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Chapter 11

Colonial Morality and Local Traditions: British Policies and Sudanese Attitudes Towards Alcohol, 1898–1956

The aim of this chapter¹ is to shed light on a topic that has received little attention in the scholarly literature on modern Sudanese history; namely interventions by the colonial state in the social arena and its efforts to control and shape the behaviour of its Sudanese subjects. In particular, the chapter looks at how British colonial officials tried to control the production and consumption of alcoholic drinks and the impact of these policies, and how the various segments of Sudanese society responded. The main argument is that the struggle around alcohol illuminates the interconnection between the issues of race, class, citizenship, and power, and provides important insights into the construction of Sudanese identity and engagement with colonial modernity. Like other colonies in Africa, Sudan was the site of an intense struggle over the manufacture, circulation, and consumption of alcohol. As we will see, the British efforts to regulate and restrict access to alcohol provoked a strong resistance from a broad section of the Sudanese population. However, this important dimension of the colonial experience and the daily struggles of the popular classes against the colonial authorities' efforts to control their behaviour has received little attention in the voluminous literature on Sudanese nationalism and anti-colonial resistance, which has tended to focus on the activities of the elite and the political parties and organisations. The discussion will also illustrate the paternalistic attitude adopted by the British and their stereotypical assumptions about Sudanese society and cultural traditions.

The chapter focuses on the capital city of Khartoum, which includes the towns of Khartoum North and Omdurman. Since the 19th century, these three towns have been the political, economic, and cultural hub of Sudan and a microcosm of this diverse country. During the period of Anglo-Egyptian rule (1898–1956), the capital became home to a mixed population that included Sudanese from various social, ethnic, and regional backgrounds as well as Europeans, Egyptians, Middle Easterners, Ethiopians, and immigrants from the neighbouring regions. While many

¹ An earlier version of this chapter was presented at the Africa Institute in Sharjah, United Arab Emirates, in May 2022. I am grateful to the faculty and fellows at the Institute and to Professor Carina Ray of Brandeis University for their valuable comments and suggestions.

foreigners were engaged in commercial activities, the majority of Sudanese were employed by the government as labourers, civil servants, soldiers, and policemen, while others worked as small traders, taxi drivers, sellers of food and local alcoholic drinks, prostitutes, and other non-wage workers. The study is based on a range of unpublished archives and published materials. The archival materials were gathered from the National Records Office in Khartoum (NRO), which is a rich source of information on all aspects of Sudanese history, including the official records of the British colonial administration. The published materials include books, magazines, newspapers, articles, and memoirs. Of particular importance for this study is the pioneering book on the *indāya* (drinking house) by the late Sudanese folklorist and ethnographer Al-Ṭayyib Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib (1934–2007). Another publication of special interest is Ḥasan Najīla's *Malāmiḥ min al-Mujtama' al-Sūdānī* ([1959] 2005), which offers a wealth of information on social life in Khartoum in the 1920s and 1930s.²

This study is informed by the extensive literature on alcohol in Africa under European colonial rule. A number of scholars, such as Emmanuel Akyeampong, Charles Ambler, Chima Korieh, Justin Willis, Simon Heap, Ayodeji Olukoju, and Lynn Schler, have explored the connections between the use of alcohol and power in colonial Africa as well as its role in defining the frontiers of law, culture, identity, and consciousness. These scholars have shed significant light on the struggle around alcohol in different parts of Africa: for instance, the consumption of alcohol in settler colonies in Southern Africa has been examined in the context of race relations and nationalist politics.³

European concerns over the impact of alcohol on African people can be traced back to the era of the Atlantic slave trade and the 19th century abolitionist movement. Humanitarian groups in Europe argued that the shipment of alcohol to Africa would become a health hazard, encourage drunkenness and laziness, and undermine the European “civilising mission” there. These forces began to lobby for prohibition on moral and political grounds. The Brussels General Act of 1889–1890 on the slave trade prohibited the sale and manufacture of spirituous liquors across a vast zone of Africa that extended from the 20th degree north latitude to the 22nd degree south latitude (Le Ghait 1892: 291). The question of liquor in Africa also figured prominently in the Saint-Germain-en-Laye Convention of September 1919, which was signed by the United States, Belgium, Britain, France, Italy, Japan, and

² Ḥasan Najīla was a well-known Sudanese teacher and a prolific author and journalist whose writings date back to the 1920s. One of his most important books is *Malāmiḥ min al-Mujtama' al-Sūdānī*.

³ The extensive literature on alcohol in Africa includes Crush and Ambler 1992; Akyeampong 1996; West 1997; Korieh 2003; Willis 2002 and 2005; and Mager 2010.

Portugal in the aftermath of the First World War. Article I of the agreement stated that the signing parties should restrict the trafficking of liquor in the “territories which are or may be subjected to their control throughout the whole of the continent of Africa with the exception of Algiers, Tunis, Morocco, Libya, Egypt, and the Union of South Africa.”⁴ To implement the provisions of the agreement, colonial governments in various parts of the continent adopted draconian, restrictive, and racially discriminatory liquor laws that forbade Africans from consuming European spirits. These policies assumed that drunken Africans would behave in a disorderly fashion and defy the colonial authorities. In Southern Africa, for instance, the production and consumption of local drinks were criminalised, and thousands of women beer brewers were systematically arrested and prosecuted. This was especially the case in apartheid-era South Africa, where the consumption of alcohol was intricately linked to the emergence of a modern industrial system based on mining and the exploitation of migrant labour. Drinking was considered to be a source of dangerous disorder, indiscipline, social deterioration, and human degradation (Crush and Ambler 1992: 1–30).

The literature has also demonstrated that colonial policies on alcohol faced considerable resistance from local people, who found various ways to defy and circumvent them. In his study of alcohol in Ghana, Emmanuel Akyeampong makes the claim that the struggle over alcohol provides important insights into the culture of power under colonial rule, and argues that the resistance by the local population to colonial policies on alcohol cannot be separated from the broader popular protests against the local and colonial hierarchies of power. He points out that the link between popular resistance to alcohol policies and the nationalist movement in Ghana was manifested in the anti-colonial protests of the 1940s and 1950s (Akyeampong 1996: xv). Jonathan Crush and Charles Ambler have also argued that alcohol became a weapon of domination by the colonial powers as well as a potent form of resistance by local Africans. In their view, the failure of colonial governments to control the use of alcohol by their African subjects attested to African agency in shaping local processes during the colonial era. As they put it:

[The] ubiquitous daily struggles over alcohol production and consumption, and occasional violent conflicts between brewers and police, were surface manifestations of a deep rejection of state interference and control in the arena of drink. Illegal drinking places became sites for what James Scott describes as the “hidden transcript” of the dominated: a discourse of opposition that encompassed not only the web of alcohol legislation, but the shared experience of racial oppression and economic exploitation that bound drinkers together (Crush and Ambler 1992: 3–4, 27).

4 “Convention Relating to the Liquor Traffic in Africa and Protocol.” *The American Journal of International Law* 15, no. 4, Supplement: Official Document, October 1921: 322–28.

Similarly, Lynn Schler (2002) has shown that the attempt to control the distribution and consumption of alcohol in Cameroon was clearly linked to the wider efforts by the German and French regimes to shape social, economic, and political processes in the colony. In her view, colonial alcohol policies and the local response can be understood through the prism of popular culture, because drinking houses and bars in certain quarters of Douala were the most significant places for public gatherings and cultural exchanges. In this way, popular culture might help scholars recover the experiences and cultures of non-elite groups and communities that were often excluded from political history (Schler 2002).

The scholarly works that deal with the struggle over alcohol in Muslim societies in Africa and the Middle East are of particular significance for this study. For instance, Ayodeji Olukoju (1996) and Simon Heap (1998) have examined the prohibition policies of the British colonial authorities in predominantly Muslim Northern Nigeria, and have shown that both Muslim and non-Muslim groups defied the prohibition laws and consumed locally-made drinks. One of the most important recent works on the subject is the edited volume by Elife Biçer-Deveci and Philippe Bourmaud (2022), which explores the consumption of alcohol in North Africa and the Middle East since the 19th century. Providing examples from different parts of the Middle East, the authors draw attention to the question of how and why alcohol became a catalyst for social and political divisions in the contemporary Middle East, and challenge the notion that these divisions are by-products of the overall influence of Islam on society and the assumption that Islam had a monolithic influence, regardless of context and socioeconomic transformation. They argue that the focus on Islamic norms and religious mobilisation tends to conceal the disputes about alcohol as a social struggle revealing all forms of domination in North Africa and the Middle East as much as everywhere else:

[W]e claim here that alcohol unveils the political content of religious norms. As such, disputes on alcohol are essential to grasp the relations of power that structure the societies of the Middle East and North Africa (Biçer-Deveci and Bourmaud 2022: 14).

In another chapter in the same volume, Philippe Chaudat examines the use of alcohol and religious practices in the town of Meknes in Morocco, and highlights how different understandings and attitudes towards alcohol consumption in Moroccan society co-exist. On the one hand, there are Moroccan Muslims who advocate strict adherence to the religious text and oppose any consumption, while on the other, there is segment of Moroccan Muslims who interpret Islamic rules less strictly and see no contradiction between the practice of their religious rites and the sale and consumption of alcohol. In other words, these people read the same religious text in a different way, and have reconciled their drinking and religious practices within their own world (Chaudat 2022).

Several scholars have highlighted the fact that alcohol has deep historical roots in several parts of the Muslim world, and have pointed out that Islamic rules regarding alcohol were never fully implemented until the 20th century. Writing on Turkey, for instance, François Georgeon (2002) has pointed out that drinking in public spaces was a normal practice in Istanbul in the 19th century. Omar Foda (2019) has shown that beer was consumed publicly in cafés in Egypt and that various brands were advertised in newspapers. In short, these and other studies have underscored the fact that drinking alcohol is a part of local tradition in many Muslim societies. In fact, this was also the case in Sudan, where the manufacture and consumption of alcoholic drinks has deep roots that date back to the ancient Nubian civilisation, as archaeological excavations have revealed. The brewing of alcoholic drinks continued even after the spread of Islam in Nubia from the 7th century A.D. According to the late Sudanese historian Muḥammad Ibrāhīm Abū Salīm (1982), despite vehement opposition from the religious establishment such as the *‘ulamā’*, the consumption of alcohol remained an integral part of life among the Nubians.

The use of alcohol by Sudanese Muslims was referred to by the Sudanese scholar Ḥaydar Ibrāhīm ‘Alī as “popular secularism,” which was a simpler and more tolerant form of Islam, as opposed to the orthodox and legalistic type advocated by the *‘ulamā’* and the religious establishment. According to ‘Alī (2011), the prevalence of this pattern can be attributed to the way Islam spread in Sudan and to the resilience of local cultural traditions.⁵

The Production and Consumption of Alcohol in Sudan

It is important to point out that consumption of alcohol in Sudan had an important social, cultural, and political significance. People gathered to drink during social events such as weddings, the harvesting of crops, the building of houses, the construction of *sawāqī* (waterwheels), and on other occasions. These drinking sessions became a time for meeting friends, exchanging news, entertainment, reciting poetry, singing, and so forth. As will be shown later, drinking venues became sites of political activism, debates, mobilisation, and exchanges of news during the period of British colonial rule.

5 Ḥaydar Ibrāhīm ‘Alī, “Al-Sūdāniyyūn: Bayn al-Tadayyun wa-l-‘Almāniyya al-Sha’biyya.” *Sudanile*, 26 May 2011, <https://sudanile.com/السودانيون-بين-التدين-والعلمانية-الش> (June 20, 2022).

There were several types of Nubian alcoholic drink. The most popular was called *al-dakkāy*, and was consumed during various seasons. It was made from dates, and was prepared in a clay jar known in Nubian as *kube* (Abū Salīm 1982: 48). The second type was called *al-nabeit*, which was also made from dates, but was stronger than *dakkāy* and took much longer to prepare. The third was *marīsa*, or *mersa* in Nubian, which was commonly drunk in many parts of Sudan. The fourth was *faqīriyya*, and was supposed to contain no alcohol, as it was given to *fuqarā'* (sing. *faqīr*) or religious individuals.

The recipes for *marīsa* varied from one part of Sudan to another. In the far north, it was made from dates, while in other parts of the country it was made from a wide variety of grains and fruits. In rural areas, brewing was primarily women's work, and both freeborn and enslaved women participated in the process. Women soaked the grain, ground it, cooked it, and mixed it with sprouted sorghum to make the mash, which often fermented into a thicker beer. It was an elaborate and time-consuming process that would take several days, and even weeks. When brewing for a large social occasion such as a wedding or circumcision, women from the neighbourhood gathered in the household of the host family to help them. Another common drink in many parts of Sudan was *'aragī*, a hard distilled liquor with a high alcoholic content that was made from dates or grain and was produced and sold by women, including former slaves and poor women, who depended on it for their livelihoods. European alcoholic drinks were introduced during the Ottoman-Egyptian rule in the 19th century and the British administration in the 20th century. However, as will be discussed later, with few exceptions Sudanese were not allowed to consume European drinks, which became a major source of contention with the colonial government.

The Evolution of the *Anādī*

Alcoholic drinks in Sudan were sold in *anādī* (singular: *indāya*), or local bars. The history and operation of *anādī* have been best described in the pioneering study by al-Ṭayyib Muḥammad al-Ṭayyib ([1974] 2004). The origin of the name *indāya* is unclear, but it is believed to have come from the Arabic word *nādī* or *muntadā*, a gathering place for social occasions. *Anādī* seem to have existed in Sudan for many centuries, as there are several references to them during the period of the Funj Kingdom, which ruled the Northern and Eastern parts of Sudan from the early 15th century until the country was conquered by the Ottoman-Egyptian Mehmet Ali in 1821 (al-Ṭayyib [1974] 2004: 2–4). During the Ottoman-Egyptian rule (1821–1885), *anādī* proliferated in Sudan alongside the expansion of commerce and the rise

of urban centres such as Khartoum, El Obeid, Berber, Shendi, and other towns. However, they were despised by Ottoman-Egyptian officials, who confined them to certain parts of cities and called them *karakhāna*, or dirty place (al-Ṭayyib [1974] 2004: 5). During the Mahdiyya (1885–1898), the Khalifa adopted strict policies towards what he viewed as “evil” practices, particularly the consumption of alcohol and the use of tobacco. According to al-Ṭayyib, the Khalifa’s policies forced many people to drink clandestinely. In the Meroë region, for instance, *marīsa* drinkers had to hide on various islands in the Nile (al-Ṭayyib [1974] 2004: 38). Under British colonial rule in the 20th century, however, *anādī* were organised and their owners were required to obtain a licence in order to operate them. In urban centres, they were located in certain quarters outside residential areas and were subject to inspections and various rules (al-Ṭayyib [1974] 2004).

The *indāya* was not just a place for drinking: it was also an institution, with elaborate working structures, organisation, protocols, etiquettes, and rituals. The work in the *indāya* was performed by a team of women and men, which included the *shaykha*, the owner and supervisor of the place, who was responsible for obtaining a licence and paying taxes to the government. She was fully in charge of the entire operation, including producing the *marīsa*, providing cooking utensils and seats, supervising the bartenders, and collecting money from customers. The *shaykha* had an assistant, or agent, who ran the establishment when she was not there. Other workers included women bartenders and men who were responsible for carrying water and collecting wood. The employees were paid according to a special system: once a week, an employee would receive the profits generated from the sale of *marīsa* on that day, while the *shaykha* would receive a fixed amount. Payday was usually the day on which the *indāya* had the largest number of customers and the highest revenue. Sales of *marīsa* usually peaked on Fridays in cities and on market days in rural areas. (Al-Ṭayyib [1974] 2004: 11, 20–23).

Anādī owners also devised a particular advertising system. When the drinks had been made, the owner of the *indāya* would raise a flag or banner indicating that the premises were open and ready to receive customers. They usually opened at around 10 a.m. The raising of the flag would be accompanied by drumming, singing, and wailing. These songs were called *duhla*, and were songs of praise glorifying *marīsa* drinking and applauding those who consumed it (Al-Ṭayyib [1974] 2004: 5–6). The drumming and singing were marketing strategies employed to lure customers.

The customers of *anādī* were exclusively men, who sat in small groups called *tāyāt* (sing. *tāya*) and were usually friends, co-workers, or artisans such as leather workers, fishermen, or porters. Each *tāya* had a leader who was recognised by the owner of the *indāya*. This leader was responsible for distributing drinks to the members of his group, collecting money from them, and paying the *shaykha*. He enjoyed a number of privileges: for instance, while members of the *tāya* would sit on straw mats, he sat on

a stool. He was also usually accompanied by a young female bartender, who would sit with him and entertain him. If other men flirted with her or talked to her the leader would become angry, and fights would break out (Al-Ṭayyib [1974] 2004).

The drinks were served by young female bartenders who would go around the members of the *tāyāt*, provide them with drinks, and entice them to drink more by singing them songs of praise. Since the consumption of a large amount of *marīsa* was considered to be a mark of both prestige and masculinity, customers would continue to drink, and would sometimes become so intoxicated that they would order more drinks than they could afford, which often became a source of quarrels with the owner. If a customer did not have enough money to pay for his drinks, he would be asked to pawn some of his possessions, such as his knife, stick, or turban, which he could only retrieve after paying his debt. If he failed to pay, the *shaykha* would shame him by placing his pawned possessions in front of the *indāya* for everyone to see (Al-Ṭayyib [1974] 2004: 20–23).

Drinking in *indāya* followed certain protocols. If someone from outside the group came to join in, he would be offered three drinks as a courtesy. The first was called *ʿAmāra*, who was a famous ruler of the Funj Sultanate, the second was called *Dikayn*, who was another Funj leader, and the third was named after *Galbūs*, an army general who was known for his toughness and was considered to be a symbol of evil. After consuming the first and second drinks, the interloper had the option of asking the group to allow him to join them or leaving, but if he took the third drink without joining the group or refused to pay his share, he would be asked to leave or be thrown out (Al-Ṭayyib [1974] 2004: 4).

The protocols also included certain rules of behaviour that were taught to new and young customers by veterans. They included the following (Al-Ṭayyib [1974] 2004: 17):

- First, one should not fall asleep during the drinking session as this is considered the most degrading thing for a man
- Second, do not sit near the door: it is a source of evil
- Third, sit on your saddle: this is because another intoxicated customer may confuse it with his own and take it
- Fourth, always sit with your back against the wall, in case fighting breaks out
- Fifth, always keep your stick on your legs, as this is your only weapon
- Sixth, keep your eyes on your donkey
- Seventh, never take off your shoes: it is socially unacceptable
- Eighth, do not talk too much: talking makes you drunk quickly and can also be a source of misfortune
- Ninth, when the drinks are passed around, do not skip; this is a sign of weakness.

Consumption of the various types of alcoholic drinks reflected the social distinctions in Sudanese society. For instance, in addition to *anādī* there were also illegal

clandestine drinking houses called *karri* (secret), where drinks were sold to wealthy and notable individuals who did not want to be seen publicly in the *anādi* (Al-Ṭayyib [1974] 2004: 136). In addition, while *marīsa* remained the most popular drink among the working-class and low-income population, the educated class, civil servants, professionals, and other elites frowned on it, preferring *ʿaragī* or imported European drinks. Instead of going to the *anādi*, some of these elites gathered in the so-called “salons” that became commonplace in urban centres like Khartoum in the 20th century. These salons can be seen as an “upscale *anādi*”, and were run by women who served alcohol and provided entertainment in their homes. They became gathering places for members of the Sudanese intelligentsia, poets, writers, singers, and activists, who met to drink, recite poetry, sing, and discuss politics. They also provided a space for these Sudanese to consume either *ʿaragī* or prohibited imported European liquors and wines, a topic that will be examined later in the chapter. One of the most famous salons in Omdurman was owned by a woman named Shūl bint Ḥilwa, who became known as Fawz (see Osman chapter here). Her salon was described in some detail by Ḥasan Najīla ([1959] 2005: 148–161), and a biography of her was written by Ḥasan al-Jizūli (2013). Fawz was noted for her charm, elegance, and sophistication. She did not just serve drinks: she also sang and participated in the discussions and debates among her guests. It is not surprising that her salon attracted some of the most prominent intellectuals and anti-colonial activists, such as the legendary Sudanese poet and singer Khalīl Farah, ‘Alī ‘Abd al-Laṭīf, Muḥī al-Dīn Jamāl, Tawfīq Ṣāliḥ Jibrīl, and many others, who discussed politics, planned their activities, and produced leaflets (Najīla ([1959] 2005: 152). Although Fawz’s salon attained great notoriety, there were also several others in various parts of Khartoum, Omdurman, and Khartoum North.

Struggles around Alcohol under British Colonial Rule

Following the Anglo-Egyptian conquest of Sudan in 1898, the colonial government began to introduce policies to control the consumption of imported European alcoholic beverages such as whisky, gin, brandy, and other spirits, as well as locally made alcoholic drinks. In May 1899, a Liquor Licence Ordinance was introduced that stated that no one may import, trade in, or sell wine, spirits, or other alcoholic liquors without a licence.⁶ Later, the Native Liquor Ordinance of 1903 forbade the

⁶ National Records Office [NRO], Khartoum, Sudan, Civil Secretary [Civsec] 1/43/2/7, Civil Secretary to Governor General, 12 March 1923.

manufacture and sale of all drinks, including *marīsa*, without a licence. Additional prohibition laws were introduced in March 1908 that limited the consumption of imported European spirits to foreigners and the social clubs of government employees and colonial officials. Another law, the Native Liquors Act, which was introduced in 1919, prohibited the manufacture, sale, or possession of *'aragī* and *marīsa* without a licence. The punishment for a violation was imprisonment for up to one year, a fine, or both.

To implement the Saint-Germain-en-Laye Convention of 1919, the British authorities issued a Liquor Licence Ordinance in 1922. This Ordinance went beyond the requirements of the Saint-Germain Convention and prohibited the sale of any liquor to Sudanese citizens, including locally-made drinks such as *'aragī*. The Ordinance also established several categories of licence, including an A licence, which allowed the consumption of alcohol on and off the premises, and a B licence, which permitted consumption off the premises. The law empowered the Governor-General, the highest authority in the country,⁷ to exempt certain categories of Sudanese from the prohibition. These included commissioned army officers and senior civil servants such as assistant District Commissioners.⁸ Sudanese members of clubs that included Europeans were allowed to consume alcohol on these premises, with no distinction being made between them and their foreign counterparts. This was the case with the government employees club in Wad Medani, the only club with a majority Sudanese membership that sold European liquors.⁹

Despite these prohibitions, local Sudanese were able to find ways to circumvent the prohibition by obtaining European liquor from licenced individuals or people working in bars and hotels, a pattern that was confirmed in police reports from the 1930s. For instance, a Sudanese man named Faql 'Abd al-Wahhāb was found with a bottle of whisky that he claimed to have received from a bartender at the Sudan Club. Two Portuguese cooks, John Fernandis and John Nabat Damalo, were convicted of supplying beer to three Sudanese servants. A Greek contractor named Stavos Papadopoulos in Khartoum North was convicted of supplying beer to a Sudanese named Sharīf Maḥjūb. Two prostitutes, Fāṭima b. Muḥammad Ḥabīb and Ḥabiba Abāba Jabrū, were found in possession of four bottles of whisky to be supplied to their clients; they claimed that the bottles had been left in their house by *khawājāt* (a Sudanese term for white Europeans).¹⁰

⁷ It should be pointed out that this office was exclusively occupied by Britons throughout the Anglo-Egyptian rule.

⁸ NRO, Civsec 1/43/2/7, Note on Liquor Legislation, Civil Secretary, 12 August 1941.

⁹ NRO, Civsec 1/43/1, The Official's Club, Wad Medani, by D.H. Hibbert, 28 November 1937.

¹⁰ NRO, 2 Kh.P.[Khartoum Province] 26/1/1, Civil Secretary to All Governors, 19 January 1933.

Another source of liquor for Sudanese was members of the Egyptian community, who were exempted from the prohibition laws. This community included Muslims as well as many Coptic Christians. There was also a large category known as “Muwaladin” (from the Arabic word *muwalladīn*, a term that referred to persons of Egyptian parentage who were born in Sudan or persons of mixed Egyptian and Sudanese parentage. Many Muwaladin tried to obtain European liquor by claiming they were Egyptian, an issue that provoked lengthy debates among colonial officials. The matter was finally referred to the Legal Secretary of the Sudan Government, who insisted that the Muwaladin could not be considered to be Egyptians and would not be exempt from the prohibition. He defined an Egyptian as follows:

a native of Egypt is one who, whether born in that country or not, can be identified with its indigenous inhabitants by reason of his descent, language, physical characteristics and customary mode of life.¹¹

Although Egypt and other North African countries were exempted from the prohibition, the denial of this privilege to Sudanese and Muwaladin clearly showed how race and colour were used as tool of inclusion and exclusion.

There was also a considerable increase in the sale and consumption of Cypriot and Greek wines by Sudanese. In 1937, a British official asserted that at least 50 per cent of the educated class drank European alcohol regularly, and of these 10–15 per cent were addicts.¹² One of the cheapest and most popular wines that was consumed by low-income Sudanese was called “Abu Farrar”.¹³ The following statistics from the government of Sudan’s Department of Economics and Trade showed the quantities of Greek wines imported into Sudan in two years in 1920s and five years in the 1930s¹⁴ (Table 3).

According to official reports, the alcohol content of these Cypriot and Greek wines was 17 per cent.¹⁵ However, British officials had concerns about the quality and health risks of cheap Greek wines. For example, in 1939, the Governor of Khartoum Province asked the Medical Officer at the Department of Health to examine these wines to see if they were harmful and should be prohibited.¹⁶ This fear reflected the efforts of colonial officials in many parts of Africa to increase administrative control over the health and behaviour of their subjects. As Nancy Hunt (2016: 10–25) has noted in her work on the Belgian Congo, colonial officials tried to install what they

11 NRO, Civsec 1/43/2/7, Sudan Government Civil Secretary’s Office to All Governors, 19 January 1933.

12 NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/1, Educated Sudanese and European Alcohol, 18 December 1937.

13 NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/1, Legal Secretary to Civil Secretary, 1 July 1939.

14 NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/1, Legal Secretary to Civil Secretary, 1 July 1939.

15 NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/1, Acting Director of Customs to Civil Secretary, 1 July 1939.

16 NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/1, Acting Director of Customs to Civil Secretary, 1 July 1939.

Table 3: Wine imports, 1923–1938.

Year	Wine in Bulk	Wines in Bottles	Methylated Spirit
	Kilos	Kilos	Kilos
1923	20,737	44,334	no record
1928	30,393	39,463	34,202
1934	140,941	15,164	34,272
1935	267,319	24,997	50,062
1936	354,117	24,518	68,548
1937	455,396	28,464	42,723
1938	457,039	33,800	50,617

saw as efficient health control and security techniques. In March 1931, B.W. Whitfield, the Sudan Government Chemist, had already produced a report detailing the results of his examination of wine samples that had been provided to him by the Superintendent of Police. The results were as follows:

Alcohol by weight	12.8 per cent
Volume	15.8 per cent
Total extract	4 grammes per 100
Ash	0.36 per 100
Potassium Sulphate	1.78 per 100

Based on this analysis, he concluded that the wine was normal and that the high proportion of ash and the presence of potassium sulphate in such amounts indicated that the wine had been plastered. In his view, however, this amount was within the limits allowed in certain European countries such as France.¹⁷

Challenging Colonial Liquor Policies

The refusal to grant Sudanese citizens access to European liquors generated vehement opposition from Sudanese, particularly in the capital. They expressed this opposition through petitions and letters addressed to British administrators such as the District Commissioners, provincial Governors, Civil Secretary, and even the Governor-General of Sudan. These petitions were submitted by ordinary people,

¹⁷ NRO, 2 Kh.P. 1/7/167, B.W. Whitfield, Government Chemist, to Medical Officer of Health, 30 March 1931.

most of whom came from a working-class background, such as artisans, tailors, mechanics, and junior civil servants. For instance, a group of people who signed a petition in 1937 included the following names and their occupations¹⁸:

Mohammed Hassan Ali	Racquet stringer and assistant in a car repair shop
Abdel Karim Fatahalla	Barber
Zen Bur	Barber
Rashid Hamdnalla	Tailor
Ibrahim Mohmmed	Mechanic
Ibrahim Abdel Fadil	Barber
Suliman Abdel Wahab	Painter
Musa Mahmud	Murasla (messenger)
Bashir Gota	Washerman
Ramadan Hamid	Carpenter
Omer El Hag	Butcher

Following receipt of the first few petitions, British officials began to gather intelligence information about the people who wrote and signed them, including their backgrounds and activities. The government authorities focused on two figures who played a leading role in the petition-writing. The first was Muḥammad Ḥasan ‘Alī, who was nicknamed *Abū Kaffa*.¹⁹ A Nubian from Dongola, Muḥammad’s father served as a cleaner in the Governor’s palace for many years. Because of his knowledge of English, Muḥammad became a well-known petition-writer, advising anti-government activists and other protesters.²⁰ The other was ‘Abd al-Karīm Faṭḥallāh, a barber, who was referred to in official reports as “Sudani,” a term used for a person of servile origin. He was also an active petition-writer.

The British authorities reacted to these petitions with a great deal of contempt. They loathed the petitioners and despised their social and working-class background. According to a police report:

None of the signatures is that of a person of standing. Most of them are those of butchers, hairdressers, tailors, bakers, cycle dealers and other like occupations. Some are known bad characters and others are all of doubtful reputation.²¹

¹⁸ NRO, Kh.P. 26/1/3, District Commissioner, Khartoum to Governor Khartoum Province, 28 December 1937.

¹⁹ His nickname was *Abū Kaffa* (“father of hand palm”) because he was missing all the fingers on one hand.

²⁰ NRO, Kh.P. 26/1/3, Report by the Commandant of Police, Khartoum, 13 March 1937.

²¹ NRO, Kh.P. 26/1/3, Confidential Report, Superintendent Police Headquarters, 23 December 1937.

The report described Muḥammad Ḥasan ‘Alī and ‘Abd al-Karīm Faṭḥallāh as heavy drinkers and smokers of *kamanga* (local hashish) who befriended prostitutes. However, as will be explained later, the petitions and letters revealed a high level of political consciousness and an acute awareness of the concepts of citizenship, equality, and justice. It was also clear that the protesters were mobilising and organising people to oppose the liquor policies. An intelligence report stated that Abū Kaffa was always “roaming the city for abetting people for matters endangering the peace.”²² He and Faṭḥallāh allegedly engaged in establishing organisations in Omdurman and Khartoum North to join their campaign. The group held its meetings in a house rented by ‘Abd al-Karīm near Comboni College in the centre of Khartoum, where people met to drink, hold meetings, and plan political activities. The report also alleged that these meetings were attended by certain activists who had participated in the 1924 uprising.²³ In 1937, these activists submitted at least five petitions, some of which were signed by more than two hundred people.

The questions and issues raised in these letters and petitions revolved around notions of citizenship, race, colour, and class distinctions. A petition sent to the Governor of Khartoum Province on 5 January 1937, which bore over two hundred signatures, stated that access to European liquor was a matter of freedom and equality, and pointed out that since foreigners “were allowed to do so and[,] we are forbidden we feel we are losing our equal rights of citizenship.”²⁴ The question of race was also raised repeatedly. For instance, in the petition submitted to the Legal Secretary of the Sudan Government, the writers pointed out:

In all Islamic countries like Egypt, liquors are politely resisted not like our existing law, which permits those white Moslems to drink and those black Moslems to be sent to the Criminal Court if they dare to taste it.²⁵

The same point was elaborated on in another petition to the Governor-General of Sudan in December 1937:

We became in every day and every moment feel foreigners in our country, as far as our government is creating to us a world of progress and luxury in Khartoum, telling us that it is not existing for us; for example, when a native gentleman goes to the Cabaret, he pays an entrance fee of 10 piasters while no body of other communities is paying this fee, why? Because he is a Sudanese, and when he enters inside, he finds himself enclosed in an atmosphere which is

²² NRO, Kh.P. 26/1/3, Translation of Report on Mohammed Hassan Ali and Abdel Karim Fathalla Submitted by No. 1, 13 March 1937.

²³ NRO, Kh.P. 26/1/3, Translation of Report on Mohammed Hassan Ali and Abdel Karim Fathalla Submitted by No. 1, 13 March 1937.

²⁴ NRO, 2 Kh.P., 26/1/3, Petitioners to Governor of Khartoum Province, 5 January 1937.

²⁵ NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/3, Petitioners to the Legal Secretary, Sudan Government, 11 May 1937.

well saturated with alcoholic drinks, while he was forbidden by his government not to join others in any favourite of the drink, why? Because he is a black coloured man.²⁶

By invoking race and Blackness, the protesters challenged the discriminatory nature of British liquor policies and showed how they conceptualised their Sudanese identity, which was often framed in the binary terms of “Africanism” versus “Arabism.”

The petitioners also questioned an important aspect of the colonial policy; namely the fact that it allowed Sudanese army and police officers and senior officials to access European liquor and deprived junior officials and ordinary people of it. As they put it:

A native of the Sudan who by sheer luck found his way through a military career – even from the ranks – is allowed liquor. A police officer who crept from sheer luck through a course of a few months at the police training school graduates and automatically becomes a right person to drink in elastic circles of the law.²⁷

It is worth mentioning that this distinction was also a source of discontent for a wide range of people. For example, in May 1937, the Director of the Sudan Medical Service wrote to the Civil Secretary complaining that while Sudanese commissioned officers and assistant District Commissioners could obtain European liquor, medical doctors were not allowed to do so, pointing out that

[a] doctor can prescribe alcohol for his patients and can obtain drugs of addiction on his own signature, and it seems anomalous that he cannot be trusted to buy beer, wine, and spirits for himself.²⁸

He went on to stress that Sudanese doctors “must be in a position of trust” and should be allowed to have the same privileges as those enjoyed by Sudanese senior officials.

The petitions also illustrated the role of class in shaping drinking patterns – a topic that has been discussed earlier – as well as the concerns of the protesters regarding the health issue. In a series of letters to the Governor of Khartoum Province, the protesters depicted *marīsa* as the drink of rural folk and the lower classes who were attracted to the entertainment provided in *anādī*, asserting that “it is impossible for those people who are living in town to go to the marrisa dens

26 NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/3, Mohammed Hassan Ali (Abu Kaffa) and Others to Khartoum to the Governor-General of the Sudan, 15 December 1937.

27 NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/3, Mohammed Hassan Ali (Abu Kaffa) and Others to Khartoum to the Governor-General of the Sudan, 15 December 1937.

28 NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/3, Director of Sudan Medical Service to the Civil Secretary, 15 May 1937.

no matter what it looks like.”²⁹ They stressed the unhealthy methods of preparing and serving *marīsa* and the unsanitary environment inside and outside the *anādi*. They described the fatal impact of *marīsa* on the intestines and the digestive organs in some detail, citing the example of a man named Aḥmad Saʿīd Aḥmad, who had allegedly died in an *indāya* in the Khartoum Deims in March 1937.³⁰ They also complained about the contradictory nature of the colonial liquor policy, which prohibited locals from consuming *ʿaragī* and at the same time deprived them of imported liquor: “Our government” the petition stated, “has deprived us of our native drink without allowing us a healthy substitute, and when we make a move towards a healthy drink such as beer or wine, we find ourselves confronting the Criminal Court.”³¹

The provincial authorities could no longer ignore these protests. In 1937, the District Commissioner (DC) of Khartoum met with representatives of the petitioners several times to discuss their grievances. Following one of these discussions, he wrote to the governor of Khartoum Province:

There appears to be a need in Khartoum for a good class of “Pub” to retail hygienically prepared Sudanese drinks in pleasant surroundings. At present the only drinking places are low class “andayat” in the slums to which no self-respecting middle- or upper-class citizen cares to go.³²

In the late 1930s, the protests and the practical challenges of implementing liquor legislation prompted British officials to begin debating the efficacy of the existing liquor legislation and to admit that it was discriminatory and contradictory. They started to take steps to amend the 1922 law by new legislation known as the Liquor Licence (Amendment) Ordinance 1939. The stated purpose of the amendment was to address the flaws in the 1922 law and to allow Sudanese to consume beer and light Cypriot wines. This idea had already been discussed and unanimously supported by all the provincial Governors in Northern Sudan in meetings in February 1938. The justifications for the new legislation were outlined in a government press notice published in 1939 that stated that although the 1922 law had been introduced to enforce the Saint-Germain-en-Laye provisions, the Sudanese law went beyond that, imposing restrictions on the manufacture, sale, and consumption of non-spirituous liquors and local drinks, which were not covered by the Convention.³³ Moreo-

²⁹ NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/3, Petitioners to Governor of Khartoum Province, 2 March 1937.

³⁰ NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/3, Petitioners to Governor of Khartoum Province, 3 May 1937.

³¹ NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/3, Petitioners to Governor of Khartoum Province, 11 May 1937.

³² NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/3, District Commissioner Khartoum to Governor Khartoum Province, 18 March 1937.

³³ NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/3, The Liquor Licence (Amendment) Ordinance, 1941.

ver, in view of the fact that the Sudanese liquor laws followed the Convention guidelines, which excluded Egyptians and Levantines from the prohibition, and since these people lived side by side with the Sudanese, it would be extremely difficult to combat leaks of imported liquor from one community to another. The government also argued that even if the authorities succeeded in combating the illegal distribution of European liquors, it would lead to an immediate increase in the consumption of indigenous liquors of an “extremely harmful type.” The statement went on to say:

[W]e have the strange anomaly that, while certain sections of the community are exempted from the provisions of the present law and while the lower classes can obtain merrissa in the merrissa shops, there exists in the towns a large class of Sudanese who, by falling between these two extremes, cannot legally acquire any alcoholic liquor since their natural sense of dignity and self-respect debars them from attendance at merrissa shops.³⁴

From the perspective of colonial officials, the 1939 amendment would improve the situation by allowing the sale of beer and light wines to Sudanese. To achieve this goal, certain “sophisticated towns” would be designated as “wet” areas where beer and light wines might be sold to natives. These included Khartoum, Wad Medani, Port Sudan, Atbara, El Obeid, Kosti, Shendi, Wadi Halfa, and other cities. Sudanese living in dry areas could obtain drinks from a wet area if they obtained a permit from the Governor of the province. However, this procedure proved to be inconvenient and impractical, and as a result, the 1939 legislation was amended in 1941, and came to be known as The Liquor Licence (Amendment) Ordinance 1941. The new version was deemed to be much simpler, as it empowered provincial governors to permit certain licence holders to sell beer and light wine to Sudanese regardless of where they lived. British officials contended that this legislation would “satisfy the legitimate needs of a large class whose *amour propre* is offended by their inability to drink alcohol unless they have recourse to merrissa shops.”³⁵ They claimed that the new legislation would allow the government to concentrate on combating the illicit consumption of imported and locally distilled liquors.

In the 1940s, the city of Khartoum had about forty-nine bars, with different types of licences that determined whether drinks could be consumed inside the premise or taken away by customers. Some of the most notable bars were the Victoria Hotel, the Gordon Bar, the Central Bar (Papadellis), the Albion Hotel, the Lord Byron Bar, the Coliseum Cinema, the Great Britain Bar, Sarsfield Hall, the Mogran Gardens, the St. James Hotel, and the Grand Hotel.³⁶

³⁴ NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/3, The Liquor Licence (Amendment) Ordinance, 1941.

³⁵ NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/3, The Liquor Licence (Amendment) Ordinance, 1941.

³⁶ NRO, Kh.P. A 43/E/1, Commandant of Police, 11 October 1952.

During the years of the Second World War, imports of European liquor, particularly whisky, declined sharply. In 1942, a rationing system was introduced that assigned specific quotas to hotels and bars.³⁷ The severe shortage of whisky increased competition among its consumers. The Governor of Khartoum reported: “[A]lmost every day now I receive applications from Sudanese of standing for permits to purchase hard liquor,”³⁸ and he invariably granted them. The Sudanese specifically asked for whisky. The Governor rejected the prevailing notion among colonial officials that in the face of a whisky shortage, priority should be given to the Englishman, who “must have first call upon them, in order to satisfy his traditional right to consume 1, 2 or more whiskies in the evening.”³⁹ He wrote to the Controller of Supplies to ease the restrictions.

Suppliers of whisky such as the Distillers Company of London, which supplied 75 per cent of Scotch whisky to Sudan, could not produce enough in the 1940s and 1950s. According to the Director of the Department of Economics and Trade, Sudan would need to import 12,000 bottles a month in order to remove whisky rationing.⁴⁰

The debate over European liquor continued in the 1950s. Five years before Sudan’s independence, J.W. Robertson, the Civil Secretary, wrote to all provincial governors telling them that “it is clear that the prohibition at present on Sudanese is becoming a point of national prestige and honour.”⁴¹ He believed that if the matter were brought before the Legislative Assembly, it would be opposed. The Assembly was an elected body that had been set up by the British in 1948, and most of its members represented conservative and sectarian-based Northern Sudanese parties. It is not surprising that Robertson recommended that Governors should use their discretion. He considered that “at private houses and private entertainment there should be no differentiation made between Sudanese and British and if spirituous liquors are offered to British, they should equally be offered to Sudanese.”⁴²

37 NRO, Kh.P. A 43/E/1, Commandant of Police, 11 October 1952.

38 NRO, Kh.P. A 43/E/1, From H.R.P. Harrison, Governor of Khartoum, to Controller of Supplies, 14 August 1952.

39 NRO, Kh.P. A 43/E/1, From H.R.P. Harrison, Governor of Khartoum, to Controller of Supplies, 14 August 1952.

40 NRO, Kh.P. A 43/E/1, E.F. Aglen Director, Department of Economic and Trade, to The Distillers Company Ltd London, 1 October 1953.

41 NRO, Civsec 1/43/2/7, J. W. Robertson, Civil Secretary, to All Governors, 4 November 1951.

42 NRO, Civsec 1/43/2/7, J. W. Robertson, Civil Secretary, to All Governors, 4 November 1951.

The Campaign Against ‘*aragī*’

While some Sudanese were able to obtain European liquors, the vast majority turned to *marīsa* and ‘*aragī*. As mentioned earlier, ‘*aragī* was manufactured in many parts of Sudan from dates or grain. In Dongola and Halfa provinces, for instance, ‘*aragī* was made from dates, while in the Southern and Central parts of Sudan it was distilled from grain. Despite its popularity, however, ‘*aragī* was reviled by British officials, who viewed it as a highly intoxicating drink and a health hazard. It is not surprising that they made relentless efforts to prohibit it by criminalising its manufacturing and consumption. This attitude was best exemplified in a letter from the District Commissioner of Khartoum North to the Governor of Khartoum Province in which he wrote: “The araki [sic] distiller was more dangerous to the community than an ordinary thief as the direct evil effects were so much more widespread.”⁴³ The DC’s statement reflected the attitude of colonial officials in many parts of Africa, who considered drinking to be a source of dangerous disorder, indiscipline, social degradation, and defiance of authority.

In the early 1930s, the government authorities wrote alarming reports about a sharp increase in the consumption of ‘*aragī* by local Sudanese, particularly in the large towns. For instance, in December 1930, the Civil Secretary of the Sudan Government sent letters to all provincial Governors and heads of department warning them that the manufacture and consumption of ‘*aragī* was on the rise, especially among government employees, and that they must therefore take steps to prosecute not only those who manufactured it, but also those who marketed or consumed it.⁴⁴ A report by Samuel Bey ‘Atīyya, the Director of the Intelligence Department, claimed that at least 30 per cent of government employees drank ‘*aragī*.⁴⁵

The anti-‘*aragī* campaign embraced several strategies, including prosecution, propaganda, and the mobilisation of local leaders such as native administrators and religious figures. The government also made use of informants and other intelligence sources to gather information about the places where ‘*aragī* was made and consumed. Despite these efforts, however, the extensive use of ‘*aragī* persisted, prompting the Governor of Khartoum Province to question the efficacy of the government measures. He told the District Commissioners of Khartoum, Khartoum North, and Omdurman that the measures might even lead to increased drinking, arguing that “the law has the effect of adding a secret pleasure to drinking, and encourages heavy drinking on the principle that if a man is taking a risk he may

⁴³ NRO, Kh.P. 1/7/167, DC Khartoum North to Governor Khartoum Province, 8 February 1931.

⁴⁴ NRO, Kh.P. 1/7/167, Civil Secretary to All Governors and Heads of Departments, 11 December 1930.

⁴⁵ NRO, Kh.P. 1/7/167, Extract from a Note by Samuel Bey Attiyah, 20 December 1930.

as well get his risks' worth."⁴⁶ The Governor went on to express his willingness to consider a suggestion from some neighbourhood sheikhs that offering a limited number of licences to 'aragī makers might help control and decrease its consumption. In his view, licensing would provide a means of regulating and controlling the ingredients of 'aragī and gradually improve its quality.

In January 1 1931 the Governor of Khartoum Province held a meeting at the provincial headquarters attended by the District Commissioners of the three towns, as well as the Medical Officer of Health and the Superintendent of Police. He asked the DCs to meet leading notables and religious figures in their districts to explain the "evils" of 'aragī drinking to them, to draw their attention to the fact that its consumption was forbidden in the "Mohammedan" religion, and to ask them to launch a propaganda campaign against 'aragī and to cooperate with the government to suppress it.⁴⁷ Neighbourhood sheikhs should also be told that they would be held liable – and even dismissed – if the government discovered that 'aragī was being manufactured and consumed in their neighbourhoods. The Governor also asked the DCs to regularly inspect liquor licence holders and to solemnly warn them that they could lose their licences if they were caught selling liquor to unauthorised persons. He instructed the Superintendent of Police to warn members of the police force to be vigilant, to take action against 'aragī makers and drinkers, and to inform the police officers that if they failed to do so, they could be dismissed from the force.

The government campaign and its efforts to mobilise community leaders to stamp out 'aragī did not yield any meaningful results. Sudanese government employees opposed the anti-'aragī policies as a pretext by the government to discharge them from their jobs. To avoid being caught, these employees simply changed the venues where they drank regularly. According to government informants, neighbourhood sheikhs and native administrators were not keen on enforcing anti-'aragī measures because they also benefited from its sale, as they required unlicensed *marīsa* makers to pay them a regular fee in return for protection. For example, the sheikhs would give 'aragī makers advance notice of police raids and visits from the inspector. At the same time, members of the police force often ignored violators, and some even frequented *anādī* when they were off duty.⁴⁸ In short, local consumers, producers, and government agents all had a vested interest in protecting the enterprise.

The provincial authorities continued to push their efforts against 'aragī. In December 1930, the Governor of Khartoum wrote to the District Commissioners of

⁴⁶ NRO, Kh.P. 1/7/167, District Commissioner Khartoum to Governor Khartoum Province, 12 January 1930.

⁴⁷ NRO, Kh.P. 1/7/167, Governor of Khartoum Province to DCs, 29 January 1931.

⁴⁸ NRO, Kh.P. 1/7/167, Informant Report, 20 December 1930.

the three towns urging them to mobilise what he called “enlightened” natives and religious leaders against *‘aragī* drinking. He also stated that he was planning for the publication of articles in leading newspapers and magazines such as *Ḥaḍārat al-Sūdān*. In his view, this public campaign would pave the way for the government to take drastic measures and impose severe penalties.⁴⁹

The question of *‘aragī* drinking became the focus of a series of meetings between government officials and local sheikhs and community leaders. On 20 January 1931, a meeting was held at the provincial headquarters, attended by the District Commissioners of the three towns and the medical officer. The province governor and district officials proposed the idea of regulating *‘aragī* making by providing licences to certain individuals, but this was opposed by the medical officer.⁵⁰ However, officials agreed that the regulations must be tightened and that local sheikhs should be warned that they must report the consumption of *‘aragī* in their neighbourhoods. A few days later, the District Commissioner of Khartoum met religious leaders and native administrators and urged them to be vigilant and to report cases of *‘aragī* drinking in their neighbourhoods.⁵¹ They all agreed to impose heavy penalties and long prison terms for violators. A similar meeting was held between the District Commissioner of Khartoum North and twenty notables and religious leaders, during which the DC explained the government regulations regarding *‘aragī*. The leaders promised to use their influence and to campaign against *‘aragī* drinking. Two proposals were put forward. First, it was agreed that the existing penalties of three months’ imprisonment and a fine for manufacturing *‘aragī* should be increased to at least one year in prison. Second, convicted persons should serve their sentence away from their homes in provincial prisons such as Port Sudan. The DC referred to verses from the Quran to support this idea.⁵²

Similarly, in March 1931, the DC of Khartoum held a meeting in his office attended by sheikhs and religious leaders, including the editor of *Ḥaḍārat al-Sūdān* and two representatives of Gordon College (which was the only secondary school in Sudan at the time). The DC pointed out the negative impact of *‘aragī* drinking on the health of consumers and on the morals of society, arguing that it was forbidden by the Muslim religion and civil law. He asked the attendees to assist in every feasible way and to act against the consumption of *‘aragī* as well as the illicit consumption

49 NRO, Kh.P. 1/7/167, Governor Khartoum Province to DC Khartoum, Khartoum North, and Omdurman, 31 December 1930.

50 NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/1, Note of a Meeting Held at the Mudiria on 20/1/31, 20 January 1931.

51 NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/1, Governor of Khartoum Province to DCs Khartoum, Khartoum North, and Omdurman, 29 January 1931.

52 NRO, Kh.P.1/7/163, DC Khartoum North to Governor of Khartoum, 8 February 1931.

of European liquors by local Sudanese.⁵³ The meeting made several recommendations. First, since many 'aragī makers obtained some of their ingredients from licensed *marīsa* makers, it was suggested that the number of *marīsa* licences should be reduced. Second, because the *anādī* were scattered throughout neighbourhoods, they should be concentrated in a single block. Third, the police should be instructed to be strict about drunkenness and should have the power to arrest drunkards without a warrant. Finally, drunk persons should be medically examined to ascertain whether they had been intoxicated by *marīsa*, 'aragī, or European spirits.⁵⁴

It is important to point out that the campaign against 'aragī specifically targeted female producers. In addition to the fact that these women were dependent on the sale of alcohol for their livelihoods, they also sold drinks to low-income urban residents who could not afford imported liquors. In 1934, the stock sentences imposed on women who were found manufacturing or in possession of 'aragī were two months' imprisonment and a fine of four pounds for manufacturing and one month's imprisonment and a fine of two pounds for possession.⁵⁵

In the same year, the Governor of Khartoum Province sought the opinions of the DCs of the three towns to see whether they thought that the existing penalties were an adequate deterrent or if they should be more severe.⁵⁶ The DC of Khartoum North stated that since the public was not averse to drinking 'aragī, it would be impossible to prevent it from being consumed, and that the only hope was to increase the price to make it unaffordable for as many people as possible.⁵⁷ In his view, the sentence for possession was too heavy. However, the assistant DC of Khartoum argued that the existing penalties for possession were not too severe because he did not see any difference between possessing and distilling.⁵⁸ His position was also supported by the DC of Omdurman.⁵⁹

Anti-'aragī measures intensified in the 1940s and the number of prosecutions increased. Colonial officials found an ally in the Advisory Council of Northern Sudan, which was established in 1944 and consisted of tribal and religious leaders. In its third session in May 1945, the overwhelming majority of the Council's members voted against any policy that would allow Sudanese to consume alcoholic beverages.

53 NRO, Kh.P. 1/7/163, DC Khartoum to Governor of Khartoum Province, 4 March 1931.

54 NRO, Kh.P. 1/7/163, DC Khartoum to Governor of Khartoum Province, 4 March 1931.

55 NRO, Kh.P. 1/7/163, Governor, Khartoum Province to DC, Omdurman, Khartoum, and Khartoum North, 26 May 1934.

56 NRO, Kh. P.1/7/163, Governor of Khartoum Province to DCs and Commandant of Police, 26 May 1934.

57 NRO, Kh.P. 1/7/163, DC Khartoum North, 28 May 1934.

58 NRO, Kh.P. 1/7/163, A/DC Khartoum to Governor, 31 May 1934.

59 NRO, Kh.P.1/7/163, DC Omdurman to Governor, 7 June 1934.

ages, including imported European liquors and light wines as well as locally-made drinks such as *'aragī* and *marīsa*.⁶⁰ The Council's decision was met with a great deal of scepticism in certain segments of Sudanese society. On its editorial page, the *al-Sūdān al-Jadīd* newspaper acknowledged that the Council's decision was guided by religious tenets that were respected by many Sudanese Muslims, but expressed the opinion that the handling of the matter should be based on a proper understanding of local realities and the exigencies of modern life.⁶¹ In this regard, the author pointed to the fact that drinking *marīsa* was part of the local traditions in the Western parts of Sudan and insisted that the government was just trying to use the support of the Council to implement the Saint-Germain Convention.⁶²

The Omdurman Town Council appointed a special committee to consider the alcohol question. At its meeting in August 1945, the discussion focused on the sale of imported liquor, the prevention of *'aragī* manufacturing, and the possibility of improving *marīsa* houses in the city. The committee recommended stricter control over the sale of imported liquor in bars and the application of severe penalties for making *'aragī*. As far as *marīsa* was concerned, the committee recommended that conditions in *anādī* should be improved, but that they should be moved to the outskirts of cities because in the committee's view, they were attended by "bad characters."⁶³

In 1945, the municipal authorities in Khartoum Province conducted extensive raids on *'aragī* distillers in various neighbourhoods, particularly in areas on the outskirts of the city such as Jabal Awlia, Halfayat al-Muluk, Kober, and Khartoum North, which resulted in numerous prosecutions and convictions (Table 4). Within a period of six months, at least eighty-nine people were prosecuted. The sharp increase in the number of prosecutions can be illustrated by the following figures:⁶⁴

The colonial authorities also began to discuss controlling the production and consumption of *marīsa* at *anādī*. One of the proposals involved increasing the fee of *marīsa* licences to four pounds.

The efforts to control and regulate the manufacture and consumption of local alcohol continued under successive post-independence Sudanese governments. In

60 NRO, Kh.P. A 43/E/1, Extract from Minutes of the 3rd Session of the Advisory Council for Northern Sudan 23–28–5–1945 and *Al-Sūdān al-Jadīd*, 1 June 1945.

61 *Al-Sūdān al-Jadīd* was a weekly newspaper that was founded by Aḥmad Yūsuf Hāshim in 1944. It covered a wide range of topics, including politics, literature, social affairs, and the arts.

62 NRO, *Al-Sūdān al-Jadīd*, 8 June 1945.

63 NRO, Kh.P.A 43/E/1, Report of a Special Committee Appointed by the Omdurman Town Council to Consider the Questions Concerning the Control of Drinks Submitted to the Governor of Khartoum on 28 August 1945.

64 NRO, 2 Kh.P. 26/1/1, Ahmed Gally, Assistant Commandant of Police, Khartoum Province to Governor of Khartoum, 14 January 1946.

Table 4: Prosecutions for illegal sale of alcohol, 1942–45.

Year	No. of Prosecutions
1942	190
1943	203
1944	231
1945	399

May 1957, for instance, the Municipal Council of the town of Atbara issued a local ordinance to prevent the manufacture and sale of *marīsa* outside *anādī* (al-Ṭayyib [1974] 2004). This order also required *anādī* owners to observe a series of rules. They were asked not to allow customers to become too drunk and to expel anyone who was intoxicated. Owners were also not to allow gambling on their premises. Finally, the order limited the daily working hours of *indāya* to between 4 p.m. and 8 p.m. These regulations can be explained by the fact that Atbara was a working-class town, and much of its population was employed by the Railway Department, which had become concerned about the discipline and productivity of its workers. The campaign against alcohol in Sudan gained momentum in subsequent years through the growing influence of Islamist political parties and organisations. A series of local laws against *anādī* and local drinks was enacted in several towns, such as Kassala and Khartoum, in the 1970s. The final blow came in 1983, when the government of Jaʿfar al-Nimayrī introduced the so-called September Laws, which banned the manufacture, import, sale, and consumption of all alcoholic drinks. Hostility towards alcohol then escalated under the military regime of ʿUmar al-Bashīr (1989–2019), which was supported by the Islamist movement. It is no surprise that the regime enacted a series of punitive measures towards the sale and consumption of alcohol, including police raids and the arrest, detention, imprisonment, and flogging of producers and consumers.⁶⁵ Nonetheless, despite these measures, the consumption of *ʿaragī* and smuggled European liquors has continued to thrive to this day.

Conclusion

The production and consumption of alcohol in Sudan under British colonial rule became an arena for contention, adaptation, and resistance. As in other parts of colonial Africa, British policies towards alcohol in Sudan were shaped by the ideal-

⁶⁵ For more details on these policies see ʿUlaysh 2012.

istic and paternalistic resolutions of the anti-slavery movement of the 19th century, the Saint-Germain Convention of 1919, and the particular British concept of Sudanese cultural and religious traditions. These officials waged a vigorous campaign against certain types of local drink such as *'aragī*, and at the same time adopted contradictory policies that allowed certain segments of the Sudanese elite to consume imported European liquors while ordinary people were denied access to the same products. Despite this, many Sudanese found different ways to thwart these prohibitions and obtain European liquors. The British liquor laws also provoked a strong reaction from a wide range of the Sudanese people, who mobilised and challenged the colonial authorities through petitions and letters that exposed the ideological basis and discriminatory nature of these policies. These protests prompted the British to rethink their liquor policies and to introduce major reforms.

Despite their relentless efforts to curtail or forbid the production, circulation, and consumption of alcoholic drinks in Sudan, the British colonial regime failed to eradicate this deeply-rooted tradition. Not even the draconian policies of the postcolonial authoritarian regimes of Ja'far al-Nimayrī and 'Umar al-Bashīr could stamp out the consumption of alcohol and its enduring social and cultural significance in Sudanese society. Alcohol is still made, smuggled, sold, and consumed in many parts of the country, either in the secrecy of closed premises or at private parties.

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