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Chapter 16
Being Dayāma: Social Formation and Political Mobilisation in a Working Class Neighbourhood of Khartoum

1 Introduction

1.1 The Genesis of the Fieldwork

This chapter is based on longitudinal fieldwork carried out in Deim (al-Duyum al-Shargiyya), Khartoum, between 2008 and 2019. I lived in Deim between 2006 and 2009, and continued to collect data there after 2010, returning to the same neighbourhood almost twice a year during my research trips.[1] When I first worked in Deim in 2008, my background was in social anthropology, and I had done research in rural Sudan on political and economic issues among nomadic groups in the Butana region since 1989 and during the 1990s. When I returned in 2006, I continued my study, and extended it to settled peri-urban pastoralists in Greater Khartoum and Southern Kordofan cattle herders, focusing on resource grabbing and its impacts on disrupted pastoral territories. Despite my continuing involvement in pastoral issues, the chance event that led me to plan fieldwork in Deim was my decision to live there when I took up residence in Sudan at the end of 2006 as coordinator of the CEDEJ (Centre d'études et de documentation économiques, juridiques et sociales), a French centre for social sciences research in Khartoum. Initially, my hybrid situation between insider and outsider made me hesitate to engage in a study of a place I felt in some ways to be my own. Discussions with my neighbours (there had been rumours since 2007 of a forthcoming new forced displacement) and my discovery of Ahmad Sikainga's wonderful book *From Slaves into Workers* (1996), together with

1 Although the chapter is mainly based on data collected between 2008 and 2019 and then during two short fieldworks in 2019 and 2020 (after the revolution), my residence in Sudan in 2021–2022 thanks to a CNRS *délégation* was crucial for the writing process. I thus thank the French Centre National de la Recherche Scientifique and the ANR Project THAWRA SuR that I have coordinated in Sudan since 2021. My warmest thanks also go to the many Dayāma who shared their memories and experiences with me, with my deep respect and admiration for their persistent capacity of resistance and struggle for social justice in Sudan.

https://doi.org/10.1515/9783110719611-017

a dearth of existing studies,[2] reinforced my desire to begin fieldwork in Deim. My initial sense of disorientation due to the fact that this was an unusual kind of work for a rural anthropologist was alleviated by the earlier training I had received at my Italian university in the oral and social history of local urban working classes before becoming an anthropologist. My data consist of 156 interviews – mostly life stories[3] – with variations in actor profiles (age, gender, profession, education, ethno-tribal origin and places of residence), coupled with notes on participation and observations on social life in the neighbourhood.

My project turned into a reconstruction of the social history of Deim with the objective of carrying out an ethnography of a neighbourhood rather than a tribal group, as I had done previously among pastoralists. Based on data collection methods I had used elsewhere, this new fieldwork was supported by three simple guidelines: matching the biographies of Deim's inhabitants (the *Dayāma*, to use their own definition) to that of their neighbourhood, viewed as a "living entity" with its own life story (Portelli 1985), to understand how places make people – as social and cultural individuals or communities – and how people make a place while making the city; focusing on "memories", in the sense of a "matrix of meanings" (Portelli 1988) rather than as representations of the past or a "store of events", both for the present and for imagining a desirable future; and unfolding the meaning of "being Dayāma", an identity that was especially singled out by both insiders and outsiders.

A further question emerged, as behind the plurality and diversity of the individual life stories and profiles of the people I met, a shared definition of the district stressed its identity as a "working class" and "popular" place – with two terms, *ʿummāl* (workers), and *shaʿbī*, (popular) being used repeatedly. Although the term *ʿummāl* (sing. *ʿāmil*) may refer to workers in general, in Deim as in other Sudanese contexts – see Sikainga for Atbara (2002: 5) – it is conventionally used as the equiva-

2 As far as I know, only one master's thesis in Sociology at the University of Khartoum has focused on issues of social order in Deim (Hamza 2000). Shortly after my arrival, I suggested to one of my students that she should choose Deim for fieldwork for her master's thesis, which was funded by an urban water management project I was coordinating (Arango 2009). Apart from these two cases and some secondary information in other works – for example on Ethiopian refugees (Le Houérou 2004) – I do not know of any other anthropological works that use Deim as a central location for their fieldwork.

3 Most of my interviews had a common structure: I asked respondents to talk to me about the story of their life (and those of parents and extended families) and the history of the neighbourhood. Multiple informal discussions and participation in exceptional or ordinary events in the neighbourhood provided further sources of information and contextualisation for the main corpus of interviews and biographies.

lent of "working class".[4] Its common association with the adjective *shaʿbī* also made it clear that people in Deim did not use *shaʿb* with an interclass connotation. Nonetheless, this shared label contrasted to some degree with the true situation at the time of my research: in fact, a fair number of Dayāma were no longer working class in the strict sense (some were unemployed or did precarious work during a deep economic crisis, others were working as employees of the lower middle class or even as managers), and the quarter itself was changing rapidly following a process of gentrification that made it difficult to define it unequivocally as a "popular place". I finally found a possible explanation of this gap between the neighbourhood's current configuration or social composition and its persisting identity as a working-class popular place, when I looked at the interplay of class formation, ethnicity and locality, as shaped during Deim's history and embedded in the parallel development of Sudanese urbanisation and the colonial – and later post-colonial – division of labour. This attempt to reconstruct the meaning of being Dayāma, in which interviews and observations of ordinary people's daily lives highlight a political value, makes more sense after the events of the recent Sudanese revolution.

Limitations of space prevent me from going into any detail on the potential contradictions and plurality in the discourses and practices of my respondents. I will restrict myself to reporting the most common and most shared visions and positions among the people I met in Deim. In this context, expressions such as "the Dayāma say. . .think. . .do. . ." do not imply a high degree of generalisation or a wish to reduce the neighbourhood to the homogeneity of a harmonious "community"; rather, I consider this huge corpus to be an "ethnographic sample" (Werner & Russell 1994) aimed at *representation* rather than *representativeness* (Olivier de Sardan 1995), which despite its limitations may offer interesting discussion elements for the general objectives of this book.

1.2 The Foundation of Deim and its Evolution

The foundation of Deim[5] is associated with the urban planning designed by the British in late colonial times. Scholars who have focused on the formation of the

4 Besides the common semantic value of the term, the composition of this "working class" is different in Atbara, where it denotes a homogenous group of workers in the railways sector (Sikainga 2002), and in Deim, where it covers a wider range of subordinated, skilled and unskilled wage-jobs. For the purpose of this chapter, I am more interested in tackling the reasons behind this conception in local discourses than I am in discussing the details of their socio-economical parameters and evolutions.

5 The etymology of *daym* cannot be definitively traced. It is linked to the history of slavery in Sudan, and described the slave traders' settlements in the frontier areas of Southern and Western

first Sudanese working class under colonial rule (Sikainga 1996) have talked about slums (called "Deims") where people from various regions and other African countries gathered between the Turkiyya (1821–1884) and the Maḥdiyya (1885–1898). This precolonial genesis explains Deim's social composition, notably the presence of former (mainly military) slaves who, after being emancipated during British rule and living far from their original homes, became a wage-earning source of manpower for the new colonial division of labour. With the urban development of the capital, these places – "Old Deims" in colonial documents – continued to attract precarious populations of various ethnic and regional origins until the British decided to demolish them and displace their populations to a new peripheral district. They wanted both to "clean" the central areas of Khartoum for a growing middle class and to solve the problems of social order linked to these precarious, scattered slums (Curless 2016). Although the aim of concentrating these populations within a planned quarter (New Deims) was declared to be to improve living conditions for the native poor, another objective was the more effective control of the "dangerous classes" and their relegation outside a city space that was reserved for the elites. The displacement took place between 1949 and 1952 (Fawzi 1954). As far as the site of my fieldwork is concerned, al-Duyum al-Shargiyya[6] (Eastern Deims), which is today known as "Deim" *par excellence*, mostly took in inhabitants of today's Khartoum 2 and Khartoum 3 districts. As we will see, the merging of dynamics of concentration and stigmatisation – which has been observed in other contemporary "regimes of urban marginality" (Wacquant 1999) – had a profound effect on the shaping of the neighbourhood and its identity.

The expansion of a capitalist mode of production enforced by colonisation and its division of labour turned the people of Deim into the bulk of the first colonial working class. Remaining at the bottom of the social ladder (compared to a very small native elite selected by the colonial power), the people of Deim were integrated into the main labour tasks of infrastructure building and agriculture and

Sudan (Johnson 1992: 170–71): the toponym Deim Zibeir (a town in Southern Sudan) still bears witness to this history, and Deim Zibeiriya is also a sub-district of modern-day Deim in Khartoum. Since colonial times, governmental actors have used the term to describe poor native areas that are socially and spatially marginal. Most local actors explain the term by using the verb *dayam*, which they associate with the idea of a camp, a temporary place to live. In one Sudanese Arabic dictionary, the word is translated as an "inhabited territory at the margins of a town. Originally a military camp" (Gāsim 1985: 423).

6 For the colonial administration, al-Duyum al-Shargiyya (Eastern Deims) was similar to al-Duyum al-Gharbiyya (Western Deims). Nevertheless, the analogy between the two neighbourhoods (in terms of their history and social composition) is not a perfect one because only the former was fully a product of forced displacement from slum areas.

into lower-level jobs as unclassified civil servants in the British administration.[7] Although the process of colonial class formation should be seen as developing in different phases (Cross 1997), in Deim we see that the progressive shaping of this "urban proletariat" also involved more or less temporary wage-earing jobs for the development of rural projects (dams and agricultural schemes) or the building of infrastructures (railways, bridges), for which the Three Towns constituted a "labour reservoir" (Cross 1997: 219, 223). Two main features of this native working class emerged: first, gradual, albeit limited, access to education (and to services that were considered to be signs of a "modern" urban way of life) and second, a growing degree of politicisation that affected the configuration of the neighbourhood, which would become a stronghold of the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP) in the following years. This allowed Dayāma to claim – as they still do today – an identity as a popular (*shaʿbī*) place inhabited by workers *(ʿummāl*), and pride in being ready to stand up for their rights and rise up against various authoritarian regimes, including in the postcolonial phase.[8] In the early decades of its development, alongside the urbanisation of the capital city, Deim continued to attract newcomers as part of a rural exodus not only from several regions in Sudan but also from African countries, mainly in the shape of refugees from Ethiopia and Eritrea (Le Houérou 2004). The multiethnicity of the place coupled with its working class structure favoured the integration of newcomers while also increasing the stigmatisation of the neighbourhood as a major block of precarious, ethnically mixed and potentially dangerous lower class people within the city. The multiplicity of cultural backgrounds (as regards not only ethnic and tribal groups[9] but also religions) was an important

7 Because of this early urbanisation and integration in the division of labour of a colonial economy, supported by a strong focus on schooling and access to education, a fair portion of the younger generations in Deim, although they share a "working class" identification, might be better defined as "middle-class poor" (Bayat 2015) compared to the profound precariousness of contemporary city dwellers in other peripheral areas of Khartoum.

8 As I will show, this is, in fact, a reality: Deim activists (with strong support from their families) have often been involved in the insurrections and political movements that have shaken the powers-that-be since the colonial period. Although people in Deim paid a high price during the repressive period of the Islamic regime in the 1990s, they have continued to be active in urban protests, as proved by the recent riots against the increase in food prices (2012 and 2013), the mobilisation against cuts in the water supply (2015–2016), the recent uprising in 2018–2019 and the ongoing struggles since the October 2021 coup.

9 Tribal affiliation is still a significant parameter for a huge part of rural and urban Sudan, although scholars have noted the non-essentialist nature of tribes and their historical political manipulation (Casciarri & Ahmed 2009). While the word "tribe" (*gabīla*, pl. *gabāʾil*) evokes a patrilineal group with a common ancestor often related to a territorial and political dimension, the term "ethnic group" refers to broader categories (such as Arabs or Nuba) that imply cultural or status dimensions, and may be seen as including different *gabāʾil* (Casciarri 2016).

factor in shaping the district as a place of "free habits" (Hamza 2000)[10] that increasingly conflicted with the Islamic morals enforced by the country's Arab-Muslim elites beginning in the 1980s.

The progressive expansion of the capital quickened after the 1980s, due on one hand to the mass arrival of environmental and economic migrants and IDPs from areas affected by the civil war such as Southern Sudan, the Nuba Mountains and Darfur (de Geoffroy 2009), and on the other to the development of new districts for the growing local middle and upper classes. This spatial reconfiguration of the capital meant that Deim shifted from its former margins to a new centre shaped by the city's expansion (Map 5). In the 1990s and 2000s, the reconfiguration of the neoliberal city, strengthening dynamics of socio-spatial injustice and relegation (Morange & Fol 2014) brought about new transformations in Deim. The liberalisation pursued by the Islamic regime since the mid-1990s, the opening up to new foreign and national investors, the boom in oil exploitation after the end of the war and the strengthening of a Sudanese bourgeoisie were all processes that accompanied an attempt by the political powers to restructure Khartoum and its centre according to new principles of exclusion. In recent times, therefore, Deim has become an attractive location for a new local and international bourgeoisie, and its inhabitants are facing (and sometimes trying to oppose) dynamics of gentrification that resemble those taking place in other cities in the North and South at a time when global capitalism is reshaping socio-spatial urban borders.[11] While the expansion of the city limits as a result of recent urbanisation[12] gave Deim a new spatial centrality, the context does not favour the Dayāma's opportunity to benefit from this, first because of a general economic crisis fostered by neoliberal policies that affects the popular classes more deeply, second, because the impact of gentrification is driving their gradual eviction from the district and finally, due to the persisting label of marginality the dominant actors ambiguously continue to associate with the "original core" of Dayāma. As we will see, ethnographical data may help

10 Scholars would often explain such kind of labelling through the legacy of slavery. Although this may make sense, I prefer not to rely on this reading, first because ex-slaves were just one component of a very heterogeneous social composition in Deim, and second to avoid an exaggerated stress on "slavery heritage" as portrayed by both colonial and post-colonial ideologies in Sudan.

11 The figures on Khartoum's demographic development show an accelerated process of urbanisation (one of the highest rates in modern Africa): the population of the capital, which was just 260,000 at the time of independence (1956), reached 1,342,000 in 1983, and 4,482,000 in 2008 (Blanchon & Graefe 2012: 43).

12 According to the last national census, in 2008, Deim had 25,634 inhabitants (distributed among twelve administrative units). In the same period, Khartoum Centre (including Deim) had 72,235 inhabitants, the Khartoum agglomeration (Khartoum, Omdurman and Khartoum North) 4,482,000, and Khartoum State 5,274,321 (CBS 2008).

reveal a more complex vision of strategies rooted in Deim's social background for countering marginalisation at both a material and an ideological level.

Map 5: Location of Deim in Khartoum.[13]

2 Making Deim's Social History through Ethnography

In this section, I will attempt to show how an ethnographic study tracing the meaning of the neighbourhood for its people helps us reconstruct a social history of the place. Local narratives on the beginnings of Deim stress its nature as an area of forced displacement: when people talk about the relocation of 1949–1952 (the birth of Deim in its present form), they use expressions that might be generally translated as "*they* brought *us* here" (*jābūnā, shālūnā, khattūnā, nagalūnā, raḥḥalūnā*).

13 Casciarri 2014.

> The British had put my parents there, in Old Deims, but then they changed their mind, they took this place back, which is now Khartoum 2, and sold it at a higher price. They destroyed our houses (my children were young when they destroyed everything), then they brought us (*jābūnā*) here, they displaced us (*raḥḥalūnā*) here. [A.B.I., b. 1925, 2009][14]

> There was no discussion or negotiation with the British: they used to come into Old Deims to put down marks, to give anyone an exact deadline to leave, and even if you had a problem, you were forced to leave, with no discussion (*mā fī kalām*). [A.M., b. 1945, 2009]

There can be no doubt about the early injustices, and the refrain of forced displacement stands as a political leitmotif, inasmuch as the Dayāma do not chose to position themselves as victims, but stress their capacity to transform this original injustice into a strength in several ways: rejecting a marginality label, actively producing locality and reversing the values associated with ethnicity.

2.1 Counter-Narratives of Centrality and Marginality

The particular genesis of Deim explains how it has had connotations of a "dual marginality" since it was founded: one spatial because of its location at the margins of the colonial city, a historical frontier between an urbanised (civilised) space and the rural desert (uncivilised) space, and the other social, due to its being inhabited by the lowest native class, one that was considered by the colonial élites to be "detribalised", and of mixed or slave origin (Kurita 2003). In the local discourse I often found an express desire to challenge this early label of marginalisation and stigmatisation, as well as its persistence.[15] The leitmotif of the founding stories of the neighbourhood seeks to claim a shared history of domination, reminding us that the first Dayāma were taken there by the colonial authorities against their will,[16] but the discourse soon also embraces rejection of the longstanding label of Deim as a marginal place. This is frequently expressed by saying that Dayāma are "the centre [heart] of Khartoum" (*galb al-Kharṭūm*). The expansion of Khartoum's urban boundaries in

14 All personal names have been anonymised. They are followed by the respondent's birthdate and the date of the interview.

15 I have noticed that outsiders, politicians and sometimes even scholars (Pantuliano et al. 2015) still tend to assimilate Deim with these images of poverty and marginality. This may be linked to both a lack of knowledge of the neighbourhood and the heritage of colonial discourses.

16 This is the main difference from other displaced groups like the Nubians, who can associate this origin from "elsewhere" with a common ancestry and cultural homogeneity (Fogel 1997). For the Dayāma, whose origins were scattered across Sudan, on the other hand, their forced displacement associated with their classification as subaltern workers is their prior commonality, which partly explains the construction of a shared popular class identity.

recent decades makes it easy for an observer to agree with this claimed "new" centrality, and Deim's position compared to the current vast outskirts of the capital confirms that the ancient margins had definitely turned into a centre. However, local narratives go beyond this purely spatial notion of centrality, and mix the present and the past in their dismissal of any alleged marginality of the district.

Three elements are worth mentioning in the construction of this central role, which have been taken as a given since the earliest years of Deim's development. The first attributes a kind of mission to the ancient Dayāma in the urbanisation of the wild space. As the elders remind us, when the British relocated the inhabitants of Old Deims to their present place, they pushed them into a remote area south of the colonial town that is still remembered as *khalāʾ*, desert,[17] a connotation expressed by memories of wild animals and natural vegetation, the opposite of an urban space.

> The borders of New Deims started in the area of the Faruk Cemetery, and you know what was beyond? Just desert land (*khalāʾ*). It was a forest (*ghāba*) with wild animals. There was nothing else before we started to build the houses you see today in Deim. [A.M., b. 1945, 2009]

For people who have already been "urbanites" for decades, this eviction to the ecological borders of the city has been reshaped in their memories, and the Dayāma seem to stress their role as unwitting, yet objective, pioneers of the civilisation of the desert, the people who made it possible to bring "culture" to the former realm of "nature", and even wilderness. This is also underlined by the contrast with the nearby middle class neighbourhood of Amarat:

> Today you see Amarat as a place with big houses and big roads, with lights, but when we arrived, it was simply desert land (*khalāʾ*). It was created long after Deim, in the period of ʿAbbūd [1960s]. Actually, the first three areas (*manāṭiq*) in Khartoum were Deim, Tuti and Burri; all the rest was only desert land! [O.H., b. 1936, 2010]

The second element that is commonly found in discussions on the founding years is the rapid availability of modern infrastructures and services – first water and then electricity are invariably mentioned as a sort of privilege the Dayāma benefited from. Their emphasis on this material aspect of daily life is also linked to a desire to recall that Deim never fit the image of a marginal place, even at an earlier stage. As some recall, ". . . in Old Deims we were using oil-lamps (*fānūs*) – there was no electricity – and we got water from wells or water vendors" [H.A.H, b. 1948, 2008],

17 This wilderness is more rarely described using the word *ghāba* – literally "forest", but more broadly defining a place with dense spontaneous vegetation – another image that conflicts with the urban landscape.

but later, ". . . in New Deims, we were the first people in Khartoum to get water and electricity in our houses, long before other places in the capital and in Sudan" [O.H., b. 1936, 2008]. Through these two powerful markers of an early modern "urban way of life" (water and electricity), the Dayāma stress further evidence of the centrality that had been denied to them. To offer further proof of the illogicality of the stigma of marginality, they mention squatter or unplanned areas of Greater Khartoum that still had no access to such facilities in the 2000s (de Geoffroy 2009).

The third recurring element stresses the unsuitability of the marginality label, and asserts that Deim has always been a central place – sometimes even more so than certain new middle class districts – far from the images of precariousness and remoteness that have been forged since colonial displacement. This relates to the presence of professionals, and examples are given of the modern jobs the Dayāma were coopted into by the opportunities opened up by the new economic system. Thanks to the singularity of individual or family lives, we thus discover that behind the common label of "wage-workers" (*ʿummāl*) lies a varied universe of craftsmen, electricians, mechanics, carpenters, tailors, cookers, builders, printers, guardians, drivers and low-level civil servants, mixed with more occasional employment in agricultural or infrastructure projects and a (less varied) female labour force employed as domestic servants in the homes of Europeans. Although the common expression "to work *with* the British" seems to obscure the nature of subordinated colonial work, the stress is placed on another aspect: by claiming to have been the first natives to include job profiles such as these,[18] the Dayāma prove their early ties to "modernity" and "urbanity" brought about by the British division of labour. They can therefore claim their social centrality as a working class within a modern wage-labour economy with a certain amount of pride.

> People in Deim were the first inhabitants of Khartoum, since the British time, when there was nothing here. They were really close to the British (*garībīn*), they learnt about their nature (*ṭabīʿa*), traditions and customs (*ʿādāt wa-tagālīd*). They were the first to be open to this new situation, and more than other Sudanese, the first to work with the British: they got from this an experience (*khibra*) that they later transferred as a heritage (*warrathū*) to their children. [H.U., b. 1970, 2008]

18 Some informants mention the fact that other Sudanese, like "people of Omdurman" (*nās Omdurmān*), refused to work with the English, preferring their traditional (agricultural, pastoral or commercial) economic activities.

2.2 The Production of Locality

Anthropologists have observed how the social appropriation of a *space* turns it into a *place* that is historical and relational (Augé 1992). This is known as the "production of locality" (Appadurai 1996), the dialectical process by which the place makes people and people "make the place" (Agier 2015). As they do so, they also draw borders and meanings of "we" and "others", of "sameness" and "otherness" rooted in a specific place, filled with constructed shared meanings. This is what happened when people first lived in Deim and built their houses (*sakannā, baneinā*), shaping the patterns of their shared lives, which continue to be characterised by certain distinctive common elements. They are mentioned in discourses, but also revealed in daily practices, as evidence of inclusion in the category of Dayāma. As scholars have underlined, certain problems are raised by the ". . .assumed isomorphism of space, place and culture", as cultural differences within a locality may be underestimated by the "implicit mapping of cultures into places" (Gupta & Ferguson 1992: 7). Being aware of this nuance, I must report what seems to be a widespread association between place and culture that Dayāma propose as part of their claimed identity.

Naming and defining the borders of one's own place is a prior requirement of this production of locality: an intimate socio-spatial knowledge of the district makes people talk differently from the official administrative divisions of the neighbourhood (either the colonial names "al-Duyum al-Shargiyya" and "al-Gharbiyya" or more recent ones corresponding to *lijān sha'biyya*, the "popular committees" until 2019). The previous names of Old Deims are still in use, their meanings often linked to ethno-tribal groups, famous figures or job occupations to signify mastery of a local history that ignores the sterile denomination of colonial or later planning.[19] The same idea of mastery is conveyed when local people reject the administrative or geographic inclusion of areas of the neighbourhood whose social and historical settings do not correspond to the shared background of the Dayāma. For example, although the sub-district of Hay al-Zihur lies spatially in the middle of Deim, most Dayāma do not consider it to be a proper part of Deim as it was built following the eviction of precarious Fellata inhabitants and the plots (which are larger than the average Deim houses) were assigned to a middle class of employees with ties to the government in the 1970s.

19 The modern names used geographical references (Deim Wasit, "Central Deim"; Deim Janub, "Southern Deim", etc.) and numbers for the blocks; the ancient ones referred to ethnic groups or regions (Deim Taqali, Deim Taaisha, Deim Banda, Deim Kara, Deim Gawamaa, etc.), to historical local figures (Deim Ibrish, Deim Zibeiriya, Deim Saad) or to occupations (Deim Attala, Deim Gashasha) (Casciarri forthcoming).

> Hay al-Zihur is not really Deim. It is not as mixed (*khalīṭ*) as Deim: there you have descendants from Greeks, Turks, Yemenis, Copts, people with light skin (*ḥumur*), like the *mawālīd* in Omdurman. [S.H., b. 1968, 2009]

> The Fellata, who at the beginning were in Mogran then with us in Old Deims, had a huge family in Hay al-Zihur, then the government took them (*jābūhum*) faraway, in a neighbourhood now called al-Inghaz. [H.R., b. 1945, 2014]

After the early steps of being able to name the "real" Deims and identifying their borders, the second expression of the production of locality is the sharing of public spaces and the production of new common areas. This starts with the connotation of a domestic space which is used in a different way from the idea of a private space. Communications between households and the image of "open doors" are frequently evoked, as in the words of a girl who returned to live in her father's house in Deim from Yugoslavia, where she was born:

> When I was a child, I came back to live in Deim [1996], I did not really understand "*who* was living *where*", because the children spent their time in their friends' or neighbours' houses, and I was surprised to see that everyone knew each other, over three generations, from grandparents to grandchildren, and the neighbour's house was in some way like your own house. For example, I did not have to knock on the door of my neighbours to enter – they would say: "Why are you knocking? You can enter as you want, that is your house!" [A.S.I., b. 1990, 2009]

Observations of daily life reveal that the extra-domestic spaces (streets or squares between blocks) are also commonly appropriated for working activities, the consumption of food or tea, the leisure time of children, adults and women (sports or playing cards) or sleeping, with intense social interaction during the day and even part of the night. Some of the features of neighbourhood morphology encourage this trend to jointly appropriate external spaces:

> The empty spaces between each block created by British planning have been left without buildings: children play there, if we have a marriage or a funeral we gather there, and some are used to play football. This land belongs to nobody, or rather I would say it belongs to us all, to do what we need. [H.S., b. 1950, 2012]

The sense of creating and maintaining these shared spaces is underlined as a sort of "commonality", in contrast with the individualisation and closing of spaces in middle class areas. Here, Amarat is often cited in discourses as a sort of "anti-Deim", a district where everyone is locked inside an individual domestic space, as a metaphor for urban solitude and individualism.

Following this appropriation of common and public spaces, great importance is attached to what we might call a claim to control social order autonomously: value is placed on the fact that people in Deim prefer not to use the formal public order institutions (the police or others). They tend to manage and solve their prob-

lems within the community, and also have a sort of local patrol (called *dawriyya*) made up of young people, who patrol and control the district at night. Some also recalled the presence of institutions for conflict resolution similar to the *judiyya*, a well-known presence in rural Sudan, which thanks to the reciprocal knowledge and mutual respect produced by the common history of the quarter, can make it possible to manage minor disputes without going to the police or courts.

The blending of this particular way of living a common space to make it look like a single, cohesive place also means that the Dayāma label is not automatically granted to everyone who physically settles within the borders of the district. "Being Dayāma" means more than just living in Deim: this social appropriation by a community of its own place makes more sense when people explain that it is not enough to be "a resident" to be a Dayāma. Intimate knowledge of the place, its history and what makes up the particular social composition of its people are the parameters that make it possible to be considered a part of this imagined community, which expresses present and past behaviours and values to single out its special identity, which is deeply rooted in a specific location. For this reason, newcomers who do not share these common values and practices of living together are not considered to be Dayāma, and are sometimes labelled with connotations that underline this difference: they may simply be defined as *judād*, "the new ones" , *mushtarīn* or *mujarīn*, "the ones who buy" or "the ones who rent", in order to stress their different status compared to the children of people who received plots during British planning, or even more directly as *nās al-fulūs*, "people with money", when identified as the actors of present-day gentrification in the quarter.

> This people, the new inhabitants, they were not born in Deim. They simply had money and bought houses here, but they were neither people of Old Deims nor their children, even if today they want to grab everything here! They are people coming from outside. It is just because they had money and wished to make profit that they succeeded in becoming owners (*nās milik*). [K.M., b. 1946, 2009]

Several narratives insist on this "cultural gap" between the Dayāma who are considered to be "original" (*aṣliyyīn*) or legitimate inhabitants (*siyād al-ḥagg*) and these newcomers whose economic wealth is the only privilege that allows them to settle in Deim. However exaggerated the local discourses may be, forgetting that in some cases the regretted transformation of a local setting and way of life comes from wealthier factions within the neighbourhood, this dichotomisation goes alongside the classification of "real Dayāma" as working class people who share a popular district.

2.3 Reversing Mainstream Meanings of Multi-Ethnicity

The common historical markers of class and locality are interlocked with issues of ethnicity and tribal affiliation, which complete the picture of a self-definition of the Dayāma, according to one of the most persistent "identity complexes" (Casciarri *et al.* 2020) through which Sudanese social dynamics are read. Although they recall the fact that Deim was created out of a heterogeneous cluster of people from different ethnic and tribal groups, witnesses constantly conclude with a positive evaluation of this "multiethnicity". In a country where the hegemonic view that is enforced by the state and its elites, but also widely accepted by majority groups, historically prizes the idea of ethnic purity and conservation, privileging shared ancestry and considering multiethnicity and mixing to be inferior, this position stands as a political statement. As one of my first and oldest respondents summed it up when he explained to me what the place of tribal affiliation in Deim was: "*Al-Duyūm kānū gabāʾil, lakin kullenā bigīnā wāḥid*", "The Deims were [formed of different] tribes, but we all became the same". [A.M., b. 1945, 2009]. This sort of inversion of the mainstream concept is expressed by various historical and contemporary practices in the neighbourhood.

A review of the narratives of the oldest inhabitants, who are often the ones who lived through the passage from Old to New Deims, although they may have been young at the time, paints a picture in which origins (of fathers and mothers, and of grandfathers and grandmothers) are far from being forgotten or censored by memory selection. A certain stigma that was enforced by colonial discourses and never abandoned in post-colonial times (Vezzadini 2015) places an emphasis on the slave origin of most of the first inhabitants of Deim, supporting the dominant vision of "blood mixture", leading one to imagine that people might hide their ethnic origins or understate the importance of ethnicity because of this feeling of inferiority. In my ethnography, however, most people had no hesitation in eliciting their regional and ethno-tribal origins prior to their arrival in Deim in detail. On the contrary, they emphasise and comment on this huge variety, constructing and explaining what they claim to be a kind of model of "inclusive citizenship" as almost the only way to overcome the impasses of Sudanese nation-building (Casciarri 2016). While in dominant discourses autochthony is associated with the legitimising concept that everyone is from a single ethno-tribal origin,[20] the Dayāma expressly claim that they come from a group, but have been "born again" in a

20 This is the case with dominant groups considered to be Arab and Muslim, among which narratives aimed at proving their status and the legitimate occupation of a territory are usually associated with claims of a common origin (*aṣl*) and a unique ancestry (*jidd wāḥid*), and thus being members of the same "tribe" (*gabīla*).

place: people remember how their fathers and mothers or grandparents arrived from elsewhere and from different tribal groups (see Casciarri 2016: 71), but they believe that other shared elements of their history have allowed them to reshape this diversity as a new unity. Although this may be linked in some cases to a desire to forget ancient slave origins, the same narrative can be found among individuals from Arab groups:

> I cannot say that because I am from Misseriya tribe I am an Arab. I define myself as Sudanese. To define oneself as Arab, Dinka or Shaygiya is something that has only brought us huge problems (*mushkila kebīra*). For me, the best thing is to say that we are all Sudanese. You know? In all Sudan, there are no Arabs, because in the past the mothers may have been Dinka or Nuba, and even if your father or grandfather was an Arab, after all this time, the Arab blood is finished, that's all! [A.D., b. 1948, 2009][21]

This brings us to a second observation on the complex relationship between "tribal affiliation" and what is normally labelled as "tribalism". Without going in the details of a vast social sciences debate and its influence on post-colonial African state-building, we can say that a "tribal paradigm" (covered by the term *gabīla*) functions as a relevant multilevel form of social organisation and symbolic representation of Sudanese groups (Casciarri & Ahmed 2009), with well-known manipulations during the colonial Native Administration system, that does not correspond to a "pure invention" of tribes (Grandin 1982). After the independence of Sudan, and alongside a general renewal of decolonised thought, African states and intellectuals began to stigmatise "traditional" loyalties to one's tribe: the term tribalism (*gabaliyya* in the local use) became a metaphor for a backward attitude and a hindrance to democracy and modernisation. Although affiliation to hegemonic Arab-Muslim *gabīla* continued to be a *de facto* basis for accessing political and economic power at least until the *inqādh* regime (1989–2019), there is a widespread perception that often associates the relevance of tribal affiliations to rural contexts, as distinguished from (and as inferior to) urban ones. This would lead us to expect that Dayāma, who first of all claim an early urbanity and also mainly do not belong to dominant Arab-Muslim groups, would tend to minimise or conceal their affiliation to their *gabīla*. On the contrary, however, their position is that remembering one's *gabīla* is linked to a political statement against the rejection of *gabaliyya*, an implicit anti-tribalism that seems much more convincing than the one that can

21 One might argue that Western Sudanese tribes like the Misseriya Baggara have a lower status among Arab groups in the country, but I also found similar narratives among people in Deim from higher status groups, like the Jaaliyin – one of whom even defined himself as a *janūbī* (Southerner) because he had lived in Juba for many years and married a woman from the Bari, a group from Southern Sudan.

be heard among the upper classes as a simple denial of the tribal issue.[22] Thus, even though most Dayāma continue to say that "tribes are still present in Deim" (*al-gabā'il mawjūda*), and while they underline the fact that the policies of the most recent regime also strengthened tribal divides within their own community, they insist on the Dayāma's capacity to go beyond such hierarchical separations:

> Before, in Deim, it was not a matter of differentiating people by asking "Which ethnic group (*jinis*) or which tribe (*gabīla*) are you from?". People were all supporting each other like one family (*ahl*), the ones coming from the West as well as the ones from the North. The division between tribes in Sudan is recent, it has been fostered by politics (*siyāsiyyāt*), by the government. Before, people wanted to build Sudan, they were saying "Sudan is our country, for us all", without putting forward difficulties or problems. And here they consider themselves as "*awlād al-Daym*" [children of Deim]. [A.D., b. 1943, 2009]

A corollary of the value placed on multiethnicity can be found in discourses and practices around marriage choices. From a sample of marriages stretching from the present generations back to the first inhabitants of Old Deims (Casciarri 2021), I noticed the importance of matching a huge gamut of ethno-tribal origins of the partners, crossing not only the borders between Arab and non-Arab groups, but also other divides (religious, or even national).[23] Again, these intermarriages are in striking contrast to the trends of agnatic endogamy found both in rural Sudan and among urban elites (Delmet 1994, Miller 2021). Close kin marriage is a persistent feature of Sudanese society and an indicator of status linked to ethno-tribal hierarchies. Dayāma discourses on this topic are another counter-narrative, in which the term *khalṭa*, which we might translate as "*métissage*" or "blending", has positive connotations compared with a widespread perception that stresses the risk of mixing "different people" through marriage, thus confusing the lines between positions and degrees of "purity". This anti-conformist treatment of the sensitive issues of kinship and marriage, and of relations between tribesmen and neighbours, has the effect of building a sort of quasi-kinship for the Dayāma. Enhancing this multilevel merging of ethnic and tribal origins as a particular meaning of "being Dayāma" leads to an assimilation of the strong solidarity links of kinship,

22 Apart from my personal experience, this trend of denying the existence of the *gabīla* has also been noticed by other researchers among opposition activists with a profile merging a middle and upper class background and their belonging to higher status Arab-Muslim tribes (Deshayes 2019). This is why I believe that the anti-tribal discourse has other powerful political meanings and is in line with the parallel claim of ethno-tribal affiliation among the popular classes, as found in Deim.

23 As far as religion is concerned, it is made up of a majority of Sunni Muslims mixed with Christians, Catholics and Copts. In terms of nationality, as far as my personal (and not statistical) data are concerned, we can include Ethiopian, Eritrean, Nigerian, Chadian, Egyptian, Syrian and Yemenite.

and is suggested as a sort of alternative path to becoming Sudanese (an overarching inclusive meaning of citizenship and nation-building). The current use of collective terms such as *awlād al-Daym*, "the sons of Deim", or *banāt al-Daym*, "the daughters of Deim", shows that a shared place may replace a single ancestor in creating this shared identity, and the assimilation of the term Dayāma[24] to collective tribal names in use in Sudan expresses a capacity to go beyond biological determinants without denying one's own origin, albeit with an awareness that it might gradually be superseded.

3 "Being Dayāma": A Counter-Power Narrative

As it seems from my ethnography of the neighbourhood, this local identity summarised by the claim of "being Dayāma" is a "counter-power" narrative that has the aim of talking critically about the present and imagining alternative futures rather than remembering the past. When talking about the history and present of their place, people in Deim explicitly or implicitly express their views on politics, power relations and the possibility of challenging them. In this section I will focus on two aspects: the definition of the Dayāma as non-subordinate subjects and the politicisation of places and moments in everyday life.

3.1 A Long and Persistent Tradition of Revolt

Insiders and outsiders seem to agree on the characterisation of Deim as a neighbourhood where people have historically been ready to stand up for their rights and to rise up against unjust powers, from the foundation of the neighbourhood in colonial times until the present day. This is often summarised by describing the Dayāma as *nās ṣa'bīn*, which means "unruly, tough people". Although this characterisation can be found in other neighbourhoods of Khartoum, in Deim it is associated with a form of reappropriation of a historical label that stresses the positive (and political) value of this "harshness". There is also a locally and nationally widespread proverb that goes: "*al-Dayāma ḥaṭab al-giyāma*", literally "The Dayāma are the firewood of Judgment Day", which, aside from the fact that it has diverg-

24 In one of my first discussions in Deim, when I questioned a man I met at a *sittat al-shāy* (tea lady) place about his origin (in terms of his tribal group), he quietly answered: "I am from the *gabīla* Dayāma".

ing interpretations,[25] emphasises and spreads a particular political vision of the neighbourhood. It is interesting to note, in fact, that after the 2019 Revolution, the same motto was echoed on the flag used in demonstrations by Deim's Resistance Committees: "*Dayāma giyāma*".[26]

The idea of a "rebel Deim" is not just a matter of imagination or external stigmatisation, however: evidence of participation in social and political mobilisations at a local and national level is widespread, and is well documented in biographies and narratives of the neighbourhood. Personalities who took part in historical protest movements[27] are frequently mentioned in discourses, which came as a considerable surprise to me because during the *inqādh*, people tended towards self-censorship on such topics, especially when talking to a foreigner. Trade Unions (*nagābāt*) were the first of these actors, and in Deim I was able to meet several elders who proudly recounted their experience in their job sector as workers' representatives as early as the late colonial times. This discourse could then easily move on to one about the repression of workers' associations in post-colonial times.

> People who were really born in Deim have a good level of education, but more than this they know and follow exactly what is going on, and in the field of politics, nobody can cheat them. These are the Dayāma. Some of the elders were active in the first trade unions since the British period, and their children followed, being active in unions or parties, mainly the SCP, and opposing this regime even at risk of their life. [S.I., b. 1956, 2016]

The affiliation to political parties is also stressed, with particular reference to the Sudanese Communist Party, which was well established in Deim, although its members paid the cost of government repression, first during the Nimayrī regime but even more dramatically in the 1990s after the *inqādh* came to power. The special ties between Dayāma and the SCP is sometimes presented as being "natural" due to the area's working class make-up, fostered by a shared lifestyle, which even the recent gentrification of the neighbourhood cannot erase:

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25 The difference can be summarised as follows: on one hand, people who proudly claim the idea that they are genuine rebels and believe that the saying comes from the Dayāma themselves, and, on the other, people who reject this connotation and believe that it was invented by others (the Islamists) to stigmatise the Dayāma as impious.

26 In this case, the term *giyāma* means "insurrection or revolt", from a widespread use of the verb *gām/yagūm* in the sense of "to rise up, to protest".

27 Recurring examples of this are the organisers of the White Flag League revolution in 1924, the officers who led the 1971 coup d'état against al-Nimayrī, and Maḥmūd Muḥammad Ṭāhā, who was killed for apostasy in 1985, together with less renowned – but locally meaningful – names such as ʿAlī Faḍul, a communist doctor and trade unionist who was killed in 1990.

> Deim, since its origin, is a workers' area (*manṭega ʿummāliyya*). There was no other class (*ṭabagāt*) beside these workers, which is why they were united, they had the same level of life, they formed their trade unions, and in their essence (*ṭabīʿathum*) most of them were close to the Communists. Today you may see some changes, for example in the buildings (*ʿamarāt*), but it is neither the workers nor their families who built them. This is a new class, coming from outside, and still we can say that Deim is a working class town (*medīna ʿummāliyya*), and a popular one (*shaʿbiyya*), like Atbara. [B.B., b. 1960, 2020]

Although this interview dates from after the December revolution, my attention was caught by the insouciance displayed by the speakers – men as well as women, and young as well as older people – even during my previous investigations, when they mentioned their link with this party. For me, this offered a clue that Dayāma claim this specific aspect of their political identity as an essential part of the wider one.

Memories of past and recent uprisings are also a central element of these counter-narratives. In this case, the speaker may include an episode linked to such movements either as it relates his or her own life or as it involves someone from their family or the neighbourhood, but with a constant intent to illustrate the common threads intertwining the national and the local, collective and personal histories, and to prove that the neighbourhood was not accurately described without evoking its political engagement, adding another shared meaning to the fact of being Dayāma. The age of the respondents influenced the references to precise uprisings, and it is more the older generations, those who lived in both Old and New Deims, who remember local participation in the 1924 Revolution (Vezzadini 2015), "the one of ʿAbd al-Laṭīf" as they call it, or a revolt in the 1940s that was also supported by local sheikhs against an attempt by the government to close places (*anādī*) where alcoholic drinks were produced and sold.[28] It looks as though people care less about stressing the political and ideological values of a precise revolt than this sort of common attitude towards rejecting injustices and standing up and organising collectively to oppose them. Local participation in protests against the dominant powers were cited in the narratives, or were simply mentioned as a background to a discourse on non-political issues.

Although the two significant moments of the 1964 and 1985 revolutions ("October" and "April") are the most frequently cited, more ephemeral and more recent movements have also marked local memories and entered this common narrative, as was evident for some that occurred during my fieldwork in 2012 and 2013,

28 Even though I did not find detailed evidence of this revolt, Sikainga (1996) confirms that both Old and New Deims were places where local alcohol was sold, and they remained so until Nimayrī decided to close them after the application of Islamic law in 1983.

and between 2015 and 2016. The 2012 mobilisation is particularly relevant in this narrative as it had more local roots in the district. It started out as general demonstrations against the increasing prices of daily items (gas and fuel), and then turned into local riots after the killing of a young woman from Deim, ʿAwaḍiyya ʿAjabnā, by a member of the Public Order Police in her own home.[29] The movement, which was known as "September 2013", is also remembered with a sense of oppression, as the repression that followed it was very rapid and violent. The movements between 2015 and 2016 were more closely to problems with cuts in the water supply (Casciarri and Deshayes 2019). Whatever the nature, duration and final outcomes of these mobilisations, the spread of this events through oral testimonies proves that for the Dayāma, given their history and social particularity, rebelling against unfair power is a logical, unavoidable, and persistent practice.

3.2 Everyday Politics in Times of Oppression

Apart from the explicitly political events, which I have mentioned in order to stress the counter-power position of Dayāma, attention needs to be paid to other dimensions of more silently, yet constantly, "making (counter)politics". I will now discuss some everyday practices in Deim that might be interpreted in the terms categorised by James Scott as "infra-politics" (1990), and as what Asef Bayat considers to be a "quiet encroachment of ordinary people" (2010). These practices help unravel the underlying political values in non-spectacular actions that bring a genuine sense of protest and yet avoid more risky explicit political acts. This connotation made them especially apt in the authoritarian period of *inqādh*. Nonetheless, it would be too simple to conceive them as expressions of a sort of opportunistic removal from "real" politics: on the contrary, what I call the everyday politicisation of the neighbourhood implies an effort to create political spaces and moments that are capable of overcoming serious repression by cultivating this important political impregnation of the Dayāma identity not just as a heritage but also as a potential tool to be reactivated in the future. This second-level political reading of local practices could be extended to a number of different aspects, but I intend to focus here on a few significant examples of the "implicit counter-politics" of everyday life and ordinary people, merging places and situations.

29 *Sudan Tribune*, an online independent newspaper, reported the killing of ʿAwaḍiyya on 6 March 2012 and the demonstration held in Deim the day after her death, which ended in an attack on the neighbourhood police station: https://www.sudantribune.com/spip.php?article41834 (retrieved on 1/8/2021).

Sūq al-Deim, the Deim market, which has existed since the colonial foundation of the neighbourhood, is one example of how hubs of everyday politicisation can be located in a place that is also a target of repressive power. Anthropologists have stressed that socialisation networks and extra-economic aims sometimes overwhelm economic transactions in African markets (Geertz 1978; Agier 1984; Sindzingre 1988), but I would also add that in Sūq al-Deim, infra-political or openly political links construct a web within the day-to-day operations of the market. Some places act as "political corners" in different spots inside the market. At the kiosk (*kushuk)* owned by Faḍul Muḥammad, a retired Post and Telegraph trade unionist (and the first trade unionist from Deim), and the father of ʿAlī Faḍul, one of the first *inqādh* martyrs,[30] people known to be critical of the power of the regime would gather in the mornings and sit reading newspapers and talking freely about politics. In the evening, the same role was played by the shop owned by John David, a tailor, who is said to have been the first South Sudanese to have a permanent shop in Deim Market. He was also close to the SCP, and embraced the progressive and secular vision of the late John Garang's "New Sudan".[31] Even where political connotations are not displayed so openly, other places are symbols of this "uncivil society" (Bayat 1997), like the two cafés at the north and west corners, which are now *gahwa*, but were *bār* until the sale of alcohol was prohibited, where people can sit until night time to talk and play cards (another activity forbidden by Islamic law). More generally, this political stance within the market can be seen in the solidarity displayed by established legal traders and shopkeepers when they "protect" the tea-seller women (*sittāt shāy*), ambulant vendors or rickshaw drivers, who are mainly *ḥabash* (Ethiopian and Eritrean) refugees and *janūbiyyīn* (Southerners) who suddenly became "illegal" after 2011, from *kasha* (police raids).

Another interesting area of implicitly political collective behaviour is found in the context of mourning, which makes it possible to talk of a "power of death". People from Deim are usually buried in the Faruk Cemetery, which symbolically marked the border between Khartoum 2 (the ancient site of Old Deims) and Deim after colonial displacement. Being a community also means giving a collective social meaning to death, and, as elsewhere, being buried in this cemetery is evidence that

30 ʿAlī Faḍul was kidnapped by the security services on 21 April 1990 and tortured to death. His father Faḍul Muḥammad kept a kiosk for selling eggs at the market almost up to the time of his death in 2020.

31 John David refused to return to South Sudan after the 2011 separation, and continued to be appreciated as a man who claimed his Southern origins and yet defended the unity of Sudan regardless of ethnicity. On his death in 2015, a celebration was held (despite attempts by the authorities to forbid it) that was attended by the whole district and political personalities from the opposition parties.

one belonged to the group, and participation in the mourning ceremony is a must for the neighbours. Here, however, death is also a space to be permeated by a greater political meaning that goes beyond the nature of this crucial moment as a rite of passage. In fact, in the early years of the *inqādh* regime, an association was formed in Deim to jointly organise the funerals of Dayāma (washing the body, preparing the shroud, transporting the deceased and digging the grave) and to overcome night time curfews. This made it possible to strengthen the already powerful value of "sharing death" and to stress the importance of gathering together and honouring the deaths of Dayāma without the risk of repression: whether they were martyrs or simply engaged citizens, they were symbolically essential for reasserting the identity of the neighbourhood as a place of counter-power, and once again to insist on the singularity of Deim compared to other neighbourhoods.

> When this government came, they imposed a curfew: you cannot move during the night, not even close to your place, unless you have special permission from the police. So we decided to form an association (*jamʿiyya)* to make it possible, when someone dies during the night, to do all the operations and go with the body to the cemetery without being arrested by the police. [O.H., b. 1936, 2010]

> Sudanese consider that bodies have to be buried soon after death. When you die in Deim, you will be buried in two hours! There is a group taking care of it. If you have someone who has died, you just call them, they prepare everything, they organise everything that's needed, for everyone from Deim. And I think there is nothing like this in other neighbourhoods. [M.F., b. 1957, 2018]

Finally, this counter-power narrative is also embodied in the lives of ordinary Dayāma in their daily occupation of public spaces. Although they often risked falling under the control of the authorities, local clubs (*nādī*) and associations (*jamʿiyya*) linked to sports, music and regional or ethnic groups remained, even during the *inqādh* regime; those were spaces where sociability was enhanced as a way of maintaining community ties, enjoying opportunities to gather and talk about how things are going or should go, and possibly organizing together at particular moments where solidarity, and even protest, was needed.

Often simply occupying a public space outside the home, even just outside one's door, can be read as an infra-political act. This intense sociability displayed in outdoor spaces affirms other ordinary ways of conceiving an alternative social order other than the one imposed by "public order laws" and Islamic morals: in Deim, this can be seen by the presence of women selling tea and food in the neighbourhood streets or the frequency of less regular events that continue to be celebrated in the open air (for example, marriages, with music and dancing often going on after the legal 11 p.m. limit). One example of this occupation of common open spaces as both a political act and a way of strengthening the solidarity of this moral

community was provided by one of my neighbours in October 2018. She invited me to a street party (with food and music), explaining that it was actually the third birthday of her child, but as it is forbidden by the government to celebrate birthdays – with the exception of the Prophet's *mawlid* – they were pretending that it was a party to celebrate the *ṭahūr*, or circumcision.

These examples of situations and spaces may seem different from one another, but what I wanted to stress is that first of all, in Deim, the political counter-narratives of the Dayāma are an expression of their wish to root their daily lives in past and present revolts, and, second, aside from the more explicitly political events, an infra-political dimension is spread in a variety of shared places and situations that ordinary people create and feed on in the flow of their everyday lives in the neighbourhood.

4 Some Lessons from the "December" Revolution

My fieldwork in Deim was supposed to be "concluded" when I left Sudan in October 2018, and I finally began the book I had been wanting to write for years (Casciarri, forthcoming). When I returned to Sudan in August 2019 after a long absence caused by the political events of the period, I shared in the euphoria of the people in Deim. Listening to their stories about how they had lived through the last revolution, I was able to find some answers to questions that had emerged during my decade of fieldwork in the neighbourhood. The following observations try to make sense not only of the persisting Dayāma identity, but also of some new elements brought about by the particular conjuncture of the "December" Revolution.

4.1 Making Sense of a Persisting Working-Class Popular Identity

As I said at the beginning of this chapter, the Dayāma as I knew them from my fieldwork and partly as an "insider" during the 2000s resembled a sort of "working class without workers", to paraphrase Bayat (2017), when he talks about "revolutions without revolutionaries". In fact, at the time of my research, most of them were either casual precarious workers in times of economic crisis or lower middle-class employees and professionals with a symbolic capital that was often higher than their economic capital. In both cases, they were quite far removed from the idealised image of a central, stable and homogenous working class that had lasted from colonial times until about the 1980s–1990s. At the same time, listening to their narratives and looking at their values as embodied in their daily practices, they seemed in

some way to be "revolutionaries without a revolution", because of the gap between their memories of past struggles, revolts and revolutions and their limited political opportunities during the thirty years of the *inqādh* regime.

As I discovered from the discussions I had with them in 2019, their involvement in the recent events of the "December" revolution helped me imagine a reason for this persistence of the claimed identity of the Dayāma as "a working class" and of Deim as "a popular place". After my return in late 2019 and at the time I wrote this chapter, it appeared to me that the efforts to maintain and pass this identity down through the generations may have been a tool for survival in difficult times by using collective memory and shared values to leave the door open to the possibility of imagining a different, fairer future. This looks similar to other Western contexts in which after the deindustralisation of the 1970s and 1980s, the former working classes had to deploy new strategies, first to guarantee their livelihoods on the margins of wage labour, and second to reassert their centrality through the production of a new popular territorial anchorage (Collective Rosa Bonheur 2019).[32] This is also what has happened in Deim, where for the Dayāma, shared memories (coupled with the production of common places) have played the role of an intangible place where common values of justice and freedom can be grounded, in which to root an identity capable of supporting the struggle for a better present to be built at more opportune moments such as the ones the last revolution brought about in 2018–2019.

4.2 Reshaping Visions of Deim and Dayāma Within the December Revolution

Nonetheless, while the more politicised Dayāma tended to stress that for them this revolution was a "natural" and logical event rather than an unexpected one, several remarked on its novelty, and declared that they had been surprised by some aspects of it that were not simply a repetition of what they, their fathers and their grandfathers had lived through. I will focus on two main elements of this perception as they were related to me in discussions in Deim during my fieldwork in the autumn of 2019. Both show that dynamic contexts – especially radical multilevel moments of change like revolutions[33] – may contradict images and categorisations that in ordi-

32 It also echoes the reflections of a Marxist geographer who, following Henri Lefebvre, considers that the agent of revolutionary change is not simply the "working class" but more particularly the "urban" class, with its constant claims of a "right to the city" (Harvey 2019: xiii).

33 While I am not going to join in the debate on how to categorise protests to subvert order, I have noticed that the Sudanese used the term *thawra*, "revolution" since the beginning of the uprising, and continued to do so after the formation of the transitional government, while Western media

nary times tend to follow a rigid dualism and binary opposition, and make them highly nuanced and very complex.

The first remark suggests the existence of a particular "interclass" alliance developed during the uprising between two neighbourhoods, Deim and Amarat, which had formerly been presented as socially and historically opposed. In previous Dayāma narratives, Amarat was in fact the stereotype of an "anti-Deim", inhabited by rich people locked up in their large, luxurious houses, individualistically dedicated to their businesses, and all belonging to dominant Muslim Arab groups. In post-revolution discourses, although most Dayāma agreed that the spark that ignited the revolution was increasing pauperisation due to the economic crises, they did admit to some extent that the urban disadvantaged class (and workers like them) had not been the first to rise up. They were thus ready to reconsider their former stigmatisation of "middle and upper class" neighbourhoods, and to welcome the fact that "*awlād ʿamarāt*" (who had previously been seen as a conservative bourgeoisie far from people's worries and needs) have been on the front line together with "*awlād al-daym*", sometimes even before and more than them.

The second novel aspect is a rethinking of the "right way" to fight in order to defeat the forces of oppression. My previous discussions with Dayāma about protest movements or political action tended to paint an archetypal view of an oppressed and exploited people whose anger had to be framed by left-wing parties and trade unions. Consequently, more spontaneous movements begun by younger and less formally politicised actors, such as the riots of September 2013, were said to have failed because of their distance from the best practices for leading a successful revolution. After 2019, a new interpretation of this spread, and people became open to accepting and legitimising new actors and new patterns for political change. The events of "September 2013" turned from a painful memory of a political mistake paid for with brutal repression to the status of marking the very beginning of the victorious movement of the 2018–2019 revolution (Casciarri & Saeed 2020).

In my discussions after 2019, the older generation, who had closer ties to a traditional vision of revolutionary events led by a carefully organised and centralised "working class party" seeking to take power even with the use of weapons, also acknowledged the crucial role of "less organised", widespread peaceful movements. This has created a sort of deep political respect for the young men (and also the young women) to whom the victory in this revolution is said to belong. The older respondents had no hesitation in expressing their astonishment when they realised they had a great deal to learn from young men and women, and from the peaceful

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and observers – and sometimes scholars – imposed and spread different labels that underscored the movement's radical dimension (Casciarri & Manfredi 2020, Abdelhay et al. 2021).

and more horizontal movement they led until the final victory. But thanks to the revolutionary experience, the same feeling of "learning something new", something that was quite unknown in usual practices, was found in the narratives of younger people. Many told me how they "rediscovered" the importance of sharing that they had thought was simply a nostalgic ideal of their fathers and mothers when they compared the past with the present. Most examples of this sharing are in the form of memories of the moments experienced during the sit-in,[34] starting from the most emblematic of them, the sharing of food, and moving up to the intangibles (solidarity, culture and feelings). Labelled with a new term borrowed from internet English (*shīr*) (Casciarri & Manfredi 2020), "sharing" took on a deep political sense, as the ultimate value of the December revolution seen as a process anchored within a long-term history of the Sudanese people. The fruitful convergence of old and new practices and values is also welcomed in other attitudes such as bravery and courage (*shujāʿ*) when it comes to facing repression, torture and death, which is said to be a tribute offered by the young to "traditional" Sudanese values.

Conclusion

This chapter has attempted to summarise a long period of fieldwork work that started out as a study of "identity building" in a popular quarter in Greater Khartoum, and then attempted to search for hints for its interpretation in a more recent political event, namely the December revolution. My final observations were mainly based on interviews and informal discussions with Dayāma during my fieldwork after the revolution, in the autumn of 2019. This means that they need to be compared with an evolving situation in which the pandemic and economic crisis since 2020 have threatened the revolutionary momentum (Casciarri 2022), even more so after the October 2021 coup d'état, which began a new phase of political repression. In any event, at the stage my reflections had reached at the end of 2019, it made sense to match the results of ten years of counter-power narratives gathered among the Dayāma with the renewed meaning their involvement in a successful revolution brought. The connotations of what until 2018 might have been read as a nostalgic, idealised image of Deim as a "rebel neighbourhood" broadly conveyed by Dayāma, or, from the outside as a persisting stigmatisation of a historically marginal place and its people, changed: after "December", it can be interpreted as a powerful tool of socio-political resilience

34 A huge sit-in was held in front of the army headquarters in central Khartoum from 6 April 2019 (leading to the fall of ʿUmar al-Bashīr on 11 April) until it was brutally dispersed, and followed by the massacre by military and militias on 3 June 2019 (Bahreldin 2020).

for groups striving to hold on to their “capacity to aspire” as a weapon of the weak (Appadurai 2013), reinforcing their ability to oppose the political and economic violence of neoliberalism. The Dayāma seem to show that this can be achieved by bridging the past, present and future whenever a sense of community is maintained with care and handed down through the years and generations. This is also possible because this sense has been constructed through the appropriation of a common space, and is connoted by values of socio-spatial justice, anchored since colonial times in a history of contested domination. In this framework, wider revolutionary processes may be successfully rooted in a specific local, social and political history like that of Deim. Nothing can illustrate this better than the wall painting near Deim Market (Figure 27). Against a general trend to paint portraits of *shuhadāʾ*, or “martyrs”, killed by the regime during the last revolution (Khiar 2020), the “Dayāma” – the collective authors signing this work – have chosen to paint two martyrs from their neighbourhood, ʿAlī Faḍul (d. 1990) and ʿAwaḍiyya ʿAjabnā (d. 2012), who were killed *before* this revolution by the same oppressive power. It is a way of reminding people that uprisings have deep roots rather than being ephemeral events, as the media and powers often suggest, and that although they are part of a united larger movement, they are nourished by local contexts and the thickness of their relations.

Figure 27: Wall painting in memory of ʿAlī Faḍul and ʿAwaḍiyya ʿAjabnā, Deim.[35]

35 Photo B. Casciarri, 2019. The text reads (from the left): “Martyr ʿAlī Faḍul, martyr ʿAwaḍiyya ʿAjabnā. Freedom, Peace and Justice. Civil Government (*madaniyya*).” It is signed by the Association of Sudanese Painters, Shabāb Ṣafrajet and Dayāma.

Another tentative reflection emerges from this study: the idea of how anthropology and history can profitably merge when attempts are made to construct the social history of "ordinary people" in popular quarters. My personal trajectory is just one of these possible pathways. Before becoming an anthropologist, I received my initial training in social history, and discovered fieldwork through an oral history of the working class in Italy. This experience gave me an interest in studying how people (especially subaltern, dominated or marginalised groups) tell stories about their lives and places, considering memory not as a receptacle of "facts" but as a "matrix of meanings" (Portelli 1985), in which we can look at how people invest their present and future through their practices and desires. Focusing on pastoral contexts during the early years of my research, and later caught up in the misleading debates that attempted to discern and label "urban" and "rural" anthropologists, I finally accepted that I had the qualifications to propose a social history of Deim through an ethnography of the district. Although I passed from the desert to the town, I still very much remained an anthropologist, relying on qualitative ethnography for my fieldwork in Deim, based mainly on stories people told me about their lives and their involvement in the life of the district, enriched by frequent in-depth observations and helped by my status as a resident, which together with my empathy certainly also represented a bias. I also overcame the malaise anthropologists still sometimes express with regard to history as a persisting legacy of colonial anthropology (and structural or functionalist approaches). Discovering my identity neither as a "rural" nor an "urban" anthropologist, but claiming a political and dynamic critical anthropology (inspired by Marxist tradition and its multiples approaches), I found myself unable to ignore the historical dimension proved to be unavoidable for me as I dealt with all my fieldwork, and in my search to understand collective social processes and their meanings. This modest contribution can be seen first as a tribute to the Dayāma, as one of the many peoples who fight injustice and oppression and sacrifice themselves for it, and second as a starting point for a development of a dialogue between historians and anthropologists to promote the construction of a new social history in Sudan.

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