

## **"We Are All Darfur" in Khartoum**

A Conversation on the Sudan Uprising with Sara Elhassan

---

*Sara Elhassan, author of "Revolution in Sudan: On the Verge of Civilian Rule?" in Afropunk, co-host of the NoSirNoMa'am! podcast, and creator of Blog #45, is an internationally recognized social media advocate who regularly uses her platform to raise awareness of the sociopolitical conditions in Sudan. She rose to prominence following the explosive political protests in December 2018, calling for the resignation of the then-president of Sudan, Omar al-Bashir, after his thirty years of brutal dictatorship. Elhassan continues, in real-time, to utilize her Twitter and Instagram platform (@BSonblast) by documenting and providing insightful analysis on behalf of the communities seeking true and just liberation for Sudan.*

Interviewed by Taariq Elmahadi

Irvine, California

July 31, 2019

*I interviewed Sara Elhassan to gain a broad account of the responses to the latest attacks against protestors in the streets advocating for peace, justice, and freedom. In our discussion, Elhassan provides a quick analysis of the Transitional Military Council's record of bad-faith negotiations and the insidious tactics of coercive diplomacy and contextualizes the true origins and nature of this movement, emphasizing the centrality of youth, women, and the tribal communities of the Nuba Mountains, Darfur, and South Sudan. She concludes this interview by emphasizing the continual need for unity across all historically marginalized communities in order for a new, democratic Sudan to be realized.*

TAARIQ ELMAHADI: Two days ago we saw one of the last attacks by the Janjaweed<sup>1</sup> in Al Ubayyid with the heartbreaking losses of Ahmed Abdelkader, Hasaan Saeed, Mohamed Elfatih, Badr Eldin, and Ahmed Abdelkarim. And Ahmed Ebaya, one of the residents, I believe he's a resident of Sudan, recalled the protests in Khartoum that turned deadly when he tweeted out two days ago that the incident "just reminds [him] of the massacre that took place on the 8th of Ramadan."<sup>2</sup> Yet, despite this, the TMC [Transitional Military Council] continues to reiterate themselves as a faithful participant in these negotiations, even invoking the United States in diplomacy to broker the new constitutional agreement. So my question is how do you interpret this

---

*National Review of Black Politics*, Vol. 1, Number 1, pp. 154–161, ISSN 2688-0105, e-ISSN: 2688-0113  
© 2020 by the National Conference of Black Political Scientists. All rights reserved. Please direct all requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content through the University of California Press's Reprints and Permissions web page, <https://www.ucpress.edu/journals/reprints-permissions>. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.1525/nrbp.2020.1.1.154>

situation and, more to the point, what do you believe is at stake here as Sudanese [people] continue in their resistance movement?

SARA ELHASSAN: Well, I mean, I think the TMC's rejection of any sort of accountability or responsibility hasn't really changed at all from when they took power in April. [The TMC has] consistently claimed that any attack against peaceful protesters, any attacks against citizens weren't them. These attackers were either rogue soldiers doing this on their own, or some shadow forces impersonating the RSF [Rapid Support Forces] or any of the other [paramilitary forces within the] TMC.<sup>3</sup>

ELMAHADI: [I am thinking about the specific persons who] are physically out there on the streets taking a stand against the Janjaweed and the military. Do they see these negotiations as a meaningful path to full-scale and ethical regime change, or are these talks seen as a transition from one fascist government to another?

ELHASSAN: I think it's hard for me to say with certainty because I'm not in Sudan. But from what I see, I think people are split. There are those who think that being in negotiations regardless of the TMC's crimes is sort of our only option because you have to get them on your side—they have to be partners in this, otherwise it won't work. We don't have much of a choice but to go along with it in order to decrease the loss of life and make sure there is no violence. But, of course, that's starting to change because, as they've seen, each and every agreement that the FFC [Forces for Freedom and Change] comes to the TMC with doesn't really lead to what they assume or what they are told is supposed to be the outcome: that the bloodshed is going to stop, the violence is going to stop, they [are] going to get a [unified agreement. Then there are those] who are losing faith in the negotiations or actually go so far as to call for a halt in the negotiations and a complete reversal of the agreement, saying that there is no point, that they are not to be trusted. I don't think anyone really trusts the TMC. But, at this point, it's between outright rejection and people being resigned to this being the lesser of two evils—which is the option that we don't want to take but we have to because we don't have any other choice.

ELMAHADI: I know recently there was a halt in the negotiations. Have you noticed, prior to that halt, less people in the streets? Or what has been your observation of the changes of people being out there on the streets throughout this process ever since folks have gone to the negotiation table?

ELHASSAN: I don't think there are less people on the streets. I think the protests and the protest sizes [have] been pretty consistent. I just think that, for lack of a better word, the motivation has shifted a little bit from “okay, we know that this agreement is happening, we know the direction we're going in, but we want to remind everybody of what our demands are and what we want” versus now it's “the TMC is not following through on its end of the deal, it's still continuing its violence, we're highlighting this.” And, a little bit more anger is injected [in]to the protests—now directed at the TMC rather than a general stance against the policies of the past regime and what people want for the future.

ELMAHADI: Do you see there being a threshold or a line the community sees that, if the TMC crosses, they're no longer willing to have conversations with them?

ELHASSAN: I think there is a difference between the community and the leaders of this movement or the FFC, the leaders who are representing this movement. I think on

the streets people have reached that limit where they are no longer putting up with, or accepting, or tolerating the TMC. I don't think they were tolerating it before but they were just, like I said, "this is the lesser of two evils and we don't have much of a choice." But now, I mean with each attack, with each new incident, people are losing their patience more and more. And so, I don't think that is necessarily reflected when it comes to the FFC. I don't think they've reached their limit yet.

ELMAHADI: I hear you. So switching slightly, shifting a little bit. Something I couldn't help but notice in this movement was the clear and visible presence of youth and more feminine leadership in contrast to the Arab Spring at the turn of the decade. Since December, a surge of videos surfaced on the internet showing women leading protests in music and chants while others [were] holding interviews with media outlets sharply and clearing condemning Omar al-Bashir and his military regime. And just yesterday, we saw a sea of young Sudanese [students] in their [school] uniforms taking to the streets to protest in solidarity against the blasphemous cruelty on the streets and in the hospitals. In your view, how vital is it that we have youth, women, and communities that have been historically marginalized represented in the uprising?

ELHASSAN: Well, I think it's important to stress the fact that this is a youth-led movement regardless of whether the people in the meeting rooms are representing that. I think the people in the streets are, I would say, 80 percent youth. And that's a modest estimate. And within that, many of them are women. The percentages that were being shared, I think around April or May, were that 70 percent of the people on the street were women. This movement would not exist without the youth. It wouldn't have happened. They led it. They started it. And they are continuing—they are continuing in that fight. And they are the people losing their lives. If you look at the documented number of people who have died in the last seven months, the majority of them are people under the age of 30. So, I think that's one thing, I don't think this revolution will succeed without accurate representation or adequate representation or youth, women, or people of marginalized communities because this is what people are fighting for. People are fighting for a new Sudan in which this marginalization should be, first of all, remedied, if not actual reparations being given to people of marginalized areas and conflict zones. If this is not realized then there is no difference between now and the last thirty years. Then there would not be a new Sudan because these are the people that have been putting themselves on the line not just in the last seven months, but over the last thirty years. I mean people—marginalized communities like the Nuba Mountains, like Darfur, and the South before that—have been fighting [against] the regime since before the people in the center decided to join the fight. So not including them in the process or not taking them into consideration would just be a betrayal of the revolution.

ELMAHADI: You answered my last question but I'll go ahead and say it anyway and maybe you can add a little bit more to it. When I heard you speak at the June gathering in LA,<sup>4</sup> you shared that one critical development as the movement was picking up energy was the connections made across communities. I mean we witnessed firsthand the organizing efforts you [and the panelists]<sup>5</sup> had undertaken in these past seven months. But specifically, I recall you sharing the regional

conversations between people in the Darfur and those of Khartoum and Omdurman. So, speaking to these regional conversations, why are these connections so valuable in this movement and how important are they for imagining new visions of Sudan?

ELHASSAN: Right. I mean they are crucial. They're essential. I think over the last thirty years, or maybe even more, Sudan has been very divided along tribal lines and so this was policy. This was national policy to keep people divided, to keep them pitted against each other so that there wouldn't be any unity or solidarity. And so now, getting folks to interact with each other on a meaningful level, not just "oh, those people are from over there and those people are from over here," but actually discussing their experiences and comparing and contrasting them has made for, first of all, education: people can become more aware and more educated about the struggles of others. But also, [it] has created a bond between people that wasn't there before. The fact that people [are] chanting "We are all Darfur" in the streets of Khartoum is a huge step forward. It's something that wasn't happening at the height of the Darfur conflict. People in Khartoum didn't even know there was a conflict. And if they did, it was through the government's propaganda of "well they deserve it" or whatever reason. And so, this shift is important for the future of Sudan because without that unity there is no hope of moving forward, right? You cannot claim to want democracy and freedom and peace and justice for all without, first of all, being aware of what all those other people are going through, right?, in order to be able to properly address their struggles and their issues. And you cannot have a democratic nation without having unity. It's just not possible.

#### NOTES

1. The armed groups of the Arabs of Darfur and Kordofan in western Sudan that later were incorporated into the RSF, according to Dr. Estefa (Janjaweed, in text). See Tsega Estefa, "Explainer: Tracing the History of Sudan's Janjaweed Militia," *The Conversation*, June 19, 2019, <http://theconversation.com/explainer-tracing-the-history-of-sudans-janjaweed-militia-118926> (accessed July 31, 2019).
2. Ahmed Ebaya, Twitter post, July 29, 2019, [https://twitter.com/Ahmed\\_ebaya/status/1155816132990984192](https://twitter.com/Ahmed_ebaya/status/1155816132990984192) (accessed July 31, 2019).
3. The TMC's leader, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (Hemedti), became Omar al-Bashir's top leader for the Janjaweed in 2003. In 2013, he created the RSF to support the al-Bashir regime.
4. Nadra Widatalla, Instagram post, June 23, 2019, [www.instagram.com/p/BzD6SlAHrJ2/?igshid=5kzlpkyq87s](http://www.instagram.com/p/BzD6SlAHrJ2/?igshid=5kzlpkyq87s) (accessed July 31, 2019).
5. Identities omitted for privacy protection.



*Sources:* Map of Sudan (above) from [www.polgeonow.com/2011/07/new-country-south-sudan.html](http://www.polgeonow.com/2011/07/new-country-south-sudan.html). Map of Horn of Africa with inset (below) from <https://sihanet.org>

## TIMELINE OF SUDAN UPRISING: DECEMBER 2018–AUGUST 2019

**December 19, 2018** Hundreds of people take to the streets of Atbara in anti-government protests. In response, a state of emergency is declared and a curfew is imposed on the city.<sup>1,2</sup>

**January 1, 2019** A coalition of twenty-two opposition groups issues a Declaration of Freedom and Change (DFC), calling for the immediate resignation of President Omar al-Bashir.<sup>3,4</sup>

**February 22, 2019** Bashir declares a nationwide year-long state of emergency, also dissolving the federal and provincial governments and appointing army and intelligence officers as provincial governors.<sup>5</sup>

**April 6, 2019** Tens of thousands of protesters occupy the square in front of the military headquarters in a sit-in protest, demanding the removal of President Omar al-Bashir.<sup>6,7</sup>

**April 11, 2019** The military announces President Omar al-Bashir has been overthrown in a coup. They also claim governance for two years, suspending the airspace, land borders, and constitution. Minister of Defense Lt. Gen. Awad Ibn Auf is sworn-in as interim president. Protestors burst into celebration outside military headquarters, chanting, “The regime has fallen.”<sup>8,9,10</sup>

**April 12, 2019** Interim President Awad Ibn Auf resigns and transfers power to Lt. Gen. Abdul Fattah Burhan (Hemedti), who presides over the military council. Deep concerns are raised about Hemedti due to his link to bloodshed in Darfur.<sup>11,12,13</sup>

**April 20, 2019** Talks between the military and opposition leaders begin.<sup>14</sup>

**June 3, 2019** After blockading roads and hospitals to prevent medical support, the Rapid Support Forces fire live ammunition at a central sit-in encampment in Khartoum. At least 118 protestors, bystanders, and medical workers are killed, over 70 are raped, over 700 are injured, and dozens of bodies are dumped in the Nile River. Subsequently, the opposition halts all contact and negotiations with the Transitional Military Council (TMC), charging the security forces with attempting a “coup” against the uprising. Sudan’s public prosecutor orders an immediate investigation of the raid and the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) calls for marches across the country to “paralyze public life.”<sup>15,16,17,18,19,20</sup>

**June 4, 2019** Hemedti announces that the TMC is canceling all previous agreements with the main opposition coalition and will move ahead with internationally supervised elections within nine months. Hemedti accuses the coalition of being equally responsible for the delay in coming to an agreement. Opposition leaders reject the TMC’s plan to hold elections within nine months, issuing a statement calling for complete civil disobedience and open political strikes.<sup>21,22,23</sup>

**June 30, 2019** Tens of thousands pour into the streets across the country for the “millions march.” Protestors seek the following: justice for the victims of the massacre; return of ownership of the revolution to the streets; and political pressure to compel the country’s ruling generals to re-enter negotiations with the Forces for Freedom and Change (FFC).<sup>24,25</sup>

**July 3, 2019** Sudan’s pro-democracy movement resumes talks with the ruling military council over a transfer of power to civilian rule, a protest leader says, a move that could break weeks of political impasse since the military ousted President al-Bashir in April.<sup>26</sup>

**July 5, 2019** The TMC and FFC reach an agreement to form a joint military-civilian authority during a pre-election transitional period of three years and three months with a rotating presidency and technocratic government formed by the FFC. At a public forum held by the FFC, citizens stand with their backs to the panel, holding signs of disapproval, one of which reads: “No to sharing power with murderers.”<sup>27,28</sup>

**July 17, 2019** The FFC and TMC sign the Political Charter (July 5 agreement). While the international community welcomes the initial political agreement, the Sudan Revolutionary Front (SRF), Sudanese Journalists Network, and National Consensus Forces (NCF) categorically reject the Political Charter.<sup>29,30,31,32</sup>

**August 4, 2019** The Constitutional Declaration is formally signed by Ahmed Rabee (on behalf of the FFC) and Hemedti (on behalf of the TMC) as hundreds of people celebrate in the streets of Khartoum.<sup>33,34</sup>

**August 12, 2019** Leaders of the SRF and FFC meet over the weekend to discuss the contents of the Constitutional Declaration ahead of the final signing scheduled on August 17.<sup>35</sup>

#### NOTES

1. [www.france24.com/en/20190411-sudan-timeline-four-months-mounting-protests-bashir](http://www.france24.com/en/20190411-sudan-timeline-four-months-mounting-protests-bashir)
2. [www.trtworld.com/africa/the-timeline-of-sudan-protests-22776](http://www.trtworld.com/africa/the-timeline-of-sudan-protests-22776)
3. [www.france24.com/en/20190411-sudan-timeline-four-months-mounting-protests-bashir](http://www.france24.com/en/20190411-sudan-timeline-four-months-mounting-protests-bashir)
4. [www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2019/6/7/Timeline-Sudans-tortuous-path-to-democracy](http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2019/6/7/Timeline-Sudans-tortuous-path-to-democracy)
5. [www.france24.com/en/20190411-sudan-timeline-four-months-mounting-protests-bashir](http://www.france24.com/en/20190411-sudan-timeline-four-months-mounting-protests-bashir)
6. [www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48511226?](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48511226)
7. <http://500wordsmag.com/sudan-news/what-you-need-to-know-about-whats-happening-in-sudan-right-now/>
8. [www.nytimes.com/2019/04/11/world/africa/sudan-omar-hassan-al-bashir.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/11/world/africa/sudan-omar-hassan-al-bashir.html)
9. [www.apnews.com/290aba2d7ba94493bc23111ca1b937c7](http://www.apnews.com/290aba2d7ba94493bc23111ca1b937c7)
10. [www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-uprising-timeline-of-tumultuous-change](http://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-uprising-timeline-of-tumultuous-change)
11. [www.apnews.com/290aba2d7ba94493bc23111ca1b937c7](http://www.apnews.com/290aba2d7ba94493bc23111ca1b937c7)
12. [www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2019/6/7/Timeline-Sudans-tortuous-path-to-democracy](http://www.alaraby.co.uk/english/indepth/2019/6/7/Timeline-Sudans-tortuous-path-to-democracy)
13. [www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/sudan-military-council-ruler-ibn-auf-steps-190412194737727.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/04/sudan-military-council-ruler-ibn-auf-steps-190412194737727.html)
14. [www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48517768](http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-48517768)
15. [www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/11/sudan-troops-protesters-attack-sit-in-rape-khartoum-doctors-report](http://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/jun/11/sudan-troops-protesters-attack-sit-in-rape-khartoum-doctors-report)

16. [www.papermag.com/how-to-help-sudan-2638804259.html](http://www.papermag.com/how-to-help-sudan-2638804259.html)
17. [www.reuters.com/article/us-sudan-politics-crackdown/sudan-sit-in-bloodshed-cripples-uprising-dUSKCNiTBiVK](http://www.reuters.com/article/us-sudan-politics-crackdown/sudan-sit-in-bloodshed-cripples-uprising-dUSKCNiTBiVK)
18. [www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/cloneofsudan-crackdown-protesters-latest-updates-190606083751943.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/cloneofsudan-crackdown-protesters-latest-updates-190606083751943.html)
19. [www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/04/sudan-halt-attacks-protesters](http://www.hrw.org/news/2019/06/04/sudan-halt-attacks-protesters)
20. [www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/04/military-sudan-bashir-protesters-death-khartoum](http://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/jun/04/military-sudan-bashir-protesters-death-khartoum)
21. [www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/cloneofsudan-crackdown-protesters-latest-updates-190606083751943.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/cloneofsudan-crackdown-protesters-latest-updates-190606083751943.html)
22. <http://500wordsmag.com/sudan-news/what-you-need-to-know-about-whats-happening-in-sudan-right-now/>
23. [www.sudaneseprofessionals.org/en/complete-civil-disobedience-and-open-political-strike-to-avoid-chaos/](http://www.sudaneseprofessionals.org/en/complete-civil-disobedience-and-open-political-strike-to-avoid-chaos/)
24. [www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/march-sudanese-renew-protests-demand-civilian-rule-190630122106508.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/06/march-sudanese-renew-protests-demand-civilian-rule-190630122106508.html)
25. <https://afropunk.com/2019/07/revolution-in-sudan-on-the-verge-of-civilian-rule/>
26. [www.apnews.com/d691c59bdf3f407885803bd97cece7a3](http://www.apnews.com/d691c59bdf3f407885803bd97cece7a3)
27. [www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/military-junta-and-alliance-for-freedom-and-change-reach-agreement-on-transitional-period-in-sudan](http://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/military-junta-and-alliance-for-freedom-and-change-reach-agreement-on-transitional-period-in-sudan)
28. <https://afropunk.com/2019/07/revolution-in-sudan-on-the-verge-of-civilian-rule/>
29. [www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-uprising-timeline-of-tumultuous-change](http://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-uprising-timeline-of-tumultuous-change)
30. [www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/int-l-community-applauds-sudan-political-agreement](http://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/int-l-community-applauds-sudan-political-agreement)
31. [www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudanese-journalists-network-criticise-deal-junta-opposition](http://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudanese-journalists-network-criticise-deal-junta-opposition)
32. [www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-rebels-reject-junta-opposition-political-agreement](http://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-rebels-reject-junta-opposition-political-agreement)
33. [www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-constitutional-declaration-signed-sovereign-council-to-be-announced-in-two-weeks](http://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-constitutional-declaration-signed-sovereign-council-to-be-announced-in-two-weeks)
34. [www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/08/sudan-constitutional-declaration-190804182241137.html](http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/08/sudan-constitutional-declaration-190804182241137.html)
35. [www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-rebel-leaders-in-cairo-to-discuss-agreements-with-ffc](http://www.dabangasudan.org/en/all-news/article/sudan-rebel-leaders-in-cairo-to-discuss-agreements-with-ffc)