements in Juba between the rebel groups and the Transitional Council in October 2020, and the coup of 25 October 2021, which brought an end to the transition period with the return to power of the military, are not addressed in this article.

community is covered in the French media.<sup>5</sup>With respect to both the observations we led and the interviews we carried out, we have been very careful to keep our own enthusiasm about the ongoing events, especially the fall of Omar Al-Bashir, at a distance when analysing discourses we heard during our fieldwork. The temporal perspective we adopted has enabled us to grasp the evolution of discourses over time, and accordingly, to examine the claim of unity as a political tool among others. Our previous research on Sudanese exiles also turned out to be a useful methodological tool in this regard: while one of us has worked mostly on Darfurian trajectories, the other two have been working on the older generation of migrants in France and elsewhere, who are mainly the elders discussed in the paper, as well as other marginalised ethnic groups. This diversity of experiences helped us mitigate the discourses on unity, and later on the specific situation faced by Darfurians, as they were all compared to discourses heard from other groups of Sudanese established elsewhere (mainly in Egypt).

Our demonstration is divided into three parts. First, we present the two generations of Sudanese currently living in France and analyse the way in which the different circumstances of their departure from Sudan, their arrival in France, and their living conditions in these two spaces affect their practices and narratives of engagement. In the second part, we show how the revolutionary context affected the feeling of belonging of the two generations and produced a temporary sense of diasporic unity, a development that led to the construction of a narrative and to actions that contributed towards emphasising a “Sudanese” identity united against the authoritarian regime of Omar Al-Bashir in Sudan. Finally, the third section analyses how the stalemate in the revolutionary process during the summer of 2019 led to the erosion of this unified Sudanese consensus and resurrected political, regional, social, and generational divides, pushing the young generation to the forefront of protest from afar.

## **I. The two “ages” of Sudanese migration to France**

Although it is difficult to obtain precise numbers for the Sudanese diaspora in France, it is possible to estimate that they number approximately 30,000<sup>6</sup> (including nearly 16,000 statutory refugees, as estimated by OFPRA in 2019 [see Figure 1], to which must be added the Sudanese

---

<sup>5</sup> We examined four national daily newspapers (Le Monde, Libération, Le Figaro, and La Croix) and three local ones (Le Parisien, Le Progrès and La Marseillaise), along with three weekly newspapers (L'Express, Politis, and Le Nouvel Observateur) and three online media outlets (Médiapart, Street Press and Orient XXI).

<sup>6</sup> AURAT L. and IBRAHIM F. “L’exil militant des Soudanais de France”, *Orient XXI*, 11 September 2020, url: <https://www.ritimo.org/L-exil-militant-des-Soudanais-de-France>.

awaiting asylum, those who have been refused the right of asylum, those who hold student or work visas, and those who have been naturalised over the course of the year). The Sudanese community in France can be roughly divided into two groups: the *elders*, who are mostly from Sudan’s northern elite, and who fled repression and political purges during the early years of Omar Al-Bashir’s military-Islamic regime; and the *youth*, who fled the armed conflicts fuelled by the regime, especially in the Darfur region, nearly twenty years later, and whose arrival led to a dramatic increase in the number of Sudanese asylum applications in France [see Figure 2]. Although the deposed regime is not the focus of this article<sup>7</sup>, it must be acknowledged that the regimes experienced by the two generations of exiles are not the same, and that this has affected their engagement in exile.

Figure 1: Cumulative number of statutory Sudanese refugees in France from 2000 to 2019

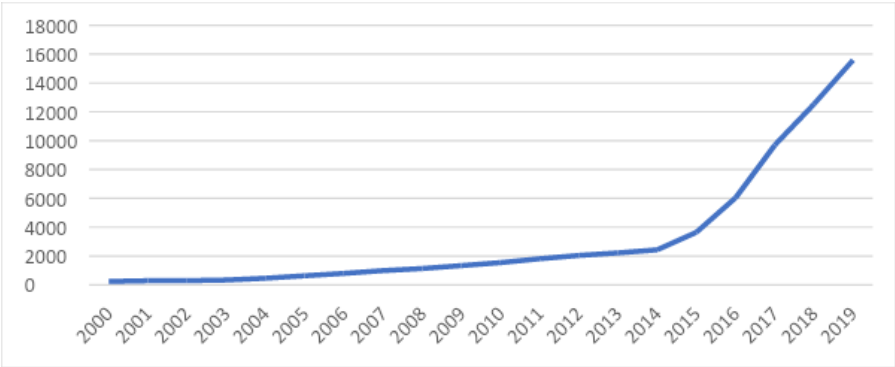
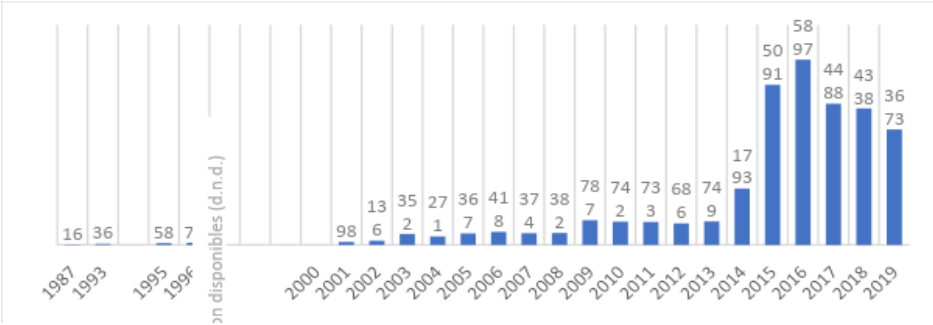


Figure 2: Number of first-time Sudanese asylum applications filed with OFPRA annually from 1987 to 2019



**A. The elders: a generation of *Nilians* opposed to the regime and engaged in a partisan mobilisation in exile (1970s-2014)**

<sup>7</sup> The military-Islamist regime of Omar al-Bashir, which remained in power for almost thirty years, was far from being monolithic: on the contrary, it showed an exceptional capacity to evolve and adapt, restructuring its alliances (regional, political, and ideological), developing an efficient clientelist system, and permeating every sphere of Sudanese society over time (see Verhoven, 2015; Ahmed 2009; Berridge, 2017).

Most of the elders arrived after and in response to Omar Al-Bashir's coup in 1989, but a small number of Sudanese – about 200 – were already living in France. The majority were students who had chosen not to return to Sudan after the coup. In the 1990s, they were joined by a new generation of students opposed to the new regime, and by journalists, members of political parties, and intellectuals. They mainly belonged to the elite of North Sudan and the Nile Valley<sup>8</sup> and had substantial cultural, academic, economic, and political capital.

This capital partly explains the conditions under which they arrived and settled in France. At that time, the country was not the primary place of refuge for Sudanese, who usually preferred Britain or the Netherlands, which shared a stronger tradition of migration with Sudan. The decision to travel to France was influenced by their network of acquaintances and more broadly by their ties to people involved in Franco-Sudanese cooperation. At this time, they usually arrived by air after obtaining a student or tourist visa, and did not have to live through the ordeal of an illegal journey by land and sea, as many refugees do today. The asylum procedures were relatively short in the 1990s and 2000s, and even though the number of accepted applications was limited (to less than 30%), those who did obtain refugee status were able to settle into their new lives quickly. While finding a job, particularly one that matched their university degrees, was often a major problem that was further aggravated by their often limited command of French when they arrived, this could be partly compensated by financial support sent by relatives who had remained in Sudan.

The generation of elders was later characterised by close, structured social ties and by partisan affiliations that were maintained in exile. The presence in France until the 2010s of a small number of elders who often came from a similar social background made it easier for them to establish ties and socialisation networks. These ties were further strengthened by their shared opposition to supporters of the regime, who were present in France in small numbers, and who were typically members of the staff of the Sudanese Embassy in Paris. Their opposition to the new regime of Omar Al-Bashir was most often expressed by a consistent partisan mobilisation in the traditional Sudanese parties, almost all of which had a French branch in the 1990s and 2000s, despite surveillance and harassment by the regime's security services. Several elders thus became the representatives of Sudanese political groups in France, following the example of Mohamed Ahmed, who represented the Unionist Party after earning his degree, and Abdel-Aziz Babiker, who became the spokesperson for the SPLM (the Sudan People's

---

<sup>8</sup> We have chosen the word "Nilians", which was used by respondents who did not belong to this dominant group, to designate this elite.



Liberation Movement) from 1990 to 2005 after rapidly receiving refugee status<sup>9</sup>. The Communist Party was the best represented and the most visible of these partisan branches in exile, and included a number of the charismatic figures of that generation, such as Abdallah Bola, Hassan Musa, and Rasheed Saeed. In practice, the struggle against the regime of Omar Al-Bashir united this generation despite their political differences, as is evidenced by the federation of Sudanese partisan groups in France within the Sudanese Democratic Alliance.

In addition to this partisan structure, other ties and networks were built and strengthened over the years with French associations like Doctors Without Borders (MSF) and Secours Catholique, and with French political parties such as the French Communist Party (PCF) and the Socialist Party (PS). New structures emerged in the early 2000s for broader socialisation, federation, and mutual aid purposes, and to increase the visibility of the Sudanese in France. One such organisation was the *Collectif Urgence Darfur*, which was created in 2003 by Jacky Mamou, a French doctor<sup>10</sup>. The generation of elders, with its deep attachment to Sudanese politics through these parties and its significant cultural and political capital, demonstrated great solidarity based on their shared social characteristics (as the bourgeois elites of North Sudan), their relative degree of unity in the fight against the Sudanese regime, and their small number, which contributed to establishing social contacts.

Gradually, however, the mobilisation of this generation declined. The new economic and political opportunities offered under the reworked military-Islamist regime after the development of the oil industry in the 2000s<sup>11</sup>, the loss of legitimacy of the traditional Sudanese parties, and the vote for South Sudan's independence in 2011 all had a considerable effect on the political engagement of this generation, which had been particularly attached to national reconciliation and Sudanese unity, in line with John Garang's vision of a "New Sudan"<sup>12</sup>. With the arrival of a new generation of young Sudanese in the early 2010s, the elders sometimes took on a new role as mentors of these novices. Since they had left Sudan many years earlier, however, they were less familiar with some of the core transformations the country had undergone, and as members of the Northern elite they seemed to view these young people, most

---

<sup>9</sup> The authors met them in Lyon in March 2021 and in Paris in February 2013 respectively.

<sup>10</sup> While this movement echoes the American "Save Darfur Coalition", it was never on the same scale, nor did it have the same connections to the media and political spheres. On this subject, see Abusharaf, 2010

<sup>11</sup> The decade of the 2000s was marked by an increase in the numbers of people returning to Sudan from the diaspora (IOM, 2012, p. 65)

<sup>12</sup> John Garang (1945-2005) was one of the main leaders of the opposition in southern Sudan (SPLA-SPLM - Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement). He had a unitary, inclusive, and multi-faith concept of the country (New Sudan).

of whom were from Darfur, as less educated and politicised, which increased the gap between the two generations of Sudanese in France.

**B. The *youth*: a generation from the margins fighting for their right to asylum and against never-ending conflicts**

In the mid-2010s, the Sudanese community in France underwent major changes, with the arrival of unprecedentedly large numbers of young people, mostly from Darfur, who had fled through Sudan, Libya, or Egypt and reached Europe by the Mediterranean route. Between 2013 and 2014, their numbers increased by 139%, which meant that in 2015, Sudanese were the largest national group applying for asylum in France and the third largest obtaining refugee status in the country (see Figure 2). These arrivals gave unprecedented visibility to the Sudanese community and altered its composition permanently.

The social and political characteristics of this new generation of young exiles were different from those of their elders. Born in the 1990s, mostly in Darfur, these young people did not belong to the privileged classes of Sudan and did not have the same economic or cultural capital. Many of them had educational capital, however, because they had benefited from the policies introduced by the regime during the 1990s and prior to that by the Sudanese Islamist Front to improve access to higher education for the marginalised regions – mainly Darfur – as part of their attempts to secure support and allegiances from Darfur (Tenret, 2016; Chevillon-Guibert, 2013). Many had begun their studies before exile and their university experience, especially in Khartoum, had been a powerful vehicle for politicisation (Deshayes, 2019).

Unlike the elders, these young people had only experienced the Islamic-military power of Omar Al-Bashir<sup>13</sup>. They had suffered directly from the violence of the regime, as exemplified by the wars in Darfur, whence they had fled and where their loved ones often still lived. The relationship between these young people and Sudanese politics was thus dominated by their experiences of extreme violence and their proximity to the armed movements that were fighting the central government<sup>14</sup>. The elders' engagement in the traditional parties was therefore replaced in the young people by a form of mobilisation that was no longer centred around the politics of Khartoum, but had been born in the marginalised regions.

---

<sup>13</sup> In particular the regime as it was reconfigured after the expulsion of the Islamist ideologue Hassan Al Turabi, which contributed to the disintegration of the convergence of interests with the Darfurians that had been prevalent in previous decades.

<sup>14</sup> Such as the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) and the Sudanese Liberation Movement (SLM) in Darfur, or even the SPLM-North in the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile state

This generation was also influenced by the hot political climate in Sudan in the 2010s, when the Sudanese regime was facing an unprecedented crisis of legitimacy. New protest groups were created, which led to a resurgence of collective actions and citizens' uprisings, starting in 2012, in which many of these young people took part. As the political conflict and protests against the Al-Bashir regime intensified, demands relating to the war in Darfur also increased. Universities played a central role in these protests through Darfuri student associations and the newly-created branches of military and political groups that mobilised against student registration fees and the discrimination encountered by Darfuris. Faced with the proliferation of such protest episodes, the regime strengthened its already heavy security apparatus and used violence to repress protest groups. Young people left Sudan marked by this specific, and often violent, social and political experience.

Unlike their elders' exile, theirs was characterised by their confrontation with repressive migration and asylum policies, which made settlement in Europe more difficult and uncertain, but which paradoxically allowed them to develop their own social and "activist capital" (Matonti and Poupeau, 2004). After entering Europe without a visa, they were prevented from moving freely across the continent, threatened by the Dublin Regulation<sup>15</sup> and the permanent risk of being sent back to Italy, and often stranded in the "jungle" of Calais or the informal camps that blossomed in the north of Paris due to the lack of sufficient housing. Despite the experience of these very precarious situations, these camps became places of intense socialisation and politicisation. Shared hardships strengthened the ties among Sudanese, many of whom lived together either in the Halle Pajol or in the former Lycée Jean Quarré in the north of Paris, which they occupied between June and October 2015. The large numbers of Sudanese shops and restaurants nearby, in a section of the La Chapelle neighbourhood that came to be known as "Little Sudan", became new places for meetings and social encounters. Occupations through informal camps and other collective actions to defend their right to asylum strengthened their relations with the French volunteers involved in various organisations, such as the collective known as *La Chapelle en Lutte* ("*La Chapelle in Combat*", from the name of the neighbourhood where most of the occupations took place in 2015/2016), which was created in June 2015 when expulsions intensified in the neighbourhood, the RESOME network (*Réseau Etudes Supérieures et Orientation des Migrant.es.s et Exilé.es, Network for Higher Education and Orientation of Migrants and Exiles*), which was organised to help exiles return to

---

<sup>15</sup> The European Regulation that determines which EU Member State is responsible for examining an application for asylum: the country in which the asylum seeker is first identified (by fingerprinting) is responsible for carrying out the examination process.

university, and the El Manba collective, which was formed in Marseille as a reaction to the blockage of the Franco-Italian border in the summer of 2015.

Through these activities, Sudanese youth acquired social and activist capital that increased with the development of further political actions in cooperation with French “support” groups to denounce the failure of national asylum policies. In Paris, the occupation of public parks and vacant buildings was combined with frequent demonstrations and gatherings. The young Sudanese were thus socialised to French political and activist culture, and gradually reinvested this knowledge and know-how in the organisation of mobilisations relating to Sudanese issues. Various political events became an opportunity for gatherings during which the Sudanese and their support groups denounced the regime and supported the ongoing protest movements in Sudan. In 2016, a demonstration was held in Place de la République in Paris in support of a civil disobedience campaign in Sudan, and gatherings were also organised in other symbolic places such as Place du Trocadéro and the streets surrounding the Sudanese embassy.

Alongside the close ties built with French “supporters”, these protests also allowed a rapprochement with the generation of elders. The triggers for mobilisation during these protests were mainly based around denouncing the war in Darfur, which most of the young Sudanese had experienced. The elders were able to follow this youth-driven movement and seize this opportunity to play a role and assert themselves as key players in this historic moment, which was widely reported in the international media. This is confirmed by the comments made by an elder who was one of the leaders of the political opposition in France to Omar Al-Bashir’s regime: *“But these last three years, do you remember? There were demonstrations all the time. There were demonstrations for Darfur, against the use of chemical weapons in Darfur. We did things to welcome the Sudanese. We did a lot of things during the period from 2013 to 2018.”*<sup>16</sup> In 2014, both generations joined forces in Paris and Lyon under the name “*Sudanese Activists*”, a name that was deliberately chosen to enable the formation of groups with no partisan or regional affiliation. This collaboration laid the groundwork for networks and shared activities that would be reactivated when the revolution occurred.

Despite the differential capital acquired in Sudan or France, the elders and the youth met together in the years before the revolution in camps, squats, and other public places to denounce an unfair asylum policy and the increasing violence in Sudan. However, these shared actions could not hide the profound differences in the representations and aspirations of the two groups

---

<sup>16</sup> Interview with Rasheed Saeed, Khartoum, February 2020. At the end of 2019, he returned to Sudan after years of exile in France and joined the transitional government (Ministry of Communication).

and the mutual mistrust that reflected both the generational and the regional divide. The young people viewed the elders as being out of touch with their daily concerns and political aspirations and disconnected from the Sudanese socio-political context. The elders found the young people to be too immature and inexperienced, and insufficiently trained in traditional political practices, and therefore poorly equipped to have a lasting impact in France or Sudan.

## **II. Serving the revolution: the construction of a common narrative across generations**

Even though Sudanese social groups were shaped by the generational divide that reproduced the social and regional divisions imported from Sudanese politics, the popular uprising in Sudan that began in December 2018 redesigned the social and political organisation of the Sudanese in France. It has been widely acknowledged that revolutions are times when specific narratives that emphasise unity and commonness develop, both if we go back in time in Sudan (Berridge, 2015) and if we look at other revolutionary situations (Lamblin, 2021). In the context we studied here, the rise of practices shared (Brubaker, 2005:12) between the two generations through the multiplication of events in support of the revolution that mirrored those taking place in Sudan enabled the production of new narratives based on a sense of common national belonging in the diaspora. The rise of expressions such as “ambassadors”<sup>17</sup> or “Sudanese of France”<sup>18</sup> among Sudanese exiles in France exemplifies this strategy of building a shared Sudanese identity and a unified political demand (a regime change).

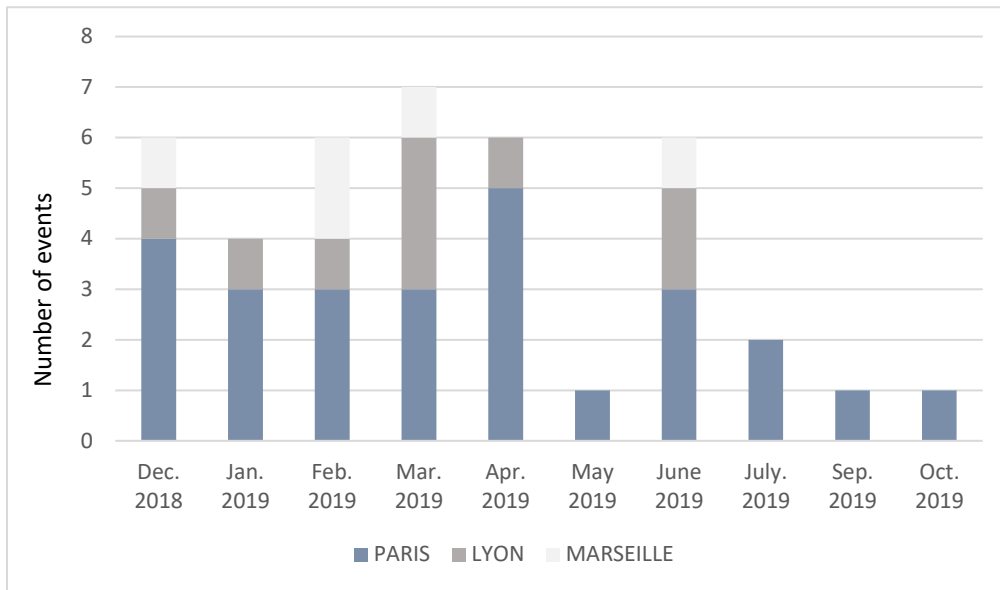
After the first two events in support of the emerging revolution organised in Paris on 23 and 24 December 2018, there was an increase in the number of demonstrations, not only in the capital but also in other French cities. On 29 December, the first gathering of the new group of “Sudanese Revolutionaries and their supporters” was held in Marseille, and on the same day, the “Sudanese Activists Network” organised a demonstration in Place Bellecour, in Lyon. Throughout the months that followed, Sudanese exiles sought to raise awareness of the emerging revolution in order to lend visibility to the Sudanese popular uprising and alert the international community, especially France (Figure 3). The events were mostly organised on the initiative and with the assistance of exile support groups, and for a fleeting moment they united most of the Sudanese living in France and transcended the generational divide.

---

<sup>17</sup> An expression used by a young man from Darfur during an interview in the summer of 2019.

<sup>18</sup> An expression used by Abubakar in a lecture given at a public conference on the development of the Sudanese revolution in January 2022.

Figure 3. Events in support of the Sudanese Revolution in three French cities



As early as January 2019, the number of groups and events grew and diversified (see Figure 4). Mobilisation through demonstrations and rallies increased the visibility of the Sudanese activist and revolutionary groups in the French militant space. These actions were sometimes associated with French politics, for example when a demonstration in Lille or Lyon joined a “Yellow Vest” protest. Actions were also sometimes coordinated with other diasporic struggles, such as Algerian mobilisations in support of the Hirak Movement<sup>19</sup>. In response to these various actions, news outlets granted a certain degree of recognition to Sudanese political issues<sup>20</sup>.

Other newly-created collectives used different channels to tell people about the situation in Sudan and contribute to a narrative of a unified political fight. Among these groups, ASUAD (Activists Sudanese United Against Dictatorship) sought to raise awareness among the French population by organising public performances, the Médiapart blog Sudfa (small French-Sudanese collaborative media) sought to inform the French public<sup>21</sup>, and the French branch of the Sudanese Translators for Change (STC) group translated Sudanese and international texts and articles and shared them on social media in order to circulate information more widely

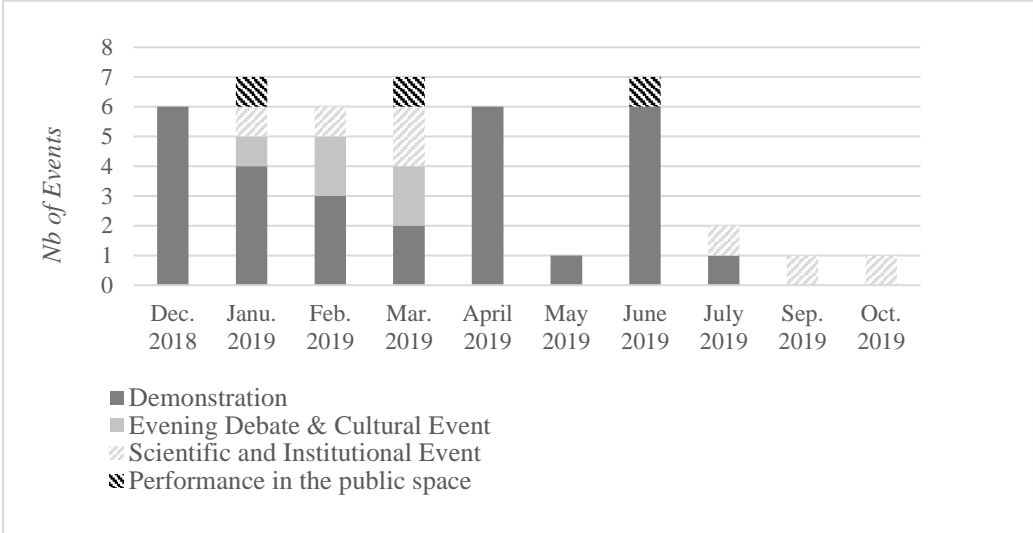
<sup>19</sup> Although there are connections between the struggles of revolutionaries, especially in the context of the Arab Spring and its second waves (Langlois, 2022), from an empirical standpoint we only note minor echoes among the diasporic movements in France.

<sup>20</sup> A review of the articles published in different French news outlets [see introduction] allowed us to establish that during the winter of 2019, several of the daily newspapers listed reported on the actions by Sudanese in France in support of the revolution.

<sup>21</sup> <https://blogs.mediapart.fr/sudfa> (accessed 21 March 2021).

within the Sudanese diaspora worldwide.<sup>22</sup> All these initiatives contributed to the rise of a national diasporic group, the “Sudanese of France”, which for the first time acquired considerable visibility in the country.

*Figure 4: The diversity of actions in support of the Sudanese revolution in Paris, Lyon, and Marseille*



This sense of unity was important not only for building a common front in France but also for mirroring and echoing the calls for unity expressed in Sudan. This was particularly important during and after the “Qiyada sit-in” organised in front of the Army Headquarters in Khartoum between 6 April 2019 and 3 June 2019. Indeed, on 6 April,<sup>23</sup> the demonstrations in Khartoum, which was unprecedented in size, led to the occupation of the Army Headquarters and a demand for the fall of the regime. Omar Al-Bashir left a few days later, and power was partly transferred to civilians. This crucial period of the revolutionary chronology, which captured all the revolutionary focus in France and Sudan alike, is described by Sudanese in France as a time of exceptional unity within the community. However, it also led to a pause in the actions of the Sudanese in France<sup>24</sup> for a time (see Figure 4) and reminded them of their position as outsiders to the unfolding events, which generated strong feelings of guilt. Conversely, the massacre that occurred in the Square on 3 June offered new grounds for further common actions on the side of the diaspora.

<sup>22</sup> The group mainly used Facebook to circulate information. See <https://www.facebook.com/Sudanese-Translators-for-Change-STC-410547673013811> (accessed 21 March 2021).

<sup>23</sup> The symbolic date of the anniversary of the 1985 revolution.

<sup>24</sup> The demonstrations slowed down and were replaced by an intense online activity that included relaying information on social media, organising fundraising activities to financially support the revolutionaries, and even for those who were able to do so, returning to Sudan.

The situation in Sudan changed dramatically in the early morning of 3 June 2019 when the army and hundreds of militiamen from the Rapid Support Forces (RSF)<sup>25</sup> violently evacuated the Al Qiyada sit-in. In a matter of hours, they murdered more than a hundred people and left hundreds of others injured.<sup>26</sup> For several hours, communications inside and with Sudan were cut off, causing extreme anxiety among the Sudanese, especially those living abroad. In Marseille as in Paris and Lyon, the two generations stood together and struggled between deep despair and a resolve to resist and fight back. The massacre that put an end to the general euphoria and interrupted protests in Sudan transferred the responsibility for actions of collective support to the diasporic groups acting from abroad. This international mobilisation was even more essential because internet access was cut off in Sudan for several weeks. On 14 June, the hashtag *Blue For Sudan* was born in solidarity with Sudanese protesters and spread around the world. While it was affected on its Sudanese side, the revolutionary front relied at that time on several different diasporic groups that showed unity not only nationally (France, Belgium, United Kingdom, etc.) but also at a European level. Indeed, Sudanese in France organised national gatherings to denounce the massacre and the complicity of neighbouring regimes (Figure 3 - month of June). As Sudan prepared for new protests on 30 June, the anniversary of Al-Bashir's takeover thirty years earlier,<sup>27</sup> a European Sudanese protest was organised in Paris to bring Sudanese activists from all around Europe to the French capital. In Place du Trocadéro, Sudanese of all origins and from both generations, not only from Lyon and other French cities, but also from the Netherlands, England, and Belgium conveyed to the world and to the Sudanese in Sudan the image of a coordinated unified front. Activities such as these created intergenerational ties through a shared sense of the long-distance "presence" to Sudan and of their "presence" as residents in France, therefore bridging the "here" and "there" of the co-presence (Dufoix, 2010:28).

The revolutionary process thus seemed to have redefined the forms of collective identity in France around a Sudanese nation and a Sudanese identity that mirrored the way the revolutionary narrative had been built up in Sudan. Beyond the shared practices we have

---

<sup>25</sup>Former members of the Janjaweed militias, accused of atrocities during the conflict in Darfur, under the command of General Hemmitti.

<sup>26</sup> "Au Soudan, les gens pleurent les morts et la perte du sit-in" ("In Sudan, people mourn the dead and the loss of the sit-in"), *Libération*, June 19, 2019, [https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2019/06/18/au-soudan-les-gens-pleurent-les-morts-et-la-perte-du-sit-in\\_1734652/](https://www.liberation.fr/planete/2019/06/18/au-soudan-les-gens-pleurent-les-morts-et-la-perte-du-sit-in_1734652/) (accessed 21 March 21 2021).

<sup>27</sup> This call to protest issued by the Alliance for Freedom and Change (ALC) was the first of its kind after the massacre of 3 June. It was massively attended: hundreds of thousands of Sudanese marched in Khartoum on 30 June to demand that the Military Council transfer power to a civilian government, in what is now called the march of the million ("*milyoneya*").



described above, the rhetoric of unity could be seen in speeches, on posters, and in the slogans used during demonstrations, such as: “Sudanese people fighting for democracy!”<sup>28</sup> In Paris, the call was to demonstrate “Without a slogan, under the banner: with the revolutionaries of Sudan” (مندون شعار تحت عنوان مع ثوار السودان).<sup>29</sup> The same vocabulary of unity could be heard at the demonstrations in Lyon and Marseille. Our respondents would always mention these first months of the revolution, and especially when Al Qiyada Square was occupied, as a federative time that went beyond social, geographical, and gender diversity. It was also presented as a moment of inspiration for their own actions: both the elders and the youth emphasised, and even exalted to an excessive degree, the unifying impact of the revolution on the community in France, despite the lingering feelings of alterity between the two generations and their regional belongings. In May 2019, a young Darfuri, the manager of the Sudanese coffee shop in Marseille and a leading personality in the city’s Sudanese community, insisted on the stronger ties between Sudanese exiles in France:

*“Has the revolution changed relationships here? A lot, in a positive way, in our way of thinking. Before, for example, we thought that the Nilians had a poor opinion of the people of the South and considered them as enemies. The revolution has erased the little tensions that existed before.”*<sup>30</sup>

This quote echoes that of an elder who had obtained asylum in France at the end of the 1990s after going to Paris as part of an artist residency programme, who expressed a new feeling of unity:

*“The revolution has united us in France. We used to be suspicious. You can’t tell if a person’s a refugee or a government spy. And the Darfuri brought racism with them. They think that because I’m from the North, I think this and that...”*<sup>31</sup>

Aside from their performative dimension, these statements about Sudanese citizenship, which reject ethnic and regional identification, must be considered in the light of the context of the 2000s and the protest movements that sprang up in the 2010s (Deshayes, 2020). Indeed, the ideology of a “New Sudan” that had been so dear to John Garang was pervasive among both the elders and the youth, for whom the former leader remained a political model. They were faithful to this idea, and criticised the regime’s political project based on an Arab and Islamic identity (Casciarri et al, 2020) for being responsible for the outbreak of wars, the unequal

---

<sup>28</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=842468356093359&set=a.112507685756100>

<sup>29</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/photo?fbid=840873786252816&set=a.112507685756100>

<sup>30</sup> Interview with Saddam, May 2019, Marseille.

<sup>31</sup> Interview with Ihab, February 2020, Khartoum.

development of the country, and discrimination against those marginalised groups who were perceived and presented as African. Echoing the Sudanese revolutionaries, the Sudanese of France also defended the idea of an inclusive and multicultural Sudan.

Many of the Sudanese we met refused to mention their ethnicity, preferring to emphasise their common national belonging. This young Darfouris clearly expressed the political and performative dimension of his refusal: not mentioning one's ethnicity would be a way to reach an ethnicity-blind society:

***Can I ask you about your ethnicity?***

*I don't want to mention it. Even my friends here in Marseille don't know it. Because I have a clear idea on this issue. For me, ethnicity and communitarianism are the real cause of all the problems happening in Sudan. This is one of the main issues that have torn the country apart. Sudan used to be considered a multicultural country, and that's a treasure. And these people divided to rule better. And I don't want to hear that such a person comes from such a group. We're all Sudanese. For me, one way of fighting this process of division is to refuse to give my ethnicity. It's one way of preventing this categorization imposed by the political power. I think that my way of thinking is shared by some. My generation, their way of thinking has changed. I have a lot of friends who agree with me on this. In Sudan and here. (Khaled)*

This emphasis on an inclusive Sudanese identity implies a desire not only to transcend ethnic and tribal affiliations, but also to overcome partisan allegiances, as expressed by this elder from Lyon when asked about his current political affiliation: "I used to be a communist; today I'm Sudanese."<sup>32</sup> With this affirmation, Othman expressed both his disappointment with the traditional political parties – a feeling that can also be found in the revolutionary movement in Sudan – and the weariness of an elder tired of political mobilisation and disappointed with political developments in Sudan and in France.

### **III. Beyond the revolutionary narratives: the empowerment of the youth**

After the massacre of 3 June 2019 that brought the sit-in in front of the presidential palace to an end, feelings of doubts and disappointment regarding the outcome of the revolution increased. Territorial and ethnic attachments reappeared and laid the ground for the resurgence of geographical and ethnic claims from specific communities and regions. The demographic

---

<sup>32</sup> Othman, who is from the Nile Valley, arrived in France in the late 1990s seeking asylum as a political opponent of Omar Al-Bashir's regime. Interview with Othman, March 2021, Lyon.

weight of the young generation, who were mostly from marginalised territories, notably Darfur (Part I), therefore raised the prominence of the Darfur issue in the debates on the revolution and its outcomes<sup>33</sup>. Accordingly, the line slowly shifted from national to regional diasporic groups (Wilcock, 2018; Lyons, 2007). The actions of the Sudanese diaspora became more scattered, and were increasingly based on regional anchoring. New discourses arose and brought to the fore a denunciation of the conflicts fuelled by the former regime and the injustices that were faced by Darfouris in particular. This led to a dual dynamic: a national diasporic disillusionment along with the emergence of new organisations and new claims based on regional diasporic membership.

Indeed, the slowdown and apparent failure of the uprising highlighted a different relationship to marginalisation and violence among the diaspora that revealed itself to be a distinctive characteristic between them. The exiles did not occupy the same position within the system of domination put in place by the regime. As a consequence, young Darfouris were invested with a dual role in France, becoming informants for other Sudanese whom they believed to be unaware of the situation in Darfur, as the following excerpt from an interview conducted in Marseille with a young man born in Darfur illustrates:

*“Here (in Marseille), there were a lot of people who didn’t know what was going on in Darfur (...). We managed to convince them, and now they’re ashamed. (...). We played a double role: on the one hand, we raised awareness among the Sudanese who didn’t have enough information about the crimes that took place in Sudan. And on the other, we encouraged the revolutionaries in Sudan and put pressure on the international community to support the revolutionaries and oust Bashir.”<sup>34</sup>*

Mazen, a young man who had been living in Marseille since 2016, told us that despite the inclusive slogans of the revolution, the Darfur question and its impact on the future of Sudan remained a very salient issue within the exiled community. Born in North Kordofan and raised in Omdurman, he was perceived to be a member of the Northern elite, and felt that the issue of Darfur was a highly sensitive one among the Sudanese in France:

*“The opposition leaders who led the recent demonstrations in Sudan were very aware of this problem, which is also why they decided to use the slogan: ‘Racist and arrogant, the whole country is from Darfur.’ It was an appeal to the people of Darfur, a desire to*

---

<sup>33</sup> Asylum policies also contribute towards reinforcing and reifying ethnic and regional affiliations, as the French institutions in charge of asylum applications refer to a “grid of identity and minority assignments” to grant or reject international protection (Gout 2020)

<sup>34</sup> Interview with Taha, July 2019, Marseille.

*reach out and find reconciliation. It erased some of the divisions that the government had created and that were created between us. These divisions can come back if we don't give a lot of power to the Darfuris in the next regime.*"<sup>35</sup>

By calling for acknowledgment of the crimes committed in Darfur and for consideration of the multiple identities within Sudanese society, the young Darfuris were defending political and cultural issues that are specific to their region. These regional and ethnic categories also structured the daily reality of the Sudanese youth in France, who maintained strong ties with people from the same region, encouraged in particular by shared knowledge and local languages. According to many Darfuris, a future Sudan should be structured around inclusive policies and citizenship that value national and African belonging, while also recognising specific local identities

In this context, while the massacre of 3 June strengthened the role played by the Sudanese in France in relaying information (see Part II), it also revived the fault lines that had been blurred by the first moments of the revolution. The deployment of the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) in Khartoum under the command of militia leader Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, also known as "Hemmitti", who was the embodiment of repression and violence in Darfur, transferred an extensive use of force that had long been employed in the peripheries of the country to the centre of the country, to the capital. The massacre caused a double reaction in the Sudanese community in France. First, it raised awareness among the populations of the North and centre of the violence experienced by the marginalised populations and of the fact that no group was now spared from it. As a young man born in Darfur put it: *"With the revolution and what Hemmitti has done, it has finally made them [the Nilians] realise what others have experienced."*<sup>36</sup> While a number of Darfuris were satisfied with this acknowledgement of the violence they had suffered, others expressed bitterness that this awareness had come so late, and they seemed to blame the Nilians for this. This happened to Mazen, a young man from North Kordofan, to whom some Darfuris made an unpleasant remark at the Sudanese coffee shop in Marseille to remind him of his origin: *"The other day, after the massacre of 3 and 4 June [...] someone said: 'Now at last, the people of Omdurman and Khartoum have understood the importance of armed movements.' It's violent, but people need to express themselves."*<sup>37</sup> Along with the late recognition of the extensive use of violence by the regime, the massacre caused a second ambivalent feeling in the young generation. They regretted that the death of

---

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Mazen, July 2019, Marseille.

<sup>36</sup> Interview with Badreldin, who was born in Kas, Darfur, in 1992 and arrived in France in 2016.

<sup>37</sup> Interview with Mazen [see above].

nearly 150 people caused more outrage than the conflict in Darfur, which left nearly 400,000 people dead and 2 million displaced. What they perceived as a selective and differential degree of indignation emphasised their sense of regional identity and belonging, and reinforced the fragmentation of the diasporic community.

The interviews conducted with the elders also reflected this (re)fragmentation, and revealed the tensions around the importance attached to the Darfur issue:

*“Today, there are differences, divisions in the Sudanese community. They [the Darfuri] want the Darfur problem to be at the centre, to be addressed. They think that it’s the only problem in Sudan. You’ve just arrived! We were refugees before you and you’ve just arrived. The government has a problem with all the Sudanese and not only with Darfur. And wait, until 2005, who were the supporters of the government? Until 2005, Darfur supported the government except for an enlightened minority. They owe a lot to the Islamists; they supported Turabi<sup>38</sup>.”<sup>39</sup>*

Confronted with the growing presence of the young generation in the public space and their ability and willingness to shape the discourse on the Sudanese revolution, the older generation accused them of a certain “regionalism”<sup>40</sup> brought about by the development of ties and organisations based on ethnic considerations. *“Before, in Lyon, it wasn’t ‘Where do you come from? From what gabila<sup>41</sup> are you?’ [...] Today in Lyon there are many new organisations: the organisation of Fours, Zaghawa, Jebel Nuba, Nubian, and Bayt al sudani. Before, there were only Nileyn.”<sup>42</sup>*

The young people are now the leaders of many collectives and organisations that still today are places of socialisation and sites of political action in the ongoing struggle from afar that the young generation continues to lead. Movements such as the Collective of Sudanese Revolutionaries in Marseille embody these places of social and political affirmation that reflect the position acquired by young people within the Sudanese diaspora. This collective is a small group led by young people born in the 1990s, mostly in Darfur, who organise demonstrations in support of the revolution, as well as cultural events related to Sudan (concerts, meals, etc.).

---

<sup>38</sup> Hassan Al Turabi is the ideologist of the Sudanese Islamic movement and the architect of the rise to power of the Sudanese Islamic Front and Omar Al-Bashir’s coup in 1989. Darfuris supported the ruling regime, especially in its early days (Chevrillon-Guibert, 2013).

<sup>39</sup> Interview with Othman [see above].

<sup>40</sup> A term used by Mohamed Ahmed, the Sudanese owner of a construction company and a former representative of the Unionist Party in France. He arrived in Lyon as a student in the 1980s, at the age of 19, and decided to stay after the 1989 coup. He is one of the oldest Sudanese in Lyon. (Interview in March 2021, Lyon).

<sup>41</sup> “Tribe” in Sudanese Arabic.

<sup>42</sup> Interview with Othman [see above].

The visibility they have gained represents a social upgrade they have achieved through the role they played in long-distance support for the revolution, and hence represents a form of social revenge for the marginalised social position they occupied back in Sudan. However, as a sign of a recent reorientation of its practices from political to humanitarian, the collective also has a central role in helping newly-exiled Sudanese who arrive at the Saint-Charles train station in Marseille from Ventimiglia (such as by providing temporary housing or purchasing train tickets to Paris). The manager of the only Sudanese coffee shop in Marseille has close ties with the active core members of the Collective of Sudanese Revolutionaries, and is a key intermediary in Marseille for remittances to Sudan.

Other collectives illustrate the emancipation of the young generation, such as the ASUAD (Activists Sudanese United Against Dictatorship) collective, whose name – which means black in Arabic – also evokes a strong African identity. Their mode of action is to hold public performances and produce powerful visuals. The collective could be seen for the first time when it staged a production entitled “Beshir Executioner of Justice” in Place du Trocadéro in Paris on 20 January 2019, in which a group of Sudanese acted out a death by hanging that symbolised the death of justice. A few weeks later, the collective was hanging posters in the streets of Paris, Lyon, and Marseille showing a Sudanese man against a background of barbed wire with his fist raised, with the slogan “Sudan in Revolt”.

During the support events, public speeches were often monopolised by the youth, revealing the positions and visibility achieved by their generation. For example, during the massive demonstration on 29 June 2019, which brought together a large number of Sudanese from different backgrounds [see above], the activities in the public spaces were either carried out by the youth or clearly aimed at an audience of young people from the Sudanese margins: the banners featured the issue of marginalisation, and the exiled leader in France of one of the rebel movements in Darfur delivered a speech that was followed by a performance by the ASUAD collective.

Another collective – known as Sudfa – made up of a handful of Sudanese and French activists was formed in April 2019.<sup>43</sup> Presented as a “Franco-Sudanese participatory media”, it produces various types of content at the intersection between the struggles for migrants’ rights after 2015 and support for the revolution. The background of its founder and main blog writer is a reflection of how the revolution has contributed to the emergence of political entrepreneurs

---

<sup>43</sup> See how they describe themselves on Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/sudfamedia> (accessed on 21 March 2021).

who are leaders among the young people. Born in Darfur in 1992, Aboubakar arrived in France in 2017. He learned French at an association in Lyon, and earned a bachelor's degree in sociology before moving to Paris, where he enrolled in a master's degree in political science in 2020. During this period, he became close to both French activist organisations and well-known politicians. After the blog was created, he was a regular participant in demonstrations in favour of fairer migration policies and against discrimination, and was also invited to most of the Sudanese events organised by French collectives or academic organisations on Sudan. As a result of his activism, which began in the early months of the revolution, the resources he acquired in France at university and alongside French collectives, and his command of the French language, he has become an essential member of the Sudanese community in France and of French collectives, and a powerful voice for the "Sudanese of France".<sup>44</sup>

Other political entrepreneurs have emerged, and their activities have varied over time depending on the political situation in Sudan. Some have set aside the Sudanese question to redirect their activities elsewhere, investing their energy in other causes, notably through their contacts with French support groups engaged in other political causes such as the "Black Lives Matter" movements. They often return to Sudanese issues when important events take place there. One activist from the "Sudanese Activists Network", for example, became a political entrepreneur within "Bon Abroad", a structure he co-founded whose mission is to help migrants develop their businesses by making original use of new technologies. After the coup of 25 October 2021, he once again became involved in events related to Sudan together with Aboubakar and others. Others, on the other hand, have converted their political activism into humanitarian mobilization,<sup>45</sup> which is what happened in the case of a middle-aged Darfuri activist for the Sudanese cause in Paris, whose actions are now focused on his job as a social worker at a day shelter for families run by Emmaus Solidarité. Following the coup of 25 October 2021, he organised demonstrations in Paris and participated in several television programmes dedicated to Sudan.

The revolution thus appears to have been an opportunity for Sudanese youth to be acknowledged as a driving force in the political organisation of the Sudanese community in France. The young Sudanese have been marked by their political experience in France in a lasting way, and in return this has strengthened their legitimacy among the French population, among the elders, and among their relatives who have remained in Sudan.

---

<sup>44</sup> An expression he frequently uses.

<sup>45</sup> On movements between political and humanitarian commitments, see Fourn Léo (2018).

## Conclusion

The objective of this article is to understand the impact of the Sudanese revolution (2018-2019) on Sudanese exiles living in France and on their different forms of engagement. Using an approach that considers the diaspora as a social construct (Brubaker, 2005; Adamson, 2012), we have examined the effects of generational affiliation on diasporic engagement (Sayyad, 1977) both in the country of origin and the country of exile. In this way, the article makes an original contribution to analyses of revolutionary situations experienced from afar within diasporic groups. We examine the links between a unique political moment and a migratory scene marked by the recent settlement of Sudanese in France. It reveals a regional and ethnic diversity that differs from other, often long-established, Sudanese diasporic groups in countries such as the United Kingdom, the United States, or Egypt confirming what a number of research studies have already pointed out regarding other diaspora: namely that the “reception context” and the migration history have a powerful effect on the form of political mobilisation (Müller-Funk, 2016). Further research on these understudied diasporic groups would be welcome, especially in countries where few mobilisations take place, such as Gulf countries where many Sudanese are established or other Mediterranean political context such as Italy, the first country of arrival for most of the young Sudanese, which they perceive as a country of transit. The comparison between Italy and France, also envisaged at the beginning as a country of transit, would make it possible to examine how spaces of transit become countries of installation, affecting diasporic configurations and their mobilizations. More broadly, these complementary researches allow to study the circulation, connexion, and competition among them when they are engaged in revolutionary struggles.

By identifying two generational groups of Sudanese living in France, the elders and the youth, we have been able to demonstrate the unifying impact of the revolution. Indeed, the revolution represented an opportunity for both the elders and the young people to claim their Sudanese unity and to serve as an unconditional long-distance relay for the revolution. For a time, it brought different groups together by creating spaces of socialisation and common political claims. These actions have contributed to the development of a “Sudanese” diasporic group (Wilcock, 2018:375) based on a narrative of common national belonging, to which both the elders and the young people felt attached. Our analysis also reveals, however, that this unity was a rhetorical and political tool whose development was halted, leading to the (re)appearance of a “regional and ethnic” diaspora (Wilcock, 2018:372), in which young Darfuris sought to



distinguish themselves from the elders and to assert the importance of the cause of their home region. It also led to the emergence of a “generational” diaspora based on their shared experience of Sudan, their escape in the late 2010s, and their arrival in France after a series of hardships that included illegal border crossings and expulsions. Accordingly, their mobilisation is both a means of asserting themselves as spokespersons for the violence suffered in Sudan – of which their relatives remain victims – and a way of asserting autonomy *vis-à-vis* their elders and the French support groups.

Recent political developments in Sudan, with the military takeover in October 2021 and the end of the transitional regime, have confirmed the increased visibility of the younger generation in the French public space and the emergence of new political figures in the diaspora. The mobilised diasporic groups are thus evolving over time, and the resurgence of the military threat has served, at least for a time, to reunite them within a “Sudanese” diaspora in France. At the same time, support for the coup from the two main armed groups in Darfur has not only reactivated tensions between the two generations, but also created new ones within the young people, once again demonstrating the shifting borders of diasporic groups.

## **Bibliography**

- Abusharaf M. Roggia (2010), “Debating Darfur in the world”, in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, November, Vol. 632, pp. 67-85.
- Adamson Fiona (2012), Constructing the diaspora. Diaspora identity politics and transnational social movements, in Terrence Lyons and Peter Madaville (eds.) *Politics from afar. Transnational diaspora and networks*, pp.25-42.
- Ahmed Einas (2009), “Les islamistes à l’épreuve de la direction de l’Etat (1989-2004)”, in R. Otayek & B. Soares (eds.), *Islam, Etat, et société en Afrique*, Paris: Karthala, pp. 293-326.
- Beaugrand Claire and Geisser Vincent (eds.) (2016), Special Issue. “Social Mobilisation and Political Participation in the Diaspora during the ‘Arab Spring’”, *Journal of Immigrant & Refugee Studies*, vol. 14, Issue 3.
- Berridge Willow J. (2015), *Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan. The 'Khartoum Springs' of 1964 and 1985*, Bloomsbury Academic.
- Berridge Willow J. (2017), *Hasan al-Turabi: Islamist Politics and Democracy in Sudan*. Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Brubaker R. (2005), The ‘diaspora’ diaspora, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 28(1), pp.1-19.
- Brücker Pauline (2020), *En quête de statut. Mobilités et mobilisations des demandeurs d’asile soudanais en Egypte et en Israël (1995-2015)*, PhD thesis, Sciences Po Paris.

- Casciarri B. et al. (2020), "Ethnicité, religion, nationalisme: intersections et ambiguïtés dans un Soudan en mouvement", *Cahier d'études africaines*, 240(4), pp. 761-778.
- Chevriillon-Guibert Raphaëlle (2013), *Des commerçants au cœur de l'expérience islamiste au Soudan: Rapports de/au pouvoir et recompositions des communautés darfouriennes zaghawa à l'aune des alliances du mouvement islamique soudanais (1950- 2011)*, PhD thesis, Université d'Auvergne.
- De Certeau Michel (1990), *L'invention du quotidien, tome 1, Arts de faire*, Paris: Gallimard.
- Deshayes Clément (2019), *Lutter en ville au Soudan. Ethnographie politique de deux mouvements de contestation: Girifna et Sudan Change Now*, PhD thesis, Université de Paris 8.
- Deshayes Clément (2020), Contester la politique identitaire du régime soudanais. Ambivalence des appartenances collectives au sein des mouvements politiques clandestins, *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 240(4), pp 943-965.
- Dufoix Stéphane (2010), Introduction. Un pont par-dessus la porte. Extraterritorialisation et transétatisation des identifications nationales, in Stéphane Dufoix, Carine Guerassimoff, Anne De Tinguy (eds.) *Loin des yeux, près du cœur. Les Etats et leurs expatriés*, pp.15-57.
- Etienne Margaux (2018), *Entrée en clandestinité et reformulation des pratiques militantes. Le cas du groupe des Muhayidin de l'Université de Khartoum*, Master thesis, Université Paris 1.
- Fourn Léo (2018), De la révolution au travail humanitaire. Reconversions de militants syriens exilés au Liban, *Revue internationale de politique comparée*, 25(1-2), pp. 63-81
- Franck Alice et Etienne Margaux (2019), Les ressorts du mouvement révolutionnaire chez les Soudanais de la diaspora. Interview with Alice Franck, *Noria Research*, Available at <https://www.noria-research.com/fr/les-ressorts-du-mouvement-revolutionnaire-chez-les-soudanais-de-la-diaspora/> (accessed 10 February 2021)
- Gout Philippe (2020), The International Protection of Refugees. An Insight into the French Asylum Court's Response to the Sudanese Making of Identities, *Cahiers d'études africaines*, 240(4), pp. 873-893.
- IOM, 2012, *Migration in Sudan: a country profile 2011*. <https://publications.iom.int/books/migration-sudan-country-profile-2011>
- Lamblin Célia (2021) *Vivre la révolution de 2011 à distance*, L'Harmattan.
- Langlois Jeremy (2022), When reorganising coercion backfires: explaining the mechanisms of revolt in Sudan and Algeria, *Democratization* (online).
- Macaulay Luke and Joanne Deppeler (2020), Perspectives on Negative Media Representations of Sudanese and South Sudanese Youths in Australia, *Journal of Intercultural Studies*, 41(2), pp. 213-230.
- Marlowe Jay, Anne Harris and Tanya Lyons (2013), *South Sudanese diaspora in Australia and New Zealand. Reconciling the past with the present*, Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Matonti Frédérique and Poupeau Franck (2004), Le capital militant. Essai de définition, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 155(5), pp. 4-11.
- Moss Dana M. (2021), *The Arab Spring Abroad: Diaspora Activism against Authoritarian Regimes*, Cambridge University Press.

- Müller-Funk Léa (2019), *Egyptian Diaspora Activism During the Arab Uprisings. Insights from Paris and Vienna* (Routledge).
- Péchu Cécile (2001), Les générations militantes à droit au logement, *Revue française de science politique*, 51(1-2), pp. 73-103.
- Rogaia Mustafa Abusharaf (2002), *Wanderings: Sudanese Migrants and Exiles in North America*, New York: Cornell University Press.
- Saadia Izzeldin Malik (2017), Identity, citizenship and ‘home’ through the transnational perspective(s) of second generation Sudanese migrants in Qatar, *Diaspora Studies*, 10(2), pp. 175-192
- Salomon Noah (2016) *For Love of the Prophet*, Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Sayad Abdelmalek (1977) “Les trois “âges” de l’émigration algérienne en France”, *Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales*, 15, pp. 59-79.
- Sayad Abdelmalek (1999), *La double absence. Des illusions de l’émigré aux souffrances de l’immigré*, Paris: Seuil.
- Serra-Mingot Ester (2018), Protecting across borders. Sudanese families across the Netherlands, the UK and Sudan, PhD thesis, Maastricht University/ Université Aix-Marseille.
- Shallal Musa, and Abdalla Hamid (2009), The Second Generation of Sudanese Expatriates in the U.A.E: Home Attachment in the Host Culture: An Exploratory Study, *Journal of the Social Sciences*, University of Kuwait, 37(3), pp. 117-141.
- Sharqawi Mohammed (2020), Dire et faire communauté en diaspora Le cas de l’immigration yéménite en Angleterre (1950-2015), PhD thesis, EHESS
- Sheffer Gabriel (2003), *Diaspora Politics: At Home Abroad*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Tenret Elise (2016), Exclusive Universities: Use and Misuse of Affirmative Action in Sudanese Higher Education, *Comparative Education Review*, 60(2), pp. 375-402.
- Lyons Terrence (2007), Conflict-Generated Diasporas and Transnational Politics in Ethiopia, *Conflict Security and Development*, 7(4), pp. 529-549.
- Wilcock Cathy (2018), Mobilising towards and imagining homelands: diaspora formation among U.K. Sudanese, *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies*, 44(3), pp. 363-381.