

ARTS IN A CHANGING SOCIETY:

NORTHERN SUDAN

by

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Introduction

This paper is based mainly on data collected through interviews in Sudan in 1966. The purpose is to detect certain changes in the arts as they reflect socio-political change. For the most part, I limited my subject to urban Northern Sudan and to the late twentieth century.

Greater Khartoum, consisting of three towns, represents the major urban complex of the country. In Africa "...the major centres of change are towns, mines, and plantations." (1) Sudan is no exception in that social change is most noticeable in the towns and in the agricultural development schemes. It is in the urban complex where one sees Arab/African social values mixed with residual British values. It is here where the middle and upper class intellectual and economic elite accept new values based upon more exposure to the media, economic viability allowing greater leisure to enjoy "culture", and greater accessibility to other areas through communications.

My subject is restricted to literature, music, theater, and art proper (e.g. painting, ceramics, sculpture, and calligraphy). There has been no attempt to deal historically with the rural "folk" art, except in occasionally contrasting it to twentieth century trends in urban Sudan. Although the media have been playing an increasingly important role in the "cultural life" of the urban Sudanese, such a topic is beyond the scope of this short paper. Therefore, I deal with the media only where they have had direct bearing on artistic change.

According to Southall's classification of towns (2), Greater Khartoum would be classified as "old established, slowly growing towns". Occupations are diverse; there is still a remnant of agricultural subsistence economy; there is an indigenous core (central riverain Arabs); and there is a link with the rural areas. The towns of Sudan are highly mobile and fluid. The more fluid the network of relationships, the less rigid the set of norms. Adding to this state of flux is a complicated system of social stratification. Different levels of age, income, occupation, and education promote different norms. Still there is a core of orthodox norms and accompanying deviations from these norms. Such deviations are provoked by self-generated individual differences, industrialization, Westernization, and influences from the Arab world. There is always a tendency on the part of Western writers on Sudan to over-emphasize Westernization and Western industrialization when considering social change. An inevitability of unilineal change is often

predicted. But, "Industrialization cannot be treated as a given change which then produces uniform consequential changes...[we cannot ignore] the dynamics of simultaneous change, the complexity of uneven sequence, the nature of structural conflict." (3) Islamization and Arabization play a major role in cultural change in Sudan. Always in the case of an Islamicized African country one should beware of statements implying unilineal social change, i.e., Westernization. One has to consider self-generated change and changes within Islam and the Arab world which affect the entire cosmological and mystical orientation of the arts.

Many diverse and conflicting ideas and institutions have permeated the urban area as the power structures changed. Movements both towards a neo-Mahdist revival and a secularization of Islam interacted. Trends toward the emancipation of women and a revision of the relationship of the sexes clashed with the new orthodoxy of the Mahdist government and such groups as the Muslim Brotherhood. Western education exists beside Islamic institutions and a trend towards Arabization. Media offer ideas from the Western and Arab worlds but also carry the ideas of an Islamic state. Communism/socialism mixed with the doctrines of a right-wing conservative incipient "theocracy" which talked of "African socialism" and yet banned the Communist Party. Features of Western political structures served as a foundation for a possible Islamic constitution. The sedentary are still migratory within a more limited framework; and old elites compete with new elites.

It is within the above seemingly contradictory framework that the Sudanese artist works. It is for these reasons that his work is often ambiguous and that he sometimes can relate to his sociocultural environment and sometimes cannot. Art content does not actually reflect social reality but emotional involvement with it. (4) Art is "the song of history, not its news-reel". (5) There are times when the "art" of Sudan seems to take on the quality of a newsreel, but generally it is the song of social experience. Most apparent in Sudanese art - particularly in music/poetry - is the function of expression of subjective involvements with contemporary events. (6)

Music

Georg Simmel treats music as an "aspect of social relationships by which individuals communicate among one another and which, in turn, maintain, structure, and restructure these relations". (7) Since human emotions cannot be adequately represented by speech, Simmel argues that vocal music is speech exaggerated by rhythm and modulation. Also mystic-religious phenomena can be better expressed in music. Instrumental music is more objective but is still used to express emotion. All types of music Simmel discusses in terms of their communication function in social life. "...apparently [the style of] music is characteristic for the character of a people!". Simmel advances the argument further in indicating that, "In order to achieve greatness, the artist has to work within an artistic tradition, parts of which he must accept and refine". (9)

Certainly to the music of Sudan one could apply some of Simmel's hypotheses.

Sudanese music is unique in that it involves a five note scale unlike the Western octave or the Egyptian seven note scale (with quarter note). Always two notes are excluded; it does not matter which two notes. It is difficult for the Sudanese public to appreciate or become accustomed to the seven note scale, and many musical experts claim that such a limited scale has hindered drastic and profound changes in the melodic personality of Sudanese music. One of Sudan's leading singers and folklorists, Abdel Karim el Cabli, claims that the five note scale is the same as a language with limited vocabulary. Some experts accept the five note scale, but insist that well-trained musicians only must apply it in order for any innovations to occur. Most of the change in music has been in lyrical composition rather than in the melodies themselves. Many of the lyrics of Sudanese songs were written by renowned poets - first either as poems which were then set to music - or as lyrics which were written directly for the musical medium. Therefore, I have combined musical lyrics and poetry in my references throughout the paper. Of course, each art form has its own unique history, but the above two have been intricately related.

With respect to changes in the text there have been changes in vocabulary in the use of non-Arabic (usually Western) words. Also, new sounds have appeared which are non-Arabic and could be described as onomatopoeic. The introduction of new languages (English and Swahili namely) has brought transformations in lyrical symbolism. Some changes in lyrical themes are blatant; one sees new sets of lyrical symbols for every new political regime or political epoch. Examples of these changes will follow below. (10)

Also, there have been additions and deletions of instruments. The introduction of new materials has brought wire strings rather than gut on the *rabat* (five string instrument), metal parts of drums, etc. Additions to the former limited list of instruments are: violin, guitar, drum sets, saxophone, trumpet, and others. There is even an entire symphonic orchestra (in the Western sense) with full paraphernalia led by French-trained Ismail Abdel Moeim. Traditionally *hakiba* singers (a kind of traditional chorus) used the triangle, tambourine, and castanets. Later they added the drum and synchronized clapping.

However, el Mahi Ismail tells us that basically there has been little change in music itself - that is, in style, technique of distribution (scale), and the instruments themselves. One hears a slight change in sound with the addition of new instruments and the slowing down of the rhythm, but these are not profound alterations.

What are the influences on Sudanese music and what has provoked the changes which have occurred? Besides internal changes in Islam (a relaxation of rigid rules against such things as free intercourse between

the sexes) and in the power structure, external forces were active. With the rise of independent Africa came a respect for African music such as "high life". One of the most popular singers in Sudan is the Westernized, yet Africanized Sharhabil. (11) From the Southern Sudan comes the notion of drum beats and from the Western world the influence of jazz. Egyptian music offers to Northern Sudan its "spirit", according to el Cabli, as well as language influences and artistic techniques. But both el Cabli and el Mahi agree that the greatest influence has been Western music, carried by the media. Since the introduction of television many influences have been felt in rhythm, lyrics, and instruments.

The relationship of Islam to music has been a rather contradictory one. That is, although it is true that religious "singing" (chants) had an influence on the development of vocal music, singing itself was negatively sanctioned by religious authorities. The only literate people were the Koranic scholars and their students. Since the only people who participated in social singing were illiterate, no songs were written down. As I indicated, Koranic chants and Islamic themes had some influence. But because Koranic singing is governed by rigid rules, leaving little or no room for emotion, there has been little improvisation in religious "singing". Religious attitudes mentioned above also affected the position of the singer in society: he was considered socially inferior. Perhaps the media and increased education brought the most vital changes to music - the media by introducing sounds and ideas from afar - and education by promoting literacy among the lyricists.

In interviewing a traditional wedding singer, Gima Ahmed, I learned that traditional wedding songs have changed. Gima gives as one reason for this change the exposure to Western ideas about the relationship of the sexes, thus creating an increase in the number of love songs and an increase in sexual imagery in the lyrics. Wedding ritual and music are so closely integrated that changes in music have necessarily brought changes in ritual and the reverse.

Before beginning a discussion of changes in music under various socio-political situations, I should first summarize (and inevitably, over-simplify) the power structures extant in Sudan since 1899:

- (a) 1899-1956: British-Egyptian "condominium" regime which allowed indirect rule in the North and promoted Islamic institutions.
- (b) 1956-1958: Independence from Britain which was followed by two parliamentary governments, both controlled by an Arab/Nubian Muslim elite.
- (c) 1958-1964: Conservative military regime.
- (d) 1964-1965: Revolution after which a left-wing interim government came to power; intellectual elites.
- (e) 1965-1966: Ultra-conservative parliamentary government under Mohamed Mahjoub, member of the Mahdist Ansar sect.
- (f) 1966-1969: Similar government structure under new leadership, Saddig el Mahdi, descendant of the original Mahdi; neo-Mahdist

conservative.

- (g) 1969-present: Left-wing military government, taking power following a *coup d'etat*; also leftist/socialist civilian elements represented.

To illustrate social attitudes and political ideologies permeating Sudanese songs, with the invaluable help of musicologist, el Mahi Ismail, I selected excerpts from patriotic-nationalistic-political songs ranging from those composed in the 1930's to those celebrating the rise of African nationalism and the dawn of independence for some African countries. One can see the poetic transformations - different allusions, contrasting tones, and distinctly different vocabularies.

SUDANI ("My Sudan") - 1930's

*My Sudan; it is embedded in my heart; I love it.
 Its sky is like a roof over my head;
 Its generosity has overwhelmed me;
 The love I have for it in my heart
 Is almost like a religion.
 It is my orchard and my garden;
 Its water has quenched my thirst;
 And its Nile has flooded me with life.*

It is a relatively simple and romantic poem written at a time before the rise of intense nationalism. Below is another which is describing or displaying emotional patriotism:

FIL FOUAD TRAHOL INAYA ("Although it is Embedded in My Heart, Yet I Trust it to God") - 1930's

*It is embedded in my heart, the dear country,
 All that I aspire for is that you are safe.
 And, God willing, you will be safe, my country.*

There is some plea for sacrifice:

We sacrifice ourselves to the dear country...

And -

*I love my country; I love its sands;
 And I will never sell it and say I do not care.*

Nationalism appears:

*When a national meets me I serve him first.
 And how could I leave him and rush to the foreigner?*

National unity is espoused above tribal unity. In the late 1940's, when nationalism had grown, Ahmed el Mustafa sang a national song which contained references to Northern and Southern Sudan being united as well as anti-British protests:

ANA OMDURMAN ("I, Omdurman" - Sudan's largest city)

*I am Omdurman, look at my stars;
The Sudan is represented within me.
I have made my heart the home for the son of the North;
And I have folded my ribs around the son of the South.*

Then to the British -

*It is not possible to achieve what you want
By wishing it only.
I am Omdurman and my misfortunes went yesterday.
Tomorrow my brave son is going to break
The chains of bad omen...*

This was the beginning period of many references to breaking bondage. The poet goes on to say that he (Omdurman) will make himself and his feelings known to the world. And the imagery of breaking chains or escaping from bondage grows stronger as independence draws nearer. In 1953, just as Sudan's political future was about to be determined, the poet, Abdel Karim el Kurishi, set the foundation for Osman el Shafiya to sing *Watani* ("My Country") in which emotional appeals are made to the people to struggle against tyranny and unite for freedom:

*Country of the grandfathers
We defend you and we sacrifice our souls...
With our blood we shall write you in history.
Come, young men. Come, soldiers, and break the chains.
Let us all shout, 'Long live the struggle,
and out should go the aggressor'...
Come, youth of Sudan, and unite with the South...*

Action, not words, is called for:

*Full freedom. This is our wish.
Ignorance, poverty, and division -
We must unite and repeat the glories
Of the great people of our country.*

In the next few selections the entire tones and themes change to the more militant. Left-wing vocabulary sweeps into the lyrics: "the good earth", "the masses", and "revolution" (a relatively new word in Arabic literature). The songs are filled with emotion as the poet (and singer) relate to a social reality. Sometimes, however, the poet is a "newsreel" in Malraux's sense. *Ardamal Tayeba* ("Our Good Earth") was

inspired by modern Russian literature and was written around 1953-54 by Sudan's Hussein Bazara. Even the instrumental introduction is militant with a military taps sound.

*I sacrifice my soul for you, my country.
You are my life; you are all I have.
The heritage of the great people
and the glories of the Arabs...*

As in the case of many patriotic songs, the poet praises the history of his country and its grandfathers. Then he uses the metaphor "light" which was first used in Arabic literature by the Iraqi poet, Abdel Wahab el Biati, a Communist who wrote around the early 1950's. The metaphor for freedom now appears frequently in Sudanese literature.

*Oh, brothers, oh, brothers...let us walk
towards the light, in a revolution
To break the chains of darkness...*

In the late 1950's around the time of the Bandung Conference, a Communist poet, Tag el Sirr el Hassan, wrote *Asya wa Afrika* ("Asia and Africa") - a song filled with references to African liberation and also full of left-wing terminology. El Cabli performed it. The song begins with beautiful poetic imagery and then moves into political allusions and references:

*[I will sing] To the reflections of the shadows
of the blacks in Kenyan forest [Mau-Mau probably]
To my comrades in the Asian countries,
In Malaya and Dia Bandung, to Ethiopia,
To the happy young nights in new China,
For which I sing in my heart a thousand songs.
Oh, my friends who are creating glory for my people.
You who are like candles whose green light is my heart.
Wahran [reference to the Algerian war] has come
To life again and is walking.*

This is a reference to the awakening of the masses. And then -

*And the glorious canal [Suez after nationalization],
The waters are like blood through my veins.
And I in the heart of Africa [Sudan] am a saboteur.
I do not know my friends; I have not visited Indonesia,
The Land of Sukarno.*

Some original lines in the first segments above made reference to Russia, but because the song came out during the conservative Sudanese military regime, and because Russia was at that time recognized as the leader of the Communist world, China and Indonesia were substituted. The song goes on -

*But the morning light in the new Africa,
The slight light drinks from the faraway star
[in the Chinese flag perhaps?]*

*I have seen the people; I have also seen Jomo;
I have seen Jomo like the light of the dawn
Against the light of the whole day. (12)*

Tag el Sirr and el Cabli sang of other African leaders - Nasser, Ben Bella, and Ethiopia's martyr of the early 1960's, Mengistu Neway.

In the early 1960's Mohamed Werdi, a Nubian, performed *Yaysat Shab* ("Awakening of the People"), which had the guise of a nationalistic song during the military regime. The song was introduced on "Revolution Day", 17th of November. But when people listened carefully there was esoteric meaning. At that time, Nubians were being forced to migrate to Khasm el Girba from their beloved and historical Wadi Halfa and surrounding areas, lost in the flooding of the Aswan Dam. Werdi asks the Nubians to go forward and not accept slavery - to fight. He makes references to Nubian history, to Beja unity, and to the South. It was the most emotional and arousing song performed during that period. At one point Werdi changes to a familiar Nubian rhythm when he talks about the fame and wonder of the grandfathers. He asks Nubians not to accept chains and be passive. On Revolution Day (October 21st) 1964, Werdi again performed a song even before the Revolution (overthrow of the military) was completed. He used an El Faituri poem (a poet who will be discussed later), which was originally about Africa, and changed the references to Sudan - *Aabahal Subho*.

Modern songs reflect the social reality of social events. Traditionally poetry was the main art of Sudan; songs are their descendants. Even during times of extreme political oppression when speech and press were stifled, songs were expressions of current emotions. Of course, not all songs have been politically charged; this is a more recent trend following the political awakening of Africa in general. Love songs and praise songs are often more personal expressions of the artists. But still they reflect the sociocultural environment.

The media have brought the artist closer to his audience where the poet/singer can share with his people the sociocultural values of his age. He is the most socially important artist of Sudan; he is the one who can reach the illiterate and the semi-literate. If the people of the towns do not understand his Arabic, as is often the case with the folklorique and classical songs of el Cabli, they can be aroused by the music itself and then pick up the meaning from someone who has understood it. Sometimes el Cabli even gives an explanation of a song before or after he performs it - an attempt to reach many strata. The poetic quality of music is changing, thus improving the social position of the poet/singer. His music has the dual artistic function of entertaining and bestowing messages - and he is looked upon by many as a recorder of the past, as a seer, or as a poet of the people.

Literature

The conversion of Sudan to Islam "was affected by nomadic people who besides the Book, could bring with them only such forms of art as could travel: poetry and calligraphy". (13) The environment of the early Sudanese poet was akin to the ancient Arab poet who travelled by camel and observed the desert. "...he addressed his audience from a platform...the Sudanese audience was one which regarded listening to poetry as its sole entertainment." (14) It is for this reason that Ibrahim el Salahi, one of Sudan's most famous painters, commented that it is poetry which is the art of Sudan. (15)

According to one of the main authorities on modern Sudanese poetry, Mohamed Ibrahim el Shoush, the poets who dominated the Sudanese literary world in the 1920's were public orators and performers. (16) In a popular sense they were preachers. The art of poetry, then, had the original function of delivering a religious message. Thus, Islam can be viewed ambiguously, as we shall see, for, in a sense, it was the foundation of the earliest poetry, but later it hindered modern development of free verse and universal, secular themes.

The poets of the 1920's were left out of the main stream of political thought. They were either romantics, basking in the glories of the past such as el Banna -

*O young moon, talk of the world
or of religions because in your talk/
lies my cure...*

*I have wept for a magnificent past full of glory/
With pride not tinged with vanity. (17)*

or they were obsessed with religious reform. None of these traditionalist poets played a major role in the unsuccessful revolution of 1924; they were moved by social incidents, religion, and the glories of the past. Technique-wise, the traditionalists used very little subtle imagery, but addressed the listener directly and blatantly. After 1930, a change came about in that the traditionalists began to comment on the Sudanese countryside, using more subtle imagery and developing one idea or image. But this naturalistic phase was a short one.

The 1930's saw a rise of the secular-educated, and poetry reflected this secularization. But this romantic school, "el Fajr", was socially frustrated and remained unfulfilled until the rise of nationalism between 1930 and 1940. However, it should not be thought that the rise of a secular, romantic school of poetry ever completely eclipsed religious poetry, for even today religious imagery and thought co-exist with secular thought. Islamic traditions have never faded completely, but merely pass through various phases of popularity. One such religious poet who graduated from the Omdurman Religious Institute, el Tigani Yusuf Beshir, wrote during this same romantic period. He could be described

as romantic, mystical, and subjective - constantly questioning his faith in vague literary whispers:

*The melodies returned to the strings in such a short while
And became lost forever in the darkness of my exhausted and
sick lyre. (18)*

It is interesting to note that Shoush deals with a classical school of poetry succeeding the "el Fajr" school in one paragraph. This school of original, disciplined, and classical poets is led by Abdallah el Tayeb, one of the geniuses of prose as well as poetry.

Of more interest to Shoush, and of more relevance to this paper, is the modern school of social-realists which emerged in the wake of the rise of Sudanese nationalism, impending independence, and the dawn of African independence - accompanied by movements such as negritude. These poets followed the surge of socialism which permeated the non-Western world after World War II. Poetry set to music, poetry delivered at public gatherings, and poetry on the printed page all followed the new trend. However, not only was the thought new to Sudanese literature, but also the technique and style. The new poets wrote in free verse and became known as the "School of Free Poetry". Rather than brilliant individual lines and sketches, the poems attempted to develop an entire idea or image.

The socialist-realists, Jaily Abdel Rahman, Tag el Sirr el Hassan, Mohamed el Faituri, and Mohi el Din Faris, used the language of the new left in writing against imperialists, capitalists, exploitation of the masses, etc. The school was violently anti-western - particularly anti-American. It was a reaction to the ivory tower school. Africa was alive to its people, and poets emoted the new sensitivity to the common man.

In his work on modern Sudanese poets, Shoush has translated a few of the poems which catch the tone of social and political protest. (19) El Faituri is obsessed with racial discrimination and his poetry is inundated with bitterness:

*Thou, who created man from clay
And an artist from clay
You tortured me with art...*

As mentioned above, el Faituri was the lyricist for one of the songs performed by Werdí about Africa; he was a spokesman for a continent crying for freedom and venting resentment:

*An old hag wrapped in incense,
A ditch filled with fire...
The dance of the naked blacks
Singing in black happiness...*

*To the white of this age,
The master of all ages.*

Race consciousness and anti-colonialism stirred him and stimulated his imagery. His social sense was aroused over social injustice to his Africa:

*Africa awake. Wake up from your black dream...
Yes, our turn has come, Africa,
Our turn has come.*

A modern favorite is Salah Ahmed Ibrahim. He combines the traditional (allusions to the Koran, Bible, and Greek mythology) with a modern social sense. He, too, is race conscious and is moved by the political injustices of a colonized Africa:

*Have you ever tasted the humiliation of being coloured
And seen the people pointing at you, shouting:
"Hey, you, black nigger"...
Have you one day tasted the hunger in a strange land
And slept on the damp ground...*

In Sudan, poetry is not just the song of the literary genius; it is the song of the sensitive intellectual, an avocation of the politicians, an art of the people. Sudan's former prime minister, Mohamed Mahgoub, expressed his political hopes and frustrations in:

*What a wasted land my country is,
Whose people find victory in submitting,
Those who find their lives in humiliation,
Who find it virtuous to be subordinate;
Those who are proud to be close to a ruler
And scheme against their people and their country.
This is your time, follies, have fun!
The hunting dog is at the hunter. (20)*

These poets and intellectuals were all instrumental in bringing about independence in 1956. And, although the press was rigidly controlled, one cannot overlook the role of the social protestors in the 1964 Revolution. Songs of protest have been the conscience of the Sudanese people. They have instigated socio-political change and reflect such changes.

Theater

Regarding theater, or what we refer to as "legitimate stage", I was able to obtain little information. One expert on Arab theater, when asked about Sudanese theater said, "It does not exist". (21) Yet, in probing a bit further I was able to discover an incipient experimental

theater at the University of Khartoum. Abdel Rahman Shibili, a student, wrote, directed, and presented a one act play filled with political symbolism. His play, "El Zabanyat", is a political allegory written in the mode of theater of the absurd. Although the play was inspired by a Western school of drama, it is "Sudanese" because Arabic is the medium of expression and the subjects and themes are Sudanese. Here is the outline:

Three men are stranded on an island. Two of the characters represent the two leading parties of Sudan at the time (who formed a coalition in 1966) and the third represents the people. In order to survive, one of them must be eaten, so two of them conspire to eat the third (the people). They decide that he is the one to be eaten because he is the only one who has a mother (absurdity). At that point a postman comes out of the sea and tells the third man that his mother is dead. The postman symbolizes the Communist Party which tried to offer a solution to the political problems of the country in 1965-1966. Two other characters appear who represent two additional parties - one of which is the Islamic Front. The Islamic Front suggests throwing the postman back into the sea and they do. (The Communist Party was banned in 1966 because of an affront to the Islamic group). A lion appears and threatens to eat all of them. It represents the very serious problems of Sudan: Southern separatism and economic failure. The two men sacrifice the third to the lion, but there is the suggestion that the lion will return and eat them one by one. (22)

Shibili reflected in a political allegory the political climate of his time. He was also adapting for the stage a new novel by Abdallah el Tayeb, *From the Window of a Train* (translation of the title), in which a Sudanese is confronted with the ambiguity of culture conflict - trying to reconcile the old and new. Abdallah el Tayeb uses a high level of Arabic (classical), unintelligible to the ordinary reader, but he mixes this classical medium with a stream-of-consciousness style. In the play, however, Shibili has chosen to use colloquial Arabic in an attempt to reach a wider audience. He feels that theater has a chance for survival in Sudan if playwrights mix modern symbolism and techniques with the traditional. Therefore, recognizing that music is the most simple and appealing art to Sudanese, he has incorporated background music into his plays. Shibili's views are in definite contrast to el Tayeb. The former maintains that Sudanese are still simple pastoral people who are moved by the simple rhythm and lyrics of a song as opposed to the intellectual effect of literature. For example, he says that Sudanese do not easily comprehend the mixing of the senses in poetic imagery - or abstractions. Shibili prefers to reach the "masses" while Abdallah el Tayeb (who, by the way, has also written classical plays) writes to a very small intellectual elite and seems more intent on raising the standard of Arabic literature than on reaching the "masses".

Regardless of the approaches of the two men, both have mixed the traditional with the new - epitomizing the ambiguous changing social

structure of Sudan's urban elite. (23)

Art

Of all the arts mentioned none symbolize the changing personality of Northern Sudan so much as the plastic arts. A very small school of artists from the School of Fine and Applied Art at Khartoum Technical Institute temporarily lost their roots and became immersed in the discipline of traditional Western art. Most of those same artists are seeking their roots once again, but with a fresh approach to the traditional.

Many changes have taken place in the art scene. First of all, esthetic art is replacing functional art; therefore, painting is replacing handicraft. However, right now there is a vacuum left by the decline of handicraft which painting has not yet been able to fill. As mentioned earlier, poetry and calligraphy were traditionally the only "arts" of Sudan (that is, with the exception of functional crafts) because they were mobile. Paintings and sculpture are more difficult to transport. Furthermore, in the minds of Sudanese, paintings do not have any function. The paintings which are seen occasionally in Sudanese homes are mostly landscape scenes. Walls of even the most educated elite are decorated with plaques, photographs (often portraits of Nasser or the current Sudanese leader), needlework (embroidery), and natural scenes. Except for calligraphy, abstract art is almost non-existent. Yet, there are painters - of all kinds - "primitives" such as Hitler Moses whose pictures depict animals in their natural Southern Sudan environment, commercial copiers of popular paintings, textile printers who reproduce antiquities on special Shendi cloth (Hassan el Hadi and Iman Atta), graphic designers (Tag el Sirr Ahmed), calligraphers (Ahmed Mohamed Shibrain), and painters of non-objective art (Ibrahim el Salahi, Hassan Badawi, Shibrain, Tag Ahmed, Mohamed Omer Khalil, and Hussein Shariff). It is the graphic designers, the calligraphers, and the non-objective painters who are relevant to the thesis of this paper, for it is these artists who walk in two worlds - the worlds of tradition and change.

Traditionally, and interpreted in its strictest sense, Islam imposed a heavy sanction against reproduction of anything that casts a shadow - namely a living figure. The linear, elaborate, and ornate art style known as Arabesque was the most highly developed style, and calligraphy was the most common form. Arabs have had a rather sacred regard for the Arabic language and calligraphy was an expression of a whole socio-religious order. Calligraphy is one of the few art forms which Sudan inherited from the Islamic world, so it is "the sole graphic gift of Islam to Sudan..." (24) But calligraphy is not just a tradition; it is a living art in Sudan. Leading the field in calligraphy is Ahmed Shibrain whose European training has created within him a charming ambiguity of style. Shibrain "washes" his paintings with highly stylized and nearly unrecognizable calligraphy. He has practiced the "dogma of picture as object. In this dogma the planar frontal conception of the picture area as the entire field of expression, is the idea.. which has

made a fusion of the two visions - East and West - possible, and causes them to merge into a common aesthetic." (25) In Shibrain's own words (26) he is trying to use the same vocabulary (Koranic) to shape the mind or reshape it by using what the people are used to. Shibrain claims that the greatest influence on his esthetics has been Islam and says in the next sentence, "I believe in liberty". Surely he is liberating traditional calligraphy from the conservatism and absolutism of Islamic art, and is still staying within the limits of his culture and traditions. He reflects the changing socio-religious structure of his society: change within the framework of Islam.

The best known painter outside Sudan is Ibrahim el Salahi, an introverted mystic, deeply involved with Islam - yet, trained in the Western tradition of art. He, too, makes extensive use of calligraphy, for he believes that the answer to building a high tradition of plastic arts in Sudan is to appeal to the Sudanese sense of design or pattern (calligraphy) and to reevaluate handicraft traditions so that art once again takes on a function in addition to the esthetic. "My future plans ...are to be free within myself and just paint...the beauty and delicacy of the Islamic calligraphy and ornamentation and the simplicity of African patterns in handicraft...this is my alphabet...I take it in and wait for the craving to paint." (27)

Salahi and others are concerned over the decline of Sudanese handicraft. The importation of new products, the introduction of new methods, and the changes in social structure (less leisure time, etc.) have exacerbated the decline. Needlework has succumbed to the easier cross-stitch introduced by the Turks; ceramics and basketry have given way to tin vessels; carved wooden beds with ornate mattresses have been replaced by metal beds; reed food covers (*tabaq*) are being made in plastic for tourists; and coarse but unique Shendi cotton cloth is being refined by new weaving methods. Salahi related a story about a very skilled shoemaker who was not only known in his local area but for quite a surrounding distance. Because he was so popular and respected he had many apprentices. But when Bata Shoe Company came to Sudan the shoemaker lost much of his clientele, people who preferred plastic shoes to hand-made shoes. Finally, business grew so bad that apprentices were not sent to him anymore. Even his family helpers had to seek work elsewhere. With no help his work declined and he finally had to give it up entirely. He became a messenger.

The feeling among these new artists that they must seek out their heritage such as calligraphy and handicraft is the same as the feeling among such folklorists as el Mahi and el Cabli that they must re-discover the folklore of Sudan. The poets, too, seek their identity among the blacks of Africa and in the glories of past Arab traditions. There is the fear of loss of identity in a more and more Westernized, urbanized, industrialized, and secularized Africa. Artists of Sudan cling to the remnants of tradition and try to wed old and new in a marvelous eclecticism. The artist is no isolated phenomenon; he is a living product of

a changing society and is very much involved. (28)

*I sat all night with the world,
listening to the news.
We say to the poet, "You lied before,
do you lie twice?"
"The White Revolution," he said...
the fellows - the rope is at their necks.
What hypocrisy!
You lied before, you poet, do you lie twice?
"Peace all over the country," he said...
Welcome the limping sheep to the herd.
You lied before, you poet, do you lie twice?
My town, Khartoum, her throat is full of blood.
What do bullets do in Khartoum?
You lied before, you poet, do you lie twice?
The writer lied, the speaker, the broadcaster,
the preacher with the beard and big stomach.
You lied before, do you lie twice? (29)*

Footnotes

1. Aidan Southall [ed.], *Social Change in Modern Africa* (London: Oxford University Press, 1961), p. 1.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 6.
3. Hilda Kuper [ed.], *Urbanisation and Migration in West Africa* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1965), p. 16.
4. Vytautas Kavolis, "Art Content and Social Involvement," *Social Forces*, 22, 2 (1964), p. 471.
5. Andre Malraux as quoted by Vytautas Kavolis, *loc. cit.*
6. *Loc. cit.*
7. K. Peter Etzkorn, "Georg Simmel and the Sociology of Music", *Social Forces*, 43, 1, (1964), p. 102.
8. *Ibid.*, pp. 105-106
9. *Ibid.*, p. 106
10. Much of the data on Sudanese music was obtained from interviews with el Mahi Ismail, European-trained musician, instructor, and ethnomusicologist.
11. Sharhabil was trained in Europe, but comes from "Negroid" Western Sudan and is steeped in "African" traditions.
12. Lyric translations were by el Mahi Ismail.
13. Denis Williams, "A Sudanese Calligraphy: A Contemporary Interpretation of Mohammedan Art", *Transition*, 3, 9 (1963), p. 20
14. Muhammad Ibrahim el Shoush, *Some Background Notes on Modern Sudanese Poetry* (Khartoum: University of Khartoum Extra-Mural Studies, 1963) p.7.
15. Interview with Ibrahim el Salahi.
16. Shoush, *op. cit.*, p. 8.
17. *Ibid.*, pp. 8-9.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 15.

19. *Ibid.*, pp. 21-30.
20. Translated by Nabeela Morcos from Mohamed Ahmed Mahgoub, "The Waste of My Country", from his *Heart and Experiences* (Beirut: The New Library House, 1964), p. 21.
21. Interview with Feki Abdel Rahman.
22. Interview with Abdel Rahman Shibili.
23. New developments have taken place since I did my research. In 1968 a Sudanese folk-dance festival was organized by liberal/socialist students at the University of Khartoum. When Baggara women performed without the traditional *tobe* (body veil), Muslim Brothers, *Ikhsan*, protested - no doubt, as much a political protest as a moral one. A riot ensued in which one student was killed. I am told that there have been a number of developments in Sudanese theater since 1966. One can no longer say that Sudanese theater "does not exist".
24. Williams, *op. cit.*, p. 20.
25. *Loc. cit.*
26. Interview with 'Iohamed Ahmed Shibrain.
27. Eileen Summers, "Sudanese Painting Weds Youth with Tradition", *The Arab World*, 12, 1 (1966), p. 10.
28. I would like to thank the following people for advice and information: Leo Kuper, Hilda Kuper, el Mahi Ismail, Ibrahim and Eve el Salehi, Ahmed Mohamed Shibrain, Tag el Sirr Ahmed, Mohamed Omer Khalil, Abdel Karim el Cabli, James Mack, Omer Ahmed, el Tayeb Salih, Mohamed el Shoush, Abdel Rahman Shibili, Feki Abdel Rahman, Nabeela Morcos, Nadia (Toubia) Alicea, Soher Mohamed Tewfik, Gima Ahmed, Soad Atabani, Durria Omer, Leila Abdoun, and Saleh el Arifi.
29. Translation of part of a poem by Salah Ahmed Ibrahim, *The Fury of the Habibi* (in Arabic), Beirut: The Education House, African Poetry, 1965, p. 104. The translation is by Nabeela Morcos. This poem was written during the military regime or *White Revolution*; the "fellows" were five officers who were hanged for an abortive *coup d'etat*.

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