The Sudanese press after separation – Contested identities of journalism
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Contents

Anja Wollenberg
Preface

Roman Deckert
The history of the Sudanese press:
Background to conflict

Roman Deckert
The current state of the Sudanese press:
A diverse range of papers for a narrow spectrum of society

Anke Fiedler
Political newspapers in Sudan after separation:
Fig leaves of government monopoly or real alternatives
to the state-run media?

Magdi Elgizouli
An overview of the Sudanese print media 2012

Roman Deckert
Party portraits
This publication is based on a series of interviews and research conducted by Anke Fiedler and Roman Deckert during a mission to Khartoum in December 2011.
Dear Reader,

ICT has been working with Sudanese journalists in North and South Sudan since 2009. Our projects, funded by the German Foreign Office, aim to support our partners as they strive to improve journalistic quality, while also working to prevent civilian conflict.

During our involvement in the region, we have witnessed how Sudanese journalism functions within a complex web of party politics, governance, and media. This observation was the starting point for further research into the multiple links between politics and the media in post-secession Sudan. This publication contains the first results of that research and can be seen as a presentation of our preliminary findings. For our next step, an equivalent study will be conducted in South Sudan.

We begin this study by focusing on the past. In Chapter 1, Roman Deckert outlines the historical context, illustrating how Sudan’s press was repeatedly transformed as politics shifted. He shows how the two spheres affect one another: Media development is constrained by politics, but the media can also trigger political change. The chapter reveals how Sudan’s press cannot be seen as a linear process of increasing censorship and repression. Instead, journalists have faced periods of fluctuating press freedom, pluralism and restriction. Journalistic practices have morphed, in keeping with the prevailing climate of tolerance or restriction.

Following this historical review, Chapter 2 shines a spotlight on Sudan’s current media landscape. Roman Deckert depicts the role of government and non-government institutions, legal frameworks, press freedom, and pluralism in Sudanese print media.

In Chapter 3, Anke Fiedler provides an in-depth analysis of Sudanese journalists’ experience of print journalism. By exploring themes like their self-image and motivations, markets and impact, individual agency and its boundaries, she highlights the challenges and rewards of day-to-day work as a journalist in Sudan. The chapter is based on interviews with 15 key figures from Sudanese journalism in Khartoum, conducted in December 2011, and includes a qualitative analysis of these conversations. From her findings, we learn about the profession’s high social standing, which helps compensate for poor pay and constant official scrutiny. We learn how newspapers instigate political discourse – despite their lackluster circulation figures. Fiedler also probes why journalists opt for a profession in which they risk censorship - and even imprisonment. Finally, she charts journalists' contrasting opinions about how Sudan’s division has impacted journalism.

In Chapter 4, Magdi Al Gizouli provides an overview of political profiles of Sudan’s leading newspapers, detailing their histories, ownership and stakeholders, as well as the journalistic quality of each publication. For reference, we have also included a glossary of the political parties.

This volume seeks to impart a deeper understanding of the political nature of the Sudanese press. Through observation, research and analysis, it also conveys a multifaceted impression of Sudanese journalists’ working conditions. It tries to paint an authentic and differentiated picture of their situation, looking beyond stereotypes of the Sudanese press as “unfree” and hence not worthy of further research. By combining facts and figures with journalists’ personal anecdotes and opinions, I think this volume captures the complexity of the subject – a subject which, as the illustration on page 19 accurately reveals, is far from straight forward.

Anja Wollenberg
(MICT, director)
The current state of the Sudanese press after the secession of the South can only be understood by taking a closer look at its more than a century-old history and its ubiquitous role as a major force in Sudan’s politics and conflicts.1

There are obvious lines of continuity from the past to the present: Senior editors and veteran journalists who dominate the scene today were socialized decades ago. Under what systems? Many young media professionals make the supposedly golden times the baseline reference for their standards and aspirations. Does their perception correspond with the historical facts or is it largely a myth?

This retrospective analysis seeks to give a comprehensive overview of the past from the more-or-less fragmented studies of Sudan’s academia on the subject, most of which ignore the Southern press. It aims to identify lessons to be learnt from the historical legacy for an evaluation of the Sudanese press and its future development.

Pre-Independence 1899-1955: From colonial tool to nationalist cradle

The press in Sudan was first introduced as a colonial means of a “quiet crusade” under the British-dominated Anglo-Egyptian Condominium.2 It launched the official Arabic-English periodical The Sudan Gazette a few months after the defeat of the indigenous Mahdist rule (from 1881 to 1898) to publish legal statutes. In 1903 the biweekly newspaper Al Sudan/The Sudan Times was established by a Lebanese-Syrian expatriate company, published in English and Arabic, yet widely viewed as a non-Sudanese vehicle for government news. It was followed in 1912 by the Sudan Herald and its Arabic supplement Ra’id Al Sudan (Sudan Pioneer). Since it was owned by Greek merchants, it was under strong government influence and considered foreign as well4 but still served for a few years as the first forum for Sudanese views.5

As the number of educated Northern Sudanese – the effendiyya class – grew, so did the desire for their own platforms to discuss the main two competing opinions: on the one hand, opposition to the British in favor of unity with Egypt and on the other hand, opposition to unity with Egypt in favor of independence.6 In this context, the country’s first indigenous Arabic newspaper, Hadarat Al Sudan (Sudan Civilisation) or Al Hadara for short, was founded in 1919 as a literary journal for the intelligentsia. One year later the British authorities allowed three traditional religious leaders – the Sayyids Abd Al Rahman Al Mahdi, Sharif Yusuf Al Hindi, and Ali Al Mirghani – to purchase it in order to rebut anti-British criticism by Egyptian nationalists.7 While it became an outspoken organ of agitation for the ‘Sudan for the Sudanese’ movement thanks to its virtual monopoly8, its editorial policy did support the British administration. Since it was owned by Greek merchants, it was under strong government influence and considered foreign as well4 but still served for a few years as the first forum for Sudanese views.5

“All the education a farmer wants is to be able to write letters, read the newspapers and know the prescribed rules for prayers.”

Tayeb Salih, Season of Migration to the North

1 The title “Background to Conflict” is a tribute to the late Mohamed Omer Beshir, one of Sudan’s most respected academics, referring to the title of one of his main works.
6 Galander, see reference 2, p. 114.
subsidies from and was censored by the government, it was considered a semi-official or even official paper, until it ceased in 1938. According to Francis Deng and other scholars, *Al Hadara* did display some racism against Southerners.

The limited freedom of the press was even more restricted by the colonial regime after the pro-Egyptian uprising of 1924. The first Press Ordinance of 1930 contained many provisions of compulsion, including censorship, suspension and withdrawal of licenses. Hence, liberal and anti-sectarian magazines like the short-lived but lively *Al Nahda Al Sudaniyya* (The Sudanese Awakening) turned their attention from news to intellectual views on cultural, social and economic reform issues. Sudan-scholar Robert O. Collins noted that "the most popular and influential newspaper was *Al Fajr* (Dawn), with high standards of journalism and literary analysis that masked its editorials criticizing political developments." Yet, in 1935 the British Governor-General eased censorship so that nationalists could air their grievances. This decision to reduce pressure was taken with regard to a mounting Nazi-Fascist campaign which tried to woo the colonial peoples of the British Empire.

By debating literary and political ideals among the growing class of educated Northern men in urban centers, the press became the main platform for emerging nationalism: "While molding nationalist ideologies along Arabist lines, Sudanese Arabic journalism helped Northern Sudan’s elites to make sense of arbitrarily imposed colonial boundaries by asserting Arab-Islamic unity within." It is indeed remarkable how those debates on national identity and the role of Islam resemble the ones of today. When the colonial regime in 1938 allowed the formation of the Graduates Congress, a consultative assembly exclusively for educated Northern men and the predecessor of the first political parties, many of its members had been active either in *Al Fajr* or in the Abu Ruf-group of *Al Nahda*.

The 1936 Anglo-Egyptian agreement on the future of Sudan especially revived the political press. By criticizing the colonial system, the print media effectively served as the cradle of the movement towards self determination and as the nucleus of political parties. At the same time, the launch of the first daily newspaper, *Al Nil* (The Nile), marked the beginning of factionalism in the press along the lines of the predominant Sufi sects. Its owner Sayyid Abd Al Rahman Al Mahdi, the patron of the Ansar order, later also established *Al Sudan Al Jadid* (The New Sudan) and *Al Umma* (The Nation) newspapers.

Thus, Mahdi became the press lord of the country in his attempt to recruit followers to his anti-Egyptian camp. In return, his main rival, Sayyid Ali Al Mirghani, the leader of the Khatmiyya order, started *Sawt Al Sudan* (Voice of the Sudan) in 1940 and later *Al Ashigga* (The Blood Brothers) as the partisan mouthpieces of his pro-Egyptian agenda. The press reflected the deep divisions between the two sectarian leaders through ideological bias and bitter propaganda campaigns. Verbal abuse on all sides resulted

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13 Abd Al Rahim, see reference 7, pp. 112-117.  
17 Warburg, see reference 8, p. 60.
in "newspaper warfare" and nearly led to violent disorder. According to the intelligence department of the Condominium, "the government's censor spent half his time ... trying to rub the poison off the shafts".

Only few papers like *Al Ray Al Aam* (The Public Opinion), founded in 1945 and the oldest newspaper that still exists today, and *Al Ayaam* (The Days), launched in 1953, could be considered somewhat objective. Another notable exception to the prevailing partisanship of the Khartoum establishment was *Kordofan*, Northern Sudan's first provincial paper, which has catered to the Western region since 1945. The main obstacle to an independent press consisted of financial constraints, as the colonial administration allocated advertising to loyal papers. Since most papers lost money, their respective owners looked for political dividends instead. In addition, the press faced growing competition from the *Radio Omdurman* station, which was established in 1940. In a vast country with a literacy rate of about five percent, the state-controlled medium reached out to the mostly illiterate population far beyond the elitist circles of the Khartoum area.

In the South, meanwhile, the first newspapers had been founded in the 1930s by Catholic missionaries. The English *Messenger* was followed by vernacular language papers: *Ruru Gene* (The Straight Road) in Zande, *Agamlong* (Believer of the Message) in Dinka and *Lelego* (The Star) in Ma'di. As the region was essentially shut off from the North by the Closed District Ordinance until 1947, the Southern press for many years could not contribute to the public discourse about the future of the country, i.e., whether to pursue unity with Egypt or independence. Such exclusion was at the root cause of the Southern rebellion that broke out in 1955.

**Post-Independence 1956-1958:**

**Political party press posturing**

When Sudan became independent in 1956, the first parliamentary phase featured a vibrant media with some 20 newspapers. Most of them were published in the national capital Khartoum, except for the bi-weekly *Kordofan* in El Obeid and the fortnightly *El Gezira* in Wad Medani as well as the missionary journals in the South. Since the press had played a vital role in the nationalist movement, it enjoyed great respect by the public. The media profession garnered admiration and many journalists actually rose to the status of celebrities. Some of these men went on to pursue distinguished careers as statesmen, poets and scholars. Hence, a very self-confident press managed to rebuff government attempts to restrict reporting on controversial issues.

Scholars consider the journalistic performance altogether positive, yet most of the newspapers were owned by the main political parties of the Mahdi and Mirghani clans and therefore had highly partisan editorial policies. As sectarian rivalries entered center-stage, party-owned and party-affiliated papers became the vehicles for bitter duels between political columnists and entertainment for elites in the national capital. Few papers like *Al Ayaam*...
and Kordofan, which aimed for neutrality, were the exception to the mainstream media. The magazine Sawt Al Marah (Voice of the Woman), though affiliated to the Communist Party, was outstanding as well, since its editorial board was made up of women in an otherwise male-dominated landscape. Thus, the majority of publications reflected the bickering and posturing of party politics in an increasingly sensationalist way, which eventually led to a widely accepted civilian hand-over of power to the army.29

The first military regime 1958-1964:
Tight controls with few loopholes

The conservative generals, whose technocratic rule enjoyed relative stability in the first few years, soon dissolved all official party newspapers. Instead, the military government of President Ibrahim Abboud started its own daily, Al Thawra (The Revolution). Some private papers like the daily Al Ayaam and the weekly Kordofan were able to keep on publishing their relatively non-partisan views, while others like Al Sahafa (The Press) were newly launched. The Sudan Journalist Union (SJU) even successfully fought against plans to nationalize the press. However, the SJU was later banned and its president jailed. Strict government censorship kept the independent media in line and the suspension of such papers became commonplace.30

Critical journalism, therefore, shifted to the hand-written wall newspapers in the University of Khartoum, which became the nucleus of civilian opposition.31 In addition to competition from the state-run radio station, the press faced pressure from another new medium starting in 1963, when the government established a national television service with assistance from West Germany. While TV was limited to the elitist audiences of Khartoum in the beginning, transmission soon spread to other urban centers.32

In the South, where the rebellion of 1955 escalated into a civil war, most of the Church-owned newspapers ceased publishing in early 1964 when all Christian missionaries were expelled by the military regime in its pursuit of an Islamization and Arabization of the region. Only the information departments of the governmental headquarters in the three provincial capitals continued to print bulletins and newsletters.33 In fact, the suppression of freedom of expression in the conflict in the South led to the downfall of the military dictatorship – for it was the violent clampdown of a related debate at the University of Khartoum that sparked the popular uprising of October 1964.34

The second multiparty phase 1964-1969:
The liberty of ultra-partisanship

After the overthrow of General Abboud’s regime, political parties and newspapers quickly bounced back to a highly fluid stage. Censorship was removed, but the largely leftist caretaker government suppressed several papers for their past collaboration with the military rulers, setting a precedent for the following governments which were dominated by the traditionalist sectarian parties of the Mahdi and Mirghani clans. Subsequently, the re-emergence of the fissiparous tendencies in the political spectrum simultaneously led to a revival of ultra-biased journalism.

29 Galander & Starosta, see reference 27, pp. 212-214.
30 Galander, see reference 2, pp. 117-118.
32 Sharkey, see reference 14, p. 543.
33 Wani, see reference 25, pp. 39-40.
The mostly party-owned press again became the in-house tool of the self-absorbed elites for inter- and intra-party bickering, poisoning the political atmosphere even more than it did in the pre-military era. Some editors were also running as candidates for the parliamentary elections of 1965.

All of the 13 daily newspapers and most of the 15 periodicals that existed by 1968 were based in Khartoum, except for Kordofan and El Gezira in the North and the missionary journal The Light in the Southern town of Malakal. Three domestic news agencies were the major sources of information for the editors. Most papers consisted of only a few pages and some “hit and run” weeklies and monthlies issued only a couple of editions due to financial constraints. Dependence on public and private advertising was overwhelming in comparison with income from circulation. Altogether, the majority were disconnected from ordinary citizens, despite growing literacy rates. Once more, only a few papers like Al Ayaam, Al Sahafa and Kordofan managed to keep a rather objective line.

The second parliamentary period also witnessed the birth of the first Southern Sudanese newspapers in Khartoum. Strikingly, they mirrored the partisan patterns of the Northern papers: The Vigilant was founded in 1965 as the mouthpiece of the Southern Front party but banned in 1967 by the government on charges of publishing seditious articles. The Sudan African National Union (SANU) party published The Explorer from 1966 to 1968, when its leader was assassinated. The Advance, started in late 1964 by a Southern communist, was short-lived, too. Delivery of such papers by air to Southern towns was infrequent. The Southern Anya-Nya rebel movement meanwhile launched its own tabloid, the Grass Curtain, in exile.

According to Nelson, official censorship was re-established in late 1968 because of government dissatisfaction with press objectivity. Still, as the war in the South further escalated and the economy deteriorated, public discontent in the North with the bigotry of party politics – as displayed and driven by the Arabic mainstream press – created such disillusionment with a corrupted pseudo-democracy that many welcomed another coup d’état by the army.

The second military regime 1969-1985: Complete monopoly

When the leftist “Free Officers” led by Jafar Numeiri took over power in May 1969, newspapers continued to be published, though under tight scrutiny from the authorities. Not for long: In August 1970 the regime nationalized the once diverse press and reduced it to two government controlled newspapers in addition to the newly-founded army newspaper Al Quwat Al Musallaha (The Armed Forces). The dailies Al Ayaam and Al Sahafa, formerly the most independent of all, were used by publicly owned publishing houses as government billboards for the purpose of mass mobilization. Most of the senior posts were given to political appointees without journalistic experience.
Control of the press was administered first by the official Sudanese Press Corporation and later directly by the Ministry of Information and Culture. They acted as gatekeepers to the media profession based upon the ideology of the regime. In 1971, the Sudan News Agency (SUNA), which still exists today, replaced the three domestic news agencies that formerly operated with correspondents all over the country.\(^\text{49}\) Due to the monotonously non-critical reporting, the remaining papers lost substantial parts of their readership.\(^\text{50}\) In addition, the already diminished press faced growing competition from the expansion of radio and TV services. Newspapers and journals were hardly distributed outside of Khartoum anymore, reflecting the widening gap between the national capital and the peripheries.\(^\text{51}\)

The situation in the South was somewhat different. At first, The Nile Mirror was launched in 1970 as a propaganda vehicle to rally Southern Sudanese behind the “May Revolution” and against the Anya-Nya rebels. After the 1972 peace agreement of Addis Ababa, which ended the first civil war, it became the mouthpiece of the government for the autonomous South. As the region enjoyed a relatively more liberal political life than the North, English newspapers and newsletters as well as magazines like sudanow and the Heritage Journal became more objective and critical than the Arabic ones – up to the beginning of the second civil war in 1983, which was followed by the introduction of draconian laws under the label of Sharia.\(^\text{52}\)

In the North, the dictatorship of Numeiri, who turned from leftist to pro-Western to Islamist, continued to exercise ultimate monopoly over the press until he was ousted through another popular uprising in April 1985. As in the case of Abboud’s military regime, it may be argued that the suppression of press freedom backfired as a catalyst for the brewing discontent of the population, especially since the regime and its media ignored the famine in the Western region of Darfur, and the eventual overthrow of the dictator.\(^\text{53}\)

The third multiparty phase 1985-1989: From relative freedom to hate speech

Soon after the ‘April Revolution’ of 1985 a very vibrant press came back to life with an unprecedented number of newspapers and magazines. Altogether, more than 130 dailies, biweeklies, weeklies, bimonthlies and monthlies were licensed during the third parliamentary period, though not all of them actually began publication. These high figures do not even include academic and professional organizations’ periodicals.\(^\text{54}\)

Most of the newly- and re-established media were launched in Arabic by Northerners with a focus on Khartoum affairs, except for the regional newspapers Kordofan and Al Gezira.\(^\text{55}\) Yet, a greater variety of Southern papers like the Guiding Star, The Sudan Times, the Forward and the Juba Gazette emerged as well. Many of them were started either by political parties or by Christian organizations. Still, there were almost no publications in indigenous languages, reflecting once again the elitism of the media in both parts of the country.\(^\text{56}\) The most important media for the South became the Radio SPLA of the rebel Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A), which was widely listened to in the North as well.\(^\text{57}\)

49 Nelson, see reference 39, pp. 213–216.
50 Rugh, see reference 31, p. 53.
51 Sharkey, see reference 14, pp. 543 & 545.
52 Wani, see reference 25, pp. 39-40.
53 Collins, see reference 12, pp. 154-156.
56 Wani, see reference 25, pp. 39-40.
Some scholars reason that Sudan enjoyed “one of the most free and most diverse press corps in Africa and the Middle East” at the time. However, a study by the international human rights organization Article 19 found that, while the press was “relatively free”, restrictions and self-censorship did exist, particularly on reporting about the famine in Darfur and the war in the South. The transitional government of 1985/86 had numerous confrontations with the press, especially with regard to military news. And Rugh concludes that the record of the three elected coalition governments on press freedom was “worse than that of the previous democratic regimes.” They not only imposed restrictions on military news but also used the State of Emergency of 1987 to close down three newspapers and detain journalists. An indirect means of censorship was the imposition of obstacles to obtain newsprint. In addition, “deeply entrenched social and cultural prejudices in parts of Sudanese society have contributed to self-censorship”. Thus, only a narrow spectrum of views was published.

At the same time, Sudanese newspapers suffered from a lack of professional quality, resulting in sensationalism and yellow journalism. After the long years of Numeiri’s rule, during which journalists could merely act as mouthpieces of the system, staff had little experience with press freedom, while readers had become used to a conformist style of journalism. To make matters worse, financial problems arose from the deteriorating economic conditions and made some media houses, which were owned by profit-seeking entrepreneurs, succumb to bribing by political parties, the government, and even foreign powers. Many parties established newspapers, but tagged them as “independent.” The bias and partisan affiliation of the press, therefore, became stronger than ever before. Once again, a few papers like Al Ayaam – with an estimated circulation of 24,000 in 1989, a market leader – were the middle ground exception to the mainstream.

The newspapers affiliated with the National Islamic Front (NIF) of Sheikh Dr. Hassan Al Turabi especially resorted to a rude form of muckraking and hate speech. In fact, more papers were linked in one way or another to the NIF than to any other party thanks to its financial power. Ironically, the fundamental reshaping of the political order by the one-party regime of Numeiri’s Sudanese Socialist Union (SSU), which had opened up society by reforming the elitist school system, paved the way for social climbers with Islamist backgrounds in the press, too. The NIF-related papers, first and foremost Alwan (Colors), depicted the parliamentary system as a ridiculous soap opera. Since they attacked the private lives and characters of their political opponents through inflammatory innuendos and called for Jihad (holy war), this misuse of press freedom helped to create a negative public attitude toward the third parliamentary regime and thus, greatly contributed to its failure.

60 Rugh, see reference 31, p. 47.
63 Galander & Starosta, see reference 27, pp. 221-237.
64 Mukhtar, see reference 47, p. 20.
65 De Waal & Abdul-Salam, see reference 62, pp. 44-45; Al-Affendi, see reference 5, p. 144.
The third military regime 1989-1999:
Complete monopoly, again

When the army led by General Omar Al Bashir staged yet another coup in 1989, generally considered to be masterminded by Turabi’s NIF, the new regime of Ingaz (Salvation) on its first day in power banned all civilian newspapers, unlike the two previous military regimes. At least 15 journalists were detained without charge, and more than 1,200 media practitioners lost their jobs. The country’s few female journalists especially faced unemployment because of Islamist policies.

These drastic decisions demonstrate how powerful the press was in the eyes of the NIF revolutionaries. A few months later the government launched instead its own two dailies, Al Ingaz Al Watani (The National Salvation) and Al Sudan Al Hadeeth (The New Sudan) in addition to the army paper Al Quwat Al Musallaha. All of them were edited by prominent NIF writers, some of whom rose to high ranks within the regime. The combined circulation of the three papers was estimated at no more than 100,000.

Only Al Hadaf (The Goal), the mouthpiece of the pro-Iraqi Sudanese Baath Party, the communist Al Midan (Plaza/Square) and Sawt Al Umma (Voice of the Nation) of the Umma party defied the ban by clandestinely operating from the underground. As during previous military regimes, critical journalism shifted to hand-written wall newspapers on university campuses. Some journalists kept on as correspondents of foreign media, but many went abroad into exile and started publishing newspapers in Egypt, the Gulf and the U.K.

After an extremely repressive period, the Ingaz regime issued a new press law in 1993 which on paper, allowed independent publications but effectively systematized controls. Due to high license fees and other financial requirements, only three new political papers started publishing. One of them, Al Sudani (The Sudanese), was soon banned, keeping potential investors from entering the business. Instead, sports and entertainment papers flourished in the urban centers of the North but were sometimes subject to closures as well.

In the war-torn South, only the government-held provincial headquarters issued news bulletins, whereas the rebels disseminated their monthly SPLA Update. Radio broadcasts on both sides gained much more importance. Southern journalists in Khartoum were treated by the authorities as the fifth column of the insurgents. For the press in both parts of the country, the 1990s, for the most part, were the bleakest period in the history of the country.

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69 Wheelwright, Julie (1991): “Pressed to quit”. In Index on Censorship, 6, pp. 26-27.
70 Galander & Starosta, see reference 27, p. 217.
73 Nduru, see reference 47, p. 17.
75 Gallah, see reference 54, pp. 143-148.
76 Lesch, see reference 71, pp. 145-146; see also Galander, reference 2, pp. 124-125 & 144-147.
77 Wani, see reference 25, pp. 39-40.
79 James, see reference 57, pp. 198-215.
80 Nduru, see reference 47, p. 21.
The fourth multiparty phase 1999-2011: The freedom of self-censorship

The media environment only improved somewhat after almost a decade. By 1999, when President Al Bashir ousted Turabi in an internal power struggle and formally re-established a multiparty system, the number of newspapers increased to six. Yet, pre-printing censorship, imprisonment of journalists and suspensions resulted in extensive self-censorship. Regulatory requirements exercised a strict economic control and prevented the publication of “hit-and-run” papers that were a feature of past multiparty periods.\footnote{Rugh, see reference 31, pp. 30, 36-37.}

The situation eased considerably from 2001 onwards, since the government and the SPLM/A entered into negotiations.\footnote{Northern Sudan: IMS support for media development, International Media Support (IMS), 2002. In \url{http://www.i-m-s.dk/files/publications/Sudan%20report%2020-020302.pdf}, pp. 6-8.} The space for publishing increased especially after the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) of 2005, with the number of Arabic dailies rising to 17 by 2007. However, it suffered frequent setbacks, especially after major attacks by rebels from Darfur in 2003 and 2008.\footnote{Media in Sudan at a crossroads, Assessment and outline of a strategy for media support, International Media Support (IMS), 2007. In \url{http://www.i-m-s.dk/files/publications/Sudan_webfinal%201252-2007.pdf}, pp. 22 & 39.} As it did throughout its history, the mainstream, political newspapers developed in an elitist and highly politicized way along partisan lines with an overwhelming focus on Khartoum affairs, except for a few papers published in Port Sudan.\footnote{Mapping the void, A State-by-state media assessment report on South Sudan and selected Northern states, Article 19 et al., 2009. In \url{http://www.article19.org/data/files/publications/sudan-mapping-the-void.pdf}, pp. 59-60.} With regard to the war in Darfur, Sudan-scholar Gérard Prunier has noted “an unconscious form of Sudanese cultural racism” in the Khartoum press, which dismissed the conflict in the beginning as a tribal phenomenon.\footnote{Prunier, Gerard (2005): Darfur. The Ambiguous Genocide. London: Hurst, p. 125.}

However, in contrast to previous periods of relative press freedom, the once predominant sectarian parties of the Mahdi and Mirghani clans, from the Umma and Democratic Unionist Party respectively, did not set up their own dailies, presumably because they lost large parts of their traditional constituencies. Altogether, party affiliations were less openly declared and more subtle. Yet, the “venomous” \textit{Al Intibaha} (The Alert),\footnote{Flint, Julie \& de Waal, Alex (2008): Darfur. A new history of a long war. 2nd edition. London: Zed Books, p. 155.} the mouthpiece of the Islamist Just Peace Forum party, became by far the most popular newspaper.\footnote{Sudan and South Sudan media and telecoms landscape guide, Infosaid, 2011. In \url{http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/sudan_media_and_telecoms_landscape_guide_15.04.11.pdf}, pp. 77-78.}

The pre-eminent scholar of Sudanese mass media, Mahmoud Galander, stresses another development:

“Qura’anic verses and Arabic proverbs were and still are widely used to create the greatest impact on an audience. Successful political and persuasive writing is dependent on mixing modern analytical approaches with appropriate quotations of Qura’anic verses, Hadith and famous utterances of Islamic personalities . . . As the political discourse has grown more Islamic, media language and style have likewise shown changes.”\footnote{Galander, see reference 2, pp. 147-149.}

The peak of press freedoms under Bashir’s rule was reached in the North during the run-up to the elections of 2010. In an apparent attempt to relieve public pressure, pre-censorship was lifted in 2009 and again – after a brief reimposition – in advance of the 2011 referendum on the secession of the South. It seems as though the government of Bashir’s National Congress Party (NCP) learnt from the lessons of past regimes which had suppressed press freedoms to such a degree that public discontent resulted in their overthrow through popular uprisings.
Accordingly, the Southern press experienced a revival, too. In 2003, Southern Sudanese journalists established *The Khartoum Monitor* in the national capital, while *The Sudan Mirror* was founded in Nairobi by a former Catholic priest from Ireland. Subsequent to the CPA, the daily *The Citizen* and the bi-weekly *Juba Post* were launched, as well as a number of short-lived publications and – after the 2011 referendum on secession, the Arabic paper *Al Masir* (The Destiny). Once again mirroring developments of the Northern press bias, party affiliations were strong but less transparent than in the past. As Southern publishers struggled with low circulation, many depended financially on support from external donors. The semi-autonomous Government of Southern Sudan (GoSS) granted greater press freedom in the beginning but increased repressions against journalists after the elections of 2010.89

Finally, one day before the Republic of South Sudan celebrated its independence from Khartoum, the Sudanese government shut down six newspapers on the grounds that were owned by Southerners: five English dailies with little circulation and *Ajras Al Hurriya* (Freedom Bells), widely considered as SPLM-affiliated. Thus, the common history of the Northern and Southern Sudanese press ended, a history which had been as divided as, and parallel to, the history of the whole nation.

**Conclusion: The dialectics of partisan press and repression**

The trajectory of the more than a century old history of Sudan’s mainstream press shows a clear pattern of alternation ever since its inception through the colonialists: authoritarian rulers suppressed press freedom to such a degree that – in most cases – public pressure contributed to regime change. Subsequent multi-party governments did keep some restrictions but allowed the mushrooming of recalcitrant publishing that in turn, rather ironically, contributed to the demise of parliamentary systems.

The factionalism of party-owned and party-affiliated newspapers has always been the main feature of the Sudanese press with its elitist focus on Khartoum affairs. Due to financial pressures, most newspapers increasingly served as in-house tools for the parties in power. They became mere mouthpieces for the dissemination of ideologically biased views along partisan – often sectarian – lines. Instead of mediating the many-fold conflicts as observers, the mainstream media often stoked up tensions through aggressive propaganda campaigns. The Southern press, though as much marginalized as the whole region in general, mirrored the developments of the Northern media in many respects.

Therefore, it must be recognized that the Western concept of the press as a corrective Fourth Estate has proven to be a fallacy in the then largest country of the African continent. Only few papers could be considered as striving for objectivity at times. Moreover, exceptions like *Al Ayaam*, *Al Sahafa* and *Kordofan* have demonstrated that the Sudanese press could play a positive role towards lasting peace and reconciliation, both North-North and North-South. A demystifying evaluation of this legacy may guide to a better future.
The current state of the Sudanese press: A diverse range of papers for a narrow spectrum of society

N ewstands in the markets of Khartoum display an impressive diversity of newspapers. There are some twenty political papers available, as well as about ten sports papers and a half a dozen focusing on lifestyle and entertainment. The number of titles fluctuates: some close down, victims of political or economic pressure, and others spring up in their place. Unlike in the past, there are few monthly magazines on the market. All papers except one – Port Sudan Medenati – are published in the capital city. All but two English-language periodicals are in Arabic. On average, they cost one Sudanese pound.

The top-selling title is by far Al Intibaha, the venomous mouthpiece of the Islamist Just Peace Forum (JPF) party. It has an estimated circulation of 60,000. Next comes the pro-government Al Ahram Al Youm and Akhir Lahza, an organ of the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS), which each have a circulation of approximately 20,000 copies per day. Five other dailies sell nearly 15,000 apiece, but the majority only manage distribution of a few thousand. The total circulation of political papers is, therefore, around 300,000 and some 200,000 for sports and lifestyle papers. In a country of about 32 million people, this seems relatively low, but experts estimate that each copy is read by up to ten people. Distribution, however, is limited to the greater Khartoum region and a couple of urban centers due to logistical and financial restraints in the continent’s third largest country.

These days, media houses’ political affiliations are far less obvious than in the past. Official party papers form a small minority: Al Intibaha of the JPF, Ray Al Shaab of the Islamist Popular Congress Party (PCP) until its closure in January 2012, Al Raed of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and Al Midan of the Communist Party of Sudan (CPS). Alwan is considered to be close to the PCP and Al Jareeda as somewhat sympathetic with the banned Sudan People’s Liberation Movement – Northern Sector. Only two papers are widely viewed as independent, Al Ayaam, and to a lesser degree, Al Sahafa. Most of the others are subtly or openly pro-NCP, since most of them are owned by businessmen with close links to the governing party (for more details see Chapter 4). However, this does not mean that the majority of papers are absolutely conformist in their editorial lines. On the contrary: Many of them represent the in-house opposition of the NCP, which hosts quite a broad range of differing interests in the absence of a proper opposition. Hence, the Sudanese press is fairly diverse even though it reflects a somewhat narrow spectrum of elitist opinion, not in the least because of its strong focus on Khartoum affairs which neglects the marginalized peripheries.

The central government controls the press largely through the Interim National Constitution. While Article 39 (2) reads: “The State shall guarantee the freedom of the press and other media as shall be regulated by law in a democratic society,” it also attaches the condition of legal regulation. Paragraph 3 of the same article stipulates that “all media shall abide by professional ethics, shall refrain from inciting religious, ethnic, racial or cultural hatred and shall not agitate for violence or war.” Accordingly, the Press and Journalistic Publications Act of 2009 regulates the details of the media superstructure. It gives semi-judicial powers to the National Press and Journalistic Publications Council, usually referred to as the National Press Council (NPC), under the supervision of the Presidency of the Republic (Art. 7.1). The NPC’s prime task is to “supervise the general performance of press institutions and companies” (Art. 8 a). As gatekeeper to the profession it issues licenses to press houses (Art. 9 b; 22, 30) and registers journalists “in co-ordination with the General Union of Sudanese Journalists” (Art. 9 a; 23). The latter does otherwise not play a significant role. The NPC may inflict a variety of sanctions and penalties, including the suspension of a paper for up to three days and the revocation of licenses,

both of individuals and institutions (Art. 9 j, m; 32, 33, 35). Article 26.1 defines eleven broadly-formulated “duties of the journalist,” which mainly relate to the security of the country as well as moral and religious values. Moreover, all newspaper editors have been required to sign the “press covenant of honor,” also known as the code of ethics. The role of the Ministry of Information with regard to the press is limited to its control over the official Sudan News Agency (SUNA).

Since the secession of South Sudan on 9 July 2011, the NPC has ordered a number of punitive measures. Most prominently, it temporarily suspended six sports papers in September 2011 for alleged contraventions like “inciting violence between teams” and referred a number of journalists to court. In stark contrast, a multitude of suspensions has been ordered by the NISS, though the National Security Act of 2009 does not include any specifics with regard to the press. Apparently, the NISS bases its actions on the comprehensive competencies given by Article 24.1: “Maintain Sudan’s national security, safeguard the Constitution and maintain the social fabric and safety to protect its people from any internal or external threat.” The NPC chairman, Ali Shummo, has publicly complained that his institution is overpowered by the NISS’ vague thresholds and benchmarks.

Indeed, the suppressive record of the NISS is far greater than that of the NPC. In September 2011, the NISS suspended the opposition daily Al Jareeda for months. In the beginning of 2012, it shut down the mouthpiece of the opposition PCP, Ray Al Shaab, indefinitely, while the dailies Alwan and Al Tayar were temporarily closed. Another common tactic of the NISS is the arbitrary confiscation of printed editions, which causes heavy financial losses for the publishers. Affected were the opposition organs Al Midan and Ray Al Shaab as well as the critical papers Al Ahdath, Al Jareeda, Al Sahafa, Alwan, and even the pro-government Akhbar Al Youm. In most instances, no clear reasons were given. Also, the NISS still has criminal court cases pending against a number of journalists for writing about an alleged rape of a political activist by security agents. However, in late 2011, eight journalists accused of working for the Dutch-based Radio Dabanga were released upon order by President Bashir after one year of detention. Meanwhile, the most common and subtle means of putting pressure on editors is to deny them advertising from the public sector and from companies owned by pro-government businessmen.

In the light of these political and financial constraints – and the country’s troubled history – the quality of the Sudanese press is generally considered to be relatively poor. In addition to the difficult circumstances, there is a lack of education and training. Although there are some 20 media schools, especially university departments, the curricula are academic with little hands-on or on-the-job experience. Hence, their output is basic.

In addition, the press faces strong competition from other media. Given high illiteracy rates and logistical challenges to newspaper distribution,
radio is still the main source of information for the population, especially for those living beyond the urban centers. Both the tightly controlled Radio Omdurman and international stations are widely listened to. Likewise, the strictly controlled national TV service is popular for its entertainment programs, whereas international satellite TV channels seem to be preferred for news. However, the press has indirect outreach through the national broadcasting stations as they often follow newspaper reporting.\textsuperscript{13} At the same time, news stories are increasingly spread by the most important medium – word-of-mouth – thanks to the rapid expansion of mobile phone networks with a penetration of more than 50 percent.\textsuperscript{14} Also, more than 10 percent of the population have access to the worldwide Web, making Sudan number nine of Africa’s top internet countries, according to recent statistics.\textsuperscript{15} While Facebook, Google and YouTube are the most visited websites in Sudan, the most popular of all the newspaper online editions is the one of the best-selling Al Intibaha, mouthpiece of the JPF party.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{13} Sudan and South Sudan media and telecoms landscape guide, see reference 11, pp. 61-63 & 75.
\textsuperscript{16} ICT adoption and prospects in the Arab Region, see reference 14.
Sudan’s Print Media: Key Players and Interrelationships

Advising
Printing Resources
Distribution Companies
Journalist-Education

Newspaper
Political Party
Religious Group/Sect

DIRECT CONNECTION
OBVIOUS AFFILIATION
FELLOWSHIP
udan’s record for freedom of the press is among the worst worldwide, according to recent reports from organizations including Freedom House, IREX or Reporters Sans Frontières (RSF). Since the July 2011 separation of the country, the state of media freedom in Sudan appears worse than before. Authorities continue to confiscate newspapers, as described in chapters 1 and 2 of this publication. In September 2011, for instance, the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS) halted the distribution of at least four opposition newspapers “without cause,” as recently highlighted by the Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ). At the beginning of this year, Western non-governmental organizations and the Sudanese media reported the closure of two controversial opposition newspapers, Ray Al Shaab and Alwan, which Sudanese authorities suspect are affiliated to Hassan Al Turabi’s Islamist Popular Congress Party (PCP). Similar observations on press freedom violations have been confirmed by pre-secession studies of the Sudanese media landscape. Other Muslim-majority countries in the region have gradually opened up discussions on access to information and press freedom principles, spurred on by the 2011 Arab uprisings. Therefore, it is perhaps unsurprising that Sudan’s rank is unchanged at 170 in a list of 179 countries. Only authoritarian states such as Iran, Syria, China, Eritrea and North Korea, have a worse ranking, according to the most recent RSF index, published at the beginning of this year.

Against this background, the question arises: Why do we need further research on the media landscape of a country where acts against journalists are, according to IREX, “the order of the day”? Isn’t the outcome of such a study predictable? Without doubt, quantitative indices and the above mentioned studies help measure the degree of freedom experienced by Sudanese media professionals; they serve as an indicator for communication and media development and also reflect the direction and intensity of change. Therefore, they provide a good basis for comparative research. Nevertheless, we need to look beyond stereotypical patterns of media systems in authoritarian countries to understand some of contemporary Sudan’s political processes.

Firstly, previous research on the Sudanese media landscape does not explain why a small number of opposition and independent newspapers do exist alongside the powerful state-run television and radio services. Such publications continue despite an “intensified pattern of harassment and intimidation” towards the printing press and publishing houses, as described in Amnesty International’s most recent report on Sudan’s media. Secondly, and more importantly, these studies and lists fail to convey what motivates journalists to constantly risk their personal freedom. Until now their decision has been unquestioned, but this issue will form the crux of this study. Since the early nineties, only one journalist has been killed in Sudan (however, according to the CPJ, no group claimed responsibility and the killing was likely motivated by religious fundamentalism and revenge). However, many journalists have been detained, and even now, they are routinely hindered in doing their jobs. But why do they continue working in their profession? What are their personal objectives? How much discursive space for oppositional writing is tolerated by the Sudanese government? These questions are relevant because they diffe-

6 Silencing dissent, see reference 2.
rentiate Western analyses based on normative-oriented approaches. The present study supports the thesis that press freedom and media independence are more complex and difficult to assess than assumed by many surveys.

For this reason, in December 2011, 15 semi-structured interviews were conducted in English and Arabic in Khartoum. This form of qualitative research provides new insights into the journalistic profession of a (from a scientific perspective) rather neglected country. Meanwhile, the fact that scientific studies are to some degree accepted in Sudan, (something which would be inconceivable in Iran or North Korea) suggests a margin of tolerance for freedom of expression.

Selection of interviewees and methodology

Qualitative research focuses on an individual’s perception, so obviously personal experiences regarding media freedom and independence differ from one person to another depending on different parameters, such as political affiliation, gender, age or hierarchical position. Biographical interviews describe typical variants at best, while making no claim to be exhaustive. Researchers should note that this form of interview is unable to provide information about the distribution of certain patterns of action within the entire population. To allow for generalizations nonetheless, respondents were selected by theoretical sampling.

First, interviews were conducted with 13 leading journalists (mainly editors-in-chief) of the most important newspapers, such as Al Ray Al Aam, Al Ayaam or Al Sahafa with the aim of exploring their social background, career stages, working conditions and self-image as well as practices of censorship and media control against the background of the secession of North and South Sudan. Second, the two official functionaries, Muheddin Titawi (Sudanese Journalist Union) and Ali Shummo (National Council of Press and Publications), were interviewed in order to understand the means and motives of representatives of regulatory bodies.

The strong presence of leaders – and thus (unfortunately) of men – is not just a coincidence. The level of qualification and capacity for self-reflection are generally highest at the top end of the career ladder, and it is there that rules are written which determine daily life in the media and the context for career advancement. Elites are more likely to reflect on their professional and personal background, to provide insight into the work of colleagues and the mechanisms that influence the media landscape in Sudan.

Political and social background: “Who wants to be a famous journalist?”

“The beginning was at elementary school in Rufa’ah city in Al Jazirah State. I used to send letters to the Sudanese and Arab children’s magazines,” recalled Haitham Cabo, editor-in-chief of the art daily Fenoon. “The Emirati Majed Magazine used to offer excellent and hard-working students a participation coupon called ‘The Little Journalist’. When they sent me this coupon, I was so happy.” Cabo’s first steps in the profession are typical of journalists in Sudan. Most of them fell in love with the profession at a young age and started writing for children’s magazines during their school days or posted articles on the local (and often oppositional) university wall paper. Saif Al Deen Al Bashir showed talent at secondary school (“My father used to review my homework”) and Haidar Al Mokashfi and Adil Al Baz, today the advisor and editor-in-chief of Sudan’s leading newspapers Al Sahafa and Al Ahdath respectively, cited a popular Sudanese

Interview partners (alphabetical order)

- Saif Al Deen Al Bashir, editor-in-chief of the English daily newspaper Sudan Vision
- Adil Al Baz, editor-in-chief and founder of Al Ahdath daily newspaper
- Osman Minghanni Al Hussein, editor-in-chief and founder of the daily newspaper Al Tayar
- Abd Al Mahmoud Al Karanki, editorial advisor to the privately owned Alwaan daily newspaper
- Haidar Al Mokashfi, who has worked for the independent daily newspaper Al Sahafa since 2003, currently as an advisor
- Kamal Hassan Bakheet, editor-in-chief of the daily newspaper Al Ray Al Aam since 2005
- Haitham Cabo, editor-in-chief of Sudan’s first and only art daily newspaper called Fenoon
- Kamal Karrar, deputy chief-editor of the tri-weekly communist newspaper Al Midan
- Ibrahim Minghanni, head of the political section of the communist newspaper Al Midan
- Abdullah Rizig, acting editor-in-chief of the English daily newspaper The Citizen since February 2011
- Faisal Mohamed Salih, director of the journalistic training center Teeba Press since 2008, columnist for the Al-Akhar daily newspaper
- Mahjoub Mohamed Salih, editor-in-chief of Sudan’s second oldest daily newspaper Al Ayaam
- Ali Shummo, chair of the National Council for Press and Publications since 2001 and professor emeritus of communication sciences
- Ammar Suleiman, editor-in-chief of Alwaan daily newspaper
- Muheddin Titawi, head of the Journalist Union since 2004
The goal of becoming a journalist can be linked to political socialization at an early age. “While in high school, I used to feel part of the national Islamic current,” said Abd Al Mahmoud Al Karanki. “Now, I feel closer to an independent national stance that is open to the West and takes a critical view of the past.” For Mahjoub Mohamed Salih, a veteran journalist who founded one of Sudan’s most influential papers, Al Ayaam in 1953, being a journalist “was a way to express my political views, specifically liberating the country from the Anglo-Egyptian rule.” In 1940, he published his first article at the age of twelve years in the daily newspaper Sawt Al Sudan. He later joined a Marxist group where he remained a member until 1950.

Early political engagement seemed to be one of the driving forces for the older generation in pursuing a journalism career. While journalists such as Abdullah Rizig (member of the Baath party and acting editor-in-chief of The Citizen) or Kamal Karrar (deputy editor-in-chief of the communist mouthpiece Al Midan) remain true to their political roots, most of the leading journalists have dissociated themselves from their former political ties over the years. That is the case with Kamal Hassan Bakheet, former Baathist and now editor-in-chief of Sudan’s oldest daily newspaper Al Ray Al Aam, or Osman Mirghani Al Hussein, editor-in-chief of Al Tayar newspaper, who decided to quit Turabi’s National Islamic Front after 1989, “because we thought that since the Islamic party managed to rule the country, we should stop working as a party.” Faisal Mohamed Salih, “already committed politically” as a Nasserist, when he entered the profession, quickly realized that it was difficult to be politically affiliated and to work as a journalist at the same time. So after five years, he said, “I left the party and I gave up direct political activism. I continued as a journalist.”

The journalists’ career development may hold the key for their changing political tastes. Al Karanki initially followed a typical ‘pro-governmental’ career path, moving from London’s Sudanese Embassy to become editor-in-chief of Al Raed, mouthpiece of the ruling National Congress Party (NCP). Eventually, he became the editorial advisor to the temporarily suspended Alwan newspaper, which was closed from January to March 2012 by the security forces presumably due to its political proximity to the PDP.8 Kamal Hassan Bakheet, however, moved in the opposite political direction: Having worked in the Baathist’s press (Al Hadaf, National Culture Magazine and Al Thawra), he joined the liberal flagship Al Sahafa and since 2005 has been the editor-in-chief of the subtly pro-governmental Al Ray Al Aam and is said to be a “vociferous supporter of President Omar Hassan Al Bashir.”9 In Sudan, being a member, or former member, of a political party does not preclude a journalist from working for newspapers across the political spectrum.

“When the coup d’état took place, I was the first to interview President Al Bashir, and I published his photo on the cover.”

Kamal Hassan Bakheet, Al Ray Al Aam

Of course, 15 interviewees cannot speak for a whole profession. They do not even make up two percent of an estimated 1,000 to 2,000 journalists in Sudan. However, it is obvious that these 15 leading journalists and media professionals have several biographical and social stages in common. Given their parallels, it is fair to assume that a significant number of their colleagues in similar leading positions have a comparable story to tell: First, they all hail from a humble background. Ali Shummo’s father exported camels to Egypt, Saif Al Deen Al Bashir’s parents worked as farmers, and teachers at the same time and Ibrahim Mirghani’s father was a merchant. “Believe me, none of the journalists’ fathers are businessmen,” said Adil Al Baz in the interview. Haidar Al Mokashi agreed.

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9 Sudan and South Sudan media and telecoms landscape guide, see reference 3.
saying: “Young graduates from universities who belong to rich families do not work as journalists. They go into business.” Abdullah Rizig’s mother and Faisal Mohamed Salih’s father were both illiterate. The only exception to the rule is Osman Mirghani Al Hussein, whose father was a government chief accountant, a Muslim Brother and “very well educated.” Although most parents tried to prevent their children from becoming journalists, a job they considered dangerous or lacking in prestige (Al Karanki: “My mother wanted me to work in the judiciary field”), the profession is full of social climbers. This personal background explains why journalists in Sudan often graduated from university in a field other than journalism. Al Bashir studied history; Al Baz holds a university diploma in economics and political sciences; and Shummo was supposed to become a teacher.

Second, all the interviewees spent time abroad, mainly in Arabic speaking countries, working for foreign media outlets or as correspondents for the Sudanese press. Most emigrated because of Sudan’s political situation. Saif Al Deen Al Bashir, today editor-in-chief of the English daily newspaper *Sudan Vision*, settled down in Doha to work for the Qatari *Al Sharq* newspaper after the coup d’état in 1989, when all Sudanese newspapers were seized apart from the army organ. Mahjoub Mohamed Salih was correspondent and stringer for newspapers outside Sudan during Jafar Numeiri’s rule and Faisal Mohamed Salih spent eight years from 1993 to 2001 in exile in Egypt, writing for the Cairo-based Sudanese newspaper *Al Khartoum*. Some of the elite Sudanese journalists waited out the politically explosive periods and then returned to their home country in less repressive times.

But some spent time abroad for reasons other than Sudanese politics. Ibrahim Mirghani, head of the political section of the communist mouthpiece *Al Midan*, studied journalism in Poland during the Cold War and Kamal Hassan Bakheet took journalist training courses in Budapest and Baghdad (which can be explained by their respective pro-socialist backgrounds). Western countries were also on the list of preferred destinations. Al Hussein participated in training courses in the United States, Canada and Great-Britain. Al Karanki said: “I’ve been to most of the major American newspapers, *Chicago Tribune*, *Chicago Sun-Times*, even CNN and BBC in addition to the Egyptian newspaper *Ahram*. I always pay a visit to the media outlets and examine their work in each city I travel to.” It is a fair assumption that leading Sudanese journalists are well aware of media systems other than their own, including those which form part of the so-called “free world.”

“*When Al Ayaam was closed down in 1989, I was over 60 years old by that time – so I relaxed a bit.*”

Mahjoub Mohamed Salih, *Al Ayaam*

“*You will be treated like a hero*”:
Self-image and motives for selecting the journalism profession.

The international networking of high-ranking Sudanese journalists and their gradual professionalization may give an explanation why statements regarding professional standards do not differ much from journalists in Western countries. Most of those interviewed cited objectivity, credibility and integrity as criteria for good journalism. According to Al Karanki, “a journalist’s capital is honesty, trust, professionalism and making impartial judgments.” Ali Shummo, chairman of the National Press Council (which is in charge of licensing the press) defines quality journalism as adhering “to a code of ethics, credibility, accuracy and balance. I mean, telling the truth, working to provide media consumers with what they need to know.” At first, this sounds surprising given the journalists’ socialization in countries with dictatorial structures. Rodney Benson offers an explanation in his study on normative journalism theories.
He writes that “even in the most repressive authoritarian states, the language of democracy has become commonplace.” Yet, Western press and communication research generally portray “non-democratic theories negatively, as anti-democratic, whatever their potential merits.” According to Benson, values of press freedom depend mainly on perspective: “Whereas authoritarianism stresses the importance of maintaining social order, libertarianism aims to maximize individual human freedom.”

Certainly, Sudanese journalism still lacks professionalism. All interviewees complained about the bad quality of journalism education or poor language skills (especially in English, but also in Arabic). However, the social background and, in particular, the political and cultural socialization of leading journalists and government officials help explain why the Sudanese interpretation of “what consumers need to know” and the Western sense of “good journalism” (usually based on the normative approach of freedom of expression and access to information principles) are generally incompatible. Especially those media professionals who adhere to a specific party line (be it the National Congress Party or another one), consider journalism as a mission rather than an occupation. Ali Shummo seeks “to guard society against pornography, things that clash with traditions, with the culture and so on.” In his opinion, “we need to regulate; we need to be very careful in handling the media because society is very fragile. The population consists of different ethnic groups, religious groups, different tribes with contrasting languages and traditions. You can ignite the whole thing with just a few words.” The objective “to protect” and “to educate” the population also came up in other interviews. “The Baath Arab Socialist Party armed me with ideological and organizational strength and personal discipline, and its bylaw punished anyone who steers off course,” said Kamal Hassan Bakheet, who today watches over the pro-governmental party line of *Al Ray Al Aam*. Ammar Suleiman, former member of the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) believes likewise “that there should be no constraints on publishing except for issues related to religion, country and ethics. Anything else constrains freedom of speech.” Following this line of argument, Suleiman’s opinion about internal press freedom seems predictable: “I believe that the task of editors-in-chief is the internal censorship in the first place. So, editors practice self-censorship on themselves and section heads practice censorship on them and so on, up to the editor-in-chief.” Kamal Karrar, an avowed communist since 1977, even compared his job to “a holy mission”, explaining that: “Anything written in *Al Midan* must correspond to our programs, our ideas. Our first mission is to spread detail of this program to the people. The second is to criticize the government’s political policy, as long as they are against the Sudanese people.” His colleague Ibrahim Mirghani added: “I am a party member, so dealing with journalism is a party duty. We want to raise the horizons of the people.”

Besides the “missionaries”, a second group dominates the professional field: Journalists who have sought to maximize their distance from politics. These journalists are more likely to feel like advocates for the general public, “Reform. This is our central target,” said Osman Mirghani Al Hussein. “When we talk about journalism as an industry in Sudan, it’s very poor. But looking at journalists as supporters of public opinion, I think we have the most powerful journalism in Sudan of all the Arabic countries.” Abdullah Rizig who claims to be independent from any governmental influence and advertisement (although he kept his financial sources secret) even compares journalists with “combatants for democracy and human rights.” *Alwan*’s adviser Abd Al

“I’ve found that journalism allows people to express themselves and disseminate their ideas as well as improve reality – a role that can’t be played by the law alone.”

Abd Al Mahmoud Al Karanki, *Alwan*
Mahmoud Al Karanki wishes “to improve the status of my people and country,” but added: “I don’t believe that political journalism in Sudan has a significant influence on decision-making.” The fact that his newspaper was shut down three weeks after the interview, underscores the meaning of his words.

Looking at the interviewees’ backgrounds, it becomes clear that their self-image is not just determined by their political affiliation, or lack thereof, but also by their experience of arbitrary state power (which is not necessarily limited to the present Sudanese authorities). “I went to jail under British rule,” said Mahjoub Mohamed Salih. “Under colonial rule, the press was an advocacy tool. We wanted to liberate our country. That’s why.” Saif Al Deen Al Bashir, editor-in-chief of the newspaper Sudan Vision, was imprisoned twice while he was a student, “because we used to write articles about what was going on after Nimeiry’s seizure of power. The first time, I was in Atbara and in Dabak prison, a very bad one. The second time, they locked me up in Khartoum West.” Today, human rights organizations continue holding the Sudanese government accountable for on-going imprisonments of journalists. Those who do not toe the governmental line suffer the most: “In February 2011, eight journalists from Al Midan were detained by the security forces. Ibrahim and I spent 30 days in prison, the others, four or five days,” said Kamal Karrar. “They always consider us enemies.”

Bizarre as it sounds, imprisonment is not necessarily experienced solely as a punishment. The editor-in-chief of Al Tayar still remembers his first work assignments as a journalist: “Every time they arrested me, for one week, two weeks or ten days, I had more readers afterwards.” The fact that oppositional writing may have a positive impact on their societal image encourages Sudanese journalists to continue in their profession. “It’s as if they gave you a certificate that you are a good journalist. This doubled my salary very fast. In almost one year, two years, my salary was doubled ten times. I was getting more than the editor-in-chief with one single column,” Osman Mirghani Al Hussein said. Ibrahim Mirghani confirmed that such experiences gave writers a reputation boost: “When you go to prison, you will be treated like a hero.”

Another example of the “social bonus” of the profession lies in name of the “Al Sahafa” (The Press) district in central Khartoum. Dating back to the 1960s, the name was chosen by the locals because the newspaper Al Sahafa was calling for people’s right to adequate housing in those days. “They did it to earn respect. The newspaper reported on the issue until the government agreed to make a housing plan,” explained Karrar.

And the interviewees are socially esteemed. On the day of the interview, Osman Mirghani Al Hussein was offered free sandwiches from a famous Khartoum restaurant (“out of respect”) and a free taxi ride: “When the taxi driver came here to the office of Al Tayar, he refused my money. “No no, I don’t take money from you,” he said. Financial instability and personal insecurities are compensated by the profession’s social rewards. Without exception, all interviewees complained about their bad income and the financial constraints of their newspapers. “It is not lucrative. It is a poverty profession. But we persist,” said Mahjoub Mohamed Salih. According to Haidar Al Mokashfi, patience is the key: “I haven’t received my salary for weeks. This is one of the financial constraints.”

In order to survive, many journalists have several jobs, a practice which has negative side effects. “Of course, there are legal ways. Some journalists work for a newspaper, radio station and the TV, or even a newspaper outside Sudan,” Faisal Mohamed Salih said. “Unfortunately, I have to say

“We are not allowed to make any public speeches in the squares. We have no way to talk to the people of Sudan other than through Al Midan.”

Kamal Karrar,
Al Midan
that there are some illegal sources, too, such as government departments or political parties which pay some journalists. They provide monthly money for journalists covering their department.” Some sort of “baksheesh”? “Yes”, confirmed Haidar Al Mokashfi, “they try to fill the financial gap by taking other payment. We call it the ‘yellow envelopes’.”

Despite all these problems, none of the journalists wants to quit the profession (Rizig: “I am satisfied with what I am doing”). Ultimately speaking, social respect, a specific professional objective and the love for writing are more powerful than governmental restrictions.

The newspaper market:
“A lung for the Sudanese”

Speaking about the strength of Sudan’s print media, Mahjoub Mohamed Salih is unequivocal. “It affects the public opinion more than any other media because it affects elite, the discourse and those who make the decisions.” He is not alone in this opinion. All journalists emphasized the Sudanese press’ power, especially in comparison to electronic media. Haitham Cabo said that newspapers, “represent an outlet or a lung for the Sudanese. They have created a space for liberties and have fought alone on the front lines for the rights of the Sudanese.” For this reason, it is unsurprising that the influence of political newspapers is appreciated by one group and feared by another: “We think that it’s the most dangerous, most important, most influential medium. It’s read by few, but it shifts politics,” said Press Council Chief Ali Shummo. Kamal Karrar even supports the thesis that top selling newspaper Al Intibaha, the mouthpiece of the Just Peace Forum (JPF) and known for its separatist stance, “actually made the separation of Sudan possible.” Although this is hard to prove, all the interviewees share the opinion: Newspapers can make the most of their relative freedom.

“Newspapers in Sudan are for the elite. It is an elitist exercise.”

Mahjoub Mohamed Salih, Al Ayaam

Sudan’s newspaper market encompasses approximately 40 dailies, covering topics from politics to entertainment. In the eyes of Abdullah Rizig, this diversity predominantly serves as a fig leaf: “Many of these papers are related by hook or by crook to the ruling party. They don’t express a range of voices; they express the one voice of the ruling party.” Abd Al Mahmoud Al Karanki says that business interests are to blame: “Many Sudanese media companies consider journalism as a commercial investment in which they trade in papers and ads to get millions of pounds. They have no intellectual target to develop Sudan’s relations with the world, nor do

“The Sudanese are first-class readers.”

Kamal Hassan Bakheet, Al Ray Al Aam

they help forge commercial partnerships so as to develop the Sudan and convert the region into an oasis of stability."

It is difficult to tell how many newspapers are actually owned or influenced by the government. Most of the journalists named Al Sahafa and Al Ayaam as the most independent newspapers. That, however, does not mean that journalists just use these two newspapers as their main reference. Quite the contrary: Keeping a tab on competitors is part of every journalist’s day-to-day work. "I read most of the newspapers – around 15 to 16 newspapers per day," said Faisal Mohamed Salih. "The best news is in Al Sahafa. I always say that. For quick political coverage, I go to Al Sudani and Al Ray Al Aam and for political columns and writing, Al Ahdath or Al Akhbar." Adil Al Baz reads "all of the newspapers" to make sure "that we have our own news. Exclusiveness. No other newspapers should have it." Even the communists consult the other newspapers including pro-governmental papers: "We read Al Sahafa, Al Tayar, Akhir Lahtha, Al Sudani in order to follow the ruling party and the political system and to search for stories", said Kamal Karrar. "As a journalist, it is a must to read other newspapers, to know what is going on." In this regard, Sudanese journalists do not differ much from their colleagues in Western countries.

Of course, the readership of Sudanese newspapers does not primarily consist of journalists. All interviewees could name their potential audience, they had a clear idea of who they address and where they could find their readers. Journalists of the leading Sudanese independent press assumed that politicians, in particular, follow their headlines. "I know security organizations and government ministers follow our newspaper because they classify our newspaper as the opposition. But we are not the opposition. We are an independent newspaper", said Al Mokashfi. Osman Mirghani Al Hussein could pinpoint articles likely to draw the attention of President Al Bashir: "This is today's newspaper. I am sure when Al Bashir reads this, he won't be happy." He highlighted an article about demonstrations against a government dam project in the River Nile State.

In general, the daily work of Sudanese journalists is dominated by the "normal", non-government readership. "Readers' reaction to what we publish is the ultimate judgment of our success or failure. They are the gauge by which we calibrate the level of coverage and performance," said Ammar Suleiman. Osman Mirghani Al Hussein explained that he received more than 100 emails per day: "It’s a very big problem for me, if I can’t open my emails for one day. Then, it is very difficult to get back to read all of them." The importance of letters to the editor reinforces the impression of journalists’ need for social acknowledgment.

**Media control and censorship:**

"If I read what happens in South America, it’s not like that in Sudan"

Only one journalist refused to give details on his personal experiences regarding governmental pressure; the others talked frankly about external influences. All of the journalists agreed to publish their names (also an indication for a certain amount of freedom of expression). However, some of them are not cited by name in this chapter for their personal security. The majority of the interviewees, say most of the pressure exerted on journalists comes from the National Intelligence and Security Services. "The Ministry of Information and the Press Council are
not directly connected with us. But the security forces punished us twice,” said one of the journalists. “Once, they came in the evening and observed the printing process. When we finished, they confiscated the issue for the next day.” Another interviewee reiterated his point: “Sometimes the security service prevents us from distribution after we have gone to press, so that we take an additional loss.”

Even though most of the journalists complained about arbitrary state control, they did not agree with the Western perspective that it is a totally controlled media landscape either. “I feel I can write everything. Maybe I am punished by the security forces,” explained a journalist who was punished twice last year. “Maybe you will be arrested. Maybe the government tries to stop your advertising. But we can write anything right now, even criticism of the president. So I think it’s not fair to say we are one of the countries with the worst press freedom situation in the world.” Given the absence of pre-censorship, such statements are common. The printed word often counts more than a couple of days in prison. Faisal Mohamed Salih, the target of several court cases, said: “If I read what happens in South America, it’s not like that in Sudan. You can be detained, harassed, sometimes tortured, yes, but killed: no.”

Newspaper confiscations are not a secret in Sudan. “We read all of the papers. We have a monitoring department which analyzes their content,” explained Ali Shummo, head of the Press Council. “If there is anything that could be considered as an infringement of the law, the department will refer to the secretary general and then he will refer it to the complaints committee.” According to Shummo, the newspaper is then given the chance to officially apologize. “If the infringement is repeated, then the paper will be suspended for between one and three days. Beyond that it should be taken to the court and the decision depends on the court’s confirmation.” It is not surprising that the official functionaries paint a quite positive picture of media control in Sudan. Muheddin Titawi explained, “we have made great progress with the printing press, the new technologies. In the past, we had two newspapers, now we have 20. We have good articles, good newspapers and well-trained journalists.” Ali Shummo is convinced that “if you compare the media landscape now to ten years back, there is a great degree of improvement. Just look at the content of the newspaper to know how much freedom journalists enjoy here in Sudan.”

In reality, however, it is difficult to tell whether there has been such a freeing up of the press: to reach a conclusive answer one would have to extensively analyze the papers’ content.

It is interesting to note at which point the Sudanese authorities interfere in press freedom. First, there is a clear difference between direct and indirect press control. Direct control is predominantly applied by the security forces, who, for example, show up in the newsroom unexpectedly. “Our law clashes with the law of the security,” said Ali Shummo. “They are very strong now; it gives them the chance to interfere with all the activities of the government.”

The head of the Press Council agrees. “They confiscate and stop the press. We are against this and do not condone it at all. We find ourselves in the same boat as the journalists,” he said. Sometimes other government institutions intervene, as one journalist, explains: “I personally received many phone calls from parliament, the ministers and so on.” Another one said: “The ministry of information has no direct relationship with the newspapers. Other ministries, governmental organizations or departments address the newspapers through the Press Council which is the supervisor of newspapers in Sudan. Only security services directly communicate with the editor-in-chiefs.” However, most of the journalists confirmed that the situation has slightly improved since prior censorship was abolished in 2009.

“We need investigative journalism in Sudan more than ever before because you have to get to the root of the problem, question everybody and get reactions from everybody.”

Mahjoub Mohamed Salih, Al Ayaam

Political newspapers in Sudan after separation: Fig leaves of government monopoly or real alternatives to the state-run media?
Economic pressures, legal status and retention of information are all means of indirect press control. In this regard, the situation appears worse than in previous years. The majority of the journalists criticized the current press law in particular (“it is not satisfactory”) and the legal framework in general. Bakheet wished “to provide the editors-in-chief with more space, because they are familiar with the interest of the country and the agenda of our enemies.” Suleiman would “reconsider the criteria for licensing journalists and newspapers” and Abdullah Rizig and Haidar Al Mokashfi went as far as to call for a complete abolishment of the press law. Mahjoub Mohamed Salih, his namesake Faisal Mohamed Salih and Osman Mirghani Al Hussein suggested a new law including access to information principles as stipulated in the prior press law. But, in reality, there are signs that tighter controls are afoot: “Our law is confined to the print media and now a new one is underway; the law is being widened to include online media,” said Ali Shummo.

Alongside the legal framework, freedom of expression is shrinking due to financial constraints. “The economic factor is more dangerous for our newspaper than the security forces,” explained one of the journalists. “Now, we are leading an anti-corruption campaign against two famous communication companies, Sudatel and MTN, the main advertisers in Sudan. If the newspapers are not strong enough, they will collapse. But I am proud because no other papers will run with this headline.” Abdullah Rizig tells a similar story: “Certain newspapers have access to advertisements. Those papers considered to be part of the opposition or those having a critical position towards the government need other funding sources.” The communist mouthpiece Al Midan for instance, has not received any advertisement since 2007, and for this reason, it is exclusively financed by the party and other sponsors. Consequently, a vibrant and financially sustainable press landscape in Sudan requires the improvement of the legal framework as well as media business planning and advertising sector development.

“The government is the number one advertiser in Sudan.”

Haidar Al Mokashfi, Al Sahafo

“Absolute independence is impossible”: Limits and opportunities of freedom of expression

Five recurring patterns were identified among the interviewees, illustrating how much freedom journalists have in Sudan. The extent to which journalists feel they have self-determination depends on their own political beliefs and how they can express them. Kamal Hassan Bakheet, who has been working as the editor-in-chief of Al Ray Al Aam for more than six years, feels no restrictions at all: “I have never been under any pressure because we are moving in the right direction, and we do not offend individuals or religions. The violating newspapers are the ones who suffer from pressures.” Abdullah Rizig also feels independent, at least since he moved to the English newspaper The Citizen: “When I worked for Al Ray Al Aam, I didn’t have the same opportunity to write freely or to express my views because of the political controls on editorial policy. When I came here, I found myself able to express myself and my views without any censorship or any obstacles.” Certainly, this freedom does not extend to the other journalists. The communists Ibrahim Mirghani and Kamal Karrar, who claimed they resist self-censorship (and practice ‘internal freedom’), feel restricted by the Sudanese authorities, so does Alwan-advisor Abd Al Mahmoud Al Karanki who nonetheless highlighted: “The editor-in-chief, editing director and editorial advisor of Alwan express their points of view.” Mirghani and Karrar spent weeks in prison and the oppositional newspaper Alwan was shut down a couple of weeks after the interview, illustrating how rapidly the government can impede freedom of expression.
How far the limits of official tolerance can be stretched hinges on a paper’s contents (regardless of its political affiliations). In general, news and comment about the rebels and opposition in Darfur, Blue Nile and South Kordofan are risky. “Our editorial line is to refuse to defame the army or threaten national security. We don’t have a personal agenda; rather, we work in accordance with the agenda of the country in general,” said Bakheet. Al Karanki also voiced this opinion: “Criticizing the army is a red line. Anyway, absolute independence is impossible. It’s really strange that some journalists commit serious crimes against the country, which pass unnoticed unless they affect a senior official or authority.” Faisal Mohamed Salih described what might happen when a paper writes about a taboo-subject: “A newspaper was recently closed for three or four months because of a short article on the army saying that the military refuses to withdraw from Abyei. The funny thing is: It was correct. Three days after that, the official spokesperson of the army confirmed that there were no plans to withdraw from Abyei. But the newspaper was closed until yesterday. The message is: Even if it is correct, don’t report it until it has been officially announced!” Other no-go subjects are the International Criminal Court case involving President Omar Al Bashir, the president and his family in general – “the most out-of-bounds theme is the leaders,” said Osman Mirghani Al Hussein.

Nevertheless, there are exceptions: “We can criticize ministers. In some cases, you can even mention corrupt ministers although you need documents to prove this,” said Faisal Mohamed Salih. “You can criticize the president, but you cannot insult him personally,” said Adil Al Baz. “If you want to make people laugh at him, you can, but of course, you have to pay the price.” Mahjoub Mohamed Salih said, “you can go against the government 100 percent, but you can’t accuse people of things they haven’t done. That’s why we need investigative journalism in Sudan more than ever before; we have to get to the roots of the problems.” In the same breath, he outlined the limits of investigative journalism: The pro-government newspaper Al Sudani recently published an article about a government official who broke the rules through his business links. The government issued orders to prevent us from commenting on this affair because the guy is under investigation. We continue fighting for our right to report on this case: Someone being under investigation should not mean we stop publishing.”

Abdullah Rizig described another, more sophisticated way to bypass rules, assuming that the Sudanese audience is able to read between the lines: “In Al Ray Al Aam, I used to write about regional issues, especially about the problems and struggles in West Africa, Chad, Central Africa or Nigeria. I used to deal indirectly with the problems of Sudan through dealing with similar issues, ethnic conflicts or power struggles in other African countries.” As soon as journalists write about non-political themes, obstacles disappear. Haitham Cabo said “they don’t have any influence on us,” and Ammar Suleiman agreed “no one has ever interfered with the core of our work”. They don’t write about sensitive issues in their politically non-controversial newspapers Fenoon and Alaan.

Language is a third point affecting a newspaper’s freedom of expression. “Our newspaper addresses a particular readership,” said Abdullah Rizig. According to the acting editor-in-chief of the English daily The Citizen, the security forces have never paid a visit to his newsroom. “Our readers are not part of the Sudanese public sphere. So, the government, the ruling party and the concerned apparatus think that we have no influence on the public discourse. English newspapers like The Citizen have more...
freedom. I am sure that the articles I write for my newspaper could not be published in the Arabic press.”

Fourth, the sense of personal autonomy depends on a journalist’s position in the newsroom hierarchy. Haidar Al Mokashfi refused the post as editor-in-chief in Al Sahafa, because he didn’t want to give up his “normal” job: “I personally believe that I am a free journalist, just a journalist without constraints. There are no responsibilities that can prevent me from doing my job. When you are an editor-in-chief, the managerial tasks fill your day. I don’t want this. I just want to be a journalist.” Faisal Mohamed Salih agreed. “A normal journalist is free and has less responsibility, of course. As editor-in-chief you are responsible for the newspaper and the whole staff. It’s very tough work in Sudan.”

The fifth and final point affecting a journalist’s freedom to write involves the financial independence of the publication. “We don’t have any pressure from any side. That’s where our feeling of freedom comes from. Most newspapers have big debts. They have problems with the taxation department. Our taxes are fully paid,” said Al Tayar’s Editor-in-chief Osman Mirghani Al Hussein who owns a large computer company with 100 employees. “I am not dependent on the newspaper. If they close it down, I’ll go to my other office. I won’t lose anything.”

His detachment from the media project was later put to the test. In February 2012, Al Tayar was shut down by the security forces and was not allowed to resume publishing until March, when the newspaper publicly apologized for a commentary critical of Omar Al Bashir, and it obeyed instructions by the NISS to remove some staff members (see chapter 2). Nonetheless, considering that most of the journalists come from a humble background and lack financial means, it is clear that Al Hussein’s financial backup is an exception.

**Journalism after secession:**
**The same as before?**

The separation of Sudan is one of the major political transformations on the African continent – and it also risked tipping the country into old conflicts. “Before independence, the government was in partnership with the SPLM and started to enlarge freedom of expression, but since the separation, the NCP sits alone in the parliament, so they are harsher to the newspapers,” said Adil Al Baz. The major effect of the historic division was outlined by Haidar Al Mokashfi: “The separation affected the country’s economical situation. This reflects on the newspapers. The secession affects us in whether or not we are paid salaries and can do our jobs.” Others reiterated this. “Weighing up the advantages and disadvantages, we have absolutely lost out with secession because we have been deprived of a market and part of our readership,” said Haitham Cabo, expressing a widely held belief among journalists. “We lost two of our journalists who were Southerners,” said Osman Mirghani Al Hussein. “They left – but we send our newspaper to South Sudan every day, because it has not been affected by the separation, yet. But we do not get the same feedback as before. The Southerners now treat us like another country.” Sudan’s range of newspapers changed after the July 2011 separation. “Pro-secession newspapers will decline while national ones objectively reflecting the relationship among the different Sudanese regions will prosper,” predicted Kamal Hassan Bakheet. Five English newspapers have disappeared in recent months (Khartoum Monitor, Juba Post, Democrat, Sudan Tribune and Advocate), but some South Sudanese newspapers are

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still printed in Khartoum (not yet distributed), as “they had some printing problems in the South,” explained Ali Shummo. The Citizen, a former Southern daily published in Khartoum, also moved to Juba. A new one was founded directly after the separation in the North Sudanese capital, but “the paper lost its partners and funding,” said its acting editor-in-chief Abdullah Rizig. “Politically, The Citizen stopped supporting the SPLM policies and now considers itself an independent organ. Editorialy, the South Sudanese issues are no longer of priority to The Citizen.” Besides the English press, one Arabic newspaper called Ajras Al Hurriya, which was said to be affiliated with the SPLM, was closed down by the Sudanese government, Faisal Mohamed Salih said, adding that he thought this move was illegal. Regardless of the political impact of the South Sudanese newspaper’s expulsion, North Sudanese law prevents any foreign interest among local newspapers. Therefore, the closure of South Sudanese newspapers after July 9, 2011 was an expected reaction.

Kamal Karrar observed that news reporting on South Sudan has receded: “Even in Al Midan we report less about South Sudan because we lack information from there. We also lost our South Sudanese readership because it is very hard for Al Midan and the other newspapers to enter the Southern newspaper market given the ongoing conflict between South and North.” Faisal Mohamed Salih believes that close links with the South will continue: “The concern is still there. If you read what is written in some newspapers about the South, you don’t feel that this is a separate state. Reporting on South Sudan is not like the reporting about Chad or Eritrea or Saudi Arabia.” In light of the ongoing disputes between the two Sudanese nations, one may presume that the Southern Sudanese share these attitudes.

According to Ammar Suleiman, “the secession has not affected the distribution of newspapers in general, but those who have been affected are certain newspapers that used to make the issue of secession a target.” One of the newspapers that has been most affected is the separatist daily Al Intibaha. “This newspaper gained fame by promoting secession. Its distribution has deteriorated because its readership are Southerners and pro-secession individuals,” explained Abd Al Mahmoud Al Karanki, voicing a widely shared opinion. Whereas Mahjoub Mohamed Salih is convinced that “many people didn’t like the idea of separation,” Muheddin Titawi thinks that “we got rid of very inefficient journalists. I think we can work better with Arabic and English newspapers in the North than with English newspapers from the South.” Besides the chair of the Sudanese Journalist Union, Titawi holds a post as columnist in Al Intibaha, which may explain this reaction. In general, journalists feel relieved that the JPF mouthpiece (still number one on the newspaper market) has apparently lost part of its readership since July 2011.

Conclusion – some closing remarks on the role of newspapers in Sudan

So are Sudan’s newspapers symbols of government monopoly or real alternatives to state media? The answer is not as straightforward as it may seem. This study showed that the country’s national newspaper market is hybrid. Political dailies are not just fig leaves disguising the worst of press freedom violations while feigning a diverse media landscape. Despite all the aforementioned problems, newspapers play an indispensable role in the Sudanese media, not just because they are the only existing critical source of public information on a national level. They provide essential background, local news, a “home” for the opposition and other assets which cannot be replaced by international and “free” TV stations such as Al-Jazeera or the BBC. Part of the reason they function

“Al Intibaha is the ugliest face of racism in Sudan.”

Ibrahim Mirghani, Al Midan
in this way lies in the opening of the media system with the 2009 abolition of pre-censorship. Nevertheless, the journalists themselves are the main driving forces for maintaining the diversity of the newspaper market. Most of them hail from a humble background but aspired to join the profession from an early age. Their love for writing (often combined with a clear political position) helps them challenge governmental pressures and restrictions. All the interviewed journalists worked abroad and are familiar with other media systems that influenced their work and shaped their self-image. They either fight for their own political perspective, or they feel they represent the “voice” of the population, working to enhance living conditions. This motivation to work “for the good cause” is boosted through the admiration of the readership, mainly the Sudanese elite. For this reason in particular, newspapers are considered to be the most influential medium in Sudan.

“When I go home at midnight, I feel very proud of what we have done today,” said Osman Mirghani Al Hussein. “And I am sure that tomorrow, I will get feedback from the readers.” Being “proud” was one of the most recurrent expressions among the interviewees, be it from a pro-governmental or an oppositional newspaper. Most of the journalists believe in their work; none of those who were interviewed were seriously thinking of switching professions. This “will” to fight and lifelong dedication should not be ignored by the international community.

However, newspapers are not “alternatives” to the state-run television and radio. First of all, in a state where only two out of five citizens are able to read and write, the press cannot serve as a means to create a critical public sphere (disregarding the fact that newspaper circulation oscillates between a rather insignificant 1,000 copies to 140,000 copies). Second, in most cases the ownership of press products is not transparent. “We are independent,” said Haidar Al Mokashfi. “I think, more than 90 percent of the newspapers in Sudan are owned by the government and the ruling party.” It is very difficult to prove such claims and figures, but one should bear in mind around 40 newspapers are published on a daily basis in Sudan. Approximately 20 of those can be considered political newspapers. “When a society begins to open up a little bit, there is a strong desire for the right to express yourself. It is like an explosion: People want to express themselves because they have been kept quiet for such a long time,” explained Mahjoub Mohamed Salih. “The mushrooming of the media, after a closed, restricted period, is natural.”

The extent of freedom of expression depends largely on the topics covered. Subjects like the army or the Darfur or South Kordofan conflicts are problematic. Other aspects affecting professional freedom are a newspaper’s editorial line towards the government, the language (Arabic or English) and the paper’s finances. Chapter 1 reviewed the history of the Sudanese press, showing how the rise and fall of newspapers went hand in hand with political shifts affecting a generation of journalists, either at home or abroad. Considering ongoing disputes with South Sudan, the conflicts about oil resources and territories as well as the political transition process, further changes to the Sudanese newspaper market are to be expected. There are signs of a return to tighter media controls in the future.
Akhir Lahza was established in 2005. As with the Sudan Media Center (SMC), it is linked to the National Intelligence and Security Services (NISS). Former Governor of South Darfur, Al Haj Atta Al Mannan, serves as chief of its executive board. Mustafa Abu Al Azaim, a journalist with a history of loyal service in the state-owned press of the Numeiri era, is editor-in-chief.

Al Ahdath began in 2009. The paper was established by Adil Al Baz, the owner and editor-in-chief. During his stint as editor-in-chief of Al Sahafa (see below), Al Baz built up a reputation among Sudan’s prominent intellectuals, both in Sudan and abroad. This readership later switched to his new publication. Despite the censorship restrictions, Al Ahdath became a lively platform for political debate during the interim period of the CPA (Comprehensive Peace Agreement) and enjoyed a wide circulation. Its editors and reporters included sympathizers with the SPLM, the CPS (Communist Party of Sudan) and the PCP (Popular Congress Party). The paper also became a platform for a younger generation of literati who experimented with themes and forms of expression that mirrored their urban Khartoum milieu. Adil Al Baz paid the price for this daringly permissive editorial strategy, and the paper was subjected to both subtle and frank financial punishments. Slowly, Al Ahdath was forced to silence the more critical voices on its pages, by and large, contributors from the Sudanese diaspora. However, in the post-secession period, it supported the peaceful resolution of the South Kordofan and the Blue Nile conflicts and backed a negotiated settlement to the disputes with South Sudan. However, it lost some of its leading editors to competing papers with more generous budgets, notably Al Sudani, or to self-enforced exile.

Al Ahram Al Youm began publication in 2009, founded by Al Hindi Izz Al Din, an Alwan veteran, Muzamil Abu Al Gasim, a sports columnist, and Abdalla Dafalla. As the major shareholder the latter was named chief of the executive board. Izz Al Din became its editor-in-chief. The paper is famed for its sensationalism and imaginative interpretation of events. It is loyal to President Al Bashir, a loyalty which it combines with skin deep criticism of individual NCP (National Congress Party) politicians. With its tabloid-like approach, Al Ahram Al Youm has boosted sales, for a while clocking up circulation levels second only to Al Intibaha. Personal feuds between Izz Al Din and Abu Al Gasim have recently dogged the paper. Jaafar Abd Al Hakam, a prominent figure and security boss who served as governor of West Darfur, commissioned Izz Al Din to establish a new paper, Al Mijhar Al Siyasi, to be launched on 2 April, 2012.
Al Ayaam can be viewed as a more progressive counterpart to Al Ray Al Aam. It was established in 1953 by a young and innovative trio, Bashir Mohamed Saeed, Mahjoub Osman and Mahjoub Mohamed Salih. The first had liberal-conservative inclinations, the second was a member of the Communist Party of Sudan, and the third was associated with the Anti-Imperial Front but was never committed to the CPS. It stopped printing as with all other newspapers in 1989 and returned to print under Mahjoub Mohamed Salih, but unlike Al Ray Al Aam, it refused to cow to the regime. Al Ayaam enraged the authorities with its critical editorial line and was the target of restrictive censorship during the years preceding the CPA. During the CPA interim period, Salih's son, Wael Mahjoub Mohamed Salih, assumed greater editorial responsibilities while his father's influence receded somewhat. As a supporter of the SPLM, Wael Salih steered Al Ayaam to reflect his views but retained the paper's traditional ties to the Sudanese leftist scene and the CPS constituency in particular. However, drained of government and NCP-loyal business advertisements, the paper barely manages to remain in print. Today, its readers are essentially a limited but loyal circle of seniors. It has failed to attract a younger readership and its standing is mostly derived from its history. Contributors include retired bureaucrats with leftist leanings or links to the CPS and its organizations. Mahjoub Mohamed Salih remains the editor-in-chief and chairman of the executive board.

Al Dar is Sudan's most popular tabloid. It calls itself a “social” publication and largely reports on crime, local celebrity gossip and scandals. Al Dar is the twin of the daily political Akhbar Al Yaum, a less successful but no less sensationalist publication. Both are owned by Ahmed Al Balal Al Tayeb, a journalist who started his career in Numeiri's state-owned press. Assuming Al Intibaha is currently the most favoured source of information and opinion in the Sudanese heartland, Al Dar is the preferred source of entertainment. Both papers use a colloquial Arabic style with a limited vocabulary.

Al Intibaha launched early in 2006, founded by the veteran National Congress Party figure Al Tayeb Mustafa, President Al Bashir's uncle, as a medium to express opposition to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement signed with the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) in 2005. The paper pushed for the partition of Sudan on the grounds that north and south constitute irreconcilable poles, racially, religiously, culturally and politically, and voiced the fear that the SPLM might eventually dominate the country. Eventually, a political party, the Just Peace Forum (JPF), evolved around it. Once South Sudan seceded the paper undertook a new mission: The expulsion of the remnant SPLM in (north) Sudan, and called for the immediate ban of the party in the country. Over time, Al Intibaha became the most popular political daily in Sudan. It enjoys a readership far exceeding other newspapers. Today, it agitates for the enforcement of a strict regime of Sharia in the country, a military solution for the conflicts in South Kordofan and the Blue Nile, and the severing of all ties with South Sudan. It championed the campaign against the June 2011 framework deal signed with the SPLM in (north) Sudan and is currently leading a fierce campaign against the March 2012 framework agreement on the status of nationals in the other state, which was signed between Sudan and South Sudan in Addis Ababa. Tayeb Mustafa is the owner and chairman of the board of directors of Al Intibaha. Its editor-in-chief is Al Sadiq Al Rizeigy. Columnists include a number of veteran Islamist journalists and NCP members including Abd Al Mahmoud Al Karanki, Rabie Abd Al Aati and Ishaq Ahmed Fadlalla whose journalistic skills were honed in the florid press of the National Islamic Front (NIF) of the 1980s.
Al Jareeda is the most recent arrival on the press scene to date. It was established in 2011 by Awad Mohamed Awad Yusif, a Sudanese businessman who returned to the country recently from Spain. The paper became a refuge for journalists from Ajras Al Hurriya, the publication of the Northern Sector of the SPLM banned upon the secession of South Sudan, and Ray Al Shaab, the temporarily banned organ of the PCP. The paper had a series of confrontations with the authorities, the National Intelligence and Security Service ordered the closure of the publication. It returned to print last February with Osman Shinger as its editor-in-chief. He had begun his journalistic career as editor of Al Ayaam’s culture pages and then became the editor-in-chief of the Khartoum edition of the English-speaking, Juba-based The Citizen during the interim period of the CPA. Aiming to attract a younger readership, the paper champions the theme of democratic freedoms and campaigns for a peaceful resolution of the conflicts in South Kordofan and the Blue Nile and the confrontation with South Sudan. It remains to be seen whether it can sustain this editorial line and remain afloat financially. It contains practically no advertisements from business and the government.

Al Midan is the organ of the CPS. It was established in 1954 as the official publication of the Anti-Imperialist Front. The paper was banned during General Abboud’s rule (1958-1964), resumed publication in 1964 but was banned again together with the CPS in 1965. It returned to print during the first two years of Numeiri’s rule and was banned in 1971 to return only in 1985. It was shutdown in 1989 with the advent of President Al Bashir’s regime. During these extended periods of censorship, the paper was clandestinely published and circulated among members of the CPS and its sympathizers. Al Midan resumed publication in 2007. It is largely read by followers of the CPS and a predominantly urban constituency. The paper agitates aggressively against the NCP regime and is regularly confiscated by the security authorities. Madiha Abdalla became the editor-in-chief of Al Midan following the death of its veteran editor, Al Tijani Al Tayeb, in November 2011. She had worked for Al Midan prior to the 1989 coup and then for Al Ayaam until she was picked by the CPS to succeed Tijani Al Tayeb.

Al Raed is the official organ of the NCP. It was launched in 2009. The editor-in-chief is Rashid Abd Al Rahim, a NCP media functionary trained in Al Ray Al Aam. The paper enjoys generous funding and is distinguished by its glossy print and numerous staff. Several of its prominent columnists and editors had previously written for Al Ray Al Aam or Alwan.

Al Ray Al Aam is the oldest Sudanese publication still in print. Established in 1945 by Ismail Al Atabani, the paper has traditionally expressed conservative views in line with the ideology of the Graduates’ Congress1 and later on, supporters of Ismail Al Azhari, Sudan’s first prime minister from the National Unionist Party (NUP). In a recent development, the paper returned to print under the ownership of the Al Atabani family. Ghazi Salah Al Din Al Atabani, who could be described as the NCP’s lead intellectual, was twice a minister, former advisor to President Al Bashir, and current head of the party’s bloc in parliament. Ali Ismail Al Atabani assumed the chairmanship of the

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1 The Congress aimed to unite the educated Sudanese under a nationalist banner but throughout its brief history, from its launch in 1938 to Sudan’s independence in 1956, it was plagued by bickering. Opinion was split over preference for one or the other colonial master, Egypt or Britain, and allegiances to sectarian patrons, Sayed Abd Al Rahman Al Mahdi of the Ansar or Sayed Ali Al Mirghani of the Khatmiyya. Drawing on the support of the Congress members, the two patrons eventually established their own parties, the Umma Party of the Ansar and the NUP of the Khatmiyya. These organizations replaced the Congress and went on to dominate Sudan’s politics for much of its post-colonial history.
executive board from his father and steered the paper to the service of the NCP regime. During the split in the Islamic Movement the paper sided firmly with President Al Bashir and enjoyed a financial boom as the major recipient of government advertisements. Today it rarely, if ever, diverges from the official government line and avoids taking sides in inner NCP disputes. Nevertheless, the paper retains a sombre editorial style and a technical competence superior to other publications. The Atabani family recently sold a considerable chunk of its shares in the paper to Fathi Sheila, formerly a prominent politician in the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP). Sheila was thus named chairman of the executive board. The editor-in-chief is Kamal Hassan Bakheet, a veteran journalist with a long history of service in the state-owned press of Jafar Numeiri’s regime (1969–1985). *Al Ray Al Aam* is considered an authoritative source of information and opinion by the older generation of the educated Sudanese in the heartland. Opinion and editorials are contributed by a number of veteran diplomats and senior politicians from the mainstream NCP and the DUP. It was the favourite publication venue of the SPLM’s Mansour Khaled during the interim period of the CPA, and today features occasional writings of Sadiq Al Mahdi and a weekly article by his daughter, Rabah Al Sadiq Al Mahdi. By and large it can be considered the voice of the Khartoumian establishment.

**Al Sahafa** attempts to maintain the credibility of an independent publication and yet avoid confrontation with the authorities. It was founded by the late Abd Al Rahman Mukhtar in 1961. Banned like other independent newspapers in the early years of the current regime, the paper returned to print in the ownership of the DUP-allied businessman Taha Ali Al Bashir. Prior to the signing of the CPA, the paper’s minor share-holders included the mild Islamist Adil Al Baz, the editor-in-chief; the self-proclaimed social democrat Al Haj Warrag; and the veteran Sudan Socialist Union journalist Amal Abbas. This unlikely combination was part of the paper’s formula for success. It attracted a cohort of young regime-critical journalists and writers with political affiliations from the margins of the establishment, the Republican Brothers, the anti-communist left and the intellectual streak of the modernist Islamic Movement. *Al Sahafa* provided its readers with nuanced coverage of the CPA negotiation process, its major journalistic accomplishment to date. In a series of interviews and on-site reports, the paper probed the government and the SPLM negotiators and thus introduced the then-rebel movement as a political agent to the public in northern Sudan. The experiment ended when Adil Al Baz departed in 2009 to establish his own paper *Al Ahdath*, and Haj Warrag changed sides to join the SPLM and became the lead editor of the short-lived *Ajras Al Hurriya*. Today, *Al Sahafa* continues to provide arguably the most comprehensive coverage of political developments outside Khartoum. It hosts as op-ed contributors a number of prominent NCP-critical Islamist intellectuals who share a modernist outlook and a rediscovered passion for parliamentary democracy. This list includes the vocal Al Tayeb Zain Al Abdin and Khaled Al Tijani Al Nour, veteran members of the dissolved National Islamic Front. When Adil Al Baz left to establish his independent publication, *Al Ahdath*, the paper lost some of its luster. The current editor-in-chief is Al Nour Ahmed Al Nour, a relatively timid figure compared to Adil Al Baz and a man with a record of loyalty to the Islamic cause. He is rumoured to be linked to Hassan Al Turabi, chief of the opposition Popular Congress Party. In the past year, ownership of *Al Sahafa* passed from Taha Ali Al Bashir to the London-based businessman, Siddig Wada. It is claimed that the deal was sealed under the instructions of NCP strongman, Nafie Ali Nafie. The paper’s strong points are its broad coverage of politics in states beyond Khartoum and the post-secession negotiations between North and South Sudan.
was established in 1985 by the NIF’s Mahjoub Urwa, brother of the formidable security figure Al Fatih Urwa. *Al Sudani, Alwan* and the NIF’s official mouthpiece *Al Raya* served as the NIF’s propaganda outlets during the 1986–1989 parliamentary regime. Mahjoub Urwa’s ownership ran into trouble with the authorities during the 1998/1999 split within the NCP. Following the paper’s failure to side decisively with President Al Bashir against Turabi, Urwa was subsequently financially punished, and the paper almost went bankrupt. During the early 2000s, *Al Sudani* became a favourite with Khartoum’s literati. It hosted several regime-critical voices and dedicated its culture pages to an emerging generation of poets, prose writers and critics. However, financial constraints took their toll on the publication and Urwa eventually threw in the towel. He agreed to sell a majority of *Al Sudani*’s shares to the pro-NCP business magnate Jamal Al Wali, who thus became the chairman of the executive board. The younger Dia Al Din Bilal, a journalist from *Al Ray Al Aam*, replaced Urwa as editor-in-chief.

*Al Tayar* was established in 2009 by Osman Mirghani, a journalist who began his career in *Alwan* and rose to fame as a columnist in *Al Ray Al Aam*. Mirghani is known as a reform-minded critic of the government’s performance who shares the NCP’s Islamic orientation. *Al Tayar* follows the inside story of NCP regional branches, reporting on factional disputes and incessant squabbles involving individual strongmen. He also highlights alleged corruption and embezzlement of state funds. Reporting allegation fraud and corruption, however, has become something of a commodity in Sudan’s press, with columnists and reporters being provided with confidential documents to expose politicians’ opponents. The paper has made a name for itself in this area. Osman Mirghani is editor-in-chief of *Al Tayar* and owns the majority of its shares.

*Alwan* is probably the NIF’s lasting contribution to the Sudanese press. It was established in 1985 by Hussein Khojali, who is viewed as the Islamic Movement’s star journalist. The paper was a training ground for a generation of NIF-loyal journalists and writers who went on to forge independent careers elsewhere. These included Osman Mirghani, editor-in-chief of *Al Tayar*, Al Hindi Izz Al Din, editor-in-chief of *Al Ahram Al Youm*, and Ishag Ahmed Fadlalla, a notorious *Al Intibaha* columnist. Unlike the majority of the NIF’s journalists, Khojali supported Hassan Al Turabi and his faction during the NCP’s 1998/1999 split and never severed his ties to the camp thereafter. It is believed that President Al Bashir himself ordered the closure of the publication during this time, in association with the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) attack on Omdurman in 2008, and soon after the killing of the JEM leader, Khalil Ibrahim. In three instances, the paper was punished for publishing views sympathetic with Turabi and his JEM disciples from an Islamist perspective. With the help of his standing in the Islamic Movement, Khojali always managed to get the paper back in print through a combination of petitions and pledges of good behaviour. When the paper was republished after its most recent closure, Khojali wrote a lengthy editorial promising to avoid writing about state security. The paper’s focus shifted to corruption cases and publishes frequent articles lamenting the passing of the Islamic Movement’s golden age. Hussein Khojali remains *Alwan*’s owner and editor-in-chief.
### Table 1: Political newspapers

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All numbers were provided by the National Press Council in December 2011.

### Table 2: Sports newspapers

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### Table 3: Social newspapers

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The Anti-Imperialist Front (AIF)

was a political party established in 1953 as the legal umbrella organization of the Sudanese Movement for National Liberation (SMNL), which was banned by the British-dominated colonial regime and later renamed as the Communist Party of Sudan (CPS). The AIF advocated for Sudan’s independence rather than a Nile Valley union with Egypt and for democratic rights, like the freedom of expression. It thereby appealed not only to communists but also to unaffiliated sympathizers from the urban intelligentsia, especially journalists, as well as some Southerners. Its president, Hassan Tahir Zarruq, won the only seat for the AIF in the 1953 parliamentary elections but lost it in 1958. Following that November’s military coup, the party was dissolved like all others.¹

The Anya-Nya movement

was established as a loosely knit rebel group in 1963, deriving its name from a snake poison. This guerilla army’s core members were veterans of the 1955 mutiny in Torit. Its activities contributed indirectly to the fall of General Abboud’s military regime in 1964.² With a subsequent infusion of arms from Congolese rebels, the insurgency intensified, winning popular support against the Umma-led governments’ violent attempts at a solution. While Southern politicians in exile were unable to create a unified movement, the military leaders became more and more active in political affairs.³ Starting in 1967, Colonel Joseph Lagu challenged the leadership of Emilio Taffeng and eventually became the new supreme commander, bringing together rivaling factions in a more cohesive umbrella organization, the Southern Sudanese Liberation Movement (SSLM).⁴ Thanks to material support from Israel, the SSLM managed to gain control over large parts of the Equatoria region.⁵ After the 1969 May Revolution, Colonel Jafar Numeiri’s new regime first increased military pressure but then entered into negotiations with the SSLM, which quickly resulted in the March 1972 Addis Ababa peace agreement. It granted autonomy to the South and absorbed the Anya-Nya fighters into the Sudanese army and government services.⁶ However, the peace remained fragile and mutinies of former Anya-Nya in 1975, 1976 and early 1983 culminated in the May 1983 rebellion, the beginning of the second war.⁷

The Baath Arab Socialist Party movement

in Sudan has traditionally been split into several factions along the divide between the Baath parties of Iraq and Syria, the pro-Iraqi group being predominant. Support for its Pan-Arabist and secularist programs from leftist intellectuals has waned in recent years. The military governments of Numeiri (1969-1985) and Omar Al Bashir have sometimes welcomed, sometimes persecuted Sudanese Baathists. After Bashir’s 1989 coup, dozens of party activists were arrested, but with Sudan’s backing of Iraq during the 1990/91 Gulf War, the movement enjoyed greater political freedom.⁸

⁶ Holt & Daly, see reference 1, pp. 180-183 ff. 188 ff. 201-204.
⁸ Lobban, see reference 3, p. 43.
The Communist Party of Sudan (CPS) is one of the nation’s oldest parties. By the 1920s, Marxist teachings already had found their way into Sudan through the Egyptian Communist Party.\(^9\) The CPS was formally founded as the SMNL (see AIF) in 1946, ten years before Sudan’s independence, and was soon considered to be one of the most influential communist parties in both the Middle East and Africa, reaching out to Southern Sudanese as well.\(^8\) Its Marxist vision of shifting the center of the country’s economic gravity to the peripheries had a wide influence on Sudanese political life.\(^11\) In the first general elections of 1953, a CPS member won a seat under the banner of the AIF. Under Abdel Khaïl Mahjoub’s leadership, the CPS played an instrumental role in the toppling of General Ibrahim Abboud’s military regime (1958-1964). Hence, the transitional government’s first cabinet included a number of CPS members. After the 1965 elections, the party was declared illegal again, mainly because of pressure from the Islamist ICF (see Popular Congress) but continued opposition activities from its strongholds in the universities and labor unions. In 1969, the CPS supported the May Revolution of the leftist “Free Officers” led by Colonel Numeiri. The party remained officially dissolved, but some CPS politicians entered into the government. However, in 1971, Numeiri accused the CPS of complicity in an abortive coup d’état led by CPS member Hashim El Atta. Mahjoub, Atta and many other CPS leaders were executed, and the party was once again forced to continue its activities underground.\(^12\) Following Numeiri’s overthrow thanks to a popular uprising in 1985, the CPS voiced strong opposition to the draconian September Laws, which Numeiri had introduced in 1983 under the label of Sharia, and advocated for a secular constitution. The party won three seats in the 1986 parliamentary elections. With other parties it entered into a dialogue with the mainly Southern rebels of the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) in order to find a solution for the civil war in the South that had broken out again in 1983. After the 1989 military takeover, the CPS played a prominent role in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), an umbrella of parties and forces opposed to the “National Salvation Revolution” rule of General Al Bashir. Simultaneously, it continued its activities from inside the country.\(^13\) CPS secretary general Mohamed Ibrahim Nugud, who had held the office since 1972 and stayed in hiding inside Sudan from 1994 until 2006, promoted “socialism in a multi-party system”. He passed away in March 2012.\(^14\)

The Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) is the oldest political party in Sudan, with origins dating from the first half of the 19th century when the Khatmiyya Sufi order was founded by Mohamed Osman Al Mirghani.\(^15\) In 1943 Khatmiyya followers and Ismail Al Azhari, a professor of mathematics, founded its predecessor, the urban-based Ashigga Party, which in 1952 was transformed into the secularist National Unionist Party (NUP). After a massive victory in the 1953 elections, Azhari became the first Sudanese prime minister under Anglo-Egyptian colonial rule. He led Sudan into independence in 1956, having reversed the party’s position on uniting with Egypt.\(^16\) Following the 1958 military takeover, the NUP was disbanded like all other parties. When the Abboud regime was overthrown in 1964, Azhari was elected head of state, and the NUP entered into coalition with the Umma Party. Both sectarian parties revived their traditional patronage systems. In 1967, the NUP merged with

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15 Lobban, see reference 3, pp. 41-42 & 75-76 & 158.
the Khatmiyya’s People’s Democratic Party (PDP) to form the DUP. After the 1969 “socialist” May Revolution, the DUP was again dissolved like all other parties, under the one-party rule of Numeiri’s Sudanese Socialist Union (see SSU); it continued its opposition from exile. In 1978, the DUP entered with other parties into National Reconciliation with the Numeiri regime, which was overthrown in 1985. In the 1986 parliamentary elections, the DUP won the second largest number of seats and participated in a coalition government with the Umma. The DUP’s deputy head and Khatmiyya hereditary leader Ahmed Al Mirghani, a great-grandson of the order’s founder, became president of the republic. When the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) ended the war in the South in 2005, Mirghani signed a political reconciliation agreement with the government. He returned to Sudan from exile in Egypt in 2008. The 2010 general elections showed that the DUP – like Umma – suffered both from internal factionalism and from an erosion of its traditional base. In late 2011, Mirghani led his party into a coalition government with Bashir. His son, Jafar Al Sadiq, became a presidential assistant.

is an armed opposition group in the Western region of Darfur. Its roots date from 1993 when it started establishing clandestine cells in Darfur and Khartoum. There, in 2000, the underground group secretly circulated “The Black Book”, a general critique of regional imbalance that documented the post-independence predominance of elite groups from the central Nile valley in government, commerce and the army as well as the marginalization of Westerners. The physician Dr. Khalil Ibrahim declared the founding of JEM in 2001, while completing a master’s degree in public health in the Netherlands. In April 2003, a joint force of JEM and the Sudan Liberation Army (SLA) started the rebellion in Darfur by attacking the air base in El Fasher. Viewed by some as the armed wing of the Islamist Popular Congress (see PC), many JEM activists had in fact been followers of PC leader Sheikh Hassan Al Turabi and have retained his revolutionary radicalism, while denying ongoing affiliation. Ibrahim himself had held ministerial posts in state governments during the 1990s and was committed to the counterinsurgency in Southern Sudan before his disenchantment with the ruling National Congress Party (see NCP). There are persistent rumors that Turabi keeps close links with JEM through his Germany-based deputy Ali Al Haj. Nevertheless, JEM’s refusal of a separation of religion and politics has made it appear even more Islamist than the NCP itself. Unlike the SLA, JEM has declared a national rather than regional agenda, fighting for power in Khartoum. However, JEM’s ethnic tendency has been at least as significant as its Islamist roots, since most of its supporters are from the Kobe Zagawa group in Northeastern Darfur. Although it has suffered several splits along clan lines and opportunistic alliances, it is more disciplined than other rebel groups and became the leading force after 2005, escalating the war with support from Chad. In 2006, JEM became involved in the civil war in Chad on the side of President Idriss Déby, himself a Zagawa.

18 Alier, see reference 7, pp. 256, 288-295.
23 Johnson, see reference 19, pp. xviii & 177-179.
Two years later, it launched an attack on Khartoum, which failed militarily but raised its national standing and broadened its base. In 2009/2010, however, a rapprochement between Chad and Sudan deprived JEM of its bases and supply lines in Chad, and Ibrahim was expelled to Libya. JEM had been accused of acting as mercenaries for the Libyan dictator Muammar Al Gaddafi, but JEM claimed that Ibrahim was kept under house arrest in Tripoli. After Gaddafi’s downfall, Ibrahim escaped to Sudan where he was killed by an air-strike in December 2011. He is succeeded by his brother Jibril. JEM has joined the rebel Sudan Revolutionary Front, an alliance with the SPLM-Northern Sector and the main two SLA factions. It has recently been fighting in Southern Kordofan for regime change, allegedly with support from South Sudan and Uganda.

The Just Peace Forum (JPF)

is a radically Islamist and increasingly autonomous splinter party of the ruling NCP. It appeared on the political stage as a vociferous critic of the CPA soon after its signing by the NCP and the SPLM in 2005. It is headed by Al Tayeb Mustafa, a veteran NCP figure and President Bashir’s maternal uncle. Its main forum is the best-selling daily paper Intibaha, which is notorious for its aggressive rhetoric. The JPF advocated for the partition of Sudan on the grounds that north and south constitute irreconcilable poles – racially, religiously, culturally and politically – and voiced the fear that the SPLM might eventually dominate the country. Once South Sudan seceded, JPF undertook the expulsion of the remnant SPLM in (north) Sudan and called for the immediate ban of the party in the country. Today it agitates for the enforcement of strict Sharia in the country, a military solution for the conflicts in South Kordofan and the Blue Nile and the severing of all ties with South Sudan. It championed the campaign against the June 2011 framework signed with the SPLM in (north) Sudan and is currently leading a fierce campaign against the March 2012 agreement on the status of nationals in the other state, signed by Sudan and South Sudan in Addis Ababa.

The ruling National Congress Party (NCP)

was formally founded in 1998 and has been led by President Al Bashir ever since. Its Islamist roots go back to the Muslim Brotherhood, which was founded in the 1940s, the Islamic Charter Front (ICF), which was formed in the 1960s, and its successor party the National Islamic Front (see PC). Bashir came to power in 1989 through a military takeover, the “National Salvation Revolution” (Ingaz) that opposed the traditional sectarianism in Sudanese politics. A power struggle between Bashir and long-time Islamist leader Sheikh Turabi resulted in the departure of Turabi’s followers, who later founded the Popular Congress (see PC). While strongly criticized by the opposition for its domestic policies, especially its harsh reaction to the rebellion in Darfur (see JEM), the NCP has been widely credited for settling the second civil war in the South through the CPA in 2005. In the 2010 general elections, which were boycotted by some major parties, the NCP won 324 out of 450 seats in the national parliament and majorities in all the state assemblies. While the polls were criticized by observers for legal and administrative flaws, many analysts agree that the result did represent more or less the extent to which the NCP enjoys popular support, especially

34 Lobban, see reference 3, pp. 205-206.
in the center of the country. After the secession of the South, the NCP included the DUP and some smaller parties in the government. In early 2012, the party's Leadership Council approved a major reshuffle in its top rank, apparently to accommodate some headmen left out of the cabinet, and to integrate influential functionaries of the Islamic Movement, especially younger members with regard to the Arab Spring. The main competing factions are led by First Vice President Ali Osman Taha and Presidential Advisor Dr. Nafi Ali Nafi.


37 Collins, see reference 4, p. 226; Sidahmed & Sidahmed, see reference 10, p. 62.

38 Reshie, see reference 9, p. 186.

39 Niblock, see reference 17, pp. 227-230.


41 Lobban, see reference 3, pp. 205-206.


43 Flint & de Waal, see reference 22, p. 103.
was one of the two main Southern Sudanese political parties in the 1960s (see also SANU). It already operated underground during the Abboud dictatorship, drawing upon Southern civil servants. After the fall of the military regime, the SF held three ministerial posts in the transitional government. False rumors about the fate of its chairman Clement Mboro, then minister of interior, sparked “Black Sunday” in December 1964, which would be considered the worst massacre between Southerners and Northerners in Khartoum for the next 50 years.44 During the 1965 Round Table Conference on the future of the South, the SF represented a number of exiled Southern leaders, many of whom favored secession, and advocated for a plebiscite in the South to decide between federation, union and independence. However, these calls were rebuffed by Northern parties,45 and the SF boycotted the 1967 parliamentary elections. In 1968, it won ten seats and gained two cabinet posts.46 After the 1969 May Revolution, it was officially dissolved like all other parties, but in 1972, the first head of the autonomous government of the Southern Sudan, Abel Alier, rose from its ranks.47 The SF does not have a direct successor, yet the South Sudan Democratic Forum traces its origins back to it.48

was one of the oldest parties in Sudan and continues to exist in the newly independent Republic of South Sudan. It was founded in exile in 1962 as the Sudan African Closed Districts National Union to promote autonomy for the South.49 The moderate wing of SANU won ten parliamentary seats in the 1967 elections but suffered from the assassination of its chairman, William Deng, the following year.50 Subsequent to the 1972 Addis Ababa agreement, which ended the first civil war and granted autonomy to the South, politicians of SANU, which was officially dissolved under the one-party rule of the SSU, gained various government positions.51 During the 1986-1989 parliamentary period, SANU promoted negotiations with the rebel SPLM/A.52 After the 1989 military takeover, SANU was officially banned, but its leadership stayed in Khartoum and continued its opposition to the government. Following the 2005 CPA that ended the second civil war, SANU remained an outspoken promoter of “Unity in Diversity” and of federalism until mid-2010,53 when it finally reversed itself to support separation.54

was established in January 1972 by the “Free Officers”, who had taken over power in 1969, as the only mass political organization. It was modeled after the Arab Socialist Union of Egyptian president Gamal Abdel Nasser. Half a year after an abortive coup by communist officers (see CPS), the founding of the SSU was an attempt to establish a popular base for the presidential system of the “May Regime.” It was supposed to replace the traditional multi-party system and break the power of the sectarian parties by urging the population to abandon traditional affiliations with religious orders in favor of the SSU.55 Its original conception was to constitute a vehicle for shifting the balance of wealth and power through the broadly representative nature of the SSU and its allied institutions like youth and women leagues, as a union of the working class (farmers, workers, professionals, intellectuals and the army) rather than a party of special interests. In the first few years, the one-party system did advance Sudan towards national integration and secularization, especially with the 1972 Addis Ababa agreement that ended...
the first war in the South. However, after three coup attempts by sectarian and Islamist forces, the SSU entered into “National Reconciliation” in 1977 and co-opted those opposition leaders in its organization and state positions. Thereafter, politics became increasingly Islamist and Sudan remained a socialist republic in name only. At the same time, the SSU built up a highly personal cult around its chairman, President Jafar Numeiri. Its claimed objective of transforming society through an all-inclusive participation of the population did not materialize. Instead, its imposed system of committees and congresses, starting from the smallest territorial unit, created a vast, parallel bureaucracy. The SSU became a symbol of privilege and corruption, resulting in the 1985 popular uprising. The army eventually sided with the protesters, overthrew Numeiri and abolished the SSU.56

and its then military wing, the Sudan People’s Liberation Army (SPLA), were formed in 1983 when Colonel Dr. John Garang de Mabior was sent to quell a mutiny of Southern troops in the Southern town of Bor but instead set himself at the head of the insurgency. During the first civil war, Garang had joined the Southern rebel movement of Anya-Nya-I and was absorbed into the regular army after the Addis Ababa peace agreement of 1972. The 1983 rebellion not only was sparked by President Numeiri’s policy of eroding the Addis accord and of Islamizing the country but was also a result of internal power struggles by Southern politicians.57 In the beginning, the SPLM defined itself as a national movement with a Marxist orientation that was not confined to the South. It declared as its principal objective: “The New Sudan,” a united and secular state that provides social, economic and political justice for the marginalized peoples of the peripheries. Hence, the SPLM also attracted support from Northern Sudan, particularly the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile. After Numeiri’s overthrow in 1985, the SPLM entered into negotiations with the main Northern parties. However, all peace initiatives failed because of political wrangling in Khartoum.58 By the time the 1989 “National Salvation Revolution” took over power in Khartoum, the SPLA controlled the largest part of Southern Sudan. In 1990, the SPLM joined the opposition umbrella NDA. In 1991, however, the SPLA lost the military initiative due to both an internal split and regime change in Ethiopia, which had been its main supporter. Peace talks with the new government failed, but in 1995, the SPLA went on the military offensive again, while its NDA-allies opened another front in Eastern Sudan.59 In 2002, the SPLM and the Khartoum government signed the first Machakos protocol, which paved the way for the 2005 CPA. However, briefly after his inauguration as first vice president of the Republic and as president of the semi-autonomous South, SPLM/A-leader Dr. Garang died in a helicopter crash. He was succeeded by his military chief of staff, Salva Kiir Mayardit, a co-founder of the SPLA/M. Subsequently, the secessionists within the party gained the upper hand, and the SPLM parted from Garang’s concept of a united “New Sudan”.60 When South Sudan became an independent republic on July 9, 2011, the ruling SPLM formally severed ties with its Northern Sector, but it is widely assumed that military support for its struggle continues unofficially.61

Party portraits

The Sudan People’s Liberation Movement (SPLM)

The Umma Party

is one of the oldest parties in Sudan, with origins dating back to the late 19th century when Mohamed Ahmed from Dongola led the Mahdist movement to victory over the Ottoman colonialists. His son, Sayed Abdel Rahman, who was also the spiritual leader of the Mahdist sufi order of the Ansar, founded the Umma in 1945 and became its patron, with his son Siddiq serving as party president. Umma’s main objective was the promotion of Sudanese independence against those who favored unity with Egypt. In the

57 Alier, see reference 7, pp. 261-280; Lagu, see reference 5, pp. 116-478.
58 Lesch, see reference 13, pp. 88-109.
59 Johnson, see reference 19, pp. 100-107.
60 Ibid., pp. 167-180.
first elections of 1953, it won the second largest number of seats, mainly in Darfur and Kordofan. As the major opposition party to the NUP, it managed to achieve its aim of the country’s independence in 1956. Subsequently, it formed a coalition with the PDP (see DUP); Umma’s Abdallah Bey Khalil assumed the office of prime minister. His government was overthrown in 1958 by the military, which banned all parties thereafter. When General Abboud’s regime was overthrown in 1964, the Umma re-emerged on the political stage under the leadership of Siddiq’s son Sadiq Al Mahdi, an Oxford graduate of history. In the 1965 elections, it won the greatest number of seats with its strongly anti-communist stance and formed a coalition government under Mohamed Ahmed Mahjoub, a famous lawyer and poet. In 1966, Sadiq became the youngest prime minister of his time but was replaced by Mahjoub one year later due to an inner-party dispute between his modernists and the traditionalists of his uncle, the Imam El Hadi El Mahdi. Mahjoub’s government was ousted in 1969 through the coup d’état of leftist army officers under Jafar Numeiri (see SSU). During the initial phase of Numeiri’s May Revolution both Umma and Ansar suffered severe repression. In 1971, Numeiri had the Ansar’s headquarters at Aba Island bombed, killing a large number of Ansar followers. Later, the Imam El Hadi was killed; Sadiq managed to escape into exile. From there he organized armed opposition to Numeiri’s regime, which reacted in 1977 by offering National Reconciliation. Sadiq returned to Sudan but soon went into open opposition, calling for an end to the one-party rule. In 1984, he was imprisoned for his criticism of the draconian September Laws that Numeiri imposed under the label of Sharia. Following Numeiri’s overthrow in 1985, Umma won by far the largest number of seats in the 1986 elections and formed a coalition with the DUP, in which Sadiq became prime minister for the second time. Nevertheless, all peace initiatives with the rebel SPLM failed because of political wrangling in Khartoum. In 1989, Sadiq was overthrown in a coup that was masterminded by his brother-in-law, Sheikh Turabi, and imprisoned until 1991. The Umma played a central role in forming the opposition umbrella NDA but left it in 1999, and Sadiq returned to Sudan from exile. He pulled out of the 2010 general elections and remained in opposition. However, his eldest son, Abd Al Rahman, became President Bashir’s advisor in late 2011.

For further details and more party profiles, see the Sudan Electionnaire at [http://sudan.electionnaire.com](http://sudan.electionnaire.com)

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62 Lobban, see reference 3, pp. 23-24 & 176-178 & 300-301.
63 Thomas, see reference 16, pp. 104-134.
64 Lesch, see reference 13, p. 53.