UNIVERSITÀ VITA-SALUTE SAN RAFFAELE

CORSO DI DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN FILOSOFIA

CURRICULUM IN PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES IN AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

(RE-)DEMOCRATISING AN ANOCRACY WITH CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE: LESSONS FROM SUDAN

Tutore: Prof.ssa Roberta Sala

Co-Tutore: Prof. Robin Celikates

Tesi di DOTTORATO di RICERCA di Yeelen Badona Monteiro

matr. 013869

Ciclo di dottorato XXXIV

SSD SPS/01 - FILOSOFIA POLITICA

Anno Accademico 2021/2022

UNIVERSITÀ VITA-SALUTE SAN RAFFAELE

CORSO DI DOTTORATO DI RICERCA IN FILOSOFIA

CURRICULUM IN PHILOSOPHICAL ISSUES IN AN INTERNATIONAL PERSPECTIVE

(RE-)DEMOCRATISING AN ANOCRACY WITH CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE: LESSONS FROM SUDAN

Tutore: Prof.ssa Roberta Sala

Co-Tutore: Prof. Robin Celikates

Tesi di DOTTORATO di RICERCA di Yeelen Badona Monteiro

matr. 013869

Ciclo di dottorato XXXIV

SSD SPS/01 - FILOSOFIA POLITICA

Anno Accademico 2021/2022

RELEASE OF PHD THESIS

Il/la sottoscritto/a / *I, the undersigned* Yeelen Badona Monteiro

Matricola / *registration number* 013869

nata a/ *born in* Verona

il/*on* 01/03/1992

autore della tesi di Dottorato di ricerca dal titolo / *author of the PhD Thesis titled*

(Re-)democratising an anocracy with civil disobedience: Lessons from Sudan

☒ AUTORIZZA la Consultazione della tesi / AUTHORIZE *the public release of the thesis*

☐ NON AUTORIZZA la Consultazione della tesi per ..... mesi /DO NOT AUTHORIZE *the public release of the thesis for ..... months*

a partire dalla data di conseguimento del titolo e precisamente */ from the PhD thesis date, specifically*

Dal / *from* ...../...../..... Al / *to* ...../...../.....

Poiché /*because*:

□ l'intera ricerca o parti di essa sono potenzialmente soggette a brevettabilità/ *The whole project or parts of it may be the subject of a patent application;*

□ ci sono parti di tesi che sono già state sottoposte a un editore o sono in attesa di pubblicazione/ *Parts of the thesis have been or are being submitted to a publisher or are in the press;*

□ la tesi è finanziata da enti esterni che vantano dei diritti su di esse e sulla loro pubblicazione/ *the thesis project is financed by external bodies that have rights over it and its publication.*

E' fatto divieto di riprodurre, in tutto o in parte, quanto in essa contenuto / *reproduction of the thesis in whole or in part is forbidden*

Data /Date 17/01/2023 Firma /Signature .....

Acknowledgements

Research on contemporary civil disobedience requires a joint commitment between the theorist's work and the activist's work on the ground, I owe a great debt of gratitude to all the people who, from these two sides, contributed to this work.

I am deeply grateful to Prof. Roberta Sala, my supervisor, for walking me through this stimulating and challenging journey. This thesis could not have been written without her valuable guidance, as well as her tremendous understanding and unwavering support. I would like to express my gratitude also to my co-supervisor, Prof. Robin Celikates, for his keen suggestions, illuminating comments and his always incisive perspective.

I express my appreciation to other professors and to my colleagues in Milan and Berlin for the fruitful discussions at various stages of my work. I also extend this acknowledgement to the professors and scholars I met in Tanzania and South Africa for enriching my reflections and for positively influencing my way of approaching philosophy.

A pandemic kept me away from Sudan, but I was fortunate enough to meet, virtually as well as in person – albeit in other corners of the world – wonderful Sudanese people. Thanks go especially to the Sudanese activists I interviewed for making me part of their political and cultural resistance during our conversations and for sharing their creative efforts to build free, equal and just societies.

My warm gratitude goes to Diego and Monica for their irreplaceable friendship, and to Benedetta for her exceptional and tireless encouragement along the way. I would like to give also thank to Rosalia and Giovanni for being constantly present by my side.

I will be forever grateful to Stella and Geraldo for believing in me every step of the way, for being a daily source of intellectual motivation, for their generosity, and their unconditional love. More than any other I want to thank Samory for his immense support and for being such a special and thoughtful brother.

Abstract

A partire dagli anni ’60 del secolo scorso nel dibattito filosofico la disobbedienza civile è stata discussa prevalentemente da una prospettiva occidentale e legittimata come uno strumento correttivo delle ingiustizie all’interno di sistemi politici democratici, pertanto il suo potere trasformativo nella lotta contro ingiustizie di tipo sistemico è stato largamente sottovalutato.

Gli attivisti ricorrono sempre più spesso ad atti di disobbedienza civile per opporsi ai regimi al potere, particolarmente in diversi paesi africani classificati come anocratici. L’anocrazia è un sistema politico a metà tra la democrazia e l’autocrazia poiché in tale regime il potere viene esercitato secondo principi e pratiche di tipo democratico e autoritario. Il presente studio indaga il significato e il ruolo della disobbedienza civile in regimi anocratici concentrandosi sul Sudan, Paese il cui presidente Omar al-Bashir è stato costretto a dimettersi nel 2019 in seguito a una campagna di disobbedienza civile di massa.

La metodologia adottata per affrontare questo tema è sia comparativa che etnografica. Le teorie occidentali della disobbedienza civile vengono problematizzate esaminando la prospettiva degli attivisti sudanesi e le loro pratiche di teorizzazione dal basso raccolte attraverso interviste condotte con manifestanti sudanesi e discusse nell’analisi.

In Sudan la disobbedienza civile è una forma di protesta collettiva e nonviolenta che mira a ristabilire la democrazia nel Paese, ossia a ripristinare l’ordine democratico esistente prima della presa del potere da parte di al-Bashir nel 1989 con un colpo di stato. Questa analisi dimostra che la disobbedienza civile nelle anocrazie può essere una pratica di (ri-)democratizzazione, può cioè svolgere un ruolo di *ri-democratizzazione* quando viene intrapresa in un’anocrazia in cui è stato in precedenza stabilito un sistema democratico, oppure può avere un ruolo di *democratizzazione* in paesi anocratici in cui non è mai stata instaurata la democrazia.

Tendenze anocratiche si stanno ora manifestando anche nelle democrazie liberali occidentali. Pertanto, questo studio, che da una prospettiva occidentale affronta un contesto politico distante e apparentemente insolito, fornisce in realtà spunti teorici e pratici interessanti per sviluppare ulteriormente la ricerca sulla disobbedienza civile come pratica di (ri-)democratizzazione oltre il continente africano.

Abstract

In the philosophical debate, starting from the 1960s civil disobedience has been mostly discussed from a Western liberal perspective and justified as a reformist means aiming to correct injustices occurring within democratic systems, thus its transformative power in countering systemic injustices has been widely underestimated.

Activists are increasingly resorting to acts of civil disobedience to challenge the ruling regimes, notably in African countries which are classified as anocratic. Anocracy is a middling type of political system between democracy and autocracy, since such a regime is governed according to democratic and authoritarian principles and practices. This study investigates the meaning and role of civil disobedience in anocratic regimes by focusing on Sudan where in 2019, after a campaign of mass civil disobedience, president Omar al-Bashir was forced to step down.

The methodology adopted to address this issue is both comparative and ethnographic. The Western conceptualisations of civil disobedience are questioned by examining Sudanese activists' perspective and their theorising practices from below, which were incorporated in the analysis through interviews conducted with Sudanese protesters.

In Sudan civil disobedience is a collective, nonviolent form of protest engaged to re-democratise the country, namely to restore the democratic order in place before al-Bashir grabbed power in 1989 through a coup d'état. This analysis demonstrates that civil disobedience in anocracies can be a practice of (re-)democratisation, by playing a *re-democratising* role when undertaken in an anocracy in which a democratic order has been previously set up; or a *democratising* role in anocratic countries which have never established democracy before.

Anocratic tendencies are now occurring in Western liberal democracies as well. Therefore, this study which, from a Western point of view, addressed a distant and apparently unfamiliar political context, provides meaningful insights to further develop research on civil disobedience as a (re-)democratising practice beyond Africa.

Table of contents

Introduction

Why is that, among the most celebrated figures of civil disobedients, such as Thoreau, Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr., it is hard to find the name of a Ghanaian or a Sudanese dissenter? And yet, in 1963 Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote the famous *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, a text which illustrates the sense of nonviolent direct action in the fight for civil rights (1963, pp. 85–109); only one year later, in 1964 Sudanese citizens with a campaign of mass civil disobedience succeeded in bringing down the military regime of General Ibrahim Abboud. They realised what then became known as Sudan's October Revolution (Berridge, 2014, 2015; Berridge et al., 2022; Branch & Mampilly, 2015).

A systematic philosophical debate around the idea of civil disobedience began in the 1960s. In 60 years of debate political theorists almost exclusively focused on the issue of civil disobedience within the Western horizon. An exception to these West-centric discussions is represented by reflections, in the field of political science, on anti-apartheid campaigns of protest in South Africa (Ackerman & DuVall, 2000; Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011; Lodge, 2011). Yet, South African protest movements have rarely found a place in philosophical accounts of the history of civil disobedience. In this research work I seek to fill this gap by extending the philosophical knowledge of civil disobedience beyond the Western boundaries and the most celebrated and studied theorists and activists of this form of protest.

This dissertation is about civil disobedience. In particular, I investigate contemporary practices of civil disobedience on the African continent. Starting from the wave of protests which crossed Northern Africa in 2010 and which then became known as the Arab Spring, protesters on the continent have increasingly resorted to acts that they define civil disobedience to manifest their dissent from the ruling regimes of their countries (Mueller, 2018). In the last decade, the practice of civil disobedience has returned to the agenda of protest movements in Africa, and civil disobedience is part of the contemporary vocabulary of protest throughout various African countries. The question that initiated this research work was the following: Why do protesters outside the Western democratic world manifestly resort to civil disobedience aiming to bring about radical change in the polity of their countries? Why do activists choose nonviolent means to overthrow ruling presidents or overturn their countries' political systems?

On the African continent various countries present particular forms of state, which are neither fully democratic nor autocratic, but rather mix democratic elements and practices with authoritarian ones. According to a regime categorisation elaborated by the Center for Systemic Peace (2021), that third class of regime is labelled as anocracy and various African countries identified as such. This categorisation is part of the *Polity5 Project* (Center for Systemic Peace, 2021), which consists of a dataset whose aim is to analyse and codify state's governing characteristics, by considering both the democratic and autocratic qualities of political systems of all around the world. From this analysis it results a spectrum of possible regimes, which includes autocracies, democracies and mixed regimes, namely anocracies. Thus, Polity project highlights that the global political framework is not characterised by either democratic or autocratic systems, but also by hybrid regimes, as it is particularly the case on the African continent. Therefore, I aim to examine what civil disobedience means and what aim protesters pursue by engaging in this nonviolent form of action in such contexts. The central two-fold question I seek to address in this study is: What is civil disobedience and what role does it play in anocratic regimes?

The philosophical debate so far has been focused on justifying civil disobedience within a liberal democratic framework. According to the most influential theories, civil disobedience is a conscientious, nonviolent and overt act, contrary to the law, which aims to bring change in an unjust law or policy (Bedau, 1991; Habermas, 1985; Rawls, 1999). This form of action is considered justified in democratic regimes. These theories conceptualised civil disobedience within the perimeter of the Westphalian state, limiting it to the democratic horizon and domesticating its radical potential, since this act is not meant to question the overall system of a country (Pineda, 2021b, 2022). Contemporary attempts (Celikates, 2021) to transcend this influential liberal conceptualisation broaden the potential of this form of protest, but still remain tied to the boundaries of democracy. The general assumption is that in less democratic political regimes more confrontational forms of dissent are needed to bring about change. Sharp distinctions have been drawn between civil disobedience and more radical forms of dissent, such as revolution. Downplaying civil disobedience to a mere reformist act, which is engaged in overall democratic regimes and aims at changes in a law or in a policy, resulted in a general underestimation of the radical role of this form of protest. The following widespread

assumption according to which regimes are either democratic or nondemocratic contributed to the restriction of civil disobedience within the boundaries of democratic states. All of the regimes which do not present Western-style democratic values are classified from a hegemonic and oversimplified perspective as nondemocratic and thus not appropriate for practicing this type of dissent. Such political and social contexts have been generally neglected by the philosophical inquiries regarding civil disobedience. Therefore, the role of civil disobedience as a nonviolent form of action has been mostly discussed within democratic frameworks. The potential of nonviolent forms of resistance in nondemocratic regimes has also been investigated, notably in research contributions in the fields of history and political science (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011; Roberts and Garton Ash, 2011). However, these analyses have focused on the broader concept of civil resistance as encompassing different methods and types of actions, among which civil disobedience. Civil disobedience is not merely a synonym of civil resistance, but rather a concept with its own philosophical meaning, its specificity, its history and, above all, its uses in contemporary activists' actions. Thus, it is crucial to explore the category of civil disobedience, whose meaning and role in anocratic regimes has so far never been fully examined.

For this reason, I explore practices of civil disobedience in an anocracy, namely Sudan. The focus of my analysis is on Sudan because it was classified as an anocratic regime by the *Polity5 Project* (Center for Systemic Peace, 2018) and, in addition, this country has significant historical precedents in the matter of nonviolent transformative civil disobedience. In 1964, and again in 1985, Sudanese citizens succeeded in toppling military regimes through actions of civil disobedience. Democratic regimes have been established throughout history in this country. Yet, the democratic edifice has been repeatedly compromised by military generals who seized power through coups d'état and integrated autocratic modes of governance in the democratic system, transitioning the country to an anocratic form of government. This was the case with General Omar al-Bashir, who grabbed power in 1989 and was forced to step down in April, 2019, after months of protests where activists engaged in acts of civil disobedience, calling for the end of his regime and the restoration of a democratic order.

By analysing the 2018–2019 campaign of mass civil disobedience mobilised in Sudan, I seek to demonstrate that civil disobedience is a nonviolent form of protest which can

play a more radical role than that of changing a single unjust law or a set of unjust laws. In anocratic regimes civil disobedience is a nonviolent means which can transform political systems. This study aims to demonstrate that nonviolent disobedience can also play a radical role outside of the perimeter of democratic societies. By filling the knowledge gap, I aim to define civil disobedience in anocratic contexts as a practice of (re-)democratisation, namely a form of action which activists engaged to change the political system of a country, by restoring a democratic order altered by an illegitimate seizure of power or by establishing democracy for the first time.

The methodology adopted in the study here presented draws on the approach of comparative political theory. This research field primarily contributes to challenge the Eurocentric perspectives in political theory, by demonstrating the significance of comparative studies. Comparative political theory rests on a particular idea of comparison, defended by various theorists (Euben, 1999, 2006; Jenco et al., 2020), according to which the knowledge on concepts and ideas discussed in the philosophical inquiries can be broadened by establishing a conversation between Western systems of thought and marginalised or neglected reflections coming from non-Western contexts. The concept of civil disobedience particularly fits this comparative approach since it has been predominantly examined in Western social and political philosophy studies. Therefore, I explored this form of protest and the role attributed to it by shifting the focus to a non-Western context – namely Sudan – generally overlooked by the mainstream philosophical debate.

Comparative political theory represents the general methodological framework of this study and it explains the epistemic and analytic relevance of investigating the practice of civil disobedience from a non-Western perspective. To examine more closely what is civil disobedience for the protesters who undertook it in Sudan and to include the protesters' perspective in the theoretical reflection, the analysis is also built on interviews with Sudanese activists. This methodological choice draws on the argument put forward by Lisa Herzog and Bernardo Zacka (2017), who argue for the usefulness of fieldwork in political theory's researches and suggest employing ethnographic methods in the work of normative and political theorising. Thus, the particular approach I adopt in this study is comparative and open to fieldwork, that is, first I decentre the mainstream Western perspective by considering civil disobedience in an African context; and second, I delve

into the Sudanese practice and idea of this form of protest by relying not only on fieldwork done by other scholars (Berridge, 2015; Berridge et al., 2022; Zunes, 2021), but also by establishing a conversation with Sudanese dissenters. This research work includes methods usually pertaining to empirical studies, such as interviews, to capture theorising practices on the ground. It is not meant to reproduce the methodology of the long immersive fieldwork experience, typically employed in anthropology, but rather to complement the sources relative to the 2018–2019 wave of protests, and further problematise the issue of civil disobedience, paying attention to Sudanese activists' perspective. The interviews were conducted online, because of the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. The interviewees are Sudanese citizens who took part in the 2018–2019 protests campaign and who have engaged in acts of protest also after the 2019 revolution. Given the still delicate political situation in the country, on security grounds no information is intentionally given about the job and role of the interviewees.

The interviews with Sudanese activists help to gain qualitative insights on why they resorted particularly to civil disobedience, despite facing a brutal repression by the ruling regime, and what was their objective when engaging in this form of dissent. I explore the perspectives of Sudanese protesters because, as I seek to show, they do have a role in the theoretical work in defining the concept of civil disobedience. While taking to the streets in Sudan, while discussing the meaning of a nonviolent conduct, while organising grassroots movements of protest to re-establish a civilian-led government in their country, they are enacting philosophy. In addition, they are not only contributing to an African philosophy of social movements and civil disobedience, but they are also advancing African social and political philosophy. Thus, civil disobedience is not just a mere practical act. With their actions dissenters oppose injustices and strive to build better societies. Civil disobedience not only counters injustices, it also encompasses a political project, that is the idea of an alternative society. For this reason, Sudanese activists have a role in the philosophical discussions surrounding issues ranging from civil disobedience to democracy and justice. Therefore, their perspective can inform and enrich the contemporary philosophical debate on these topics.

This study seeks to extend the knowledge on the meaning and potential of civil disobedience in hybrid regimes, such as anocracies. The relevance of this research work for the philosophical debate is based on the concept of civil disobedience as well as on

the concept of anocracy. Anocracy is a conceptual category which was elaborated by a Western institution (Center for Systemic Peace, 2021) to describe a spectrum of possible governing authorities. The deployment of a theoretical tool coming from the West in the analysis of civil disobedience in an African country – an analysis which is also based on the engagement of Sudanese activists in the work of political theorising – highlights a tension. This tension emerges between the attention given to the actors of civil disobedience in Sudan and their self-understanding on the one hand; and, on the other hand, the introduction of a theoretical category, developed in the Global North, to analyse issues concerning a non-Western context with its specificities. This study addresses this tension by demonstrating the usefulness of doing justice to local contexts and practices of theorisation on the ground, without leaving behind theoretical instruments and vocabularies developed from a Western standpoint which can be further discussed and developed in dialogue with such local knowledge.

Furthermore, anocracy represents a meaningful analytical tool to describe countries' governing authorities, as well as the changes occurring within them, not only in the African continent but also in the Western world, since anocracy is not an issue concerning exclusively Africa. Anocratic tendencies are occurring in various countries on the global landscape. The United States, for example, according to the Center for Systemic Peace (2022), have been classified as an anocracy at the end of 2020 and then, the following year, the country was categorised again as a democracy.[1] Thus, transitions towards anocratic forms of government interest Western countries as well. While to some readers the analysis of the practice of civil disobedience in Sudan may seem an uninteresting and extravagant choice, however there are good reasons to investigate in more depths anocracies on a global level as well as protest movements arising in such contexts, as the case of the United States suggests. The reflections stimulated by this study about the transformative role of civil disobedience in anocratic regimes can also have implications

[1] United States' regime was categorised as anocratic due to various constraints to state's functioning and a despotic exercise of power occurred under Donald Trump's presidency. Notably, the Polity measurements for this country reflected some of the traits which characterised his presidency that year, including the following: the purge of officials in the federal bureaucracy who were considered disloyal, a growing vilification of opposition forces, and the suppression of protests (in particular those erupted after the death of George Floyd, a black man brutally killed by the police on May 25, 2020 in Minneapolis, Minnesota [The New York Times, 2022]). Furthermore, after 2020 presidential elections, Trump first refused to concede the vote, based on alleged fraud, and second, he held a demonstration with his supporters on January 6, 2021, which turned into the infamous storming of Capitol Hill building (Center for Systemic Peace, 2022).

beyond the African horizon and can be a meaningful contribution to the general debate in social and political philosophy, as well as for activists around the world.

This dissertation is divided into three chapters. In Chapter 1, I trace back the concept of civil disobedience starting from the first three eminent theorists and activists, namely Henry David Thoreau, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. The following influential liberal and democratic conceptualisations of civil disobedience have built on the historical and emblematic activism of those three dissenters. In this introductory chapter I show that the liberal and democratic theories have restricted the place of application of civil disobedience to democratic regimes and have underestimated its radical potential. Thus, I discuss a reason for this narrow understanding, provided by Pineda (2021b), namely the liberal approach which has conceived civil disobedience from the perspective of a Western white state. To broaden the perspective and capture the radical power of civil disobedience, I explain why this study adopts a comparative approach and it is methodologically open to fieldwork.

In Chapter 2, I introduce the additional conceptual category of anocracy, which allows on the one hand to define more accurately the political systems where the actions of civil disobedience investigated in this study take place, and on the other hand to move beyond the general assumption according to which regimes are either democratic or nondemocratic. This descriptive and analytical instrument is adopted to frame the analysis of civil disobedience in Sudan. The central section of this chapter, through a historical insight, explains why it is worth exploring this country for a philosophical reflection of the power of civil disobedience to transform a political system. Having categorised Sudan as an anocracy, in Chapter 2 I present the empirical part of this research work. Notably, I discuss the interviews that I have conducted with two Sudanese activists, during which it emerged the transformative role they attribute to civil disobedience considered as a means to realise a revolution. Lastly in this chapter, I address the issue related to the type of change Sudanese activists are still pursuing by engaging in acts of civil disobedience. Here, I also analyse how Sudanese citizens continued to resort to civil disobedience, even after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, to further demonstrate their perseverance in pursuing the goal of re-establishing democracy in their country. As I seek to emphasise, one of the major constraints is the often-dominant role of military forces

which has shaped the ultimate political goal of their protests, namely a democratic system ruled by civilians.

In Chapter 3, I outline the idea of civil disobedience from the perspective of Sudanese activists, namely a nonviolent, collective means to achieve a revolution in the political system of a country. Then, I more generally define a theory of civil disobedience in anocracies, according to which this form of protest is a (re-)democratising practice. Given the role that is attributed to civil disobedience in an anocratic country such as Sudan, in Chapter 3 I address the issue of democracy in Africa and illustrate what democracy means for Sudanese activists. By highlighting the crucial role that Sudanese activists have in the practical execution of political theorising, I address the reasons why the study of civil disobedience in Sudan is meaningful to understand who contributes to this philosophy. In the end, I elucidate why this study discloses the need for Western scholars to desuperiorise their knowledge on civil disobedience, and how this analysis can represent a research pattern to further develop contemporary African social and political philosophy as a discipline which explores African people's daily challenges and the ways they tackle and respond to these challenges.

Chapter 1

Reframing the history of civil disobedience

Introduction

Starting a critical reading of a peculiar form of dissent, such as civil disobedience, requires a reconstruction of the theoretical reflections elaborated by philosophers over time, as well as of the exercise of this form of action by protesters.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section 1 presents a historical and critical overview of the idea of civil disobedience, starting from the most celebrated exponent of disobedience, namely Henry David Thoreau. The American philosopher Thoreau became famous for his personal refusal to pay a state tax, as doing so would have contributed to the Mexican War and the enforcement of slavery. While Thoreau did not explicitly speak about 'civil disobedience', he did elaborate the first conceptualisation of nonviolent disobedience to the State. In particular, Section 1 explores Thoreau's contribution by highlighting some misinterpretations of his famous work, enabling an explanation of why what he formulated was a theory of noncompliance and, more precisely, of 'civic' disobedience. This study's historical reconstruction of the concept of civil disobedience starts with an analysis of Thoreau because, after his refusal, other dissenters described their acts of conscientious, open, and political lawbreaking as civil disobedience. Specifically, Thoreau and his ideas had a great influence on the reflections, theories, and resistance techniques elaborated by another famous figure – namely Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi, leader of the Indian Independent Movement. Subsequently, the analysis moves to the third paradigmatic and eminent figure in the history of the idea of civil disobedience, namely Martin Luther King, Jr.

The aforementioned men are not only the most important figures in the debate surrounding civil disobedience. Exchanges and conversations also occurred, especially between Gandhi and King, which are necessary and worthwhile to consider for the purposes of the analysis. The first reason that motivated the decision to first analyse these three exponents of disobedience is that they represent the roots of the debate around the concept of civil disobedience. The second reason concerns the influence of these three

figures; that is, their impacts on subsequent accounts of civil disobedience were highly relevant, such that their ideas were the starting points and cornerstones of later conceptualisations of this form of protest. The analysis of these three celebrated activists emphasises the radical power in their ideas of civil disobedience, according to which this form of dissent has a transformative potential when countering profound injustices, such as slavery, colonialism, and segregation.

A systematic theoretical reflection on the concept of civil disobedience mainly developed around the 1960s and 70s, when King and the US Civil Rights Movement were protesting against racial discrimination through nonviolent direct action. It is in the light of their acts that the liberal and democratic understanding of civil disobedience has become particularly influential and consolidated in the contemporary debate. Next, a review of the literature produced on the heels of mid-twentieth century activism and Anglo-American academic debates focuses on John Rawls's influential theory of civil disobedience. Section 2 presents an overview of the Rawlsian idea as well as of the main liberal, democratic, and radical democratic theories of civil disobedience. It explains that a problem exists with these accounts, namely that they are normatively tied to a Western constitutional democratic order. This has resulted in a narrow understanding of civil disobedience as well as an underestimation of its transformative potential. In addition, the liberal and democratic perspective has contributed to the establishment of sharp boundaries between civil disobedience and other forms of dissent, particularly conscientious objection and revolution. One of the aims of this central section is to discuss the boundaries drawn between these forms of dissent to accommodate the activism of contemporary social movements. Starting from Pineda's (2021b) illuminating contribution, Section 2 also explains that liberal philosophers have understood civil disobedience in narrow terms, domesticating its radical potential, because they see it like a state, and more specifically a white state. Thus, civil disobedience has been theorised as a nonviolent action undertaken in overall democratic political systems, aiming to correct limited and exceptional injustices. This restricted vision downplays the nature and extent of a systemic issue such as racial injustice and discrimination, which is what King and the US Civil Rights Movement opposed and attempted to dismantle.

Besides narrowing the potential of civil disobedience, this predominant liberal idea, tied to a democratic constitutional system, has limited the proper political space of this

form of protest. Seeing civil disobedience like a white state corresponds to seeing it like a Western state. This form of protest has mainly been investigated as a nonviolent form of political action appropriate to Western liberal democracies. The exercise, role, and effectiveness of civil disobedience in less democratic political systems, outside of the West, have not been frequently explored. To answer the question of the role of civil disobedience outside of the Western liberal democratic order, particularly in non–fully democratic regimes, the methodological approach adopted in this work draws on the field of study of comparative political theory. Section 3 explains the reasons that drive the existence of a comparative subfield of political theory as well as what it means to undertake a comparative study. The aim is to demonstrate that the reasons behind the studies in this discipline correspond to the purpose of the analysis presented in this dissertation; that is, to the mainstream philosophical debate on civil disobedience, the intention is to bring a non-Western perspective on the role that it can play when engaged in contexts that are not entirely democratic. Specifically, the analysis attempts to establish a conversation with the contemporary Sudanese perspective on civil disobedience. Therefore, Section 3 outlines the methodological ground of this research by justifying the need to elucidate neglected patterns of civil disobedience coming from the African continent, thereby challenging the Western assumptions about this form of protest and including further meaningful perspectives on what civil disobedience is today. In addition, Section 3 describes another method adopted in the analysis presented here, namely research fieldwork. Building on the contemporary ethnographic turn in political theory, this section illustrates the usefulness of including interviews with Sudanese protesters to examine the activists' perspective on this form of protest undertaken in a non-Western and non–fully democratic context.

1. Civil disobedience: Where it all started

This section discusses three introductory ideas of civil disobedience propounded by the most prominent exponents of civil disobedience: Henry David Thoreau, Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr. The analysis of their theories of civil disobedience follows three steps: (i) the first step focuses on key moments in their life, as their ideas of civil disobedience were shaped by their personal engagement in the practice

of this form of protest; (ii) the second step is a study of the features that characterised their concepts of civil disobedience; and (iii) the third step is a discussion of civil disobedience's aim and role according to their theorisations. The analytical reflection developed in this section seeks to emphasise the radical core that characterises these three ideas of civil disobedience. To these authors, civil disobedience was essentially a nonviolent practice with radical potential undertaken to transform a society crossed by profound injustice.

1.1 Withdrawing the consent from government to remedy injustices: Thoreau's 'civic' disobedience

When approaching the debate around civil disobedience the first name that one usually encounters is that of Thoreau. Traditionally, the term 'civil disobedience' dates back to this American philosopher. Among his most famous works is an essay entitled *Civil Disobedience*, which was published in 1849. In this essay, Thoreau defined what has been considered the first formulation of the idea of civil disobedience. Specifically, he described his personal deliberate refusal to pay state taxes, as doing so would have contributed to the permanence of slavery as well as supported the war with Mexico. As will be explained in this subsection, Thoreau considered civil disobedience to be a justified act if a government was to enact unjust policies or laws. It is essentially an act of refusal and non-cooperation, through which an individual withdraws consent from the government responsible for implementing such policies or laws. An individual endowed with conscience should not allow the perpetuation of slavery or war; therefore, in case a government implements laws or policies that institutionalise such injustices, citizens have the right to revolutionise – that is, to resist and disobey.

In public debate, Thoreau is generally considered the epitome of civil disobedience. However, some elements in the narrative regarding the figure of Thoreau need to be clarified. As underlined by Raffaele Laudani (2013), many misunderstandings exist in contemporary discussions about this author owing to a nonrecognition of the American background of his reflection on disobedience.

First, it is necessary to clarify the American roots of Thoreau's theory. The reflection contained in Thoreau's essay was elaborated in the context of abolitionism and is part of

the radical American tradition. Thoreau was an activist of the abolitionist movement and, among other things, he assisted and escorted fugitive slaves on their way north.[2] A reference to the political and historical context of the time is necessary when examining his famous motto, expressed in the opening lines of the essay as follows: ‘‘That government is best which governs least’; […] Carried out, it finally amounts to this, which also I believe – 'That government is best which governs not at all’’ (Thoreau, 2013, p. 145). The first misunderstanding was the labelling of Thoreau as anarchist because of this claim. Shortly afterwards, he clarified that ‘unlike those who call themselves no-government men, I ask for, not at once no government, but *at once* a better government’ (Thoreau, 2013, p. 146; emphasis in original).

In 1859, Thoreau gave a speech before the citizens of Concord (Massachusetts) entitled *A plea for Captain John Brown*, in which he portrayed and defended the high moral standing of John Brown, a convinced abolitionist who strongly opposed slavery. Thoreau offered an explanation for why he was asking for a better government. The then incumbent government ‘puts forth his strength on the side of injustice, as ours to maintain Slavery and kill the liberators of the slave’, and thus, ‘it reveals itself a merely brute force, or worse, a demoniacal force’ (Thoreau, 2013, p. 207). Thus, his indignation particularly against slavery motivated his demand for a better government because, as he stated, ‘[t]he only government that I recognize, (…) is that power that establishes justice in the land, never that which establishes injustice’ (Thoreau, 2013, p. 207). This did not mean dismantling the government. Thoreau’s idea of government was that it is ‘at best but an expedient’, and he argued that ‘the only obligation which I have a right to assume, is to do at any time what I think right’ (Thoreau, 2013, p. 147). Contrary to the common anarchist interpretation, Thoreau combined the Declaration of Independence’s spirit with the emancipatory claims of abolitionist struggles as well as the pacifism of his opposition to the Mexican War. According to Thoreau (2013), individuals have no obligations other

[2] According to available documentation, Thoreau not only escorted fugitive slaves but also used his house in Concord, his hometown, as a haven for many of those escaping. He took an active role in the ‘Underground Railroad’, an actual person-to-person network, through which African-American slaves escaped the south to Canada. It consisted of clandestine operations through which local people built a network of secret houses and routes, offering assistance to the slaves by providing shelter, collecting money for train tickets and food, and conveying them to railway stations. For further details about Thoreau’s notes in this regard and about the involvement of his community see the contribution on the Underground Railroad in the reconstruction of antislavery history of Concord by the Concord Free Public Library (https://concordlibrary.org/special-collections/antislavery/05_essay).

than to do what they think is right, since they are first of all human beings, and then citizens. Human beings are endowed with conscience.

For individuals of conscience, it is not possible to recognise a government which allows slavery. It is also not possible to acknowledge authority and give consent to a morally corrupt government. In respect of the government of a nation, taken to be the refuge of freedom, that had a sixth of its population enslaved and that unjustly overran and conquered a country, subjecting it to military law, a man 'cannot without disgrace be associated with it' (Thoreau, 2013, p. 148). That was where the issue of disobedience arose, since '[a]ll men recognize the right of revolution; that is, the right to refuse allegiance to and to resist the government'. In such circumstances, 'it is not too soon for honest men to rebel and revolutionize' (Thoreau, 2013, p. 149).

In the following paragraphs, an explanation is provided for the reasons why Thoreau spoke specifically about 'revolutionising' and why this is relevant to the discussion surrounding civil disobedience.

Another misunderstanding is related to a second celebrated figure in the matter of civil disobedience, namely Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi and his great influence. The Indian lawyer read Thoreau's essay and adopted the term 'civil disobedience' to describe the philosophy behind the actions undertaken by the anticolonial movements that he led in South Africa and India. Gandhi believed that Thoreau originated that specific title for his essay, and the term is still widely assumed to have been born this way. The title *Civil Disobedience*, together with the essay's alternative title *On the Duty of Civil Disobedience*, as highlighted by Laudani, 'was never directly chosen by Thoreau himself but posthumously attributed by American Christian abolitionist activists who were close to him as a contribution to the wider debate on the relationship between political obligation and moral conscience' (2013, p. 94). Thoreau, in fact, chose the title *Resistance to Civil Government*, which came from a conference on *The Relation of the Individual to the State* and he held at the Lyceum of Concord. There, he explained his refusal to pay the poll tax to express his dissent with the political choices both of the state of Massachusetts and the federal government. It was the editor of the 1866 edition of the essay who chose the title *Civil Disobedience*, in light of Thoreau's use of the term during their correspondence (Hanson, 2021; Jenco, 2003; Laudani, 2013; Scheuerman, 2018).

In his essay, Thoreau never used the term ‘civil disobedience’ – he only referred to ‘disobedience’. From the American radical perspective, of which his theory is a part, ‘revolution’ means disobedience and resistance; therefore, when Thoreau wrote about the ‘right of revolution’ and ‘the right to refuse allegiance and resist a government’, it was his formulation of a form of disobedience and resistance. More precisely, he spoke about a ‘peaceable revolution’ (Thoreau, 2013, p. 158), which is summarised as follows: ‘If a thousand men were not to pay their tax-bills this year, that would not be a violent and bloody measure, as it would be to pay them, and enable the State to commit violence and shed innocent blood’ (Thoreau, 2013, p. 158). Thoreau’s peaceable revolution was not meant to be a ‘nonviolent’ revolution, since violence was contemplated. Thoreau conceded the possibility that blood may flow. The greater the seriousness of what was at stake and the greater the unwillingness of the authority to hear and recognise the reasons of those who were rebelling, the more radical the actions would have been. When speaking of the seriousness of an issue, the case of slavery is emblematic. With reference to the use of force, Thoreau declared that he agreed with Captain Brown’s peculiar attitude, according to which ‘a man has a perfect right to interfere by force with the slaveholder, in order to rescue the slave’ (Thoreau, 2013, p. 210).

For Thoreau, it is a peaceful revolution in a precise sense that elucidates the meaning of disobeying. This revolution does not consist of a direct confrontation with the state and its institutions. Rather, it is basically an act of refusal. Such a revolution is accomplished when citizens refuse allegiance and withdraw their consent from the government, by disobeying laws or rules. On a practical level, various actions of refusal can be engaged according to Thoreau. The first possibility is fiscal disobedience, which is the action famously undertaken by Thoreau, who wrote the following: ‘I have paid no poll-tax for six years. I was put into a jail once on this account, for one night’ (2013, p. 161). The meaning that Thoreau attributed to this act of withdrawing consent from an institution, held responsible for committing and perpetuating injustices – that is, an authority towards which one cannot show respect – is clearly summarised in a claim about his refusal and consequent jailing: ‘I felt as if I alone of all my townsmen had paid my tax’ (Thoreau, 2013, p. 161). The second type of action is secession, which refers not only to that of a state but also to the secession from the union of a single citizen with their state when the latter does not fulfil its duty. This idea is derived from Thoreau’s abolitionist activism

(Laudani, 2013). Two more practices are indicated for enacting the withdrawal of consent. One is non-cooperation, meaning a refusal to cooperate with state institutions by both private citizens and those holding public office. The revolution, according to Thoreau, is accomplished not only when a citizen has refused allegiance but also when an officer has resigned from office. Lastly, there is desertion, which means withdrawing support from the government by leaving the armed forces. This was invocated specifically with respect to the Mexican War. According to Thoreau, these are the practical methods of refusal for conducting a peaceful revolution.

By analysing Thoreau, it is possible to observe how disobedience was initially conceptualised and then justified. As has been discussed thus far, for Thoreau, disobeying means conducting a peaceful revolution, which he considered accomplished the moment that citizens withdraw their consent and support from the government they deem responsible for perpetuating injustices. As Thoreau argued, the point is that 'unjust laws exist' (2013, p. 154). The question then is whether to obey them, attempting to amend them while obeying or breaching the unjust laws. Thoreau observed the following:

'Men generally, under such a government as this, think that they ought to wait until they have persuaded the majority to alter them. They think that, if they should resist, the remedy would be worse than the evil. But it is the fault of the government itself that the remedy *is* worse than the evil. *It* makes it worse' (2013, p. 154; emphasis in original).

Thoreau emphasised, under the circumstances that he described – such as a government being involved in a war, being responsible for violence, and allowing slavery in its own territory, that there is no time to wait until the majority is persuaded to amend unjust laws, since the problem is precisely with the ruling majority and with that government. Furthermore, he argued that 'adopting the ways which the State has provided for remedying the evil, I know of such ways. They take too much time, and a man's life will be gone' (Thoreau, 2013, p. 155). He observed that injustice is 'part of the necessary friction of the machine of governments'; yet, if injustice is 'of such nature that it requires you to be the agent of injustice to another, then, I say, break the law' (2013, p. 155). Therefore, an individual should disobey because, as Thoreau stated, '[w]hat I have to do is to see, at any rate, that I do not lend myself to the wrong which I condemn' (2013, p.

155). For Thoreau, disobedience is justified because an individual 'must do justice, cost what it may' (2013, p. 150). Thus, of primary importance is not collaborating with evil, and in order not to collaborate with evil, one must refuse allegiance, thus withdrawing one's support from the government. Remedying injustice by withdrawing one's consent, according to Thoreau, is embodied in the following:

'[I]f one thousand, if one hundred, if ten men whom I could name, – if ten *honest* men only, – aye, if *one* HONEST man, in this State of Massachusetts, *ceasing to hold slaves*, were actually to withdraw from this copartnership, and be locked up in the county jail therefor, it would be the abolition of slavery in America' (2013, pp. 156–157; emphasis in original).

Disobeying by breaking the law means facing consequences, as demonstrated by Thoreau's arrest. A dissenter must submit to jailing because, for the American philosopher, prison is the place for a righteous man, 'under a government which imprisons any unjustly'; it is 'the only house in a slave-state in which a free man can abide with honor' (Thoreau, 2013, p. 157). Thoreau also stated the following: 'It costs me less in every sense to incur the penalty of disobedience to the State, than it would to obey. I should feel as if I were worth less in that case' (2013, p. 160). Thus, Thoreau deliberately refused to pay his head tax and accepted his jailing, without resisting. In his other famous work *Walden*, published in 1854, he even said the following: 'I might have resisted forcibly with more or less effect, might have run "amok" against society; but I preferred that society should run "amok" against me, it being the desperate party' (Thoreau, 2004, p. 166).

It is noteworthy that, in Thoreau's theory, in front of the injustice there is no place to opt for the instruments that a state provides to its citizens to correct it, such as elections or petitions, or by attempting to constitute a majority to bring about change. While injustices are part of a government's functioning, the only justifiable solution is disobedience in the face of some injustices – even a radical and violent disobedience. When institutional and legal possibilities to interrupt injustices are not viable, the only option that remains is to follow extra-institutional ones.

Thoreau's reflection provided an answer to the question of what to do as a private citizen or as a people in the face of injustice. That answer is to break the law by not paying taxes or by resigning from office. For Thoreau, if an individual wishes to do anything, then he or she must disobey. This amounts to not yielding allegiance and withdrawing the support from a government that allows injustices. Here, another question may arise: Why should this form of noncompliance through consent withdrawal be effective? As Thoreau claimed, the answer lies in the fact that individuals, along with their consent, are what the state is based on. For the state, the individual is 'a higher and independent power, from which all its own power and authority are derived' (Thoreau, 2013, p. 171). Hence, withdrawing one's consent and support from a state means removing the source of its power. In Thoreau's idea of disobeying through consent withdrawal resonates the echo of Étienne de La Boétie and his essay *The Politics of Obedience: The Discourse of Voluntary Servitude*, which he wrote in 1549. There are many assonances even if, as Laudani (2013) clarified, there is no firm evidence of direct knowledge of La Boétie's text by Thoreau (indeed, the text was available in English from the early 1700s and was probably the object of discussions between Thoreau and Ralph Waldo Emerson).

La Boétie's reflection on the meaning of disobedience was motivated by a precise conception of politics: the authority of sovereign power depends on the consent that subjects give to it. Furthermore, while for Thoreau men are first of all individuals with a conscience, for La Boétie all men naturally love liberty and strive to defend it, which is what the political struggle is for. The institution of a sovereign power typically functions on the logic of the will to dominate, which constitutes a threat to the love for liberty. Disobedience is thus an extra-institutional way to defend liberty. The very political act of defending liberty is to no longer serve. More specifically, disobedience does not consist of 'a direct clash with power but rather as the voluntary withdrawal of support from the sovereign's–tyrant's policy, in the explicit negation ("without offering any more resistance than a stone or a tree stump") of its legitimacy' (Laudani, 2013, p. 37). La Boétie clarified this as follows: 'I do not ask that you place hands upon the tyrant to topple him over, but simply that you support him no longer; then you will behold him, like a great Colossus whose pedestal has been pulled away, fall of his own weight and break into pieces' (De La Boétie, 2008, pp. 15–16). Avoiding a clash with power means conceiving the political conflict in destituent terms (Laudani, 2013). People give consent

to sovereign power, thus being servants; once they cease to submit to such power, they are free, thereby ending their servitude. Disobeying simply means to give nothing to the sovereign power (De La Boétie, 2008). The meaning and potential that Thoreau attributed to an act of disobedience, practiced by withdrawing support from a government, is thus linked to the idea, shared with la Boétie, that to put an end to the injustices perpetuated by a government, it is consent that must be removed – which is the primary source, as well as the nourishment, of a government's power.

The theory Thoreau elaborated regarding disobedience is analysed here because it represents a first formulation of the concept of civil disobedience. Thoreau did not adopt the term 'civil disobedience' to identify the act through which an individual refuses to obey to oppose a government which implements policies they deem unjust. He instead referred to a peaceable revolution that, in consideration of the background of American political radicalism, corresponded to resistance and civil disobedience or, more precisely, to a 'civic' disobedience. It is a revolution with a disobedient essence. For Thoreau, men have a right to revolutionise and to resist a government that implements unjust laws and policies. In the face of unjust laws or policies, such as those that allow slavery and war, the legal channels provided by the state are not viable and effective instruments. For this reason, an individual can justifiably transgress unjust laws, pursuing a peaceful revolution, realised by acts of refusal – namely refusing to pay state taxes, resigning from offices, not cooperating with political institutions, or deserting. An individual should disobey because of a duty to always do what he or she thinks is right.

Thoreau's reflections and practice of disobedience served as inspiration for later theories of civil disobedience. Before introducing and discussing the liberal concept of civil disobedience, which is more established and influential, there are two more prominent exponents of civil disobedience to analyse – namely Gandhi and King.

1.2 Satyagraha: The Gandhian disobedience

One the most celebrated theorists of civil disobedience is Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi. The Indian lawyer knew the works and acts of Thoreau, particularly his essay *Resistance to Civil Government*, in which he essentially found a confirmation of his philosophy, of the campaigns of resistance he led, as well as a shared view regarding

citizens' relationship with government (Hendrick, 1956). Gandhi's interest in the reflections of Thoreau is confirmed by his own words, when he explained the considerable influence of Thoreau's ideas after reading *Walden* (Thoreau, 2004) while in South Africa in the early 1900s.

To understand Gandhi's idea of civil disobedience, it is necessary to retrace some of the salient stages of his life. The Gandhian conception of civil disobedience emerged from his personal life. In the 1890s, Gandhi left his hometown Porbandar, India, and moved to England to study law. He spent three years in London before returning to India, where he received an offer to work as a lawyer for an Indian firm in the Natal region of South Africa. Thus, he moved to South Africa in 1893, beginning a long and critical chapter of his life, remaining there for 21 years. In South Africa, he was not only exposed to racial discrimination but also had the chance to see the living conditions of Indians.[3] Later in the dissertation, I return to the significance of Gandhi's time in South Africa. During this period, he transformed into a political activist, and he then fought for the rest of his life. The first acts of defiance and resistance that he led occurred in South Africa in response to ordinances and laws that discriminated against and disenfranchised Indian people. It was there that he started exploring some techniques of nonviolent resistance. Once he returned to India in 1915, he practiced those forms of political actions in the face of laws and policies promulgated by the British. Thus, he began the movement of nonviolent non-cooperation against the British imperial government. Gandhi was arrested many times and fasted to protest the injustices of colonial rule. The most crucial and famous action of civil disobedience was a campaign known as the 'Salt March' in Spring 1930 in India. It was a mass act of refusal undertaken against a tax on salt imposed by the British, and thousands of people were imprisoned as a consequence. Ultimately, Gandhi – or Mahatma to the Indians, which means 'great soul' – became the leader of the movement for Indian independence, which was achieved in 1947 (Basebang, 2010).

In the following paragraphs, the defining elements of civil disobedience as theorised by Gandhi are examined. These are the elements largely discussed in the subsequent philosophical debate. Gandhi's contribution to the idea of civil disobedience is also worth

[3] With regard to the time that Gandhi spent in South Africa, and especially what he observed and experienced about living as Indian in a society based on a system of deep-rooted racial discrimination, an interesting source is his story collected in the volume *Satyagraha in South Africa* (Gandhi, 1968a).

analysing for the role he played and influence he exerted – and still exerts – in the debate as well as among activists.

William E. Scheuerman (2018) provided a reconstruction of the main accounts of civil disobedience that followed in the contemporary debate, identifying different models of civil disobedience. He places Gandhi alongside Martin Luther King, Jr., as key figures in the religious-spiritual model of civil disobedience. The characterising components of civil disobedience are regarded by these two famous leaders in spiritual terms. When analysing the idea of civil disobedience elaborated by Gandhi, it is possible to grasp the religious interpretation of this form of political action.

For Gandhi, civil disobedience represented, first and foremost, a moral right as well as a divine obligation; it consisted of principled lawbreaking committed in the face of immoral laws (Scheuerman, 2018). The spiritual trait becomes evident in the idea that civil disobedience taps directly into divine forces and can be a 'corrective to a social world plagued by sin and evil' (Scheuerman, 2018, p. 11). Gandhi understood civil disobedience as an open disobedience to laws that go against God's will. Before frequently using the term 'civil disobedience' (which Gandhi took from Thoreau, as previously explained), he spoke about 'passive resistance' and about 'civil resistance'. For Gandhi, 'civil disobedience' was a term that indicated a politically motivated breach of the law and, more specifically, it was 'one particularly effective type of *satyagraha*' (Scheuerman, 2018, p. 13; emphasis in original). Literally, *satyagraha* describes the insistence on truth and the force deriving from this insistence (ibid.). Civil disobedience was precisely one type of satyagraha, alongside other forms of action such as strikes, boycotts, pickets, and non-cooperation. In the word, *satya* refers to an element of truth and thus the conformity to Being and God, namely *sat* (Laudani, 2013, p. 103). It can be summarised as truth-force (Brown, 2011) or, as Gandhi specified, as 'love-force' or 'soul-force' (1968b, p. 148). To practice this divine truthfulness required mental and physical discipline and a process of self-purification.

Another element that characterised Gandhi's idea of civil disobedience is nonviolence. Since civil disobedience is an action motivated by truth and love, requiring discipline, violence was not contemplated in its exercise. Nonviolence is identified with the word *ahimsa* in Gandhi's thought. *Ahimsa* has a Sanskrit root – 'himsa' – which means injury

(Gandhi, 1968b). Thus, ahimsa means nonviolence[4] and, more generally, not inflicting injury upon others. Satyagrahis, who are the practitioners of satyagraha, accept violence upon themselves by conforming to nonviolence, but they must not inflict it upon others. *Ahimsa* means complete nonviolence, and thus, the absence of harm and physical violence (Basebang, 2010). Nonviolence was understood with regard to other human beings as well as to animals. For Gandhi, nonviolence was not only the attitude of dissenters when protesting, but it was also a philosophy. Gandhi's strong commitment to nonviolence did not have a purely strategic function; rather, it was a principled commitment. In other words, nonviolence was not a pragmatic feature of the acts of disobedience, but rather part of a broader moral vision, playing a normative role with regard to the attitude that Gandhi considered appropriate to the practice of civil resistance.[5] He was convinced by the idea that discipline, alongside nonviolence, was a prerequisite for securing certain political outcomes and avoiding chaos and lawlessness. Gandhi more than once interrupted satyagraha due to the fear of an outbreak of violence (Scheuerman, 2018). The spiritual ground of this conception of civil disobedience is evident in this precise idea of committing to nonviolence. Violence is indeed an instrument that hubristic individuals deploy, while truth-seekers – namely the dissenters – do not use force on their peers. In short, violence is not consonant with truth, love, and the insistence on truth. Yet, Gandhi was aware that violence is part of a spiritually imperfect world (Scheuerman, 2018). He claimed that '[t]he world is full of *Himsa*' (Gandhi, 1968b, p. 128; emphasis in original). Love was an essential ground in this idea of civil disobedience, since it is only love that

[4] Throughout this section on Gandhi as well as throughout this dissertation, the term 'nonviolence' is written without a hyphen. Readers may ask whether there is a reason behind this deliberate terminological choice. Discussions and debates were held about drawing a distinction between the hyphenated term 'non-violence' and the non-hyphenated one, namely 'nonviolence', to refer respectively to a pragmatic interpretation or to a principled interpretation of nonviolence. This distinction was also examined by the influential theorist of nonviolent action Gene Sharp (1973). There were also discussions that followed the point of view of Italian philosopher and dissenter Aldo Capitini regarding preferring the de-hyphenated term to more accurately describe the affirmative connotation that Gandhi attributed to nonviolence (ahimsa), removing the negative sense otherwise stressed by the prefix 'non-' (Fofi, 2015). As argued by Bala (2009), there are no reasons for distinguishing the two forms of the term to refer to sharply different interpretations of nonviolence, as what emerged from all of the discussions was that these are not separate meanings of the concept of nonviolence. Rather, it is a matter of two approaches or two dimensions of the same concept. The choice here to write 'nonviolence' rests upon this argument. Therefore, this paragraph discusses a pragmatic and a principled approach to nonviolence with reference to Gandhi, without adopting a potentially confusing differentiation of terms.

[5] The discussion about how activists may differently interpret the commitment to nonviolence, namely as a purely pragmatic feature or a more comprehensive moral stance, is part of the issue of ideology, which concerns the idea and the exercise of civil resistance. This matter and, more specifically, the issue of activists sharing or not sharing the same ideology about nonviolence is particularly problematic in the case of Gandhi. The critical contribution offered by Judith M. Brown (2011) investigates this issue in the Gandhian campaigns of civil resistance.

allows the search for and insistence on truth. Love also entails respecting others. There is no possibility to pursue the divine truth without respecting others.

The spiritual and religious trait of this conception of civil disobedience is not of secondary importance. It is in every feature of this form of dissent as well as manifest in the justification of civil disobedience. For Gandhi, an obligation existed to disobey with civility. Civil disobedience was considered a duty, and more precisely a sacred duty when facing laws that are morally corrupt. According to Gandhi, laws do not just have to be obeyed, whether they are good or bad. In the face of unjust laws, those engaged in truth-seeking have the duty to disobey to restore justice. Thus, satyagrahis had a moral and divine obligation to disobey (Scheuerman, 2018). Civil disobedience more evidently becomes an obligation after attempting to remedy the injustice through ordinary legal and political channels. Truth-seekers have the obligation to engage in lawbreaking and restore the moral order when the secular powers prove incapable of changing immoral laws or resist the attempts to abrogate them. Immoral laws are those that go against the divine truth and the search for it. To draw a parallel with Thoreau (2013), who argued that unjust laws exist, for Gandhi there could be immoral laws. The fact that a law results from a democratic process through majority rule does not guarantee its moral rectitude, nor does it make such a law just and morally acceptable (Scheuerman, 2018). It is not a delegitimisation of the democratic rule of the majority, but rather the understanding of the possibility that a law can be unjust, even when this results from the majority's decision. In the face of immoral laws, one has the obligation to engage in lawbreaking. As previously argued, according to Thoreau, there are circumstances (e.g., war or slavery) in which there is no time to opt for the legal channels provided to prompt change or to wait for the majority to be persuaded to amend an unjust law. Therefore, an individual must resort to an extra-institutional act, namely disobedience, by refusing to collaborate with the governing institutions, thus withdrawing their consent. Gandhi, instead, believed that lawbreaking should be engaged once all ordinary legal and political channels at one's disposal have been exhausted. Hence, satyagraha requires spiritual commitment as well as moral and physical self-discipline; in addition, it is not the immediate response in the face of immoral laws, but rather an alternative channel that should come after institutional and legal ones have proven ineffective.

Another clear mark of the religious meaning backing Gandhi's idea of civil disobedience is related to one of the aims of this form of action. For Gandhi, civil disobedience was a strategy for converting the opponents – those who contribute to the enactment of immoral laws or policies. The way satyagrahis disobey, conforming to self-discipline, decorum, and nonviolence, in the higher pursuit of divine truth, allows the conversion of their opponents (Scheuerman, 2018). The practice of satyagraha proved effective when it succeeded in converting opponents through convincing them about the injustice of some rules, norms, or policies and the necessity to strive for love and truth (Brown, 2011).

As explained up to this point, to borrow the words of Scheuerman in his discussion of Gandhi's idea of civil disobedience, '*every* feature of his account of civil disobedience was spiritually constructed' (2018, p. 15; emphasis in original). In addition to the elements outlined thus far, civil disobedience for Gandhi was to be exercised openly, firstly because covert disobedience – and more generally secrecy, lying, or fraud – are not compatible with divine truth; moreover, this was because to convince and convert opponents, the reasons for breaching the law had to be expressed publicly. For Gandhi, exercising acts of civil disobedience openly also involved providing advance notice of the action to political authorities.

The moral and spiritual trait also emerges in another aspect of the dissenters' posture. They 'were expected willingly and even joyfully to *accept whatever punishment* or abuse they faced', even if it entailed death, which is why it was such a sacred duty that it could have demanded martyrdom (Scheuerman, 2018, p. 16; emphasis in original). The willingness to accept punishment was a display of the activists' moral sincerity. Moreover, this attitude had another function. Accepting punishment could have meant going to prison, which had a strategic facet, namely filling jails. As previously explained, after the acts of defiance exercised in India, thousands of Indians were imprisoned, including Gandhi. This resulted in jails being filled, which meant obstructing the imperial machine, forcing it to handle an extraordinary situation. What Brown (2011) observed is that it was precisely through such tactics that satyagrahis contributed to making the ordinary activities of the government difficult. This was realised, for example, by attacking the sources of revenue on which the British relied, ensuring that people from the villages could not guarantee some services, and making key collaborators of the

colonial power withdraw support for the government. What proved effective was not so much making it *impossible* for the British to rule, but rather obstructing their government by making it *difficult* for them to govern. In this path through the philosophical and practical roots of civil disobedience, it is interesting to observe how, throughout history, the idea of this form of dissent has been put into practice, exerting an influence on other activists. Submitting willingly to being jailed was an element that also characterised the strategies of King and the US Civil Rights Movement. Furthermore, Brown (2011) highlighted the distinction between making it impossible for the British to rule and making it difficult for them to continue with their government. Here lies the essence of civil disobedience, which has not been interpreted as a direct clash with the authority opposed by the dissenters or as a violent overthrow of a government – but rather as a challenge to the authority's government through interfering with its activity.

The influence of Thoreau and of the tactics he considered for enacting refusal emerged in one of the strategies that Gandhi elaborated and adopted, namely non-cooperation. This consisted of refusing to cooperate with the ruling regime (i.e., British rule). Once Gandhi realised that the British relied and depended on the collaboration of the Indians, he understood the potential and effect of interrupting this cooperation. The withdrawal of cooperation was the core of various actions, such as the 'refusal to serve in the legislatures and law courts, to buy legal alcohol and salt (which were both government monopolies) or foreign cloth (which gave reasons for British business to support the Raj), and ultimately refusal to pay land revenue' (Brown, 2011, pp. 53–54). Gandhi hoped that Indians could comprehend their involvement in the British empire machine, as it would enable them to adopt disobedience strategies and to start to implement what he defined as *swaraj*, an idea of actual self-rule beyond the achievement of political independence. Pursuing *swaraj* for Gandhi signified building a new polity as well as a new society from the ground up (Brown, 2011).

Last but not least, it is worthwhile observing the aim assigned to an action of civil disobedience. Satyagraha, for Gandhi, was what activists should deploy in the face of immoral and unjust laws to amend or abrogate them. However, Gandhi also thought that disciplined souls engaging in lawbreaking, by properly conducting it, can 'engender far-reaching change and eventually a total overhaul of society' (Scheuerman, 2018, p. 17). Moreover, Gandhi's idea of satyagraha was not limited to political matters; rather, it could

also cover economic issues. Thus, according to his idea, it could have a wide scope with regard to its application. This could be one of the reasons why civil disobedience for Gandhi 'potentially permitted radical and indeed massive change not just to the state but also to family and the economy' (Scheuerman, 2018, p. 17). To be clear, Gandhi also specified that this does not mean conducting a revolution as, in his view, civil disobedience is different from a revolution. As Scheuerman emphasised, Gandhi declared the following: 'I want no revolution. I want ordered progress … I want no chaos. I want real order to be evolved out this chaos which is misrepresented to me as order' (2018, p. 17). Thus, Gandhi drew a line between civil disobedience and revolution by associating the latter with chaos, disorder, and probably also violence. Yet, to civil disobedience he attributed a more radical goal – namely to overhaul the entire society.

To close this analysis of Gandhi, I intend to elucidate the radical core of his idea of civil disobedience, which explains why he envisioned the possibility for civil disobedience to transform a society. Gandhi considered civil disobedience to be based on a general respect for law. Scheuerman (2018) mentioned that Gandhi was at first, more moderate in a sense regarding the posture of satyagrahis with respect to the law. Initially, he thought that civil disobedience should address specific laws or government policies or measures due to his worry about the lawlessness or violence that would likely result from a wider contestation and opposition to laws. In other words, Gandhi thought that there first had to be obedience to laws, even disagreeable ones, to avoid a broader contestation leading to chaos and violence. While it might sound paradoxical, according to Gandhi, to observe the duty of challenging the immoral laws of a society and achieving liberty, there is a price to pay in the form of submission to state laws. Thus, people do not simply have to passively obey state laws. The respect for and fidelity to law associated with this peculiar act of lawbreaking mean 'diligently obeying *most* but not *all* laws' (Scheuerman, 2018, p. 18). In fact, as compellingly highlighted by Eraldo Souza dos Santos (2022), Gandhi's idea of civil disobedience was originally more radical than its understanding outside of India (especially in the United States) seems to suggest. Probably, this radical element underlying his idea of civil disobedience always characterised his vision, representing the final goal of the type of nonviolent resistance he theorised and practiced, and of his critique of the state. This radical quality appeared specifically in two aspects of his thought, the first of which was his personal interpretation of being an anarchist. As

Souza dos Santos recalled, in 1916, shortly after Gandhi return to India, he defined himself as ‘an anarchist but of another type’ (2022, p. 113). This meant that his civil disobedience was an action inscribed in a more radical critique of the state. However, it was not the anarchism of other anticolonial leaders who took up violence and also terrorism. The second aspect, which has mostly gone unexplored, was his idea of complete civil disobedience. For Gandhi, complete civil disobedience was ‘a state of peaceful rebellion – a refusal to obey every single State-made law. It is certainly more dangerous than an armed rebellion’ (1968b, p. 171). Gandhi imagined that at some point the stage to be reached is that of a total disobedience. He was aware, however, that this would most likely unleash violence and bloodshed (Souza dos Santos, 2022).

Thus, it is worth noting that Gandhi stated the possibility that civil disobedience goes much further, as far as becoming disobedient to all of the laws that a state enacts. Here, the following question may arise: To what extent can this refusal of all the laws of the state still be described as civil disobedience, at least in the terms by which civil disobedience has been defined thus far? This radical version of Gandhi is certainly not of secondary importance for the understanding of his idea of civil disobedience as well as for the general theorisation of the concept of civil disobedience. Ultimately, what must be underlined is that civil disobedience in Gandhi’s theorisation was a nonviolent instrument for pursuing not only a change in immoral laws but also a profound change in the society.

1.3 Martin Luther King, Jr.’s nonviolent direct action: Eradicating a system of racial oppression

The reflections elaborated by Gandhi, as well as the strategies and acts adopted in the path towards Indian independence, became an intellectual and practical reservoir for Martin Luther King, Jr. and the activists of the Civil Rights Movement in the United States. King was fascinated by the concept of satyagraha and the campaigns led by the Indian activist, where they engaged in nonviolent action. Through Gandhi, King realised the power of love and nonviolent methods (King, 1981). He continued the practice of civil disobedience in America, where Gandhi represents an intermediary between him and Thoreau (Eschner, 2017).

This subsection first focuses on the prominent stages of King's life, as his idea of civil disobedience derived particularly from his personal involvement in the exercise of this form of protest. Understanding King as an activist and intellectual of civil disobedience is necessary for discussing how he conceptualised this form of protest and also for critically analysing the mainstream liberal interpretation of his civil disobedience. More details on the historical and theoretical ties between the liberal model of civil disobedience and the activism of King and the Civil Rights Movement are provided in Section 2. Next, this subsection outlines the characteristic elements of an act of civil disobedience in King's view. Lastly, it discusses the radical role that King attributed to civil disobedience, which was a form of nonviolent direct action to be undertaken in the face of unjust laws, such as the segregation laws, with the aim not only of amending those laws but also of opposing a system of racial injustice, opening the path to integration within society. Ultimately, as Pineda (2021a) argued, civil disobedience for King was an instrument for reconstructing the relationships between citizens to build a multiracial democracy, based on the equality of each individual.

Reverend Martin Luther King, Jr. was originally from Atlanta, Georgia, and he became famous for leading the American Civil Rights Movement. He contributed to some of the most critical struggles of African Americans for racial equality, in the period between 1955 and April 4, 1968, the day he was assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee. King's story of activism started in December 1955 in Montgomery, Alabama, when Rosa Parks, a black woman, refused to relinquish her seat to a white man and to move to the back of a city bus, the area designated for black passengers. After her refusal, the Montgomery Bus Boycott was organised, a mass boycott of the city buses by African Americans, who instead walked to work every day. This is an example of a mass action of non-cooperation, which resulted from the idea that, for black people, riding on a segregated bus was humiliating, while walking with dignity was not. King was given the role of spokesman for the protest (King, 1981). The boycott ended almost a year later when the US Supreme Court declared segregation on public transportation unconstitutional. In 1957, King became president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organisation that gathered black ministers of the South to discuss the strategies adopted against segregation and of the leadership of the nascent Civil Rights Movement.

In the 1960s, a series of nonviolent mass protests were held and King was arrested several times. In 1963, during a nonviolent campaign in Birmingham, Alabama, protestors faced a particularly brutal reaction from the city's police, who responded with power hoses, dogs and clubs. While under arrest, King (1963) wrote a letter, which became known as the *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, to those Christian and Jewish fellow clergymen advising him and all of the black people who were protesting to wait for justice. This letter is a crucial text for comprehending King's idea of civil disobedience. The same year, King played a crucial role in the organisation of the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom. On this occasion, he gave his famous *I Have a Dream* speech. Part of the goal of racial equality was formally achieved when Congress approved the Civil Rights Act (The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 1964) and the Voting Rights Act (The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration, 1965), legislations that abolish segregation and recognised the right of black people to vote. King's commitment to civil disobedience lasted until his death. In his last years, he organised actions, such as the Poor People's Campaign, which was aimed at economic justice by forcing the government to end poverty.[6] An essential thing that he learned when fighting against racial injustice was that it is deeply intertwined with economic injustice (King, 1981).

King's life was in itself a history of nonviolent disobedience. He became a civil disobedient firstly by studying. He derived his understanding of the role and potential of nonviolent action from the study of the Gandhian methods, and then his intellectual reflection on civil disobedience was later corroborated by practice. Thus, the power of nonviolent action was not only strengthened by his personal engagement in acts of civil disobedience but also through meetings and exchanges with other civil disobedients. King underlined the importance of his visit to India in 1959, where he saw the achievements reached through nonviolent struggle. He saw the far-reaching change that nonviolent action can engender as well as that an alternative to violent action was viable. When King was involved in the mass boycott in Montgomery, he realised the practical force of nonviolent action. As anticipated, civil disobedience was also a spiritually motivated

[6] All of this information regarding the most important events in King's life is available on the website of 'The Martin Luther King, Jr. Research and Education Institute' of Stanford University (https://kinginstitute.stanford.edu/king-resources/major-king-events-chronology-1929-1968) as well as on the website of 'The Martin Luther King, Jr. Center for Nonviolent Social Change' or 'The King Center' (https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/martin-luther-king-jr/).

lawbreaking for King.[7] As he declared, his method of civil disobedience was derived from Gandhi, while his motivations and spirit came from Christ (King, 1981). In contrast to Gandhi, King attempted to combine this religious vision of civil disobedience with the political and constitutional principles of US society (Scheuerman, 2018).

According to King's ideas, civil disobedience is a last resort. This means that it is an act to be undertaken to oppose an injustice only after lawful forms of protest, as well as attempts to negotiate with political opponents, have proven to be ineffective. Thus, to oppose laws that go against God's will, legal channels are prioritised.

Here, a problem arises precisely when a law is in opposition to the law of God. In this case, resorting to civil disobedience is justified. The justification of civil disobedience, according to King, is based on the argument that laws can be just or unjust. While there is a legal and moral responsibility to comply with *just* laws, there is also a moral responsibility to violate *unjust* laws. Disobedience to unjust laws is therefore justified and is even a spiritual duty. Segregation statutes and ordinances were instances of unjust laws since they were morally wrong. In other words, they were against the moral law or God's law. In his 1963 *Letter from Birmingham Jail*, King explained various ways to determine whether a law is unjust.[8] First, segregation laws were unjust because, according to King, they damaged human personality and were not in agreement with the moral law. Second, unjust laws are those imposed on a minority group by a majority that exempts itself from compliance. Third, laws can be unjust not only for their morally wrong content but also for the unfair process behind their enactment, such as when laws are imposed on disenfranchised minorities, who have played no role in the process of enacting those laws. In this regard, King (1963) mentioned black people being prevented from registering as voters and thus being excluded from the democratic processes. Lastly, unjust laws are those laws that are just when on paper but unjust in their application, an example of which is just ordinances used to perpetuate a segregated order (King, 1963).

[7] As Scheuerman (2018) observed, civil disobedience, thus conceptualised, seems to speak only to those dissenters who embrace the Christian faith, thus excluding non-believers. Both Gandhi and King had to deal with the accusation of being, in this sense, sectarian. King responded to this accusation by declaring the democratic and constitutional ideals to be important points of reference for his conception and by underlining the idea that essentially everybody, non-believers included, believes in the existence of a force that brings order in the universe. Nonetheless, his account was not immune to criticism on this matter and not all the non-believer activists recognised and shared this religiously connoted form of dissent.

[8] Regarding the difficulties that King encountered in compellingly explaining why certain laws are unjust, interesting historical and analytical insights are provided by Pineda (2021a).

In the face of unjust laws, the answer for King was a nonviolent campaign, but only after precise steps had been exhausted. The first step involved collecting facts to demonstrate the existence of injustices; the second step was negotiation; the third step was self-purification; and the last step was nonviolent direct action. Before practically engaging in direct action, the path to pursue was that of negotiation. This is what black people attempted to do with the local administrators in Birmingham, albeit unsuccessfully. The failure of negotiations made it necessary to take action, namely through engaging in civil disobedience (King, 1963). In the following paragraphs, I analyse what civil disobedience was for King as well as what it meant to concretely resort to it.

In King's view, the first element that characterises an action of civil disobedience is that it is a breach of the law. Typical acts of civil disobedience acts, undertaken by Civil Rights Movement activists, were sit-ins at white-only restaurant counters. This action involved black protestors sitting at forbidden lunch counters and remaining seated there until policemen remove them. The protesters were not supposed to resist. The second feature of an act of civil disobedience, in King's view, was nonviolence. As it was for Gandhi, nonviolence for King was more than a practical tactic. It became 'a commitment to a way of life' (King, 1981, p. 202), and thus, a real philosophy of life. While for Gandhi this commitment was so strong that it included, for example, vegetarianism, King elaborated a less restrictive vision, by disapproving especially of violence against persons, rather than that against property. Being nonviolent required another step – namely self-purification. Activists participated in workshops to train in nonviolence, meaning preparing themselves to face blows without resisting and retaliating. Moreover, given that the acts undertaken were contrary to the law, disobedients had to be prepared to be jailed. Thus, civil disobedience in King's view required protesters to observe discipline and self-control, especially when facing provocation. A direct-action programme, besides planning acts of disobedience, could also contemplate another form of nonviolent action, namely economic withdrawal. Among other actions, a campaign of abstention from purchases was organised in 1963 as a strategy to pressure merchants (King, 1963). This last nonviolent tactic was similar to the methods adopted by Gandhi and Indian activists when they refused to buy products under the monopoly of the British, thereby obstructing their sources of revenue.

The main feature of King's civil disobedience was nonviolence. Committing to nonviolence while exercising disobedience was part of a broader characteristic of this form of protest – its civility. The civility of a dissenter was demonstrated by breaking the law non-violently and openly, and then willingly submitting to the penalties. Describing the action of civil disobedience undertaken in 1963 in Birmingham, where he was arrested for violating a court order, King declared the following:

'We did not hide our intentions. In fact, I announced our plan to the press, pointing out that we were not anarchists advocating lawlessness, but that it was obvious to us that the courts of Alabama had misused the judicial process in order to perpetuate injustice and segregation' (1963, p. 78).

Thus, he publicly announced the reasons behind the protest as well as the plan of action. All of these elements characterised what for King essentially represented the civil disobedient attitude, namely a respect for just laws. By drawing this distinction, King clarified that his idea of disobedience did not correspond to an anarchist's position of law evasion. Unjust laws were the ones to be disobeyed by breaking them openly and non-violently and then accepting the penalty. For King, a dissenter who acted in this manner was actually demonstrating 'the highest respect for law' (1963, p. 95). This point constitutes one of the most disputed aspects of this idea of civil disobedience, which was later misinterpreted in the philosophical debate through the attribution of a conservative rather than a radical sense to this form of protest. On the one hand, King (1963) explicitly stated that conscientious lawbreaking, conducted in that manner, was essentially the expression of the highest respect for the law. King demonstrated that he had the American political and constitutional ideals as his normative horizon. His respect for law referred to a commitment to the values and principles enshrined in the US Constitution and in the Declaration of Independence. On the other hand, King (1986) also argued that it was critical to abolish the system that had legalised racial segregation; thus, he urged a more radical change to the system. His idea of civil disobedience corresponded to a radical and transformative kind of action, and such a radical conception of nonviolent disobedience was 'civilised' by the readings provided by liberal theorists. The aspect of civility attributed to civil disobedience was, for King, one of the defining elements of this form

of protest; yet, it must be more accurately framed within his thought. That dissenters had to accept the penalty for their actions, thus demonstrating respect for the law in general and for the constitutional principles that underpinned American society, did not mean for King that, in a political system that allowed racial segregation, only a single law or a set of laws needed to be amended. In this last regard, it is necessary to clarify the actual role that King defined for civil disobedience.

In King's reflections, morality was put together with purely political arguments, although he insisted more on moral reasons. King's insistence on the moral and spiritual principles that motivate civil disobedience, as well as on the moral implications of unjust laws on individuals, was not merely a trait of the religious sense of his civil disobedience. Rather, as Pineda (2021a) suggests, his insistence on how degrading is segregation for human personality and dignity was symptomatic of the extent of the problem of racial domination and the profound crisis affecting the American society. Pineda's (2021a) reflection is interesting because it assists in better understanding King's idea of civil disobedience. In light of this deeper diagnosis of the problem with a society structured on racial oppression, civil disobedience for King had a more far-reaching role: it was a nonviolent transformative act aiming at eradicating the profoundly distorted relations of a society based on racial domination. Civil disobedience was the answer that King provided to the deep-rooted problem of racial injustice. A system of racial domination, in his view, was an evil system. The problem in American society was not limited to Jim Crow laws, which were the laws that established segregation. Racial injustice was a systemic problem stemming from segregation, which created a status quo of social relations structured on racial hierarchies. Racial domination was against King's values. He believed in the equal worth of each individual and in the interconnection and mutuality among individuals. When one assumes an interconnection and intersubjectivity among individuals, this means that they have responsibilities towards others as well as a duty to oppose the domination or exploitation of other individuals. The principles that establish equality among individuals and the duties and responsibilities that derive from intersubjective relations are not only religious principles but also constitutional principles – as part of the US Constitution and the Declaration of Independence. A system that institutionalised and perpetuated racial segregation was but an evil system that went against these fundamental principles.

Building a society on a system of racial hierarchies means building a system of oppression, which affects not only the institutions but also – and above all – the individuals and their reciprocal relations. Pineda (2021a) argues that, in the case of King's society, there was such an entrenched system of oppression that white as well as black Americans adjusted to the injustice because they adapted to the distorted power relations. Consequently, black people lost any possibility of dignity and especially of agency.

These are the reasons why civil disobedience, in King's mind, was more than a tactic to bring about change in Jim Crow laws. Pineda suggests that nonviolent direct action was rather a form of 'creative maladjustment' (2021a, p. 67), meaning a practice of the transformation of those relations of oppression produced and maintained by the adjustment to an unjust system, that is, by a blind and uncritical acceptance of such a system. The problem with segregation was that it had a systemic nature, which was the case because the racialised relations among individuals had become 'normality' over time. Thus, transforming these pervasive racial structures was a matter of maladjustment. Essentially, civil disobedience was a practice that enabled citizenship for oppressed black people. This means that it was a practice for restoring their denied agency, and emancipating themselves, thus enacting freedom, not only fighting for it (Pineda, 2021a). For King, civil disobedience was actually a transformative practice because of the role that it could play in the eradication of such a system of injustice and oppression.

Furthermore, Pineda (2021a) underlines another interesting element to this transformative practice. To King and the Civil Rights Movement, civil disobedience played a function of disclosure; that is, it unveiled the system of racial domination and, since it was undertaken publicly, it was also a way of disclosing the brutal response of policemen and white citizens in front of black people's call for justice and equality. Thus, it uncovered white Americans' responsibilities. White citizens were playing a role in the perpetuation of racial hierarchies as long as they acquiesced those power relations and did not oppose the deeply unjust status quo. This steadfast commitment to nonviolence, despite the violent response of the authorities to acts of civil disobedience, thus had this further meaning. King believed in nonviolence not out of naïve fascination; he was aware that nonviolence does not lead to miracles overnight (King, 1981). Rather, nonviolence required perseverance to be effective. Returning again to Pineda's (2021a) reflection, King believed that committing steadfastly to nonviolence – and therefore engaging in

actions of creative maladjustment – was the way to dismantle the dynamics of racial domination and to reimagine a democratic order based on the equality of each individual. The final aim of such a transformative nonviolent direct action was not desegregation but rather integration, namely 'a multiracial democracy produced through the free, creative agency of individuals, fully alive to their equal moral worth and their constitutive dependence on and responsibility for each other' (Pineda, 2021a, p. 70). Ultimately, for Pineda, King's account is not merely an of civil disobedience, but rather a 'politics of disobedient civility' (2021a, p. 70). This is because King did not only aim to provide an account of legitimate civil disobedience and a justification for it, distinguishing it from other forms of protest. He also outlined nonviolent direct action as a practice with the power to radically transform and reconstitute a society on new civic relations. He conceptualised a practice that allowed the relations among citizens to be rethought. It is a 'disobedient civility' because the conceptualisation elaborated by King still rests on civility. His idea about the need to build new relations among citizens – thus one about building a society freed from racial domination, hatred, and violence – was an investment in civility (Pineda, 2021a).

There is a concept in King's thought which summarised this nonviolent attitude and the ultimate search for radical change. This concept is 'agape', or 'love in action', an 'unconditional love for all, including adversaries, needed for nonviolent conflict-resolution'.[9] This concept corresponds to the Gandhian satyagraha (i.e., truth-force). Agape, as unconditional and disinterested love, besides drawing its meaning from Christian morality, describes the core idea of a society that is an alternative to a system that discriminates and segregates people. It is a society guided first of all by love and respect. Agape summarised the dissenters' attitude and was also a prefiguration for a desired social and political order. In this sense, civil disobedience represents an anticipation of a future order based on equality, justice, and love (Scheuerman, 2018).

In conclusion, the analysis of King's idea of civil disobedience is an essential step in a general review of the history of this concept. The discussion of his account presented here has focused particularly on the necessity of more accurately describing the role that he attributed to this form of dissent, which was a transformative role. Starting from the

[9] This explanation is available in a glossary of nonviolence provided by The King Center (https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/glossary-of-nonviolence/).

interesting reflection of Pineda, this analysis attempted to explain that civil disobedience for King was a way to respond to the pervasive problem of racial domination in American society. By disobeying segregation laws, King and the civil rights activists led a transformation in the system of relationships between citizens based on racial hierarchies. The aim of their acts of civil disobedience was not to amend the set of Jim Crow laws, but rather to reconstruct the civic relations between individuals withing society.

In King's concept of civil disobedience, what must be observed is the positive feature that characterises it. That is, civil disobedience was not simply a way to counter injustices. Nonviolent direct action for King was a way to realise an alternative society, grounded on integration rather than segregation – a democratic society truly structured on justice, equality, and freedom. It is a concept that encompasses not only a way to protest, but also the realisation of a political project. Understanding the radical meaning of civil disobedience is necessary to discuss its ultimate potential, especially when undertaken in political contexts crossed by profound injustices.

In closing this first section, I wish to highlight the main points of the theorisations elaborated by Thoreau, Gandhi, and King. Thoreau inaugurated this nonviolent practice by conceptualising it as an act of refusal, through which citizens withdraw their consent from a government that has enacted and perpetuated injustices. Civil disobedience for Thoreau was a form of withdrawal from citizenship, performed by refusing to honour the duties that arise from citizenship (e.g., paying taxes), to protests against unjust policies and laws. Disobedience was a way to preserve individuals' conscience from participating in injustices. In Thoreau's conceptualisation, civil disobedience was primarily an individual action and was not yet an action designed to be undertaken publicly, even though he was aware of the potential of the same acts (fiscal disobedience, resignation from offices, and desertion) performed by a large number of people. Gandhi and King considered civil disobedience to be a public and collective form of political action. Their theories described mass acts of civil disobedience. Notably, the involvement of a significant number of people was crucial for the effectiveness of the campaigns they organised and participated in. In the repertoire of tactics and strategies they described for practicing civil disobedience, the influence of Thoreau and the theoretical and practical tie between Gandhi and King clearly emerges. The main difference between Thoreau's theory on the one hand and those of Gandhi and King on the other is that Thoreau

formulated a secular idea of disobedience, while Gandhi and King defined the concept in spiritual terms. The issue of disobedience for the Indian activist and for the leader of the Civil Rights Movement arose in front of immoral and unjust laws, namely laws that went against God's law and damaged human personality. Religion was very much present in the horizon of meaning of Gandhi and King's ideas of civil disobedience, but these ideas were also emancipated by a purely religious meaning. Their ideas spoke to non-believers as well, and through civil disobedience they also appealed – above all – to secular values, which should have guided the alternative societies they wanted to see realised.

This last point leads to the common thread that connects these three theorists and their ideas of civil disobedience – an element that was only treated in much detail only in very recent philosophical contributions. In these three conceptualisations, civil disobedience is a radical practice identified to transform cultural, social, and political orders structured on the following systems of oppression: slavery, colonisation, segregation. Thoreau's peaceable revolution, Gandhi's complete civil disobedience, and King's nonviolent direct action are all concepts that entailed more than the opposition to an unjust law or a set of unjust laws. Their concepts of civil disobedience described their ideas about a just and inclusive society as well as how to reach it.

The following section examines the liberal and democratic theories of civil disobedience, which are the predominant understandings of this concept within the philosophical debate. These theories were formulated starting from the exemplary stories of activism of Thoreau, Gandhi, and King. In particular, the next section analyses particularly the limits of these theories, which were demonstrated to domesticate the role of civil disobedience, especially when such theories attempted to provide a theoretical framework to the paradigmatic example of King.

2. Problems with the influential liberal and democratic models of civil disobedience

During the 1960s, in the wake of the activism of the US Civil Rights Movement, the issue of civil disobedience became a topic of interest in the philosophical academic

debate.[10] From that moment onwards, some questions related to this subject started to be discussed more thoroughly, particularly the following ones: How can civil disobedience be defined and justified? How can it be distinguished from other forms of protest? What role can civil disobedience play?

Various philosophers and political theorists have provided answers to these questions, conceptualising a liberal model of civil disobedience, which became the predominant understanding of this form of political action in contemporary philosophical debate. This conception has two major limits: (i) civil disobedience is theorised as a justified act only within the boundaries of liberal democratic states; and (ii) the radical and transformative role of civil disobedience is underestimated. The narrowness of the liberal idea of civil disobedience, as well as the underestimation of its radical power were subsequently addressed by democratic theories of civil disobedience, which broadened the scope of this form of protest; notwithstanding, democratic theorists circumscribed civil disobedience within the perimeter of a democratic society.

Therefore, a gap exists in the philosophical knowledge about civil disobedience – namely what role it has outside of liberal democratic states, particularly in non–fully democratic regimes. In such contexts, the following question arises: What is the aim that dissenters pursue when engaging in this form of nonviolent political action? Before answering these questions, this section first reviews the influential liberal conception of civil disobedience. The critical analysis of liberal contributions to the debate on civil disobedience aims to highlight the main problematic elements. Besides the restriction of the proper place and role of civil disobedience, an additional implication of the narrow liberal idea is that sharp distinctions have been drawn between civil disobedience and other forms of protest, specifically conscientious objection and revolution. This section presents a conceptual comparison between civil disobedience and these two other types of dissent to reappraise the boundaries drawn to distinguish them. In real-life activism, civil disobedience and revolution in particular overlap more than the various liberal conceptualisations contended.

In the last subsection, particular attention is given to the reason, as identified by Pineda (2021b), for the narrowness of liberal conceptions. Liberal philosophers have

[10] Hugo Adam Bedau (1991), one of the prominent liberal theorists of civil disobedience, recalls that in 1961, on the occasion of the American Philosophical Association's annual meeting, a symposium was organised on *Political Obligation and Civil Disobedience*. It was the first discussion dedicated to this topic in the academic community.

conceptualised civil disobedience as a mere reformist act within an overall just system as they see it like a state, and specifically a white state. This perspective on civil disobedience has prevented theorists from understanding it in broader terms as a decolonising praxis (Pineda, 2021b, 2022), that is, as an act that opposes global structures of racial and economic domination. Pineda's argument is discussed to corroborate the need to challenge and rethink the influential liberal conceptualisations of civil disobedience, starting from a non-Western perspective.

2.1 John Rawls and liberal philosophers on civil disobedience

Most liberal conceptualisations of civil disobedience are narrow because they conceive this act as being bound to liberal democratic regimes and as aiming to amend injustices within these political orders. Contemporary accounts of civil disobedience have proven to be normatively tied to a Westphalian conception of the nation state (Pineda, 2022, pp. 13–14), which has resulted in a limited idea about the appropriate context, justification for, and role of this form of protest. This emerged particularly in the liberal model of civil disobedience, as elaborated in the Anglo-American philosophical debate, starting from the 1960s.

The most influential liberal theorisation of civil disobedience was provided by John Rawls in his book *A Theory of Justice*, which was first published in 1971. Civil disobedience, for Rawls, is a 'public, nonviolent, conscientious yet political act contrary to law usually done with the aim of bringing about a change in the law or policies of the government' (Rawls, 1999, p. 320). Rawls elaborates his theory specifically for 'the special case of a nearly just society, one that is well-ordered for the most part but in which some serious violations of justice nevertheless do occur' (Rawls, 1999, p. 319). Therefore, civil disobedience is an issue that concerns democratic regimes. In particular, its role and appropriateness are discussed within the boundaries of what Rawls defines as 'a more or less just democratic state', where citizens 'recognise and accept the legitimacy of the constitution' (Rawls, 1999, p. 319). Civil disobedients appeal to their fellow citizens and a shared sense of justice to oppose unjust laws or policies as well as to pursue change within the existing political order. By adhering to nonviolent forms of action, civil disobedients, unlike ordinary criminals or rebels, demonstrate 'fidelity to law' (Rawls,

1999, p. 322). Those who engage in civil disobedience, according to Rawls, must do so non-violently and publicly (which involves also communicating the act in advance), and also by demonstrating 'a willingness to accept the legal consequences' of their illegal acts (Rawls, 1999, p. 322). According to the Rawlsian understanding, civil disobedience is a 'last resort' (Rawls, 1999, p. 327), which means that it is an act that can be justifiably undertaken when legal channels for engendering change have been exhausted and proven ineffective, or when the majority has exhibited indifference or immovability.

Thus, from this liberal perspective, civil disobedience is an instrument for drawing attention to unjust laws or policies and for urging the community and state officials to remedy 'serious violations of justice'. In particular, civil disobedience is a justified means of opposing blatant violations and infringements of the two principles of justice outlined by Rawls (1999) – namely the principle of equal liberty and the principle of fair equality of opportunities.[11] In short, civil disobedience is a means of reform within a democratic society, to be undertaken when principles of justices are not entirely applied and citizens' basic liberties and rights are violated. Civil disobedience is not meant to overturn and transform an unjust political system. His theory of civil disobedience is explicitly designed for nearly just societies and cannot apply to different systems of government (Rawls, 1999).

Notably, almost all of the defining features of Rawlsian civil disobedience have been disputed, and furthermore, the narrowness of his theory has been criticised (Arendt, 1972; Brownlee, 2012; Celikates, 2014, 2016a, 2016b, 2021; Pineda, 2015, 2019, 2022; Scheuerman, 2018; Singer, 1973; Zinn, 1968). For example, the fact that civil disobedience, for Rawls, must be undertaken publicly and, especially, by announcing the act in advance, implies that covert acts of intentional lawbreaking cannot be described as acts of civil disobedience. Emblematic instances of the potential problem with these publicity requirements include the actions of digital disobedience taken by the hacker group Anonymous (Celikates, 2016a) and leaking and whistleblowing acts, such as those

[11] The two principles of justice, in what Rawls identifies as their final formulation, are described as follows: 'First principle. Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all. Second principle. Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both: (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity' (Rawls, 1999, 266). Civil disobedience for Rawls (1999) applies specifically when the first principle is seriously infringed and the conditions of fair equality of opportunities are not guaranteed.

undertaken by Edward Snowden and Wikileaks (Celikates, 2016b; Pineda, 2015; Scheuerman, 2018).

The fact that civil disobedience must be nonviolent has also been debated. Rawls concedes that dissenters can consider to engaging in 'forceful resistance' (Rawls, 1999, p. 322) when public appeals to fellow citizens and state authorities fail. In his view, violence against people must be avoided. Yet, the issue about resorting to violence against property remains unanswered. The assumption that civil disobedience must be nonviolent has not only been disputed, but some contemporary scholars have also made space for uncivil forms of disobedience (Aitchison, 2018; Delmas, 2018). Another limit in the Rawlsian theory is the restricted ground of civil disobedience's justification. Issues related to socioeconomic inequalities or institutional and procedural deficits have been ruled out from what civil disobedience is justified for addressing (Celikates, 2016a; Pineda, 2022).

Among all of the controversial points in Rawls's theory, the three most problematic features are as follows: (i) the appropriateness of civil disobedience being restricted to nearly just regimes; (ii) the dissenters' willingness to accept the punishment that derives from their breach of the law, as a way to express fidelity to the law and recognise the legitimacy of the political system; and (iii) the reformist role of civil disobedience, that is, its aim of bringing about change in the laws and policies that are deemed unjust, rather than calling into question the political system as a whole. These three elements describe the narrow nature of civil disobedience in the liberal understanding.

Regarding the first point, Rawls does not actually explain precisely what a nearly just society is and to what extent a political system can be defined as nearly just (Celikates, 2014; Simmons, 2010). If a society is nearly just, meaning that it is generally democratic, why should legal means for addressing violations of justice be impossible to pursue? Why, in such political contexts, should it be necessary to resort to lawbreaking in the face of injustices? A society where legal channels are blocked and basic rights are systematically violated likely cannot be defined as a nearly just society (Celikates, 2014). With regard to the second point, which concerns the expression of fidelity to the law and the recognition of the legitimacy of the political system by accepting punishment, a problem arises when one analyses the most paradigmatic and famous cases of civil disobedience. While Gandhi accepted legal punishment and was arrested several times,

his acceptance did not mean that he recognised the legitimacy of the British rule in India. Furthermore, as previously underlined, King did not recognise the overall legitimacy of the US political system, which institutionalised segregation and was structured on deep-rooted racial domination; however, in his view, the commitment to nonviolence and the acceptance of the consequences of disobedient acts were an expression of the highest respect for law. The liberal reappraisal of King and the Civil Rights Movement's civil disobedience downsized the transformative potential that King originally attributed to nonviolent disobedience. Neither Gandhi nor King sought local changes within the existing systems in which they protested. In the case of King, it is difficult to imagine that, through his disobedience acts, he appealed to the majority's sense of justice, since a problem existed with white citizens' sense of justice as it allowed the structures of racial domination to persist. The third most contested point concerning the role of civil disobedience is a demonstration of how a narrow conceptualisation shapes a limited justification of civil disobedience, a limited form, a limited place of application, and the type of change that it can bring about. According to the Rawlsian view, civil disobedience is an act of lawbreaking aimed at drawing attention to imperfect applications of the principles of justice and then remedying those imperfections by appealing to the majority's sense of justice. This conceptualisation does not consider the possibility for civil disobedience to play a more radical and transformative role in a political system. The change that King and the civil rights activists pursued was not simply the change of the unjust Jim Crow laws, but rather a more profound change. Therefore, Rawls's theorisation seems to be circumscribed to an ideal democratic context and proves inept for accommodating more realistic and less just political contexts (Brownlee, 2012). The limits of his assumptions more evidently arise when one considers that in the elaboration of Rawls's theory, the disobedience campaigns of King and the Civil Rights Movement were cases of interest, as well as practical references of his theoretical work. For King, civil disobedience was a radical means to dismantle systemic racial oppression. Therefore, the standards that Rawls sets with his theory fail to accommodate the case that he seeks to explain (Celikates, 2014). More broadly, the traditional liberal conception of civil disobedience has had a problematic relationship with the real-life practices of this form of protest (Scheuerman, 2015).

Other liberal theorists have shared this conception of civil disobedience. Hugo Adam Bedau (1991) and Carl Cohen (1966) have theorised civil disobedience as an act to be undertaken within the framework of existing systems of laws, the goals of which remain circumscribed to the boundaries of a liberal democratic order, which is the proper place for this form of political action. The defining features set by Rawls's theory are also shared by many democratic theorists of civil disobedience. For Jürgen Habermas, civil disobedience is a justified form of nonviolent protest that consists of a breach of law 'without calling into question obedience to the rule of law as whole' (1985, p. 100), and dissenters must be ready to accept the resulting legal punishment. In his view, civil disobedience is nonviolent since it is fundamentally a symbolic act.[12] Theories of democratic disobedience, on the one hand, formulate less restrictive conceptions of civil disobedience. On the other hand, most of these theories (Markovits, 2005; Singer, 1973; Smith, 2004, 2015) remain tied to a constitutional democratic political order. In these cases, as Pineda (2022) underlines, democratic accounts are more tied to a democratic framework than Rawls's theory. Therefore, most contemporary accounts that have attempted to reappraise the Rawlsian conception of civil disobedience have ended up being confined within a democratic framework of reflection.

2.2 Radical democratic disobedience: An attempt to transcend the Rawlsian idea

More recent accounts of civil disobedience have succeeded in broadening the concept to accommodate contemporary practices[13]. Robin Celikates (2021) defends a radical democratic conception of civil disobedience, according to which this political practice is more militant and more transformative than liberal theorists contended. Celikates

[12] Reducing civil disobedience to its symbolic dimension can be problematic because it risks excluding the possibility for moments of more direct confrontation. As Celikates (2016a) underlines, civil disobedience also has a symbolic power, but it depends on the concomitant confrontational dimension. Civil disobedience, following King (1963), also has a dimension of dramatisation, which goes beyond the purely symbolic function. The symbolic, communicative dimension and the confrontational one are thus interdependent. On the interconnection of these two dimensions of civil disobedience, see also Celikates' (2015) contribution entitled *Learning from the Streets: Civil Disobedience in Theory and Practice*.

[13] In this regard, Christian Volk (2018, 2022) provides an interesting account about contemporary practices of political protest and their function. Notably, he offers a theoretical framework to describe collective radical forms of protest, from the perspective of radical democratic theory (which he constructively criticises as still insufficiently equipped to fully capture the meaning of such practices of contestation for democracies). Furthermore, Volk (2022) identifies, besides the reformist function, the transformative role that protest can play, by outlining analytical tools to distinguish between emancipatory transformative protests from non-emancipatory ones. However, also his contributions address practices of radical contestation only within the framework of democracies and he does not specifically explore the concept of civil disobedience but rather the broader concept of political protest.

transcends the Rawlsian conceptualisation by elaborating an idea of civil disobedience as a practice of democratisation from below. He formulates a minimalist definition, less demanding (in normative terms) and less narrow than the liberal one. From his radical democratic perspective, civil disobedience is 'an intentionally unlawful and principled collective act of protest', through which citizens aim to bring about a change in 'norms, practices, institutions, and self-understandings'; it is conducted in a civil manner, which means in a non-military way (Celikates, 2021, p. 134).

There are two interesting elements in Celikates' conceptualisation: first, with this definition, he adopts a broader understanding of citizens, who are not only those recognised as such by a state. On the heels of Étienne Balibar's (1996) idea, Celikates (2019) embraces a conception of citizenship according to which it is a collective practice rather than a status conferred by a state. Citizenship is thus constituted from below. In the liberal understanding, civil disobedience is a form of action designed for citizens in the narrow sense. They can justifiably engage in this form of protest as well as appeal to their fellow citizens' sense of justice and to state institutions. From this alternative radical democratic perspective, civil disobedience is not an instrument of political action only owned by citizens. Subjects other than those formally recognised as citizens by a state institution are also entitled to resort to disobedience to protest injustices at the national and transnational levels.[14] This broader notion of citizenship stems from a different understanding of democracy. The second interesting point in Celikates' conceptualisation of civil disobedience is that democracy is not considered a system of government, but rather as a political process. Within this process, civil disobedience is a political practice through which the demos (a collective subject made of citizens in the broader sense – citizens as well as foreign residents and migrants) exerts its agency. From this perspective, by engaging in civil disobedience, protesters are also active subjects in the theoretical and conceptual work around the notion of this form of political action. This radical democratic approach conceives democracy as on ongoing political process powered by practices from

[14] Celikates (2019) introduces this alternative notion of citizenship while conceptualising *irregularised* migration as a type of civil disobedience. Starting from the practices of disobedience undertaken by migrants (who are irregularised by the border politics of the states and supranational institutions such as the European Union), Celikates defines civil disobedience as a radical and transformative practice and, above all, a type of constituent power. The philosophical and practical significance of his contribution is twofold: on the one hand, it addresses the need to rethink the concept of citizenship consistently with the changes in contemporary political and social frameworks; on the other hand, it opens up the conceptualisation of civil disobedience, making space for the transformative and transnational role that it can play. Migration is a matter that transcends the boundaries of a single state. Civil disobedience undertaken by migrants is an issue that goes beyond to the boundaries of nation states.

below. Ultimately, civil disobedience is an extra-institutional practice of contestation for addressing democratic deficits, and it represents an essential part of democracy (Celikates, 2015).

The merit of Celikates' conception is that it broadens the potential and role of civil disobedience, attributing a transformative power to this practice of contestation. He re-politicises civil disobedience by recognising a democratising potential in it, which means that it is a political form of democratisation from below. Yet, this conceptualisation is intended to account for civil disobedience within democratic societies, albeit in the radical democratic sense. Celikates' theorisation is also tied to a democratic political horizon. Thus, it remains to be discussed whether such a radical democratic concept of civil disobedience can address contemporary practices in less democratic societies.

All of these theoretical attempts to reframe the influential liberal model are still restricted within the boundaries of the nation state. The theories elaborated have mostly investigated the justification, form, and role of civil disobedience in a democratic regime. A significant implication of the widespread conceptualisation of civil disobedience as being bounded to liberal democratic states is that it has been framed as a purely domestic concept, which restricts the possibility of elaborating accounts of transnational disobedience. These refer to theoretical accounts (Allen, 2011, 2017; de Moor 2017; Ogunye, 2015; Scheuerman, 2018) that make sense of contemporary acts of disobedience undertaken by activists around the globe to address transnational issues, such as global justice and climate justice. The answers to the question of how civil disobedience can be transnationalised as well as how contemporary forms of transnational activism can be addressed fall outside of the scope of this dissertation.[15]

The other significant consequence of such a democratic-bounded and reformist conception of civil disobedience is that the more transformative role that it could play, not only in democratic states but also – and particularly – in non–fully democratic regimes, remains under-investigated and thus underestimated. This has occurred due to two main reasons, which are discussed as follows: First, other forms of dissent and protest, such as revolution, are generally considered the means for generating radical change within a political system. This has resulted in a sharp distinction between these more militant and radical forms of protest and civil disobedience. Second, the

[15] A thought-provoking reflection on this issue is provided by Pineda (2022).

transformative role of civil disobedience has not been sufficiently investigated and considered, since most theorists have framed it within the boundaries of Western constitutional democratic states.

Before discussing the problem of theorising civil disobedience from the perspective of a white state, starting from Pineda's (2021b) argument, the following subsection explains how civil disobedience has been distinguished from two other forms of dissent, namely conscientious objection and revolution. I present this terminological analysis at this stage to first emphasise that by defining civil disobedience in the terms explained, liberal theorists have drawn a distinction between civil disobedience and the other two types of dissent, thus also narrowing the form and role of civil disobedience. Second, I also wish to define the terms at work in the horizon of the forms of protest, providing a sort of conceptual toolbox for approaching the analysis of contemporary practices of these forms of dissent, and specifically the case study of this dissertation. The case study concerns civil disobedience in Sudan and Sudanese activists' vocabulary of protest.

2.3 Rethinking the boundaries of the forms of protest

Mainstream liberal theories have defined civil disobedience as a nonviolent form of protest aimed at bringing change to laws or policies within the existing political order. Accordingly, civil disobedience has been distinguished from other forms of dissent, especially those seeking to overturn the opposed regime.

This subsection outlines the differences that have been drawn between civil disobedience and conscientious objection on the one hand and revolution on the other. The aim of this digression among different forms of dissent is twofold, the first of which is to introduce the concepts of conscientious objection and revolution, explaining how these two further forms of protest have been distinguished from civil disobedience. I propose that the distinctions drawn by the liberals between civil disobedience and the other two forms of dissent, especially revolution, are consequences of the normative tie they established between civil disobedience and a Western constitutional democratic order. When it comes to analysing practices of civil disobedience outside of the Western liberal democratic horizon, particularly in less democratic contexts, the differences between these types of dissent blur, and they are no longer completely different forms of

protest. Second, this conceptual focus among these actions of dissent is aimed at rethinking their reciprocal relationships. Such actions are not completely distinct forms of protest as the liberal understanding determined. When examining real-life practices of civil disobedience in less idealistically democratic political contexts, it cannot be unquestionably stated that those who explicitly engage in it are not pursuing a revolution in the system they oppose. Similarly, the boundary between a civil disobedient and a conscientious objector is not so evident when the former, for whatever personal reason, appeals to moral principles or religious beliefs in an act of open defiance of the law.

2.3.1 Civil disobedience vs. conscientious objection

The term 'conscientious objection' emerged in the 1890s. During the First World War, it became a widespread notion in relation to the pacifist resistance to military conscription. According to Brownlee, this term came to be used to refer to 'any person's principled refusal to follow an injunction, directive or law on grounds of a declared steadfast personal conviction' (2012, p. 532). Rawls defines conscientious refusal as 'noncompliance with a more or less direct legal injunction or administrative order' (1999, 323). Common examples of conscientious objection described by Rawls (1999) are early Christians' refusal to perform acts of devotion required of them by the pagan state and Jehovah's Witnesses refusing to salute any country's flag. This act of refusal is also, and above all, exercised with respect to military service and in other contexts, such as by healthcare workers or in education, civil service, family law, criminal justice, and personal attire in public (Brownlee, 2012). Brownlee provides the following practical examples of such a refusal:

'[t]he pharmacist who refuses to prescribe an emergency contraceptive pill; the religious patient who refuses a blood transfusion or an inoculation; the religious parents who refuse to take their child to see a doctor for a life-threatening but curable disease; the civil servant who refuses to perform same-sex civil-partnership ceremonies; the religious grocery store employee who refuses to shelve or process the sale of alcohol; the doctor or nurse who refuses to participate in the provision of abortions; the judge who refuses to hear gay couples' applications for adoption; and the religious person who refuses to wear or not to

wear legally regulated clothing or ornaments in public, at work or at school' (Brownlee, 2012, p. 532).

Sometimes, it can be difficult to distinctly place acts of refusal under one of the two categories. In Brownlee's view, some acts can be described as both conscientious objection and civil disobedience, since these types of dissent both involve a principled nonconformity. In this regard, she provides the emblematic example of US National Guard members draft dodging during the war in Iraq (Brownlee, 2012). Therefore, conscientious objection and civil disobedience overlap in some cases, and it is not always easy to distinguish the two forms of dissent, especially in real-life situations – which Rawls (1999) also concedes when distinguishing the two forms of defiance.

Next, I explain how conscientious objection has been distinguished from civil disobedience, drawing on Brownlee's (2012) analysis. The first difference concerns the nature of these acts of dissent. Paradigmatically, civil disobedience consists of a breach of law, while conscientious objection is a breach of an order, a norm, or a directive. Notably, it might not entail a breach of the law at all. There are cases in which conscientious objection may be a breach of the law but only incidentally (Brownlee, 2012). Another significant difference is that while civil disobedience involves illegal actions, meaning that dissenters must face the consequences of such actions, conscientious objection in some countries is permitted and is a type of refusal protected by law. That is, in liberal-democratic countries, a right to conscientious objection is generally protected by the constitution on the basis of conscience, freedom of thought, or religion (Celikates, 2016a). Depending on the country and the legal system, the constitutional or legal protection of such a form of refusal applies to the objection to military conscription, abortion, and animal testing. There are contexts, such as civil service, healthcare, and retail, where 'there is a growing number of legal accommodations for persons who refuse to perform parts of their job on grounds of personal (religious) conviction' (Bronwlee, 2012, p. 533).

Moreover, civil disobedience, as an act breaching the law, can be direct or indirect (Rawls, 1999). It is direct when dissenters violate the same law they are protesting against; for example, the civil rights activists who held sit-ins at white-only lunch counters were directly violating the rules which established segregation in public spaces

and restaurants. Civil disobedience can also be indirect in that it can involve the breaching of a law or an order that is not the one deemed unjust by the protestors. A classic example of indirect civil disobedience is that of activists who, in order to express their opposition to a war and their country's involvement in it (or more generally their opposition to the foreign policy pursued by their government), organise a sit-in in front of a military base or trespass it, thus violating the ban on entering. In this case, no direct violation of a specific foreign policy has occurred, but rather a breach of a different law to express dissent about the country's participation in a war. Indirect conscientious objection does not exist: it is only direct, meaning a refusal to comply with all or part of a given law, order, or injunction. Furthermore, conscientious objection is usually performed individually. It can have collective grounds, which means that it can be based on the familial and/or religious commitments of the individual's community (Brownlee, 2012), whereas civil disobedience can be an act of lawbreaking practiced by an individual or a mass action.

Another difference concerns a central aspect common to both forms of dissent, namely conscientiousness. This is a feature that in both cases, in terms of purpose, in both cases distinguishes such practices from ordinary criminal acts. Even though conscientiousness is a shared element, it assumes different forms. In civil disobedience it has a communicative form, while in conscientious objection, according to Brownlee (2012), it has a non-communicative form. The conscientiousness in civil disobedience is communicative in the sense that dissenters, in their lawbreaking, aim to communicate the reasons why they deem a law or policy unjust; therefore, they also openly dissociate themselves from that law or policy. Civil disobedience is thus also, and above all, an act of communication. On the other hand, conscientious objectors do not aim to publicly dissociate themselves from a law or policy they consider wrong. Furthermore, a conscientious objector does not aim to change the law in question or to remedy the injustice by appealing to society. There is no civil purpose for conscientious objectors, meaning a social facet and impact on the community, since they do not seek to persuade their community of how a conduct is wrong. Conscientious objectors 'merely wish to act without interference in ways they take to be consistent with their own convictions', and the communication in their acts is aimed at expressing that 'the law should not interfere with them in this domain' (Brownlee, 2012, p. 533). They ultimately search for immunity

from laws contrary to their personal beliefs. Conscientious objectors demonstrate no civil commitment in that they do not complement the act of refusal with active participation in the deliberations regarding the law in question. On the contrary, one of the aims of an act of civil disobedience is also, and especially, to exert a civil role, which means contributing to or at least prompting a change in the law that is deemed unjust, not simply searching for an exemption or immunity from that law. In conscientious objection, there is also no social purpose, since the conscientious objector 'does not invoke the convictions of the community, and in this sense conscientious refusal is not an act in the public forum' (Rawls, 1999, p. 324). The difference between civil disobedience and conscientious objection is a matter of optimism and expectations; that is, conscientious objectors 'are less optimistic than those undertaking civil disobedience and they may entertain no expectation of changing laws or policies' (Rawls, 1999, p. 324).

From the Rawlsian perspective, the following additional difference exists: civil disobedience represents an appeal to a conception of justice shared by the community and therefore, it is a political act; by contrast, conscientious objection is not necessarily based on political principles. It can be based on religious principles or principles of a different nature. Conscientious objection is not political when the objectors invoke reasons of conscience and refuse to comply with a conduct because it is contrary to their religious convictions and not for reasons of justice. This difference with civil disobedience does not imply that conscientious objection cannot be based on political principles at all.[16] There may also be an act of conscientious refusal that is 'founded upon a political conception, and not necessarily upon religious or other notions' (Rawls, 1999, p. 333).

Regarding the publicity and illegality of these acts of dissent, the difference varies depending on the type of definition of conscientious objection provided by philosophers. For example, Joseph Raz describes it as a private act 'designed to protect the agent from interference by public authority' (2002, p. 276). Thus, with such an act, the objector asserts his or her immunity from that interference. Furthermore, in his view, conscientious

[16] Rawls (1999) mentions the case of conscientious objection in times of war. The reasons underpinning conscientious objection in such particular circumstances are likely connected to political more than religious principles. It is a kind of conscientious refusal based on peoples' principles of justice. The political aspect may characterise, as Celikates emphasises, what is called 'selective conscientious objection', namely 'the refusal to participate in a particular war or military action' (Celikates, 2016a, p. 44). This is distinguished from the objection to participate in any war, in any military action, or armed forces in general (United Nations Human Rights: Office of the High Commissioner, 2012). This kind of conscientious refusal is very similar to civil disobedience (Raz, 2002) because it is explicitly justified by political reasons. When examining conscientious objection, Rawls (1999) also discusses the justified refusal to take part in specific wars, albeit not defining this specific type of objection as 'selective'.

objection is necessarily a violation of the law. A conscientious objector, for reasons of conscience, should not obey the law if it is bad or wrong, either in part or totally. Rawls's idea about the publicity and illegality is broader. In the abovementioned definition, he distinguishes conscientious refusal from conscientious evasion. The latter is taken to be a covert act, whereas conscientious refusal is a breach of law 'assumed to be known to the authorities' (Rawls, 1999, p. 324).

These are the main differences derived from a liberal understanding of such forms of dissent. Besides conscientious objection, revolution has been distinguished from civil disobedience, especially in terms of the aims pursued and means adopted, as elaborated in the next subsection.

2.3.2 Civil disobedience vs. revolution

The term 'revolution' refers to 'a change in the way a country is governed, usually to a different political system and often using violence or war' (Cambridge Dictionary, n.d.). Two elements characterised this definition, namely the purpose of changing the government and the use of violence.

First, it is necessary to analyse how a revolution is generally understood. From a philosophical perspective, a revolution is subsumed under the category of acts of extra-constitutional rejection of a government's authority. Alongside revolution are other forms of such a political action, including resistance, rebellion, and secession, which is a variant of rebellion (Buchanan, 2017). Resistance is the conceptual category that includes civil disobedience. The term resistance refers to disobeying a specific law, to exerting effort to obstruct a policy promoted by a government, and to obstructing a government that is attempting to pursue a particular action. Acts of disobedience, civil disobedience and acts of noncompliance exercised covertly are considered examples of such a form of rejection. Resistance can also be violent or peaceful.

Rebellion, in contrast to resistance, is a total rejection of a government's authority. It can be driven by different reasons – from disposing of the government (the anarchist's aim), to establishing a new government exercising its authority on the same territorial domain, and also to secession and irredentist secession. Secession involves the creation of a new territorial unity within the state's territory, while irredentist secession leads to the separation of part of the state's territory and its unification with another state.

Revolution is described as a rejection of the government's authority, through extra-constitutional means, but also as an attempt to replace the existing government with another one. By also aiming at establishing a new government, besides rejecting the authority of and deposing of the existing one, revolution also has a pars construens, namely a positive intent (Buchanan, 2017).

I now move on to explaining why civil disobedience and revolution have generally been described as different forms of dissent in the philosophical debate. The contributions (Brownlee, 2013; Delmas & Brownlee, 2021) drafted about civil disobedience are useful sources for outlining how these concepts were identified. The main difference established between civil disobedience and revolution concerns the objectives of these two forms of action. As described earlier in this chapter, civil disobedience is mostly conceived of as aiming to change a law or policy that is opposed and deemed unjust; therefore, civil disobedients do not challenge the overall regime of their country. In other words, they generally have more focused and limited objectives than those of revolutionary agents. Revolution, by contrast, is identified as an action aimed at changing the government of a country; thus, revolutionaries undertake this type of action to overthrow the political order and change it. By pursuing this more radical aim, revolutionaries do not intend to persuade or morally appeal to their community about the reasons for their dissent. In contrast to civil disobedience, which is also considered a communicative act (i.e., dissenters openly express their opposition to an unjust law or policy to motivate their lawbreaking), revolutionaries do not aim primarily at communicating. What revolutionaries communicate is the urgency of changing the regime of their country. They, if anything, attempt 'to persuade the society under that government that a change in regime is required' (Brownlee, 2013).

In comparing the understandings of these two forms of resistance, it emerges that civil disobedience must be distinguished from revolution because the former is mostly considered a nonviolent form of dissent while the latter is necessarily violent. In fact, revolution was investigated as a form of action that can be conducted violently or non-violently; alternatively, it can beginning non-violently and then become violent, depending on how violence is understood (Buchanan, 2017). By assuming that a revolution can also be nonviolent, the distance between revolution and civil disobedience is shortened, in terms of how these political acts are conducted. Research has been

conducted by sociologists (Goodwin, 2001; Ritter, 2009) on nonviolent revolutions and the subsequent outcomes. In the field of political science, an eminent contribution, about the potential of nonviolent revolution is provided by Erica Chenoweth and Maria J. Stephan (2011). The authors examine the effectiveness, and also historical failures, of nonviolent revolutions by discussing some case studies (from Iran to Palestine and the Philippines), thus adopting an international perspective that moves beyond the boundaries of the Western world. Once the focus shifts to practices of these forms of protest outside of the Western perimeters and boundaries of liberal democratic regimes, it is possible to observe that the differences drawn within a Western horizon between these forms of dissent are challenged; furthermore, such forms of protest can be seen to potentially overlap or be intertwined, rather than remaining separated types of action, pursuing goals necessarily of different types.

The differences established between these forms of dissent, from a Western liberal perspective, must be rediscussed in favour of a 'multi-dimensional continuum of protest' (Brownlee, 2013). Therefore, I suggest rethinking the relationship between civil disobedience, conscientious objection, and revolution. From a Western liberal perspective, these three forms of action should theoretically represent three different conceptual boxes with no connection or intersection. Real-life acts of protest, depending on their features (i.e., violent or nonviolent, public or covert, and reformist or revolutionary) should be inserted in one of the three boxes.

To more comprehensively address historical and contemporary protest movements, it is necessary to imagine that these categories of protest are conceptual sets which can be challenged and reshaped by the practice and, above all, which often intersect. Instead of drawing sharp boundaries between civil disobedience, conscientious objection, and revolution, an alternative approach may be to consider these forms of protest not only as overlapping in some circumstances, but also as cooperating in the search for change within a society. Paradigmatic historical social movements, as well as more recent ones, have demonstrated that the boundaries between these forms of protests are more open than most Western philosophical reflections have assumed. In particular, as this dissertation attempts to demonstrate through analysing the practice of civil disobedience in a non–fully democratic society (i.e., Sudan), rethinking these conceptual boundaries allows one to make space for transformative civil disobedience, and for a civil

disobedience which, by being steadfastly nonviolent, realises a revolution within a society.

Before proceeding to an examination of how to broaden the analysis of civil disobedience beyond the Western liberal democratic horizon, it is necessary to identify why the liberal understanding has shaped an idea of civil disobedience that underestimates its radical power. In the following subsection, I discuss one answer that has been provided to this question.

2.4 Seeing civil disobedience like a Western white state is a problem

The reason that has motivated the narrowness of the liberal understanding of civil disobedience and the domestication of its role, according to Pineda (2021b), lies in the fact that liberal theorists have seen civil disobedience 'like a white state' (2021b, p. 4). In this subsection, I analyse Pineda's argument and explain that the liberal philosophers who saw civil disobedience like a white state additionally saw it like a Western state, thereby neglecting patterns of civil disobedience emerging from activists in different corners of the world.

To understand what liberal theorists seeing civil disobedience like a white state means, it is necessary to return to the historical context of the Civil Rights Movement's activism of the 1960s and 70s. That period in American history corresponded to widespread disorder, riots, and violence; 1968 was a particularly tumultuous year with the assassinations of Martin Luther King, Jr. and Robert Kennedy, violent oppositions to the Vietnam War, and, in addition, student protests (Gillon, 2019; Zelizer, 2020). That same year, the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence was established on the initiative of President Lyndon Johnson. In a report, the Commission stated that 'disobedience is disastrous from the standpoint of the maintenance of a democratic society' and no matter how nonviolent, it was considered a threat to the democratic order; moreover, it encouraged 'a climate of lawlessness and violence' (Pineda, 2021b, p. 25). During that period, civil disobedience was associated with generalised criminal lawlessness as a result of the causal links that critics of black people's activism established between disobedience, violence, and crime. They depicted this form of protest as violent and as a catalyst of additional violence. The extent of this distorted association

was corroborated by the fact that, as Pineda (2021b) underlines, 'violence' became the watchword of the decade. A 1964 poll in which people were asked whether 'most of the actions taken by Negroes … to get the things they want had been violent or nonviolent' revealed that '57% answered that "most" had been violent' (Pineda, 2021b, p. 28).

Liberal philosophers who theorised the concept of civil disobedience on the heels of the protest organised by this social movement for civil rights should have distinguished civil disobedience from violent and criminal actions. They attempted to defend civil disobedience from the criticism coming from the conservative forces in the country; as a result, it was defined as 'a means of reform *internal* to legal and political institutions' (Pineda, 2021b, p. 30; emphasis in original), and also as a form of action that should be nonviolent and be aimed at local changes in the existing system of laws. Civil disobedience was considered a communicative action, an appeal to white citizens' conscience, recalling the core shared values enshrined by the US Constitution. It was defined as a justified form of action within the boundaries of liberal, constitutional democracy. Hence, these historical circumstances shaped the narrow definition of the role, potential, and justification of this form of protest.

A narrative consolidated around the civil disobedience of King and the Civil Rights Movement was that it was a nonviolent practice through which morally civil black protesters appealed to the majority's conscience, with the aim of amending unjust laws. To corroborate this narrative,

'protestors went willingly to jail; they refrained from violence and oriented themselves toward brotherhood and understanding; they spoke in rhyme with 'self-evident' American truths, of liberty and justice for all. They were dissenters, but perfectly *domestic* and *domesticated* ones; they challenged not the American state or systemic white supremacy, but a simple failure of American citizens to live up to the best version of themselves, awakening conscience to truths that were always already there, though slumbering deeply. They were paradigmatically *civilly disobedient*' (Pineda, 2021b, p. 3; emphasis in original).

This is how the activism of the Civil Rights Movement was framed. Civil disobedience ended up being considered a breach of the law but within the boundaries of fidelity to the law. This is because many liberal philosophers (e.g., Rawls) saw it like a white state,

'taking for granted the legitimacy of the constitutional order, assuming as primary the ends of constitutional integrity and stability, centering the white citizen as the normative ideal, and figuring the problem of racial injustice as limited, exceptional and all-but-already solved' (Pineda, 2021b, p. 4).

Racial oppression – what the Civil Rights Movement fundamentally opposed – was considered but a limited problem. From the liberal perspective, racial injustice was only an exception which could have been solved by amending the segregation laws. As previously underlined in the analysis of King's idea of civil disobedience, the reality of segregation laws was that they structured a system of racial hierarchies. White citizens were responsible for and entangled in such structures of domination because they acquiesced this system; consequently, they contributed to an adjustment to injustice and to distorted relations between citizens. The problem of racial oppression was not understood as it was in reality – a systemic injustice. American democratic society was instead considered an overall healthy and sound system in need of local changes in its laws.

Such an understanding of civil disobedience and the problem of racial injustice derived from seeing this form of protest like a state, and specifically a white state. Pineda's expression of 'seeing like a white state' is borrowed from James C. Scott, the author of *Seeing Like a State: How Certain Schemes to Improve the Human Conditions Have Failed* (1998). In his book, Scott analyses failed examples of large-scale authoritarian plans (i.e., plans managed centrally and imposed in a top-down manner), which are revealed to be completely blind to the reality of the addressees of those plans. Some examples considered in his analysis are as follows: the Chinese Great Leap Forward, Brasilia's city urban project by architect Oscar Niemeyer, and the *ujamaa* system of President Julius Nyerere of Tanzania. Some key moves were made by the liberal and democratic theorists of civil disobedience, which, as Pineda (2021b) argues, echoed Scott's reflection. These moves were adopting the state's ends as the normative point of

departure, rationalising and standardising the citizen, and detaching from local realities. Liberal political theorists, who were not state officials or appointed state planners, nonetheless assumed as their philosophical starting point that of state officials, which is the constitutional nation state. From this standpoint, the maintenance of the constitutional order and stability was the priority. They started to theorise civil disobedience from the perspective of a legitimate constitutional order for the most part, presuming a prima facie duty to obey the law. In other words, civil disobedience was theorised as a form of political action in need of a normative justification, since the grounding assumption was that law came from a legitimate authority to which citizens owe respect and they are interested in maintaining. Assuming the legitimacy of the state and a constitutional integrity as the justifying and legitimating boundaries for the exercise of dissent, and for protest more generally, means to see civil disobedience like a state.

It is no accident that the reference here is to the act of seeing, and thus, to sight. As Pineda (2021b) underlines, political philosophy is a form of seeing political phenomena, and it is not of secondary importance that the perspective of the viewer impacts how the phenomena are visualised. Seeing is not just seeing – it is like having some lenses that determine particular visions of the social order, the people who populate it, and the ways in which dissenters express their dissent in relation to that specific social order. Moreover, seeing in these terms entails racialised visions. By seeing civil disobedience like a white state, there is a standardisation of the ideal citizen, who is notably also a standardised white citizen. Pineda's (2021b) reading of the reason that motivates such a vision of civil disobedience is an illuminating instrument for reframing the narrowness of the liberal idea of civil disobedience, as well as a further explanation of the reasons that led to a general underestimation of the radical potential of civil disobedience. Therefore, discussing Pineda's contribution provides further evidence of the limits of mainstream accounts of civil disobedience, especially ideas for overcoming these limits and reflecting on a philosophical concept of civil disobedience, which can make sense of the historical practices and contemporary acts of nonviolent disobedience.

In addition, Pineda offers an alternative perspective to civil disobedience, namely seeing civil disobedience like an activist. The liberal perspective basically neglected the Civil Rights Movement activists' point of view and their role in the theoretical work of defining civil disobedience. By seeing civil disobedience like an activist, according to

Pineda (2021b), it is possible to understand that this form of protest was not considered a means of law reform, restricted to the boundaries of a legitimate constitutional order; rather, it was a form of action in the struggle against global white supremacy, that is, against segregation and colonialism. In short, it was a decolonising praxis undertaken to oppose the violence of white supremacy and to radically transform the structures of racial and colonial domination (Pineda, 2021b, 2022). From the perspective of the activists, civil disobedience was a concept in 'imaginative transit', which means that it was part of a 'process of thinking and traveling across boundaries and disparate contexts' (Pineda, 2021b, p. 19). This expression describes the processes through which activists around the world have built the idea of nonviolent direct action as an instrument of protest in the 'transnational struggle against white supremacy and global capitalism' (Pineda, 2021b, p. 12). The idea of nonviolent resistance has been in imaginative transit in various contexts, from India to South Africa, Ghana, and the United States. It was an idea that resulted from the activism and theoretical work of Gandhi and King, but also from the struggles of the anticolonial movements on the African continent, with Kwame Nkrumah being an emblematic example of these imaginative transits of nonviolent direct action through Africa.

Seeing civil disobedience like an activist means shedding light on patterns of nonviolent direct action, which were developed in contexts generally neglected by the mainstream philosophical analysis. Therefore, to Pineda's thesis, it should be added that liberal and democratic theorists have seen civil disobedience not only like a white state but also like a Western white state, thereby overlooking practices and ideas of civil disobedience outside of Western democratic political orders.

In the following section, I argue for the necessity of adopting a comparative methodological approach to challenge the mainstream concept of civil disobedience. My aim is to demonstrate that this nonviolent means of protest can also bring about radical change in less democratic regimes, by analysing the transformative role it has in non-Western political contexts.

3. Comparative political theory: A methodological reservoir to decentre the perspective

The methodology employed to conduct the research presented in this dissertation builds upon the approach adopted in the field of comparative political theory. This discipline emerged in the 1990s, originating from the need to question Western systems of knowledge and Western perspectives by exploring non-Western knowledge contributions.

Andrew F. March (2009) defends the idea that political theory has actually always been comparative because it has always involved comparison, such as when studying specific topics across different contexts or developing genealogies of the origins of some conceptual categories. Furthermore, March warns about the possibility that researchers fascinated by the idea of a comparative political theory only pursue an interest in the study of non-Western knowledge and traditions. He emphasises that the aim of this subfield is not a mere globalisation of the traditional focus of political theory to include African, Latin American, Indian, or Islamic thought systems; rather, the existence of this subfield is more ambitiously justified. The identification of a comparative subfield in political theory resulted from the need to broaden the traditional Western systems of knowledge to consider non-Western perspectives on concepts, ideas, and issues typically studied by political theory. I contend that the goal of globalising the perspective on the topics of political theory is itself a challenging and necessary objective. It is an intent that must be supported and appreciated per se because it allows one to rethink the location of Western systems of knowledge in the global horizon. Eurocentric knowledge is part of a broader set of knowledge systems, meaning that it is not the only recognised system of knowledge, which non-Western systems must be adapted to or assessed on the basis of. The main aim of comparative political theory is to challenge the conceptual categories elaborated from a Western perspective and that have led philosophical inquiries by shedding light on practices, reflections, and thoughts developed in other areas of the world. Comparative political theory primarily aims at deparochialising the Eurocentrism of political theory. Noteworthily, it seeks to stimulate a critical sensibility in theorists (Jenco et al., 2020).

However, it is worth recalling the more ambitious justifications to which March (2009) refers because they are further arguments for explaining why adopting a comparative

approach could be fruitful. The first justification would be an epistemic argument – that is, establishing a conversation with non-Western perspectives on political questions has primarily an epistemic value. The second justification for comparative research is a global-democratic argument; that is, in the contemporary globalised world, philosophising cross-culturally should be imperative. As the issues of contemporary political theory are global issues, perspectives on them emerging from different contexts around the globe should be included in the philosophical debate. The third justification would be a critical-transformative argument grounded on the motivation of postcolonial studies. Behind Western concepts, ideas, and categories, there can be an imperialist and hegemonic theoretical approach that claims to extend Western perspectives to non-Western contexts, excluding non-Western standpoints on those same concepts, ideas, or categories. Thus, the project of comparative political theory should involve the investigation of non-Western answers to political issues as a response to hegemonic ways of theorising. The fourth justification would be an explanatory-interpretative argument. The study of non-Western perspectives can offer interpretative instruments for illuminating consolidated Western conceptual categories.[17] Lastly, the fifth justification would be a rehabilitative argument. It is based on a type of work that a comparative study can pursue, namely the exploration of similarities between ideas elaborated by non-Western and Western theorists. Such a comparative inquiry could rehabilitate non-Western traditions, considered to be hostile, illiberal, or irrational, by demonstrating that they are not completely alien, as they might have been depicted. All of these arguments fundamentally demonstrate the potential of a comparative approach and represent valuable reasons for undertaking a comparative study.

To obtain an enhanced understanding of why there should be a comparative field of political theory, it is necessary to clarify what comparison means. In this discipline, the term can be problematic in that it literally implies that there must primarily be bounded and separate bodies of thought that are then compared (March, 2009). Some theorists (Jenco et al., 2020) addressed this issue by adopting a conception of comparison – which in my view is more comprehensive and appropriate for the purpose of my analysis – that does not necessarily entail the contrast between two separate objects; rather, it involves a

[17] In this regard, March mentions the work of Brooke A. Ackerly (2005), who analysed Confucianism to question Western liberalism as a prerequisite in the path toward democracy.

conversation between what is familiar and understood and what is unexplored and unfamiliar. Conducting comparative research means bringing non-Western approaches and perspectives into familiar discussions (Euben, 1999, 2006; Jenco et al., 2020).

According to the definition provided by Jenco et al. (2020), the work of comparative political theory follows three main directions: (i) a critique of the relations of domination, power, and exclusion both in knowledge production and academic research; (ii) the elucidation of systems of thought that are usually marginalised; and (iii) the consideration that ideas and concepts travel, thus exploring their transnational and cross-regional paths. The third direction is particularly relevant for my analysis. As Pineda (2021b) emphasises in her work, the concept of civil disobedience has been involved in circuits of imaginative transits around the world, crossing India, Africa, and America. Therefore, a philosophical reflection on the concept of civil disobedience needs to consider the geographical itineraries of this idea.

Two cases are particularly emblematic for demonstrating the necessity of adopting a comparative approach and shifting the focus to Africa to extend the knowledge on civil disobedience. As mentioned in Section 1, the first civil disobedience campaigns that Gandhi organised took place while he was in South Africa. Specifically, the first struggles he led in the early twentieth century were for the rights of Indians in South Africa, who were disenfranchised and discriminated especially in the Transvaal.[18] Here, he started to outline the criteria of civil disobedience actions, which involved the commitment to nonviolent tactics of protest and the acceptance of the punishment deriving from the act of lawbreaking. During these South African struggles, Gandhi for the first time used the term satyagraha to define nonviolent resistance.[19] In that same period, he elaborated the main strategies of disobedience – namely fasting; 'hartal', which referred to strike actions; and 'dharna', which was a term for a 'sit-in' (Power, 1969, p. 452).

[18] In the accounts that Gandhi (1968a) offered about his period in South Africa and the circumstances that sparked the first mass protests, Gandhi's racist approach to black South Africans emerges, along with some racist stereotypes about the Negroes or Kaffirs (he used these derogatory terms to refer to black people), who he describes as uncivilised and lazy. Reflections on Gandhi's racism are provided by Desai and Vahed (2016) in their work titled *The South African Gandhi: Stretcher-Bearer of Empire*. Other sources are Biswas (2015) *Was Mahatma Gandhi a Racist?* and Kolge (2016) *Was Gandhi a Racist? His Writings in South Africa*.

[19] Russell L. Hanson (2021) offers an interesting investigation of how satyagraha was shaped by Gandhi's South African experience and the influence that Thoreau exercised on the practical and theoretical work of the mobilisation of Indians in South Africa.

Beside Gandhi's work on conceptualising civil disobedience in South Africa, another relevant case to mention is that of Kwame Nkrumah, who Pineda (2021b) includes among the activists who have contributed to the imaginative transits of the concept of civil disobedience on the African continent. Nkrumah was the first Prime Minister and President of Ghana, after the country gained independence from Britain in 1957. Before becoming president of Ghana, Nkrumah was the founder and then leader of the Convention People's Party (CPP), the movement that led the nonviolent direct action campaigns in the country, organising strikes and acts of civil disobedience (Chan, 2021; Pineda, 2021b). In particular, Nkrumah drafted a programme of what was defined as 'Positive Action' (Basebang, 2010; Pineda, 2021b). Positive action referred to the nonviolent resistance adopted by Nkrumah and Ghanaians to pursue the goal of independence. Nkrumah's concept of positive action drew from Gandhi's methods of nonviolent non-cooperation. Nkrumah was impressed by the example of Gandhi in India. He embraced nonviolence as a tactic in the struggle against colonial rule and organised boycotts and strikes.

The reference to these two significant examples of African-based exponents of disobedience and their theoretical and practical work on defining the concept of civil disobedience demonstrate why a comparative approach is necessary for a philosophical analysis of this concept. To explore the origin of Gandhi's idea of satyagraha and Nkrumah's formulation of Positive Action campaigns, a political theorist should decentre the mainstream perspective and shift the focus to these non-Western experiences and practices. This is what Pineda does when she captures the imaginative transits of civil disobedience by shedding light on the role of African activists, such as Kwame Nkrumah, in the conceptualisation of civil disobedience. Analysing how this concept travelled, especially across contexts usually neglected in philosophical inquiries, and also how it was translated into practice in different cultural, social, and political circumstances, means fundamentally engaging in comparative research.

Thus, to broaden the geography of such a concept, I investigate how civil disobedience is conceptualised in Sudan by Sudanese activists, which is the aim of the analysis presented in the next chapter. In a debate on civil disobedience which has thus far been predominantly Euro-American, this subfield of political theory motivates the need to observe and study what civil disobedience is outside of the Western liberal democratic

context, which means examining more than just Gandhi and the campaigns of civil disobedience he led in India. Adopting a comparative approach means examining what civil disobedience means for activists around the globe who have engaged and are still engaging in this form of protest. Until now, the philosophical debate has mostly focused on what civil disobedience was to Thoreau, Gandhi, and King as well as to liberal and democratic Western philosophers. The questions of what civil disobedience is and what role it can play on the African continent have been overlooked. More specifically, previous works have failed to address the issue of civil disobedience outside of Western liberal democracies, particularly in less democratic systems in Africa.

To better investigate the meaning of civil disobedience in Sudan, I rely on empirical material deriving from media reports, statements and documents from Sudanese social movements, academic accounts, as well as fieldwork carried out by other theorists (Berridge, 2015; Berridge et al., 2022; Zunes, 2021); and besides, I combine these sources with interviews which I conducted with Sudanese activists involved in 2018–2019 wave of protests. The reflections emerged from such interviews enable me to include the activists' perspective in the theoretical framework. The decision of examining the Sudanese protesters' viewpoint to understand the meaning and role of civil disobedience in less democratic contexts, is grounded on two methodological stances: (i) the first is the approach of comparative political theory; (ii) and the second is the alternative theorising posture suggested by Pineda (2021b), that is seeing civil disobedience from the activists' standpoint. I also include interviews with Sudanese protesters as an approach to focus on theorising practices on the ground, and thus to observe their role in the enactment of political theorising, as well as their ideas and aims in the practice of civil disobedience. The inclusion of empirical material and interviews in the analysis builds on the argument presented by Lisa Herzog and Bernardo Zacka (2017). These authors defend the usefulness of adopting an 'ethnographic sensibility' (Herzog and Zacka, 2017, p. 763) in political theory. Having an ethnographic sensibility in a philosophical research means paying attention to people's practices and experiences, notably how and why individuals act, and how they interpret their contexts. These two authors underline that with the term 'ethnographic sensibility' they particularly refer to the researchers' mindset when approaching the study materials in this subject area. They claim that the long immersive fieldwork, typical of the anthropologists, is not the only available method to explore

people's situated experiences, and their understanding of social, cultural and political contexts they are in. An ethnographic sensibility involves visits on research sites and interviews, as well as the study of other scholars' ethnographies. Thus, ethnographic sensibility is not merely a matter of the type of research protocol used, but rather it means also paying attention to empirical materials and complementing philosophical research with methods usually pertaining to fieldwork and empirical studies. They particularly argue for the fruitfulness of this ethnographic sensibility in normative inquiries.[20] However, ethnographies can enrich the theorising work by facilitating the observation of how people discuss and deal with social and political matters. Herzog and Zacka (2017) provide various arguments to explain why political theorists should consider an ethnographic approach.

Three of these arguments offer interesting reasons for adopting ethnographic sensibility to investigate the meaning and role of civil disobedience outside of Western liberal democratic systems. The first argument is epistemic and it points to how ethnographic work can help observing the ways individuals act in a specific context, to identify the normative demands arising for them in such context. Ethnographic sensibility can be an instrument to analyse the situations people have to face and the contexts in which they operate, by examining the reasons behind their acts and, especially, the justifications for their acts. Ethnographic research has an epistemic role since it helps bringing on the surface these reasons. Moreover, by observing how individuals act in a specific context, it is possible to identify further issues and interrogate acquired assumptions and concepts. To answer the research question about the meaning and role of civil disobedience in a not entirely democratic context, the work presented here is structured also on interviews with activists from Sudan, and it addresses various issues including the following: Why do Sudanese activists protest? What are their priorities? What does nonviolence mean for them? Why is it important for them to adhere to a nonviolent conduct while protesting? Ethnographic research not only represents a tool to consider local knowledge and local ways of theorising, it also allows theorists to discuss the Western ways of conceptualising nonviolence and civil disobedience. It can inform

[20] Herzog and Zacka (2017) in their contribution defend the added value of ethnographies by explaining their characteristics and how ethnography can integrate empirical material deriving from other methods of research used in normative theorising, namely the identification of causal mechanisms determining specific social outcomes, the instrument of opinion surveys to investigate people's preferences and values, and experiments describing decisions and moral intuitions.

Western philosophers' political theorising. Ethnographic sensibility has an epistemic role because it can uncover set of issues that Western researchers might not have thought to investigate. The second argument provided to explain the usefulness of ethnographic sensibility is the evaluative one. Ethnographic sensibility involves a close observation of social practices and the agents of such practices. This sensibility enables to also examine social practices which are often routinely enacted, and capture the principles individuals applied in specific situations. Ethnography plays an evaluative role in research since, through exploring the nature of social practices, it can contribute to determine the appropriate principles of assessment (Herzog and Zacka, 2017).

The third argument is valuational and it describes how ethnographic sensibility helps framing more accurately, as well as comprehending and potentially reconsidering the shared normative values and principles. That is, ethnographies can influence people's visions about abstract principles in that they enable a discussion about how existing social practices and principles are interpreted and understood. According to Herzog and Zacka's (2017) argument, ethnographies more generally can inform people's thinking about normative principles. Ethnographies can play a role in informing people's thinking of political principles as well. Analysing the practice of civil disobedience by Sudanese activists means observing the aim they pursue through this form of protest, which is an aim of political transformation of their country's political system towards a more democratic order. Therefore, by interviewing the activists from that country it is also possible to understand their idea of democracy and, consequently, to reconsider the democratic principles tied to the Western model of liberal democracy.

The interesting thesis that Herzog and Zacka (2017) convey in their contribution is that the value of ethnography in political theory is not to provide conclusive answers to the questions driving research in this field of study. Rather, ethnographic sensibility further problematises the issues of political theory by shedding light on new questions captured by observing individuals in the contexts in which they operate and in their situated experiences.[21] In short, ethnography is not a tool to find better solutions or better answers,

[21] The work I present here is not an ethnography. It is, more modestly, open to fieldwork and thus inspired by the ethnographic turn in political theory. The adoption of an ethnographic sensibility poses some challenges to the philosophical inquiries. A complete discussion of these challenges is beyond the scope of this dissertation. Herzog and Zacka (2017, 777-780) address potential dangers connected to this methodological stance, in particular the following: (i) reactivity and reliability, which refer to the presence (and influence) of the researcher in the field and to the interpretation of the research findings; (ii) perspectival absorption, namely the risk, by empathising with the research subjects, to lose a detached perspective and assume the subjects' point of view; (iii) bias deriving from sympathy with

but to more accurately frame research, open further relevant questions and revise theorists' principles, assumptions and approach to political philosophy. As Herzog and Zacka (2017) underline, ethnographic sensibility in political theory requires researchers to rethink their approach, which means being open and willing to reconsider the questions which drive fieldwork, as well as their theoretical commitments that can be re-examined in light of a closer and better understanding of the questions and issues which the research subjects consider relevant. Drawing on their argument, I contend that an ethnographic approach can be an interesting and constructive tool to investigate non-Western perspectives on civil disobedience and, therefore, rediscuss and reappraise the theories Western philosophers formulated.

Ethnographic sensibility, along with the broader methodology of comparative political theory, also helps to desuperiorise the mainstream and hegemonic views on political systems, and particularly on Western liberal democracy. When approaching the practice of civil disobedience within the political contexts of African countries, it would be useful to take off the lenses of Western liberal democracy as the only possible reference of democracy. For this reason, a comparative perspective on civil disobedience could also be an approach for challenging the Western categories formulated to describe and categorise the different systems of government. The analysis offered in Chapter 2 of this dissertation not only aims to investigate what role civil disobedience can play in non–fully democratic regimes, but also to question the regime-categorisation commonly adopted in the West. The specificity of the African political framework suggests a reconsideration of the hegemonic conceptual categories deployed to define different types of regimes.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have provided a conceptual and methodological premise to the present research work required to answer the question about today's role of civil disobedience in non–fully democratic regimes. I considered how civil disobedience was initially theorised by focusing on the most famous exponents of civil disobedience – Thoreau, Gandhi, and

participants in the research, that is, privileging some people's standpoints over those of other subjects, thus compromising a critical analysis; and last (iv) particularism, which is the risk to restrict the attention to a specific context and its particularities to the extent that it is not possible to abstract away from such specific study and generalise the deriving findings.

King. Furthermore, in my historical and conceptual description of the genesis of the idea of civil disobedience, I analysed these three figures because of the practical and intellectual influence they exerted on activists around the globe and on other theorists of civil disobedience. Systematic debates on the concept of civil disobedience started in the 1960s and 70s in the wake of their ideas and practices. The liberal theories that emerged from these debates presented various problems; above all, they resulted in a narrow understanding of civil disobedience, which limited its political space of application to democratic constitutional orders and underestimated the transformative role that it can play. Even more democratic accounts, despite broadening the scope of civil disobedience, ended up being similarly tied to a normative democratic political framework. Therefore, the role of civil disobedience in less democratic regimes remains under-investigated.

Moreover, I discussed the reason behind these narrow conceptions, namely that liberal and democratic theorists saw civil disobedience like a white state. However, I argued that they also saw it like a Western state. This perspective prevented them from observing that civil disobedience plays a more transformative role than simply changing an unjust law. Above all, it prevented them from capturing the itineraries of this concept around disparate contexts and patterns of nonviolent disobedience outside of the Western liberal democratic horizon. The study that I present in this dissertation seeks to fill this gap in the philosophical knowledge of civil disobedience by bringing a non-Western perspective to the debate on the issue of the form and role of civil disobedience – namely the perspective of contemporary Sudanese activists. Their perspective is analysed to answer the question about the role and scope of nonviolent disobedience in non-Western and less democratic political systems. To pursue this research aim, the methodological approach that I adopt draws on comparative political theory, as this discipline offers a methodological ground for challenging the assumptions of the mainstream Western conceptualisations of civil disobedience through elucidating ideas and practices developed by African activists, which have previous been neglected by traditional philosophical inquiries.

Furthermore, drawing on the arguments put forward to defend the fruitfulness of fieldwork in political theory, I explained that my analysis adopts an ethnographic sensibility. That is, the research presented here is methodologically structured also on empirical work resulting from interviews with Sudanese activists, who participated in 2018–2019 wave of protests. This ethnographic method allows me to closely observe the

subjects involved in the practice of civil disobedience in a non–fully democratic regime, as well as to rethink the assumptions about this form of protest acquired in the Western philosophical debate.

Chapter 2

Sudan: An African lesson of peaceful resistance

'The revolution is not over yet. I know my friend that you are tired. I know this is exhausting, but no one gives up in the middle of a fight. Our victory is soon to come'
Quote by a Sudanese protester, 2022[22]

Introduction

What does it mean to engage in civil disobedience in a non–fully democratic regime? What aim do protesters pursue when they deliberately engage in civil disobedience in such a political context? These are the questions that this chapter attempts to answer.

As highlighted in the previous chapter, the philosophical reflections developed thus far in the debate have mostly focused on and justified practices of civil disobedience in democratic contexts. Research studies have also been conducted about nonviolent resistance and civil disobedience in nondemocratic regimes, mainly within the domains of political science, sociology, and law (Chenoweth and Stephan, 2011; Chen, 2016; Roberts and Garton Ash 2011). Therefore, philosophical contributions have investigated the issue of civil disobedience but limited to the boundaries of the democratic state. Studies in other disciplines have investigated the role of nonviolent resistance in nondemocratic contexts. There is a general lack of philosophical research on the issue of civil disobedience in not entirely democratic political orders. The research in the abovementioned fields – political theory included – has focused on civil disobedience and, more broadly, on civil resistance only in democratic or authoritarian states, as they are grounded on the following general assumption: systems of government are either democratic or nondemocratic. Yet, the contemporary reality of protests describes an increasing wave of mobilisation across the world, with people taking to the streets and

[22] See the transcript of the conversation with a Sudanese activist (Interviewee B) in the Appendix of this dissertation.

manifesting their dissent in complex political environments, which are unlikely to be defined as either democratic or nondemocratic.

This chapter is divided into three sections. Section 1 questions the predominant distinction between democratic and authoritarian states by introducing an additional category – namely anocracy. This term defines those regimes which combine democratic and authoritarian features. After explaining where this conceptual category comes from, the first section aims to demonstrate that this term comprehensively describes the political form of various states in the African continent as well as Sudan, the country that is the subject of this research.

Section 2 details why this dissertation specifically discusses Sudan to reflect on the matter of civil disobedience, besides the fact that this country is an anocracy. As will be illustrated, Sudan has a significant history of civil disobedience and still in contemporaneity represents an interesting case to study. Between 2018 and 2019, Sudanese civilians organised a mass campaign of civil disobedience, which culminated with the end of Omar al-Bashir's 30-year presidency.

The analysis of the Sudanese practice of civil disobedience focuses particularly on this 2018–2019 protest campaign. Section 3 outlines what happened in Sudan during that period, starting from the voices of Sudanese activists involved in the protests. In particular, this study highlights their ideas about the reasons for engaging in acts of civil disobedience, the meaning they attribute to this form of protest, and what their ultimate goal is through committing specifically to civil disobedience. To further understand what it means for Sudanese people to take to the streets and protest peacefully, Section 3 briefly examines the practice of civil disobedience in Sudan during the COVID-19 pandemic. The acts of resistance undertaken during this challenging period demonstrate the crucial role of civil disobedience in the search for a radical change in the country. Notably, the path towards a more democratic political system has not been fully realised yet.

1. Anocracy: A concept for describing contemporary African spaces of protest

From a Western hegemonic perspective, the two common labels for classifying the systems of government of a country are a democracy or an autocracy, depending on the

instruments for citizens' political participation and its extent, the more or less centralised structures of power, the greater or lesser freedom of expression and association, and the related right to protest. From this Western standpoint, theorists tend to identify the main political framework in democracy, while on the opposite side stands any nondemocratic regime. This is a binary classification that often carries a moral judgement, which encompasses an alleged superiority of Western democracy over other types of social, cultural, and political organisation. Regarding this claimed superiority, especially in the relationship between the West and Africa, the Cameroonian philosopher and historian Achille Mbembe (2022) underlines that democracy is a colonial category, imported to the African continent and part of a colonial arsenal that contributed to the epistemic subordination of African knowledge and structures of political organisation.

This binary categorisation is something that Pineda (2021b) denounces in her argument. The theoretical perspective of seeing civil disobedience like a white state corresponds to seeing it like a white democracy. This stance not only overlooks the epistemic value of civil disobedience practiced in contexts that differ from a constitutional democracy, but it also bolsters a 'bifurcated world' that consists of 'liberal democracies, versus everywhere else' (Pineda, 2021b, p. 197).

In this section, my aim is to question this general dichotomous vision of the world, deepening the definition of political regimes by introducing an additional conceptual category, to describe another type of political system – the anocracy. The term 'anocracy' refers to a form of government. More specifically, an anocracy is a type of regime that combines democratic and autocratic features. This term is adopted in the *Polity5 Project* elaborated by the Center for Systemic Peace (2021). The project consists of a dataset structured on more than 60 variables, which 'covers all major, independent states in the global system over the period 1800-2018'[23] (Center for Systemic Peace, 2021). In particular, the states considered are those with 'a total population of 500,000 or more in the most recent years' (Center for Systemic Peace, 2021). This dataset is the result of monitoring regime changes in all of the countries considered. It represents an annual work of assessment of the characteristics of and changes in the regimes' authority.

[23] The more updated version of the data series currently covers this period up to 2018. The Center for Systemic Peace (2022) is working on a five-year update in 2024, which will present the findings of the research relative to the period 2019–2023. For the purpose of my analysis, this data series is not outdated since I consider protest events that started in 2018 in Sudan.

The premise of the regime classification developed in this project clarifies the main reasons for drawing such distinctions and introducing an additional category. This reason lies in the complexity of the global political landscape. As previously explained, forms of government are commonly divided into the two contrasting types of democracies and autocracies. These two forms of government differ in the way the state's executive authority acquires power and transfers it, in the way political power is exerted or also restricted, in the way the social order is maintained, and in the extent to which public interests and opinion influence the decision-making process. According to the authors of the aforementioned dataset (Marshall & Elzinga-Marshall, 2017), democracy and autocracy are two ideal forms of government considered to be relatively stable political and social systems. Political reality, though, is not always an exact actualisation of these ideal forms of government, and countries cannot simply be subsumed under these two categories. In the global landscape, states often present a mix of the characteristic qualities of these two forms of government. Democracy and autocracy are rather like two opposite ends of a spectrum of governance (Marshall & Elzinga-Marshall, 2017). The *Polity5 Project* has the following specificity:

'It examines concomitant qualities of democratic and autocratic authority in governing institutions, rather than discreet and mutually exclusive forms of governance. This perspective envisions a spectrum of governing authority that spans from fully institutionalized autocracies through mixed, or incoherent, authority regimes (termed 'anocracies') to fully institutionalized democracies' (Center for Systemic Peace, 2021).

Therefore, the project rates the levels of democracy and autocracy in each country annually, by codifying information. The resulting ratings are combined into the 'POLITY score' (Marshall & Elzinga-Marshall, 2017, p. 29). The *Polity5 Project* dataset thus assigns scores that represent the spectrum of possible regimes. Regimes are rated using a scale ranging from −10, indicating full autocracies, to +10, indicating established democracies. The scores correspond to a categorisation that distinguishes the following three types of regimes: (i) autocracies, which are regimes with a score ranging from −10 to −6; (ii) anocracies, which are governments with a score ranging from −5 to +5; and (iii) democracies, which are governments with a score ranging from +6 to +10. The

measures that form the Polity scheme record 'key qualities of executive recruitment, constraints on executive authority and political competition. It also records changes in the institutionalized qualities of governing authority'[24] (Center for Systemic Peace, 2021).

Before assigning scores to the countries under analysis, the *Polity5 Project* formulates definitions about the three possible types of regimes on the basis of a series of qualities and features, namely the extent of participation in the competition of power and thus in the recruitment of state representatives and state executive offices, the possibilities of political participation, and constraints on the activity of the chief executive. Democracy, according to Marshall and Elzinga-Marshall (2017), is a political system that allows for deliberative and open political participation, in which representatives of the state are chosen and replaced through fair electoral processes, and in which mechanisms of checks and balances, involving civil society or judicial or military institutions, monitor the activity of the head of the executive. By contrast, political participation in an autocracy is restricted (if not abolished outright); those in power are selected from within a political elite or through rules of succession; and there is no system of checks and balances on the chief executives' activity. An anocracy, compared with the previous two types of political regime, is a middling system. Anocracies are those societies 'whose governments are neither fully democratic nor fully autocratic but, rather, combine an often incoherent mix of democratic and autocratic traits and practices' (Marshall & Elzinga-Marshall, 2017, p. 30). These regimes are very often characterised by inefficiency or instability. Anocracies are societies where coups d'état often occur, causing regime changes or changes in leadership. An anocracy is a political context where even armed conflicts can spark. Another emblematic feature of anocracies, according to this definition, is that this mix of democratic and autocratic traits emerges in cases where elections are held and open to some opposition groups while others are excluded. Another typical scenario in an anocracy is that elections are held but the resulting legislation does not effectively exercise control over the executive power. In this regard, the *Polity5 Project* also identifies the following three subcategories of anocracies: (i) open anocracies, with scores between +1 and +5; (ii) closed anocracies, with scores between −5 and 0; and (iii) the subcategory of failed or occupied states. In open anocracies, the competition for power is

[24] The data series does not include information about separatist groups and territories or about 'segments of the population that are not yet effectively politicized in relation to central state politics' (Center for Systemic Peace, 2021).

more open and enables the participation of opposition groups or other actors, while in closed anocracies this competition is restricted to the country's elite (Marshall & Cole, 2014).

Noteworthily, an anocracy is not merely another form of government. Rather, countries that were originally autocratic often follow a transition to democracy through anocracy, or vice versa: a democratic country can progressively become an autocracy, passing through an anocratic political system. In other words, an anocracy is not an ideal type of government to pursue, but it is often a middling political form that a country assumes when its democratic or autocratic system of government is altered for various reasons. This can occur when leaders lose control of the political dynamics that enable an adequate functioning of governance. It could also be the case in a country where democratic institutions are established but, due to internal conflicts among social groups or the political elite, the form of government then turns into anocracy. In addition, a country could become an anocracy in the transition from an autocratic form of government to a full-fledged democratic system (Marshall & Elzinga-Marshall, 2017).

The African continent is a particularly emblematic framework in this regard. According to data presented by the Center for Systemic Peace (Marshall & Elzinga-Marshall, 2017, pp. 30–32), an anocracy is a widespread type of regime on the African continent, and Sudan, the country analysed in the present research, falls into this category. Before proceeding to a detailed definition of Sudan's regime as anocratic, I explain why my analysis builds on this additional conceptual category as well as why this different regime's categorisation is meaningful for a philosophical reflection on practices of civil disobedience in non–fully democratic contexts.

There are two main reasons behind the choice to rely on this categorisation. The first reason relates to the premise of the *Polity5 Project*, namely that the forms of government in the global political landscape are commonly subsumed under the two categories of democracy and autocracy; however, in practice, states are rarely exact representations of these ideal types of government. In other words, regimes are not simply fully institutionalised democracies or fully institutionalised autocracies in reality. Thus, this premise challenges the dichotomous vision of the world according to which political systems are either democratic or nondemocratic. The conceptual categories offered by the Center for Systemic Peace, particularly anocracy, are a more comprehensive description

of the political complexity of states as well as critical instruments for moving beyond the commonly oversimplified distinction of democracies versus autocracies. According to the data contained in the *Polity5 Project*, the global political framework is also characterised by hybrid regimes. Starting from the 1990s, the number of democracies increased on a global level; however, the number of anocracies also increased until the mid-2000s, considering various cases of unsuccessful transitions from autocracy to democracy (Marshall & Cole, 2014). Therefore, this different categorisation and conceptualisation is useful for capturing the mutations in countries' political systems around the globe.

The second reason motivating the adoption of this classification relates more specifically to the category of anocracy. The analysis presented here focuses on an African country. To approach this country and its specific form of government, it is necessary to consider the countries' political systems from a continental perspective. The peculiar political organisation of African states is the result of various events and dynamics, such as colonisation, an often-complicated cohabitation of different ethnic groups, and a precarious cohabitation between civilian actors and military forces. I contend that due to these historical, social, and cultural aspects, African states cannot be merely defined either as democracies or autocracies. In my view, the category of anocracy associated by this classification with different African states, including Sudan, offers a more appropriate description of the peculiar form of government characterising such countries. It is thus a meaningful analytical tool for framing the contexts where contemporary practices of civil disobedience occur.

Besides explaining the reasons for relying on this categorisation, I wish to address two possible objections arising from this choice. The data series of the *Polity5 Project* is a tool commonly known in the academic debate of political science. It was elaborated by the Center for Systemic Peace, which is an American research institution. As previously explained, the categorisation formulated in this work is backed by conceptualisations regarding what a democracy is, what an autocracy is, and what an anocracy is. In other words, behind this categorisation are ideas about democracy and, more generally, about societies and politics, as well as interpretations of the political dynamics. Behind the scores that the project assigns to the countries analysed, there is a conceptual elaboration that is understandably informed by the experience, by studies, by the cultural background of those involved in the research, and by the institution that supports the research.

Moreover, the historical background as well as ideological biases can influence the definitions of democracy, autocracy, and anocracy. Political scientist Seva Gunitsky (2015) emphasises some critical points of Polity measurements, such as the following: in the concept of democracy, the focus is more on the procedural features than on mass participation, an overlooked aspect that should also be an essential part of a democracy. Another criticism concerns the American perspective of this project, which would have shaped the definition of democracy, as influenced by American power relations with other global forces.[25] This last point is connected to the other possible objection, namely the risk of what economist and philosopher Felwine Sarr defined as 'quantophrenic biases' (2019, p. 1). In one of his most famous works entitled *Afrotopia*, Sarr (2019) discusses the issues in the narrative of Africa and in the Western approach to Africa. He described these biases as resulting from a Western obsession with quantifying, evaluating, and counting everything, thereby summarising the social and political dynamics into gauges and numbers. The consequence of these biases has been that, over time, Africa has been assessed according to buzzwords, such as development, emergence, or Millennium Development Goals. These hegemonic concepts, adopted to describe Africa, project the myths of the West onto the history and trajectories of African societies. African societies' path has been included in a Western teleology that is claimed to be universal, which has failed to consider the deep changes operating on the continent as well as the dynamics under way. Sarr states the following:

'The activity of quantification can be useful for predicting, managing, and anticipating the path that remains to be traveled as well as respecting its relation to the distance that has already been traversed; however, in carrying out this mathematical reduction of reality one runs the risk of surreptitiously transforming imperfect measurements and reference points into the ultimate aims and end goals of the social adventure' (2019, p. 2).

Therefore, Sarr warns of not only the risk of ideological or neocolonial biases but also of potential quantophrenic biases. These biases could be connected to the adoption of a

[25] A detailed reflection on the critical points highlighted with regard to the Polity Project's methodology falls outside of the scope of this dissertation. Gunitsky (2015) thoroughly discusses what, in his view, are the major methodological problems in the Polity measurements.

dataset such as *Polity5*, which is based on a specific conceptualisation of political regimes and provides a numerical expression to such a conceptualisation. This numerical expression is represented by Polity scores, which could be hegemonic tools for assessing countries' political regimes on the basis of potentially biased standards of democracy.

An answer to the first objection may be that, understandably, the cultural, social, and political background of those involved in the creation of this dataset have informed and shaped the conceptualisations and resulting regimes' categorisation behind the scores. Yet, this is not a strong reason for pre-emptively denying the epistemic and analytical value of this research for the description of contexts that differ from the one in which it was developed. The risk would be an absolute relativism. Attention should thus be paid to the extent of these cultural bias, which should not distort the political reality of the countries analysed.

The second objection regarding the connected quantophrenic biases is particularly relevant to the present study, which analyses an African country. To address this objection, I wish to clarify that the Polity categorisation is adopted here for its descriptive quality. There is no normative aim behind the use of these political categories. The Polity conceptual categories developed to define the different forms of government, particularly the anocracy, are considered in this research as meaningful descriptive and analytical tools. The intent is not to establish the form of government that a country should adopt or the standard of democracy that a country should conform to, starting from these definitions. I argue that the categorisation defined by the *Polity5 Project*, especially the concept of anocracy, are interesting and appropriate instruments for describing the present political systems in the global landscape. Therefore, these categories are useful for framing the political contexts of contemporary practices of civil disobedience.

Considering that political regimes are generally defined either as democratic or autocratic, the role of civil disobedience in anocracies has thus far remained under-investigated. In the following subsection, I place the focus on Sudan, which was categorised as an anocracy and where citizens have many times organised campaigns of mass nonviolent disobedience aimed at a radical change to the country's political system.

The African continent, as previously anticipated, is a region worthy of consideration with regard to anocratic regimes (Center for Systemic Peace, 2020; Marshall & Elzinga-Marshall, 2017). The *Polity5 Project* provides data for each country on the continent.

Regarding the Polity score assigned over the years to Sudan[26] over the period 1956–2018, it ranges from +7 (i.e., a democracy) to −4, which indicates an anocracy (Center for Systemic Peace, 2018, n.d.). The differences in the annual Polity score of the country reflect the political events that have characterised its history. Since independence in Sudan, democracy has been established many times, but these democratic chapters have been repeatedly obstructed by army generals seizing power through coups d'état. Sudan's form of government has changed over time, oscillating between democracy and autocracy. Starting from 2011, the annual Polity scoring for Sudan classified the country as an anocracy. In 2018, when Sudanese protesters started to engage in a campaign of mass civil disobedience, culminating with the end of Omar al-Bashir's 30-year presidency in April 2019, Sudan was assigned a Polity score of −4, meaning a closed anocracy (Center for Systemic Peace, 2018).

In the next section, I demonstrate that Sudan is an emblematic country in the matter of civil disobedience because Sudanese people throughout history have resorted to this nonviolent form of protest many times and succeeded in overthrowing military regimes. By describing the historical exercises of peaceful resistance in Sudan as well as the more contemporary practices of civil disobedience, I also explain how and why the political system has changed over time and how it has come to be an anocracy.

2. Why Sudan: The history of Sudanese civil disobedience from the October Revolution to the fall of Omar al-Bashir

Civil disobedience in Sudan was not practiced for the first time in 2018–2019. This African country has a notable history of civil disobedience and nonviolent resistance. Sudanese people have succeeded twice in overthrowing military regimes, in 1964 and then in 1985. Besides these crucial chapters in the country's history of political activism, the Sudanese have engaged many times in mass protests in recent history. In this section, I first describe two significant historical precedents and a mass movement of protest that

[26] The dataset of the Center for Systemic Peace (2018) refers to Sudan with two different names: the scores assigned to the country from 1956 (year of independence) to 2011 can be found under the heading 'Sudan'. The scores relative to the period 2011–2018 are instead under the heading of 'North Sudan'. In 2011, a referendum established the separation of the southern part of the country. South Sudan has been an independent state since July 9, 2011. Therefore, the Center for Systemic Peace distinguishes 'North Sudan' from 'South Sudan' in the data relative to the post-referendum period.

was sparked between 2011 and 2013, which was the premise to the 2018–2019 campaign of civil disobedience. Then, I explain what happened in the country starting from December 2018 up to the months following the end of Omar al-Bashir's rule in 2019.

To understand what became known as the 1964 October Revolution, it is necessary to go back to Sudan's independence in 1956. Adam Branch and Zachariah Mampilly (2015) offer a detailed reconstruction of the major protest events in Sudan starting from this moment. The analysis that follows draws particularly on this source.

2.1 The revolutionary past of Sudan

In the aftermath of independence in Sudan, a civilian government was formed headed by Prime Minister al-Azhari, although he was forced to resign a few months later. The government was then led by a coalition that comprised the Islamist Umma Party and the People's Democratic Party. In 1958, this coalition was dissolved by a military coup d'état guided by Ibrahim Abboud, who became the chief of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces. For the first time, the military took power in Sudan (Branch & Mampilly, 2015).

Abboud soon proved incapable of addressing the economic and political problems in the country. Therefore, the Sudanese people started to organise acts of protest demanding the restoration of a democratic regime. Students were at the forefront of this protest movement, alongside women. On October 21, 1964, a Sudanese student named Ahmed al-Quresh was killed by police while he was participating in a seminar promoted by the Khartoum University Student Union. The day after al-Quresh's death, tens of thousands of Sudanese people gathered for his funeral procession and mobilised a mass protest involving students and professional unions. They opposed Abboud's policies for the southern region of the country[27] as well as his government's education and economic policies. A general strike was held that same day, bringing the country to a halt. Tens of thousands of people engaged in a confrontation with the armed forces 'through mostly non-violent action but also through bouts of rioting' (Branch & Mampilly, 2015, p. 429). The protesters marched towards the presidential palace, and then the military opened fire.

[27] The south of Sudan was afflicted by a civil conflict between the 1950s and early 2000s. The roots of this conflict are found also in the northern leaders' attempts to Islamise the whole country. Abboud launched an 'initiative to Arabize Sudan's so-called African tribes' (Branch & Mampilly, 2015, p. 427). Such attempts, alongside the lack of economic development in that area, escalated the conflict, culminating in the secession of the south after its 2011 referendum on independence.

Many activists were wounded or killed. This repressive response triggered a reaction in the armed forces that proved a crucial factor for the success of successive popular revolutions. The use of force on peaceful protesters determined a split within the army between middle-class ranking officers and senior officials. On this occasion, the young army officers were dissenters: they refused to stifle the protests by force and sided with the protesters (El-Tigani, 2003). Shortly after, Abboud was overthrown.

The end of Abboud's government in Sudan started a four-year chapter of parliamentary democracy (Berridge, 2014, 2015; Berridge et al., 2022). Yet, this civilian-led transitional government did not succeed in providing stability to the country or addressing its economic and political issues. In 1969, Colonel Jaafar Nimeiri, who headed the Free Officers Movement, a young officers' group, grabbed power. Nimeiri promised a new path for Sudan, but the death of Muslim reformer Mahmoud Mohammed Taha triggered the beginning of a new wave of mass protests, which is known as the 1985 Intifada[28] (Berridge, 2014, 2015). This time, a large portion of Sudanese civil society, including students, lawyers, doctors, and bankers, took to the street in Khartoum, and these professionals along with trade unionists organised a campaign of civil disobedience. A nationwide general strike followed (Berridge et al., 2022). The regime suppressed the protests by arresting many activists. Demonstrations soon spread to various cities and, once again, some army commanders disobeyed orders to open fire on the people who were protesting peacefully. Some of the officers declared on the radio that they were siding with the people and Nimeiri was deposed (Branch & Mampilly, 2015).

An interim government was then announced by the generals and elections were called for, but even this time a stable civilian government did not emerge. The country was stuck in a political impasse, which was provoked by John Garang, a former military officer who led the Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A). Garang aimed to appoint the southern rebels as the leading democratic force in Sudan. He attempted to narrow the gap between the rural areas of the country and urban civil society to unite Sudan as a democratic and multiethnic country. Yet, on that occasion, the southern rebels were

[28] *Intifada* (Berridge, 2015) is an Arabic term that means rebellion or uprising, which has been used to refer to Sudanese civilian uprisings. Berridge (2014) reflects that some of the leading actors of the 1964 October Revolution became the primary supporters of the succeeding autocratic military regimes. In this regard, Nimeiri is an emblematic example: as an army officer, he refused to open fire on the protesters in the 1964 Revolution, but he also contributed to the overthrow of the democratic government resulting from that same revolution. With regard to coups d'état carried out by officers who previously joined popular revolutions, there are many parallels between the Sudanese case and the events in Egypt in 2013.

excluded by the formation of a new government coalition led by Sadiq al-Mahdi. This government did not address the demands of the protesters and popular movements. Between the end of 1988 and mid-1989, in Khartoum and nearby Omdurman, new riots were mobilised and protests held to oppose increasing prices. In June 1989, Colonel Omar al-Bashir toppled al-Mahdi's government with a coup d'état and seized power (Branch & Mampilly, 2015). This further coup sanctioned the beginning of the al-Bashir era. From this moment, a new challenging political chapter began for Sudanese citizens.

Over time, Sudanese protesters had succeeded in bringing down military regimes by involving a network of professionals and civil society associations in the organisation of popular opposition movements, engaging in various nonviolent tactics. Al-Bashir learned the lesson from the successful previous revolutions and began to adopt measures to counteract the protesters' tactics, thus avoiding a repeat of previous events. For example, to prevent the army from siding with the people, more soldiers were deployed outside of the capital, while the security forces loyal to the regime were entrusted with the control of Khartoum. Trade unions were progressively dissolved, government employees dismissed, student activism harshly repressed, professionals chased out of the country, and many activists sent to so-called 'ghost houses', which refer to places of torture (Berridge, 2014; Branch & Mampilly, 2015).

Yet, the untiring activism of Sudanese citizens did not stop with the arrival of the harsh regime of al-Bashir. In 2010, the first multiparty elections were held in Sudan, which are one of the elements that support the categorisation of Sudan as an anocratic regime. Al-Bashir integrated authoritarian traits into the country's political system, yet under his rule, Sudan experienced the first multiparty elections. In view of this electoral appointment, three university students in Omdurman formed *Girifna*, a prodemocracy movement that aimed to defeat al-Bashir's party, the National Congress Party (NCP), through the ballot box. Girifna means 'we are fed up', by which the students meant that they were fed up with injustice, discrimination, corruption, war, and dictatorship (Girifna, 2009). The young activists committed to large-scale mobilisation in the major cities of Sudan to pursue their electoral mission. Despite Girifna's efforts and the hope that this electoral occasion could have paved the way to democracy, the elections were rigged and al-Bashir was reconfirmed as president (Human Rights Watch, 2010).

Even after the beginning of al-Bashir's rule, Sudan continued to be a sort of permanent workshop of nonviolent resistance. Girifna was the most emblematic expression of this political and theoretical work. This grassroots movement was built on an unconditional trust in nonviolence. The founders declared that it was motivated by the philosophy of nonviolent direct action of Gandhi and King, and in that moment 'Girifna believes that the overthrow of the NCP regime by violence or war would lead to a new and equally destructive dictatorship' (Girifna, 2009). Besides engaging in peaceful demonstrations and distributing leaflets in schools, universities, and market places, this movement organised *mukhatabat*, which means 'street talks' (ibid.), especially in market places, to disseminate their message among Sudanese citizens. Furthermore, Girifna started to use digital media and different forms of communication (e.g., poetry, music, and videos) to educate people about nonviolent tactics and methodologies to manifest dissent, about citizens' rights, and about the movement's goals. Thus, Girifna represented the essence of the Sudanese commitment to nonviolent forms of protest – a commitment which is not only practical and political but also – and above all – theoretical. This is a common thread that has characterised the history of civil disobedience in Sudan, which is a history that unfolded through protest actions in the streets and also through theoretical work on the goals, strategies, and methodologies to adopt. This is what enabled Sudanese citizens to steadfastly commit several times to nonviolent protest to achieve radical changes in the country.

After the first multiparty elections, Sudan was about to face another challenging page in its history. In 2011, a referendum sanctioned the independence of South Sudan, and from that moment onwards, Sudan had to renounce to oil revenues, since most of the oil fields were situated in the territory of the new state. Rising inflation was crippling the country and the government enacted an austerity plan. In addition, a wave of protests, sparked by the self-immolation of Mohamed Bouazizi (Encyclopaedia Britannica, n.d.), a fruit seller, in Tunisia in 2010, was crossing Northern African and Middle Eastern countries. It was the beginning of the well-known Arab Spring. The critical situation inside Sudan and the influence of the popular movements that were revolutionising countries in North Africa motivated Sudanese citizens to take to the streets once again in 2011. The protests continued until 2013, involving especially students, who organised sit-ins and demonstrations. The protesters opposed the austerity measures and demanded the

end of al-Bashir's regime (Sudan Tribune, 2012). However, these protests were brutally stifled by the regime. Security forces fired tear gas and used live ammunitions and rubber bullets on peaceful demonstrators. Over 200 protesters were killed in the popular demonstrations in 2013 (Berridge et al., 2022). This further wave of nonviolent protests, contrary to the two previous historical successes, did not bring about the change that Sudanese protesters were pursuing. The reasons for the failed unseating of al-Bashir lie in both the brutality of the repression and the lack of coordination between the popular leaders of the protests and local resistance movements (Berridge et al., 2022). Yet, it was only a matter of time before the overthrow of the regime was eventually achieved in 2019.

In the next subsection, I introduce this recent chapter in Sudan's history of civil disobedience, which represents the case study of the present research work. Before explaining how Sudanese citizens succeeded in toppling al-Bashir's regime by engaging in acts of civil disobedience, I wish to emphasise some key points about the history of Sudanese citizens' activism and its relevance to a philosophical reflection of civil disobedience outside of democratic contexts. By retracing the historical precedents of peaceful disobedience in Sudan, it is possible to observe the changes that have occurred in its political system over the years as a result of nonviolent actions of protest. As previously anticipated, analysing the history of Sudan's revolutions allows an understanding of the variations in its form of government, as traced by Polity scores. Democracy has been established many times in Sudan, but it has been compromised just as many times by military seizures of power. Military officers integrated authoritarian methods of exerting power in the previously established democratic structure. Furthermore, as was the case with al-Bashir in 2010, they attempted to appear democratic by holding multiparty elections. Therefore, the analysis of the revolutions' history in Sudan demonstrates the appropriateness of the category of anocracy for describing this regime and for framing civil disobedience as well as the role it has played for the activists engaging in it.

Sudan's history of nonviolent resistance indicates that practical and theoretical patterns of civil disobedience exist to be studied outside of the West, particularly in Africa. A comprehensive reflection on the meaning and role of civil disobedience should not overlook these practices and lessons from outside of the Western world. Sudan is an interesting reservoir from which to start decentring and questioning the mainstream

perspective on civil disobedience, and allows an investigation of the conceptualisation of this form of protest in less democratic political contexts. This provides further evidence of the fruitfulness of a comparative methodological approach in the analysis of the concept of civil disobedience.

2.2 The 2019 revolution: A new chapter of peaceful disobedience

The end of al-Bashir's 30-year presidency eventually arrived on April 11, 2019. The mass campaign of civil disobedience that contributed to achieving this political outcome started in December 2018 (Elsheikh, 2019). In this subsection, I briefly outline the salient stages of the 2019 revolution and what followed immediately after by highlighting why the issue of civil disobedience matters in this very recent popular uprising in Sudan. In Section 3, I analyse the revolution's events more thoroughly, starting from the perspective of some Sudanese activists directly involved in the 2018–2019 campaign of mass protests. Before retracing the main events that led to the overthrow of al-Bashir, it is useful to frame this revolutionary campaign of protests within the broader African continental framework.

The protests that broke out in 2011 and then in 2018 in Sudan are part of a bigger picture of popular uprisings that crossed the African continent, starting with the Arab Spring. These protest events are part of what political scientists defined as the 'third wave of African protests' (Mueller, 2018, p. 19). The first wave was sparked by the protests of anticolonial movements and started the decolonising process in the 1960s, while the second wave was the one that inaugurated the democratic transitions in the 1990s (Branch & Mampilly, 2015; Mueller, 2018). Since the Arab Spring, protests in Sub-Saharan Africa have increased (Mueller, 2018). As previously underlined, what happened in North Africa motivated people across the continent to engage in acts of protest. The reasons for these popular uprisings have generally been identified in poverty, inequality, and hunger. That is, people protest 'not because they oppose dictatorship on ideological grounds' (Mueller, 2018, p. 24), but rather 'protests in sub-Saharan Africa are materially motivated revolts of the poor – bread riots, essentially' (Mueller, 2018, p. 27). On the one hand, this interpretation captures part of the reasons behind the increasing number of protests (poverty and inequalities fuel a growing discontent). On the other hand, a thorough

examination of the protest phenomena suggests that it is not only a matter of materialist concerns but also – and above all – an opposition to dictatorial regimes that obstruct the pursuit of democracy, justice, equality, and freedom. This narrative also applies to Sudan; in 2018, Sudanese took to the streets to protest the rising cost of living and to demand subsidies for bread and fuel, both of which were true, but this mass mobilisation was not merely a riot about bread. Soon, it spiralled into a broader opposition to al-Bashir's regime (Elmileik, 2018).

The protests that started in December 2018 were similar to the two previous revolutions because Sudanese activists steadfastly committed to nonviolent actions. As in the 1964 and 1985 revolutions, the regime responded with a brutal crackdown on the protesters. Even in front of shots of the security forces, demonstrators shouted '*Silmiya, silmiya*', which means 'peaceful, peaceful' (Kristof, 2019). As in 2013, Al-Bashir deployed special units of the security forces to suppress the protests, particularly the National Intelligence and Security Service (NISS) and the infamous Rapid Support Forces (RSF), a paramilitary militia. The RSF, previously known as the *Janjaweed*, are considered responsible for various crimes perpetuated in Darfur in the 2000s; at the time of the 2018–2019 protests, the RSF was led by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, generally known as Hemedti. As I explain later in the chapter, the RSF brutally dispersed the protesters' sit-in in 2019, carrying out a massacre, and furthermore, Hemedti became a member of the Sovereign Council, the transitional governing body created after the 2019 revolution.

During these months of protest, Sudanese activists took to the streets, organising marches, demonstrations, strikes, and sit-ins. Professionals were again at the forefront of the uprising. In particular, the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA) was the leading actor in the 2018–2019 protests and coordinated mass actions (Berridge et al., 2022). The Sudanese Professionals Association (2019) not only called for a civil disobedience campaign to persist until the bitter end but also drafted the political manifesto of the social movements involved in the protests, namely the *Declaration of Freedom and Change* issued in January 2019. In this document, the acts of protest are framed in 'the course of peaceful struggle' (Sudanese Professionals Association, 2019). In the *Declaration*, the aims of this nonviolent struggle are formulated as follows:

‘First: The immediate and unconditional end of General Omar Al Bashir’s presidency and the conclusion of his administration.
Second: The formation of a National Transitional Government. This transitional government will be formed of qualified people based on merits of competency and good reputation, representing various Sudanese groups and receiving the consensus of the majority. Their role is to govern for a term of four years, until a sound democratic structure is established, and elections held’ (Sudanese Professionals Association, 2019).

This transitional government was to be responsible for numerous goals, among which the following is particularly relevant:

‘[To] oversee efforts to dismantle the structure of governance set up by a totalitarian one-party regime, and transition it to institutions based on a constitution and the rule of law. The goal is to create the conditions for a thriving state in which the people of Sudan elect their representatives freely; and to restructure civil services and the armed forces to be representative of the nation i.e. National, Diverse and Independent’ (ibid.).

This document summarised what the protesters effectively committed to in the subsequent months of protests. As in the previous revolutions, what proved to be crucial for achieving the overthrow of al-Bashir was the disobedience of a proportion of police and army officers, who ultimately decided to side with the people. Once again, the military publicly stated that they refused to open fire on peaceful protesters, motivating their refusal by declaring that the use of force would have been unjust as well as a violation of the Koran’s precepts. In 2019, this decision of the military to virtually join the demonstrators again proved to be decisive. Considering the historical precedents, it was not by accident that in the *Declaration* the activists appealed to soldiers as ‘brethren in the armed forces’ (Sudanese Professionals Association, 2019). This echoed the tactic of fraternisation with the armed forces adopted by anti-war demonstrators outside missile sites in Canada in the 1960s (Fofi, 2015). In April 2019, protesters at a mass sit-in staged at the entry of army’s headquarters appealed to the military generals, asking them to repeat the 1985 feat that had ousted president Nimeiri. On April 11, 2019, a coalition of the heads of different military branches (the Sudan Armed Forces, RSF, and NISS)

exerted pressure on al-Bashir, who was eventually forced to step down (Berridge et al., 2022).

To obtain an enhanced understanding of the perspective of Sudanese activists on the 2019 revolution and their commitment to civil disobedience, it is necessary to explain what happened after the fall of al-Bashir. Immediately after he was toppled, the military seized power and formed the Transitional Military Council (TMC). Other protests followed until civilians, reunited in the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) front, which includes the SPA, signed an agreement with the TMC. This power-sharing deal established the Sovereign Council, which was a government formed by both civilians and the military. More specifically, this government comprised five military representatives and six civilians (one of which was chosen in agreement with the military). According to the agreement, a military general would head the new government for the first 21 months of the 39-month transitional period, while a civilian would lead the Sovereign Council during the remaining 18 months (Al Jazeera, 2019).

The ministers of the newly formed council were soon faced with the same economic problems that had triggered the protests in December 2018 – namely the rising cost of living, growing inflation, and shortages of basic commodities such as flour and fuel (Al Jazeera, 2019). In addition, as Elsheikh (2019) underlines, over the following months the TMC became the de facto ruling body. The FFC front denounced the new government for not being chosen by the people as well as the fact that many of the military generals on the Sovereign Council had participated in and served al-Bashir's regime. These insights into the outcome of the 2019 revolution are essential for understanding what civil disobedience brought about in 2019 uprising. As I explain later in the chapter, the ultimate goal of Sudanese civil disobedience was not achieved in April 2019.

In the next section, I analyse this ultimate goal by presenting the ideas of the Sudanese activists involved in the 2019 revolution regarding the meaning and role of civil disobedience in Sudan and more broadly in an anocratic regime.

3. How Sudanese activists describe their civil disobedience

Having discussed why the political system of Sudan can be categorised as anocratic and having described the historical and contemporary relevance of this country in the

matter of civil disobedience, I now move on to presenting the empirical part of the research on the meaning and role of civil disobedience in anocratic contexts by analysing the ideas of Sudanese activists. What follows is a description of civil disobedience in Sudan starting from December 2018, the role that it had in the change that occurred in the country, and what ultimate aim the protesters pursued by engaging in this specific form of protest. I collected the answers to these questions by interviewing Sudanese activists who were directly involved in the protests.[29] In particular, this section focuses on the voices of two Sudanese protesters who offered interesting perspectives on the radical scope of civil disobedience that, in their view, is an essential nonviolent means for achieving a political revolution. After introducing their reflections on civil disobedience, I provide an overview of what happened to the practice of this form of protest, in Africa and particularly in Sudan, after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The perseverance of Sudanese activists in engaging in acts of nonviolent disobedience, even under challenging conditions for their personal health, further demonstrates the transformative potential that they attributed to this form of protest.

Focusing on what happened from December 2018 onwards and why Sudanese people organised a mass campaign of civil disobedience, the two interviewees underlined that Sudanese people's discontent and dissent against the ruling regime were growing. Interviewee A (Appendix) identified that the reasons for the 2018–2019 protests originated back in the early 2000s. In his view, Sudanese people had been preparing this mobilisation for years, discussing different approaches and means for toppling the regime. The protests resulted from an accumulation of grievances and injustices over the years, the most critical of which were the restriction of freedom of expression and other human rights violations, especially those of women's rights. Interviewee B (Appendix) explained that the eruption of mass protests derived from a compilation of social, political, and economic problems. They were unleashed by years of corruption, racial and religious discrimination, oppression, a growing gap between the rich and poor, a huge brain drain, and economic and political deterioration. Politically, the situation in Sudan had been worsening with increasing detentions and disappearances of dissenters. On an economic level, both interviewees emphasised that the separation of the southern part of the country

[29] The interviews were conducted online due to the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic and the growing political instability in Sudan. For security reasons, the identity of the two interviewees has been kept anonymous and they are denoted by the letters 'A' and 'B'. The transcripts of the two interviews can be found in the Appendix of the dissertation.

after the 2011 referendum was the major cause of the country's collapse. Therefore, they both agreed that the triggering events of what became the 2019 revolution could be identified in Sudan's recent history.

These challenging circumstances motivated Sudanese citizens to create a network of civil society associations (e.g., the SPA), which gathered medical doctors, professors, students, and political parties. These associations were in charge of organising and scheduling the protests as well as releasing statements. This is how Sudanese people gave rise to such a large-scale mobilisation. As interviewee A claimed, the 2019 revolution was literally Sudanese, since it was made and designed by Sudanese people. A relevant question is what Sudanese activists were asking for by taking to the streets. Interviewee B, who participated in the protests (both in 2012 and 2019), argued that the aim that guided his direct involvement was to overthrow the political and military regime. In their 2019 campaign, the protesters' request was not simply directed towards president al-Bashir. They also requested the end of military regimes, as the Sudanese people considered it to be time for civilians to govern the country. According to interviewee B, Sudan would have vanished if it continued to follow the political path traced by al-Bashir, which compromised every possible aspiration for the future. In addition, he was motivated to take to the streets by a quest for justice, referring to justice for the people who had to leave Sudan, who disappeared after expressing their opinion, or who died. They were demanding that those who rule the country must be held accountable for the injustices they had perpetuated. In that moment, overthrowing the regime was the only thing that Sudanese protesters could do.

What is interesting in interviewee B's case was that he had the chance to participate in the mobilisation both from outside of the country, with the Sudanese diaspora, and inside the country by taking to the streets in Khartoum. Outside of the country, his role was to channel the information coming from Sudan to the international world, using social media platforms and reporting to the media, thus raising awareness about what was happening. This task was particularly challenging due to Internet blackouts and blocks on communication enacted by the ruling regime. Sudanese people in the diaspora were also involved in organising protests in various cities around the world, especially outside Sudanese embassies. Once back in Sudan, interviewee B described how acts of protest unfolded as follows: protesters normally received a text message on their mobile phone

with details about the location of the protest of the day and then they went out. Interviewee B emphasised that in Sudan, people involved in the protests were focused on the message they aimed to convey with their actions. Their key objectives were as follows: (i) to create awareness of the problems with the ruling regime; (ii) to underline the nonviolence of the actions being undertaken, and (iii) to communicate that everyone was invited to join the protests, regardless of age, ethnicity, social class, or gender.

The point about the nonviolence of Sudanese dissenters' actions is an interesting one. During the period of protests analysed here, one act was classified as violent by the foreign media covering the uprising in Sudan – namely when protesters outside Khartoum, in Atbara, set fire to the headquarters of the ruling NCP (Al Jazeera, 2018). Interviewee B did not categorise said action as violent, since the intention was not to kill people and there were no casualties. It was a symbolic action intended to manifest their dissent with the political force ruling the country. In other words, it was more of a confrontational act to convey a direct message to the regime. Here, what Sudanese protesters considered a violent act emerges: in the exercise of a disobedient action, setting fire to and destroying a building is justified, provided that it does not result in people being injured.

Thus, nonviolence was the main commitment in their practice of civil disobedience. Interviewee B convincingly explained why Sudanese protesters steadfastly complied with nonviolence. In his view, it is possible to access guns and weapons in Sudan. Therefore, picking up a gun and harming soldiers and the military was something a Sudanese citizen could easily have done while protesting in that mobilisation. Yet, this was not the intention of the protesters. Their aim was rather to denounce, from inside the country and abroad, the situation that Sudan was falling into. Nonviolence was a requirement that the protesters decided to adhere to, even when tear gas was fired at them. Interviewee B underlined that protesters, on various occasions, attempted to throw back the tear gas canisters or to throw rocks, but they never targeted soldiers. There was no intentional violence and protesters never adopted offensive actions. Resorting to a direct violent action was considered legitimate only in case of self-defence, and thus, only if it was necessary to protect their lives. Numerous people, especially young people, died in Sudan during the protests. Interviewee B recalled that young protesters were often asked why they were going out to protest, knowing that they might not come back home. A common

response was ‘I’m dead anyway’ (Appendix), by which they meant that they were already dead considering the kind of life they were living. There was no future and their country was not providing its people with even basic living necessities. They would rather have died for their country and for the potential hope they derived from this mobilisation than continued to live under such conditions.

There is a peculiar aspect to analyse in how the protests practically occurred in the 2019 Sudanese mass mobilisation. This feature is connected to what interviewee B defined as ‘the street of potential of Sudan’ (Appendix). This road of potential essentially consisted of an encampment, situated in front of the army headquarters in Khartoum, and it was where the protesters organised their main sit-in. The street of potential was a place of political as well as cultural resistance. This encampment comprised tents where various activities were held. According to interviewee B, there was a tent where activists talked about Darfur, while another was dedicated to South Sudan, and another collected all of the books that had been banned by al-Bashir. It was a place where people from different communities and from all over Sudan could talk about their experiences and conditions. Interviewee B emphasised that it was an exceptional place where Sudanese people were free to speak – something that had not occurred for years. On this street of potential, protesters painted the walls with artworks and murals, while artistic performances were also staged there. All of these cultural products were also forms of dissent and manifestations of regained freedom of expression after years of al-Bashir’s rule (Morgan, 2019).

This large sit-in became the main assembly point for all protesters. The organisation in the encampment was led through the cooperation of various committees. A few of these civilian organisations were as follows: the Medical Committee, which took care of injured protesters; the Protection Committee, which ensured the security of the people in the sit-in; the Provisions Committee, which provided drinks and food; and the Awareness-Raising Committee, which organised classrooms and workshops on nonviolent methods of protest and the rights of Sudanese citizens (Zunes, 2021, p. 8). It was also a space for discussing issues related to ethnicities, gender, and religion. Moreover, opposition politicians could speak to the civilians gathered there (ibid.). The choice of the street of potential’s location was not accidental: Sudanese protesters were performing an act of civil disobedience simply by holding the sit-in in that precise location. This street, in front

of the army headquarters, was a military area where trespassing and taking photographs were not allowed. Protesters chose this place because it was in front of the security services, which sent a precise message to the regime, and the army in particular. In case demonstrators, who were there to protest non-violently, were to be harmed, the military would have been held responsible, given the fact that the area was under the armed forces' control (Zunes, 2021).

The protesters managed to maintain the sit-in after the fall of al-Bashir, remaining there until dawn on June 3, 2019. That day the RSF raided the camp, dispersing the protesters by opening fire. Numerous activists were arrested, several were raped and wounded, and many were even killed.[30] June 3, 2019 was one of the saddest pages in Sudan's recent history because of this brutal violence unleashed by the military. With this violent response, the armed forces suppressed the main symbol of Sudan's civil disobedience. As Morgan (2019) underlines, the sit-in was a place of unity for Sudanese people, who had gathered there to protest. In the camp, there were no divisions for reasons of ethnicity, gender, class, or religion. They were all there to fight for a democratic Sudan.

Now, the central issue that must be examined is what civil disobedience was in that context for Sudanese activists. Interviewee B argued that during the 2018–2019 protest campaign, acts of civil disobedience occurred. In his view, civil disobedience was a 'firm statement towards the government to show that the people are not weak, that the people are strong, that the people are here for a fight, and that we're not gonna give up easily' (Appendix). To understand the meaning of civil disobedience and the role that it plays for Sudanese people, it is necessary to introduce another concept. In the vocabulary of Sudanese activists, another word is almost always present when they refer to what happened in 2019 – namely revolution. Therefore, the following question may arise: What does revolution mean for Sudanese protesters and what is the difference, if any, between revolution and civil disobedience? For Interviewee B, revolution has a larger meaning since it refers to the aftermath or results of the nonviolent action, while civil disobedience is a way to create a revolution. More precisely, civil disobedience is one of 100 strategies required to fulfil a revolution. Revolution has a greater magnitude than civil disobedience, which is a mechanism for achieving a revolution. Furthermore, according to interviewee

[30] The exact number of people killed during the June 3, 2019 massacre is unknown, but various sources have reported almost 100 deaths among protesters (Fricke, 2020).

B's perspective, a revolution can be fulfilled only through nonviolent means, one of which is civil disobedience. The Arabic term for civil disobedience is 'عصيان مدني' (*Eisyan Madani*). The term *Madani* means civilian, while *Eisyan* means disobedience (Appendix). Interviewee B underlined that the term 'civil disobedience' is a very common term for referring to nonviolent protests, not only with reference to the events of 2019 but also to past practices of peaceful resistance. Therefore, in the protesters' vocabulary, civil disobedience indicates an essential step towards realising the more ambitious aim of a revolution of the Sudanese political system.

The same meaning was attributed to civil disobedience by another person[31] involved in the protest events of 2018–2019 in Khartoum. According to this source, who shall remain anonymous, civil disobedience is an instrument for creating the revolution. That is, what happened in 2019 was a revolution conducted through civil disobedience, which was crucial for the success of such a revolution. Practicing civil disobedience was tough – it required sacrifices – but today it is still considered the only viable means for achieving a revolution. This provides an additional explanation for the wide circulation of the term 'revolution' with reference to 2019's events. According to this anonymous source, a practical example of civil disobedience in 2019 was young Sudanese people in various occasions taking photographs of soldiers and then posting them on social media platforms, such as Facebook. Thus, they revealed the faces of soldiers who had threatened or targeted people and held them publicly accountable for their acts. This act was a clear-cut violation of the rules that forbid photographs of army personnel and military areas; thus, it was a nonviolent form of disobedience practiced through the use of digital media.

To understand what the commitment to civil disobedience implies for Sudanese citizens, it is necessary to focus on a practical facet of this form of protest. As described thus far, during the 2018–2019 mobilisation, Sudanese protesters were engaged in acts of disobedience on a daily basis for months. Furthermore, after the end of al-Bashir's presidency, they continued to organise acts of civil disobedience. Thus, it was a protracted and demanding method of protest. In Sudan, many people live below the poverty line, with most earning their daily living by selling in the informal market. Interviewee B explained that an emblematic case in this regard is that of 'tea ladies', who are women

[31] For reasons of safety, the identity of this source is kept anonymous along with his integral communication.

who sell tea in Sudan.[32] Tea ladies are a fundamental force driving Sudan's economy. When acts of civil disobedience are planned for one or two weeks or longer, these women and other peddlers have no money for their families, since the acts interrupt their informal commerce. In other words, tea ladies have no customers when acts of mass civil disobedience are organised. When people are not earning money for the family for several days, according to interviewee B, this can trigger violence. That is, because of the commitment that civil disobedience requires, violence can be triggered by pushing people living below the poverty line to resort to violent means to survive. While civil disobedience was considered fundamental by the Sudanese involved in the 2018–2019 actions, it is a form of protest that requires strategic organisation. Thus, in the peculiar circumstances of a country such as Sudan, an issue arises concerning the engagement of people in poverty in protest actions, who must earn a living on a daily basis. These instances indicate that civil disobedience can impact Sudanese people's life conditions. Here, another question that arises is whether there could have been an alternative to civil disobedience for bringing about a change in Sudanese society. Interviewee B highlighted that an alternative could have been to revolt; however, for Sudanese activists, revolt is not a type of action that they can rely on. Civil disobedience was the appropriate form of action to oppose the unjust regime of al-Bashir because it had proven successful in the past. Even though it was demanding for some of the civilians involved, civil disobedience is a form of resistance that Sudanese people do not intend to give up. It is a matter of rethinking the ways in which the acts are organised, rather than abandoning civil disobedience in favour of other violent forms of dissent.

This reflection opens an interesting issue, namely that civil disobedience for the activists is costly in material, moral, and psychological terms. Interviewee A argued that civil disobedience was like a daily job. This meant that dissenters had to invest effort into this form of protest, reconcile this commitment with their personal life, and be aware that engaging in such methods of civil disobedience could place their primary job and economic status at risk. Interviewee A mentioned that some Sudanese people with secure employment outside of Sudan in 2019 left their jobs, returned to their country, and started from scratch. This aspect – the implications of practicing civil disobedience on activists'

[32] An interesting portrait of tea ladies in Sudan is offered by the Sudanese visual artist and photographer Ebti Nabag (2022). This contribution underlines that tea ladies are often women marginalised in society because they are widowed, divorced, or refugees from neighbouring countries.

lives – has generally been overlooked. The philosophical inquiries on civil disobedience thus far have mainly focused on the punishment derived from breaching the law, and thus, on dissenters facing arrest or jailing. Examining civil disobedience in a country such as Sudan and considering cases such as the tea ladies prompt a reflection of interest not only to Sudanese activists but also more broadly to civil disobedience activists worldwide. The case studied here demonstrates that this practice requires time and high personal effort, which cannot always be reconciled with activists' lives; thus, aspiring activists often cannot afford to engage in acts of civil disobedience.

The fact that civil disobedience proved to be an effective instrument in the history of Sudan contributed to the perseverance in this specific practice rather than other forms of dissent. Interviewee B underlined that the 1964 October Revolution is a constant inspiration as well as the reference model of protest for Sudanese people taking to the streets today. The previous uprisings in Sudan are theoretical and practical sources of reflection for activists. Yet, this historical precedent also has a negative facet. As observed in the previous section, the more protesters deploy the same tactics of dissent, the more the ruling regime becomes resistant to those practices. Civil disobedience tactics thus need to be rediscussed and readjusted each time in light of a different and potentially more severe response by the ruling regime.

Interviewee A shared a similar idea of civil disobedience, emphasising two interesting elements about 2019's civil disobedience. First, the involvement of citizens of different ages, classes, ethnicities, and genders at some point triggered a snowball effect, which not only enabled the participation of increasing numbers of Sudanese people in the protests but also contributed to the spread of protests in cities across the country. Second, the geographical development of this mass movement started outside of the capital, and then people in Khartoum were progressively motivated to mobilise.

In addition, Interviewee A highlighted that civil disobedience was practiced peacefully. The protesters did not use arms. The feature of nonviolence, in his view, is definitely the distinctive trait of all revolutions that have occurred in Sudan. He provided another explanation for the exclusive commitment to nonviolent forms of disobedience. He believed in peaceful means of change and that the meaning of civil disobedience lies in his trust in peaceful instruments for seeking it. He also participated in peaceful protests in Darfur in the early 2000s. There, civil disobedience was the nonviolent tool chosen for

protesting. The people's trust in nonviolent instruments, such as civil disobedience, was complete, such that he and his fellow Sudanese citizens believed that it was unnecessary to join armed groups to overthrow the regime. Rather, they convincingly and steadfastly committed to civil disobedience and peaceful means of dissent. Their civil disobedience and perseverance in nonviolent strategies eventually proved to be effective.

An interesting perspective on the relationship between civil disobedience and revolution was also provided by interviewee A. In his view, Sudanese people achieved the revolution because they practiced acts of resistance on a daily basis, such as when talking to people on the street, when educating students at universities, and when engaging in the activities of civil society's organisations. Revolution is an ongoing exercise which engages civilians daily, eventually becoming part of their everyday lives. It is truly an activity pursued from below. For interviewee A, as for interviewee B, when he referred to Sudan, civil disobedience and revolution were both relevant concepts; that is, both of these categories describe what happened in Sudan. Interviewee A offered an idea of these two concepts that was similar to that offered by interviewee B, namely that civil disobedience contributes to the realisation of a revolution. However, for interviewee A, a difference existed in the extent of the outcomes that these two forms of dissent can generate. Revolution is a term that describes the achievement of a radical change, such as the end of al-Bashir's regime. Revolution, especially when achieved by deploying violent means, enables a radical and more 'immediate' change, but this change is often precarious. In other words, a revolution conducted with violent instruments causes significant change in the short term. By contrast, civil disobedience as a nonviolent means has a greater potential: it is a practice through which dissenters bring about similarly radical change but piece by piece, especially leading to a more sustained change. Here lies the essence and potential of civil disobedience from the perspective of this Sudanese activist. For interviewee A, the term civil disobedience is the more suitable description of what protesters did in Sudan in 2018–2019, and civil disobedience is what Sudanese have to practice if they hope for a more sustained change. Interviewee A seemed to suggest that in a non–fully democratic context, dissenters can conduct a violent revolution and possibly reach their desired outcome (i.e., regime change) more rapidly, although this outcome will likely not last. By contrast, while nonviolent civil disobedience might require more time, it allows a lasting change to be achieved. Thus, for this Sudanese

activist, civil disobedience has the potential to start a radical and sustained change within a society in a nonviolent manner. This role attributed to civil disobedience is even more significant considering the political context where it is practiced and the relative aspirations of change.

In the following subsection, starting from the perspective of the activist interviewees, I examine the other aspect of interest for this study – namely the ultimate outcome that Sudanese protesters pursued when they engaged in civil disobedience in 2019.

3.1 A form of protest to change a regime

The other relevant issue when reflecting on the meaning of civil disobedience for Sudanese citizens relates to the aim that they strived for by engaging in this specific form of protest. To obtain an enhanced understanding of the political aim of civil disobedience in Sudan, my analysis now moves beyond the 2018–2019 protest campaign. Before discussing the necessity of bringing about change in Sudan's regime and of democracy as the pursued political system, it is necessary to analyse a connected issue – namely how Sudanese people defined their political system when they engaged in this campaign of protests, and consequently, why they aimed to change the political system.

The interviewees found anocracy to be an interesting category for describing their country when the protests erupted in 2018. While they both agreed about the appropriateness of the category of anocracy for describing the political structure of Sudan, they expressed two different approaches to this concept. According to interviewee A, the term anocracy is appropriate for defining the political system in Sudan when the protests started in 2018 because, as he recalled, in Sudan's history there have been different 'exercises of democracy' (Appendix): (i) after independence in 1956, Sudan was a democratic regime for two years; (ii) Sudan was again a democracy in the period between 1965 and 1969, before Nimeiri grabbed power; and (iii) democracy was established in Sudan again in the period between 1985 and 1989, prior to the beginning of al-Bashir's presidency. Even during Bahir's rule, according to interviewee A, a democratic façade was displayed with the organisation of multiparty elections in 2010. Compromising these exercises of democracy in each case was the Sudanese military. Considering the regimes of Abboud, Nimeiri, and al-Bashir, the military has ruled in Sudan for more than 50 years.

Thus, for interviewee A, Sudan's exercises of democracy were obstructed in different moments by the military, who still dominate the scene today. The category of anocracy, in his view, appropriately describes this political framework, where democracy was implemented many times but then repeatedly jeopardised. For this reason, in his opinion, democracy must be restored in Sudan. He stated that the main objective from the beginning of the wave of protests was a change in the political regime. Economic issues were at the forefront when the protests erupted in December 2018. Yet, the aim of Sudanese people was more than a request for bread and fuel subsidies to face the high costs of living. They took to the streets aiming for a regime change. This political aim corresponds to the goal expressed in the *Declaration of Freedom and Change* by the Sudanese Professionals Association (2019), which called for a restoration of democracy in Sudan. Therefore, from the perspective of this activist, democracy was and still is the goal of civil disobedience actions.

For interviewee B, his standpoint on the category of anocracy was more critical, not for the conceptualisation behind the term but rather its origin. This interviewee also described the political system that protesters aimed to establish in Sudan in slightly different terms. First, interviewee B defined al-Bashir's presidency as dictatorial military rule. He was familiar with the term 'anocracy', but he argued that it is not a term that the population of Sudan generally deploy. He underlined that such a term represents an interesting categorisation of al-Bashir's era and is even more suitable for describing Sudan since the 2019 revolution, starting from the moment the Sovereign Council was structured. Thus, the category of anocracy is more appropriate for describing Sudan's political system in the post-revolution phase.

Interviewee B added a further reflection with regard to the category of anocracy, which in his view is an interesting definition yet one that comes from the West. In particular, interviewee B questioned the extension of political terms made by the West or any other continent to Africa. He called for an intellectual and political emancipation of Africans, who should themselves find ways, concepts, and terminologies to define their countries and their social and political modes of organisation. This is one of the main reasons motivating the necessity of establishing a conversation with Sudanese protesters to discuss the concepts adopted in political theory inquiries. It is another example of the fruitfulness of a comparative perspective on the topic of civil disobedience, and

consequently, on democracy and anocracy. The critical stance of interviewee B also emerged in his view about the aim of Sudanese protesters and the form of government that Sudanese people seek to establish in their country. Starting from this perspective, I next explain what democracy means for this Sudanese activist by highlighting that, in his view, Sudanese people were not simply calling for democracy. Behind their protests were different meanings and ideas about what democracy should look like in Sudan.

In the words of interviewee B, it emerged that the goal of democracy changed over time. That is, democracy was undoubtedly the aim pursued by the protesters in the 2019 revolution. Yet, the transitional phase that started after the end of al-Bashir's presidency was an opportunity for civilians to rethink that goal and to discuss the meaning of democracy and the appropriateness of this form of government to the Sudanese context. In the 2018–2019 protest campaign, the movements and activists involved were described as prodemocracy movements, since democracy was their primary goal. Once al-Bashir was toppled, the situation in the country changed. As previously explained, the army grabbed power until an agreement was signed with civilians to lead the country towards new elections. The transitional government was formed based on a precarious coalition that lasted until October 25, 2021 when, once again through a coup d'état, the military led by General al-Burhan seized power, removing Prime Minister Abdallah Hamdok and thus dissolving the Sovereign Council (Al Jazeera, 2021). After April 2019, given the dominant role of the military, protesters started calling more specifically for civilian rule; that is, they aimed to establish a civilian government. Civilian rule, according to interviewee B, does not correspond exactly to democracy. The ideas expressed by these two activist interviewees indicate that among the protesters and activists, a univocal idea of democracy has not been defined. Rather, Sudanese people have developed different perspectives on democracy, given the complex dynamics and events that have occurred in the country.

Interviewee A argued that democracy is what Sudanese protesters are attempting to re-establish in Sudan. Interviewee B introduced a critical perspective with regard to the political systems that Sudanese people aim to establish. He argued that democracy is a Western ideology that cannot be imposed on Sudan because of ethnic, social, cultural, and religious conditions that are different from most Western countries. In his view, Sudan and most African countries are not ready for democracy, and he ascribed the ups

and downs in the post-Bashir transitional phase to the difficulties of defining a political regime that is apt for the country. From his perspective, before defining a suitable form of government, it is necessary for Sudan to find its own political identity. This political identity would be the result of research and analysis of the complex Sudanese framework, which has a distinctive and problematic feature – namely its diversity. Diversity in Sudan is connected to the cohabitation of different tribes, ethnicities, and languages. Finding a suitable political structure that includes these different subjectivities remains a challenge for Sudan. However, interviewee B did not deny that this political identity could eventually incorporate democratic values.

Furthermore, the perspective on democracy and its meaning has changed over the last years in Sudan, which has arisen from a different perspective on Sudanese citizens' priorities. According to interviewee B, Sudanese must now think about their basic living necessities. The country's economic stability is prioritised in issues related to the appropriate type of political system. In analysing this reflection of interviewee B, it is notable that for him the political system of his country is no longer the primary issue that he aims to address when engaging in protest today. From a philosophical point of view, it should be noted that the issue of the political structure of a country is not completely detached from the economic and social conditions of the people living there. A possible explanation of the different priorities attributed to economic and political issues could be that politics in a country such as Sudan over the years has proved to be detached from the everyday and basic necessities of its citizens. Therefore, citizens have not counted primarily on their government and politicians to address their needs. This may have led to such a large distance between politics and Sudanese people's problems that they eventually considered economic and social issues to be separated from the definition and shaping of their country's system of government.

Interviewee B, who clarified that in 2019 he was a prodemocracy activist, underlined that in 2022, protesters in the streets are still highly lenient towards democracy, which remains the horizon of the political values that they pursue. However, he highlighted that the term that more accurately describes the Sudanese people's stance today is 'civilianship' (Appendix), which refers to the rule of civilians. This specific stance introduces an additional category to the reflection on the type of regime that should be established in Sudan through the practice of civil disobedience.

In Chapter 3 of the thesis, I discuss all of these findings as well as attempt to frame this philosophical analysis in a broader reappraisal and consequent 'desuperiorisation' of Western conceptualisations of civil disobedience and democracy.

Before turning to the ultimate argument that the present study aims to defend, the next subsection briefly describes what it meant for Sudanese people to engage in civil disobedience after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. The practice of this form of protest in Sudan during this challenging period provides further evidence of the relevance of this African case; however, it also demonstrates that Sudanese activists continue to engage in civil disobedience to pursue a profound change in their country.

3.2 Disobedience despite everything: Protesting in times of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic started in 2020 and had a direct impact on the practice of mass forms of protest. All over the globe, various countries adopted drastic measures to contain the spread of the virus, such as social distancing, lockdowns, and curfews. Common forms of protest, such as collective civil disobedience, were generally outlawed because gatherings of any kind were forbidden for public health reasons.

After the outbreak of the pandemic on the African continent, protests increased rather than stopping (Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, n.d.). African people took to the streets to oppose the severe restrictions adopted by their governments. In almost all African countries, COVID-19 containment measures weighed on the lives of many people, whose livelihood depends on day-to-day jobs. This wave of peaceful protests against the restrictions was harshly stifled, particularly in authoritarian regimes, which used the pandemic to justify the use of force (Gargard, 2020). These challenging conditions for protesters throughout the continent eventually reignited anger about pre-existing injustices, grievances, and frustrations, thus revitalising people's demands for more radical governance reforms. For example, hundreds of people took to the streets in Mogadishu, Somalia in April 2020 to protest the abuse of government security forces, demanding justice as well as opposing the doubling of food prices during the holy month of Ramadan. In the enforcement of restrictions to contain the spread of the virus, two civilians were killed (Africanews, 2020b). Similarly, violent protests and clashes with security forces occurred in Touba and other Senegalese cities in June 2020 in opposition

to a dusk-to-dawn curfew and to call for an easing of the restrictions. In Senegal, what began as an opposition to COVID-19 restrictions spiralled into a broader protest campaign that questioned the country's government. Numerous Senegalese citizens engaged in civil disobedience to overtly protest against the growing side-lining of political opponents, the measures that President Macky Sall implemented to tackle the pandemic, and the potential extension of his mandate to a third term (Africanews, 2020a).

Interestingly, in Africa during COVID-19, the forms of protest mostly remained the same, and in most cases they did not transform into tactics of digital activism or virtual mobilisation **(**Uldam & Askanius, 2020). Throughout the African continent, people organised 'traditional' offline protest actions that questioned not only the lockdowns, which made it impossible for many people to earn a living, but also their countries' governments.

Sudan is also an emblematic instance in this recent African pattern of protests. Despite the lockdown, Sudanese people continued to engage in acts of civil disobedience seeking political change in their country. In July 2020, Sudanese protesters gathered in the streets of Khartoum, the nearby city of Omdurman, and other Sudanese regions to peacefully demonstrate, calling for more decisive and faster reforms, in addition to greater civilian participation in the governing body leading the transitional phase. Civilians went out again to strive for the democratisation of their country despite the lockdown. They conducted nonviolent civil disobedience by collectively and publicly violating the measures imposed to curb the spread of the virus and by blockading streets, all under the slogan of 'freedom, peace and justice' (Al Jazeera, 2020).

Noteworthily, during the pandemic in Sudan, activists and citizens did not interrupt their protest agenda and continued to commit to nonviolent actions, despite the spread of the virus and attempts by police to disperse demonstrators with tear gas. Interviewee B (Appendix) explained that some activists feared the virus, especially in the first months after the outbreak, and protests did stop for nearly two months. Then, Sudanese protesters realised that their economic, social, and political problems were more serious than COVID-19. Interviewee B explained that after a few months, Sudanese people agreed that COVID-19 could not prevent them from going out to protest. They had been through many other diseases before, and even worse.

This additional focus on what happened to the practice of protest during the COVID-19 pandemic in Sudan reveals that the country's path to democratisation is still an ongoing process. In such a challenging situation for the entire world caused by the spread of a virus, Sudanese protesters continued to resort to and rely on civil disobedience as a nonviolent tool for bringing about a positive and sustained change in their country. This brief investigation has demonstrated how activists on the African continent continued to engage in practices of civil disobedience to express their dissent and to challenge not only COVID-19 restrictions but also their countries' political regimes. This provides further evidence of the radical and transformative role that African activists attribute to this form of protest, as they continued to practice it even in the face of a high risk to their health.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have offered an explanation of the restriction of civil disobedience's role to democratic contexts in mainstream philosophical inquiries. Theorists have adopted a hegemonic Western perspective that has determined a binary vision of the political landscape, according to which regimes are either democratic or nondemocratic. Reality, though, is more complex than this simplistic classification. Besides democracies and autocracies there are also anocratic regimes, which are characterised by a combination of democratic and autocratic traits and practices. I argued that the conceptual category of anocracy, defined by the *Polity5 Project* of the Center for Systemic Peace, is a descriptive tool appropriate for framing the forms of government of various African countries and specifically that of Sudan.

In addition, I demonstrated that Sudan is a meaningful and relevant case for a philosophical reflection on civil disobedience in anocratic contexts because Sudanese activists, prior to the 2019 revolution, had successfully overthrown military regimes in the 1964 October Revolution and the 1985 Intifada by engaging in nonviolent acts of civil disobedience.

To understand why protesters in Sudan in 2019 chose a nonviolent form of dissent once again, namely civil disobedience, to pursue a radical change in the political system of their country, I asked two Sudanese activists who participated in the 2018–2019 mass mobilisation about the meaning and role of civil disobedience to them. Through our

conversations, it emerged that civil disobedience and revolution are not two separate concepts for Sudanese protesters, since civil disobedience is a nonviolent means to create a revolution. That is, a revolution for bringing about a sustained change can only be pursued through nonviolent means, of which civil disobedience is one. By analysing the reflections of these Sudanese activists, I highlighted that in an anocratic regime, civil disobedience has a more ambitious aim, namely to change the country's political system.

The discussion of the protesters' perspectives regarding the aim of taking to the streets and peacefully disobeying allowed me to highlight that among the activists, no univocal and definitive idea of democracy exists. Sudanese activists initially engaged in civil disobedience with the manifest aim of overthrowing al-Bashir's regime and restoring democracy, which remain the goals for one of the activist interviewees. Yet, the dominant role of the military in the post-Bashir transitional period had an impact on the ultimate goal of the protesters, which became to establish civilian rule. As this ultimate goal has not yet been achieved, Sudanese citizens continue to take to the streets and engage in acts of civil disobedience.

Their perseverance in the practice of civil disobedience for reaching this objective was further evidenced by their commitment to this form of protest in times of COVID-19. In the last section of the chapter, I focused on the practice of this form of protest after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic. In 2020, a wave of protests crossed the African continent. In various African countries, citizens not only opposed the draconian measures undertaken by their governments to contain the spread of the virus but also more radically challenged their countries' regimes. In this new pattern of protests, Sudan proved to be once again an emblematic case, since Sudanese people – far from interrupting their protest agenda – continued to engage in traditional forms of protest (even though gatherings of people were not allowed) by taking to the street to oppose the restrictions for containing the virus. Above all, they questioned the dominant role of the military in the transitional government and to demand greater civilian participation. With this overview of the practice of civil disobedience in times of COVID-19, I attempted to demonstrate that, even in challenging conditions, civil disobedience in anocratic regimes is the nonviolent instrument that activists rely on to radically change the political system of their country.

In the next chapter, I first reflect on the findings about civil disobedience that emerged through the conversations with the Sudanese activists, thus outlining a conceptualisation

of the meaning and role of this form of protest in anocratic regimes. Then, I present the ultimate argument of this research work, which is as follows: Sudanese activists, while practicing civil disobedience and discussing the strategies, tactics, and aims of this form of protest, are not only democratising their country from below but also doing social and political philosophy.

Chapter 3

(Re-)democratising anocracies with civil disobedience

'Civilian struggles are the bravest, long-enduring, most promising, and fulfilling actions of popular movement. The demonstrators are probably the most powerful professors that teach arrogant rulers the harshest lesson, how to kneel solemnly before the royal highness of the rebellious dahmaa (beleaguered mob)'.
El-Tigani, 2003

Introduction

The research question that guided this work is as follows: What is the meaning and role of civil disobedience in anocratic regimes? Having defined what an anocracy is and having analysed why and with what aim activists in an anocratic regime like Sudan engage specifically in this form of protest, this final chapter provides conclusions on the basis of the research findings gathered thus far through the interviews with Sudanese activists.

The chapter is divided into three sections. Section 1 first discusses the reflections offered by the Sudanese activists and attempts to outline a theory of civil disobedience in anocratic regimes as a (re-)democratising practice. Second, it reflects on the final goal of civil disobedience in anocratic Sudan, which is not merely a democracy as conceptualised in the Western representative paradigm.

Section 2 focuses on Khartoum's 'street of potential', namely the site of the aforementioned sit-in at the army headquarters. During the 2019 Sudanese revolution, this place not only represented a gathering point and an organisational hub but also summarised the philosophical work behind the Sudanese activists' acts of protests. In the sit-in, protesters and citizens discussed their ideas of civil disobedience, of nonviolent discipline, and of Sudan's future political system. They were essentially engaged in the work of political theorising. What emerged through the street of potential is a Sudanese idea of civil disobedience in anocratic contexts. This idea is discussed as a theoretical instrument for desuperiorising Western knowledge on civil disobedience, according to

which it is a form of protest only appropriate to democracy aimed at local changes in law or policy.

Sudanese activists are actively engaged in the exercise of protest but also – and above all – in a theoretical work about the strategies, nonviolent methods, and type of society they are attempting to establish by seeking radical change. Section 3 explains that Sudanese activists – while taking to the streets, disobeying, gathering in sit-ins, and thus seeking to re-establish a democratic system in their country from below – are doing philosophy. The model of civil disobedience that emerges from Sudan is a conceptualisation that, on the one hand, allows a desuperiorisation of Western knowledge in the matter of civil disobedience and, on the other hand, discloses an approach for advancing contemporary African social and political philosophy. The last section provides a definition of contemporary African social and political philosophy and explains that Sudanese activists, and African people more generally, drive this philosophy, which deals with African people's daily challenges (e.g., poverty, diseases, inequality, and modes of governance) and the ways in which they tackle said challenges. This chapter ultimately aims to demonstrate that the study of Sudanese civil disobedience is a philosophical instrument that can meaningfully inform the Western debate, and furthermore, it can also outline a possible path for further developing research in contemporary African social and political philosophy.

1. An African theory of civil disobedience

In this section, I attempt to outline a Sudanese model of civil disobedience. I then reflect on the possibility of more generally defining a concept of civil disobedience as a (re-)democratising practice in anocratic contexts. Following the ideas expressed by the Sudanese activists interviewed, civil disobedience is a collective, nonviolent form of protest undertaken to oppose an unjust political regime and whose aim is to bring about a radical change in the system of government. There is one significant element in this idea – namely the revolutionary goal. Civil disobedience is a necessary means for creating a revolution. In addition, civil disobedience in anocratic contexts is a practice pursued to restore a democratic order altered by an autocratic authority.

According to the Sudanese activists' conceptualisation, civil disobedience must first of all be nonviolent. Violence must be avoided in the practice of this form of protest. For Sudanese protesters, even when faced with live ammunition and tear gas, the use of force or violence against policemen or security forces is not an option. Sudanese activists only justified the destruction of property as a way to manifest dissent, as long as it does not harm anyone. To them, nonviolence is a necessary requirement in the exercise of civil disobedience. In the 2019 mass mobilisation, nonviolence was the only weapon that the people had (Zunes, 2021). As underlined in the previous chapter, such a strong commitment to nonviolence in the 2019 protests derived mostly from the successful use of nonviolent tactics in past revolutions,[33] even in the challenging conditions of the Darfur region. The importance of steadfastly adhering to a nonviolent discipline was proved by the fact that during the protest actions, leading activists carefully monitored that no one was engaging in violent activities. Around the main sit-in located in front of the army headquarters, checkpoints were even set up and aspiring protesters were frisked to make sure that nobody had brought weapons or potentially dangerous objects. Furthermore, there was a risk of infiltrators or agent provocateurs being among the protesters; therefore, some demonstrators were also asked to present someone vouching for them as supporters seriously committed to the protest movement (Zunes, 2021).

Nonviolence is the main characteristic of Sudanese civil disobedience. According to Zunes (2021), nonviolence was primarily a strategic instrument, since maintaining nonviolent conduct meant preventing the ruling regime from depicting protesters negatively as well as enabled a larger participation of people, who would be more likely to join a peaceful mobilisation than a violent one. In short, there was not a moral commitment to nonviolence per se; rather, it was a tactical decision for ensuring the desired outcome. In fact, moral reasons should not be completely dismissed, as they are among the reasons that motivated the commitment to a nonviolent discipline. Interviewee B (Appendix) underlined that it would have been easy for Sudanese protesters to obtain weapons and use them against soldiers or security forces, but everyone deliberately refused to use violence; here, he was likely also referring to protesters' moral reasons.

[33] Stephen Zunes (2021), starting from the interviews he conducted in Sudan, reports that the writings of Gene Sharp, as well as materials about the strategic value of nonviolent action, were circulating among the protesters; moreover, some activists had the opportunity to participate in workshops on nonviolent methods in the United States, Europe, and India. This has not been confirmed by the activists I interviewed, who instead explained the importance of their history of peaceful revolutions as a theoretical, practical, and strategic reservoir for the mobilisation of 2018–2019.

These reasons are connected to moral values that the protesters would want to see realised in the alternative society they were attempting to establish. Both interviewees observed that they had experienced and understood what it means to live in a regime that uses violence and violates basic human rights and moral principles. Thus, adhering to nonviolence meant adopting a morally different conduct from that of the ruling regime.

Another element that describes the idea of civil disobedience that Sudanese activists outlined is the collective feature of this form of protest, which was not accidental in the protests in Sudan or of secondary importance. The activist interviewees referred to civil disobedience as collective action, and the success of their civil resistance was connected above all to a collective engagement in the protests and a collective commitment to nonviolence. Civil disobedience, from the perspective of Sudanese activists, is not an action that an individual should undertake to pursue change. Rather, it is an action whose success depends on the large-scale participation of dissenters. The scale of the protests mobilised in Sudan was a crucial factor for the success of the revolution. As also underlined by the activist interviewees, the large participation in the protests was decisive, not only in the capital Khartoum but also across the entire country. Considering that al-Bashir's regime repeatedly attempted to 'divide Sudanese by North and South, Arab and non-Arab, Muslim and non-Muslim' (Zunes, 2021, p. 16), this collective participation in the name of national unity was fundamental in such circumstances. The importance of collective participation in the protests was also demonstrated by the role of the local resistance committees, namely the grassroots sites of coordination for the protests in various neighbourhoods and villages. The network created through the efforts of these committees was critical to the outcome of the acts of civil disobedience. In each committee, members were assigned various tasks, such as preparing masks to protect demonstrators from tear gases, reporting and recording protests, and caring for injured protesters (Zunes, 2021). In short, Sudanese civil disobedience, and more broadly civil disobedience in an anocratic regime, is a form of protest that relies on collective participation. Such participation organised around local committees also had a strategic role in the Sudanese protest campaign. There was no single leadership but rather a network of activists, which allowed for the decentralisation of the protest movement. Consequently, this decentralisation and the lack of a single leader made it difficult for the

regime to arrest the heads of the protests and obstruct the actions. Such an organisational structure was crucial because,

'if one neighborhood was experiencing a crackdown from police and other security forces, committees in nearby neighborhoods would immediately mobilize protests to help take the pressure off. This large-scale decentralized network of activists who could organize a protest within minutes helped create a situation where security forces were over-extended and exhausted from having to constantly move from place to place to suppress actions' (Zunes, 2021, pp. 18–19).

This strategically decentralised structure of the protest movement explains why Sudan represents a model of civil disobedience that can inform the philosophical debate as well as activists in general. This country constitutes a model of civil disobedience in anocratic contexts, which are contexts where activists must often face violent repression by the ruling regime. It provides tactics designed to exercise this form of dissent in peculiar regimes, such as anocracies. Therefore, the analysis of the practice of civil disobedience in Sudan allows an African model of civil disobedience to be outlined and also, more generally, a paradigm for the organisation of civil disobedience in anocratic contexts outside of the African continent.

Through analysing what it meant for Sudanese people to practically engage in civil disobedience, it is possible to identify different forms of actions. Some of these tactics share similarities with the actions undertaken by the well-known exponents of disobedience discussed in the first chapter, namely Gandhi as well as King and the US Civil Rights Movement. Other actions are specific to the Sudanese anocratic context. Sudanese protesters, as historically prominent dissenters, engaged in peaceful demonstrations, sit-ins in forbidden areas, and nationwide strikes, which were organised first in precise sectors and then extended on a national level. They also repeatedly demonstrated their willingness to be arrested, and one of the tactics adopted aimed at filling jails; that is, activists voluntarily demanded to be incarcerated to join their fellow arrested protesters. A peculiarity of Sudanese acts of civil disobedience, which is related to the specificity of the anocratic context, was the involvement of soldiers, who were also civil disobedients. Activists sought solidarity with members of military units not

entrenched with the regime. Those soldiers who refused to violently suppress protests and shoot peaceful protesters engaged in acts of non-cooperation or defected. In particular, during the large sit-in in front of the army headquarters, soldiers protected demonstrators from armed attacks and communicated their support to the protesters gathered there (Zunes, 2021). The participation of soldiers in the acts of disobedience in 2019, as in past Sudanese revolutions, was a critical factor in achieving the overthrow of al-Bashir.

From the analysis of Sudan's case, it is possible to highlight some critical aspects about the practice of civil disobedience in anocratic regimes.

1.1 Designating the potential of civil disobedience in anocracies

Two elements particularly characterise the Sudanese idea of civil disobedience. The first is the fact that civil disobedience is considered a necessary means for achieving a revolution. The second element is the role that it plays in hybrid political contexts, such as anocracies, which is more specifically a role of (re-)democratisation. When I investigated the meaning that Sudanese activists attribute to civil disobedience, I found that the radical potential of this form of protest was already announced in the aim they declared in the 2012 protests and the 2018–2019 demonstrations. Sudanese activists explicitly engaged in civil disobedience to topple the ruling regime of al-Bashir. They did not resort to this form of protest to oppose a single law or policy and demand change. In 2019, Sudanese activists took to the streets to manifest their dissent towards an unjust regime, which was a peculiar unjust system, since it was not a fully institutionalised autocracy, but rather an anocracy. Thus, Sudanese protesters were opposing an authority (President al-Bashir) that came to power illegitimately – through a coup – within an overall legitimate democratic system. This illegitimate authority had progressively distorted the democratic edifice of the country since 1989. Thus, Sudanese were calling for a radical change aimed at restoring a civilian government, which in 1989 was overthrown by the military led by Colonel al-Bashir. In the 2018–2019 campaign of civil disobedience, the protesters were demanding a change in the presidency of the country as well as a change in the political system, which was no longer fully democratic and dominated by the military. Therefore, civil disobedience in an anocracy is a form of protest which activists resort to, aiming not only at small changes in a law or policy

without calling into question the overall political system. In anocratic contexts, civil disobedience points to a greater aim, questioning the government or the entire political system. A first lesson that can be learned from Sudan is that civil disobedience proved to be effective in the pursuit of this radical goal, without descending into a violent revolution.

This distinctive feature that describes the transformative potential of civil disobedience determines another conceptual facet. For Sudanese activists, the idea of civil disobedience is not completely separated by the concept of revolution. In the first chapter, I underlined that seeing civil disobedience from the standpoint of a white state for liberal theorists has meant domesticating its transformative potential as well as drawing sharp distinctions, especially between civil disobedience and revolution. By examining the protest vocabulary of Sudanese activists, it is possible to observe that such a common liberal distinction blurs in anocratic contexts, such that civil disobedience is a nonviolent means of achieving a revolution. If citizens intend to revolutionise the political system of their country, according to the ideas of Sudanese activists, they should only use nonviolent means, of which civil disobedience is an appropriate one. Two conclusions can be drawn from this reflection on the connection between civil disobedience and revolution in the Sudanese perspective: (i) civil disobedience can also play a role in less democratic contexts, and specifically a transformative role; and (ii) achieving a revolution does not necessarily require violence.

The other aspect worth discussing in the reflections of the Sudanese activist interviewees is that civil disobedience can not only play a radical role because it enables a revolution – it can also contribute to a more sustained change through being a nonviolent form of action. The great radical and transformative potential of civil disobedience lies not only in its nonviolent conduct but also in the perseverance of its exercise. For Sudanese activists, civil disobedience is a daily practice that involves not only demonstrations and sit-ins but also theoretical work and a deeper reflection on the following: adhering to a nonviolent discipline, citizens' rights, economic issues, and the political system that should be built for a just and inclusive society. An emblematic example of this intellectual and practical work is found in the activities of the Girifna movement, as explained in the previous chapter. It is the daily work flanking the acts of

civil disobedience that ultimately contributes to a sustained change to the political system and society.[34]

The other interesting element in the model of civil disobedience that emerges from the Sudanese practice is that, besides having a radical potential to change a political system, civil disobedience is a practice of re-democratisation. The fact that it is not merely a democratising practice but also an instrument for re-democratising a political system is related to the particular context of anocracies. In Chapter 1, I discussed the theory of civil disobedience as a democratising practice formulated by Celikates (2021). From the perspective of his radical democratic theory, civil disobedience is first of all considered within a democratic context, and second, democracy is conceived as a political process. Therefore, civil disobedience is a form of action through which citizens (in a broader conception of the term) contribute to that political process and address democratic deficits. In the Sudanese case, civil disobedience is a re-democratising practice because it is performed within a non–fully democratic context. Thus, Sudanese activists' goal through civil disobedience is not to bring about a change in an already democratic process, thus remedying its deficits, but rather to systemically restore democracy. Sudanese civil disobedience is likewise radical, compared with Celikates' idea, but in the sense that it aims to bring about a more profound change within the political system, restoring a democratic order that has been compromised by authoritarian practices. In other words, civil disobedience in Sudan is a transformative action aimed at changing the country's political system.

By generalising the discussion surrounding the case of Sudan, it follows that civil disobedience in anocratic regimes can be a (re-)democratising practice. As I clarified in Chapter 2, a country can transition to an anocratic political form after having established a democratic system of government (as it is the case for Sudan). In such a case, civil disobedience can play a *re-democratising* role, namely it can contribute to restore the democratic order which has been previously altered by illegitimate seizures of power and the integration of autocratic principles and practices. It could also be the case of a country

[34] The Sudanese idea of civil disobedience as a daily practice that must be persevered with to pursue change resonates with the Spanish motto of the so-called 15M movement, which Pablo Ouziel (2015) investigated, namely 'Vamos lentos porque vamos lejos', which means 'We go ever so slowly because we are going on forever' (Ouziel, 2015, p. 1). This slogan summarises the idea of being the change by engaging in small steps, which can determine a radical change, instead of opting for faster actions that could eventually reproduce the unjust structures and power relations that the civil disobedience is attempting to dismantle.

that is anocratic from the outset or that has never established democratic forms of government before. In this last scenario, civil disobedience can play a *democratising* role, that is, it can contribute to establish democracy for the first time. In anocracies civil disobedience can play a more restoring or a more transformative role, and can be either a democratising or a re-democratising practice. A theory of civil disobedience in anocracies must include both these possibilities.[35] Therefore, I define civil disobedience in anocracies as a (re-)democratising practice.

Defining civil disobedience as a (re-)democratising practice opens a further reflection about the ultimate goal pursued by activists when engaging in this form of protest in an anocratic context. That is, the issue arises of democracy as the political system that activists aim to establish through resorting to this transformative action. In the following subsection, I attempt to provide an answer to the following question: Which kind of democracy is required for Sudan and, more broadly, for Africa? To address this question, I draw on the perspective expressed by one of the Sudanese activists I interviewed, namely the concept of democracy as civilian rule.

1.2 'Civilianship': How to define democracy in Sudan

In an anocratic context such as Sudan, civil disobedience is a democratising practice because it is a form of action aimed at restoring a democratic order that has been compromised by an autocratic authority. The ultimate goal of civil disobedience in such a context is thus democracy. In the Sudanese case, as particularly underlined by interviewee B (Appendix), democracy is not intended as the Western model of representative democracy; rather, for this Sudanese activist, democracy means above all civilian rule. In this subsection, before reflecting on the idea of a democratic order as the rule of civilians and its significant meaning in an African context such as Sudan, I first provide an overview of democracy in Africa. Then, I explain that the ideal of democracy as the rule of civilians is a form of government grounded on the democratic values of justice, freedom, and human rights. However, it is a government simultaneously tailored

[35] The two potentials of civil disobedience identified here – namely the restoring and transformative one – are not mutually exclusive. Notably, civil disobedience that is engaged by protest movements which aim to restore a democratic order which was previously established can also have transformative elements since, for example, the pre-existing order may not fit, exactly as it was, the new post-revolutionary organisation of the country in question.

to the specificity of African anocratic contexts, where the ultimate goal of establishing stable, united, and peaceful political orders involves finding a balance between the democratic aspirations of civilians and the authoritarian posture of the often-dominant military forces.

To discuss the topic of democracy in Africa, it is necessary to examine African democratic experiences, which refer to the form that democracy has assumed on the continent. Albert Kasanda (2018) offers a historical and conceptual reconstruction of the path of democracy in Africa. His contribution represents an interesting starting point for reflecting on the following question: What does democracy mean in a country such as Sudan and, more generally, in Africa? Kasanda (2018) essentially identifies the following three main trajectories in the history of democracy in Africa: (i) the post-independence season, with the inauguration of a democratic form of governance characterised by a strong anticolonial nationalistic imprint; (ii) the transition from Western representative democracy to forms of governance such as single-party rule, diarchism, and a no-polity system; and (iii) the phase of (re)discovering multiparty systems of government.

Representative democracy was the form of governance adopted in the aftermath of African countries' independence, and this political system inaugurated the constitution of modern states institutions and parliaments as well as the organisation of elections. This form of government was set up still under the influence of the colonisers. Thus, it was derived from the Western paradigm of liberal democracy, which was considered appropriate for the contexts of African states, despite their cultural, social, and ethnic specificities. The major problem with this first experience of democracy – most African leaders embraced the representative model – was that political power was transferred to African national elites, yet the economic power remained under the colonisers' control. Moreover, the national bourgeoisie who came to power in the post-independence period later proved to be corrupted and incapable of sustaining a real development in their countries (Fanon, 1963; Kasanda, 2018). This only partial independence from the West currently persists in neocolonial power relations between Western and African countries.

The model of representative democracy was progressively substituted by other forms of government. A first alternative was the one-party system. Many African leaders responded to the crisis of representative democracy in African states by defending this different system of government. Pluralism was no longer considered a guarantee for

democracy, but rather a reason for stasis and divisions. Such leaders thought that their countries should be ruled by a single party to meet the peoples' aspirations, reach political stability, and consolidate national unity. It is interesting to observe that the failure of the first experience of democracy led to the adoption of the opposite mode of political organisation – that is, to the concentration of legislative, executive, and judicial power in the hands of one leader. The risks inherent to a single-part system, as adopted by many African leaders (e.g., Kwame Nkrumah, Ahmed Ben Bella, Julius Nyerere, Mobutu Sese Seko, Ahmed Sekou Touré, and Jomo Kenyatta to name just a few), were absolutism and a sort of deification of these founding fathers, who were thought to be invested by God in their exercise of power.[36]

The second alternative to representative democracy was diarchic rule. As suggested by the Graeco-Latin etymology of the term (the Latin word *duo* means 'two' and the Greek word *arkhein* means 'to rule'), it refers to a system of government where two actors concurrently exert the state's power. This political system could constitute a way to strike a compromise between different actors contending power. Apparently, it represents an instrument for avoiding violent seizures of power and making power-sharing deals between two contenders. In fact, it means putting together those who defend the political status quo with those who seek change in the system. This alternative type of governance seemingly constitutes an apt mode of political organisation for pursuing stability; yet, as Kasanda (2018) correctly observes, it does not prevent military coups, one of the major causes of instability across the entire African continent. The military could stage a coup d'état even when they are part of the ruling government.

The last alternative, the no-party political system, entails a sort of return to the precolonial past and hinges on the idea of consensus. The no-party political system is considered a more suitable solution for African political contexts than the multiparty system, since the former is not based on competition or antagonism, as in majoritarian democracy; rather, it is based on the inclusion of the minority and on consensus. The most illustrious advocate of this system of government was Kwasi Wiredu. In his contribution titled *Democracy and Consensus in African Traditional Politics: A Plea for a Non-Party Polity* (1997), he distinguished Western majoritarian democracies from democracies

[36] A significant example of the degeneration of this individual leadership was the case, described by Kasanda (2018), for Kamuzu Banda, former president of Malawi, who forced people to participate in the ruling party's rallies and to worship him almost like a god.

based on consensus and offered an investigation of the traditional *Ashanti* political system. The Ashanti system was not structured on parties as they are intended in the Western world, but rather on lineages and youth groups. This type of political system included everyone in the exercise of power. The major problem with this system, as Kasanda (2018) observes, lies in the concept of lineage (referring to the people in a village or town sharing a common ancestor [Wiredu, 1997]), which is anachronistic in a globalised world; in addition, it cannot be combined with the democratic principles of equality among individuals regardless of their social status, origin, and religion.

Thus, the aforementioned three systems of government were proposed as alternatives to a democratic system based on multipartyism, which was considered the primary cause of divides and instability in African countries. Starting from the 1980s and 90s, these alternatives to representative democracy, particularly one-party rule, were debated since they eventually proved inept for overcoming ethnic antagonisms and guaranteeing sustained development, unity, and stability. Then, a new interest emerged in liberal democracy, opening the third phase outlined by Kasanda (2018), namely a (re)discovery of the multiparty political system. The reappraisal of a democratic system based on multipartyism has opened a debate about how democracy could have been re-established after the experience following African countries' independences. Two tendencies emerged in discussions around this issue: a universalistic interpretation of democracy and a particularistic vision of democracy. Referring to these two trends, which Kasanda (2018) discusses, is useful for framing and better understanding the reflection elaborated by interviewee B about democracy and the political order that Sudanese activists seek to pursue in their country. According to the universalistic interpretation of democracy, this form of government refers to the Western democratic model and is grounded on the premise that democracy is an apt political system for every context. Therefore, possible dysfunctions are not inherent to democratic institutions; rather, they depend on the people governing within such a system or on local traditions and cultures. By contrast, the particularistic interpretation of democracy considers the Western paradigm of democracy inappropriate for African contexts. This second vision claims emancipation from the Western model of democracy, which is not considered appropriate and applicable to every country, culture, and people. In particular, to be emancipated from the Western paradigm, African people should draw on African precolonial modes of political organisation

(Gyekye, 1997; Ramose, 1999; Wamba-dia-Wamba, 1992). This is an interesting response to the hegemonic Western paradigm of democracy, since it considers local specificities of African countries by turning to traditional precolonial political systems as the premise for rethinking democracy. Yet, as Kasanda (2018) observes, this particularistic alternative presents the same disputed aspects of the universalistic approach that it criticises. More specifically, the first debatable aspect relates to diversity among African countries. The rediscovered traditional modes of governance, according to the particularistic stance, could be extended to the entire African continent. However, this could be problematic since a mode of politics structured in a specific country does not necessarily fit a different country with other social, cultural, and ethnic specificities. The second potentially problematic aspect of the particularistic position concerns the risk of anachronism. Focusing on the countries' precolonial legacy to find solutions to the contemporary political development of African states should not mean overlooking the changes that are occurring in Africa and to African people in the era of globalisation. This particularistic approach to defending the specificity of African countries and their past political culture ultimately seems blind to the deep changes occurring on the African continent today.

Besides the three phases in the history of democracy in Africa, it is necessary to consider another trajectory that has characterised this history over the last decades, namely anocracies. The reflection presented thus far has focused on different models of democracy and their appropriateness to the peculiar cultural, social, and political contexts of African countries. The discussion of democracy in Africa today should consider this further trajectory, which, as explained in the previous chapter, is a path that many African countries have followed. In contrast to a representative democracy, single-party rule, and diarchism, an anocracy is not a paradigm or an ideal system of government to pursue, but rather a departure from the democratic political system. Yet, for a contemporary discussion about the model of democracy which could be appropriate to African countries, it is necessary to reflect on the anocratic trajectory that most African countries are following, included Sudan. In other words, to answer the question about the appropriateness of a democratic multiparty system in Africa today, one should first consider that throughout the continent, democracy is increasingly combined with authoritarian practices. Various countries, such as Sudan, are stuck in a 'grey area', to

borrow a term used by interviewee B (Appendix), which means that they are stuck in a transitional phase, searching for a balance between civilians' move towards democracy and the military's drive towards autocratic rule. Therefore, a synthesis should be pursued between the universalistic interpretation of democracy and the particularistic one. To explain why a suitable answer should be found in the synthesis of these two visions, I now return to the reflection of one of the interviewed Sudanese activists.

Interviewee B (Appendix) argued that democracy is a term that comes from the West and refers to a Western form of government; therefore, Sudanese have to find their own term and political system that could be appropriate to their country; in his view, the political term that explains the apt political system should come from the agents of the protests and the people interested in the country's political organisation. It should be a term that comes from Sudanese people, or from African people more generally. For this reason, it is necessary to examine the terminology that Sudanese activists employ to describe the political system they would like to see realised in their country. In terms of finding a term that best describes Sudanese activists' stance towards the political system they wish to establish in Sudan, interviewee B clarified that the system they are pursuing refers to a democratic horizon and democratic values, but their stance can be more precisely defined by the term 'civilian'. As clarified in the previous chapter, protesters in Sudan have called for civilian rule to replace military rule. The ultimate aim of protesters is to establish civilian rule. It is worth focusing on the choice of the term 'civilian', which is particularly significant in anocratic contexts. Anocracies in Africa are a form of government that characterises countries where the balance between civilian forces and the military is precarious. In such countries, military leaders often seize power through coups d'état and integrate autocratic practices into democratic political systems. What has been observed in this analysis is that the aim of political protests in such countries is to restore the democratic order that was in place before a coup. Yet, the goal is not exactly the Western liberal paradigm of democracy, but rather the rule of civilians. The alternative political system to an anocracy can be summarised using the term 'civilianship', which means an order with a civilian government, where the legislative, judicial, and executive power is in the hands of civilians and no longer in those of the military. Sudanese activists, through civil disobedience, have asked – and are still asking, especially since April 2019

– for re-establishing a democratic order in the country, which also encompasses a 'de-militarisation' of the government.

Therefore, the Sudanese idea of the political system to be established in their country is a synthesis of a universalistic and particularistic vision of democracy. Interviewee B underlined that Sudanese citizens refer to democracy and promote democratic values; that is, they have a universalistic vision of democracy. However, interviewee B also pointed to the fact that discussing the most apt political system for Sudan, and also for other African countries, means considering the specificities of the context. The universalistic interpretation of democracy provides a general framework for defining the pursued form of government, while the particularistic approach allows one to identify the actual expectations of Sudanese citizens – namely to establish the rule of civilians, moving beyond the dominance of the military.

What I have defined here as 'civilianship' represents an African idea of government for starting to discuss what democracy means today in Africa as well as which path anocratic countries should follow to pursue just and peaceful political orders. Analysing how Sudanese activists reflect on the aim of their protests and the political structure they seek to establish in their country is emblematic of their engagement – not only in the practical work of protest but also in the theoretical work that backs the protest actions. In the next section, I argue that Sudanese activists, while expressing and discussing the aim of their protests and their idea of democracy, are enacting philosophy.

2. The street of potential: A cultural and philosophical resistance

'[On the road of inspiration] you would run into phenomenal human beings: the knowledge they have, the ways, the coping mechanisms, the sense of unity, the sense of respect. It's probably one of the best experiences I've had as a Sudanese, to just walk into Al-Qiyada and see what is the potential of Sudan, because that road was a road of potential. It was what Sudan can be' (Appendix).

With these words, interviewee B described the meaning of the sit-in in front of the army headquarters, which was the symbol of the 2019 revolution; however, it also summarised the sense of civil disobedience in Sudan. In this section, I reflect on the

conceptual and intellectual work of Sudanese activists, starting from the physical space of the street of potential. I argue that Sudanese activists, while protesting to restore a democratic political structure in their country from below, were doing philosophy. The theoretical work they started while protesting is an instrument not only for decolonising the mainstream liberal ideas of civil disobedience but also for desuperiorising the Western philosophical knowledge on civil disobedience.

During the 2019 revolution, the street of potential in Khartoum – 'Sharee Al-Qiyada' in Arabic (Appendix) – was not only an organisational hub for activists and protesters. Its meaning moved beyond a practical level for two reasons: first, the choice of this precise location intentionally conveyed a message of dissent towards the ruling regime, and second, the street of potential was the actualisation of the positive meaning of civil disobedience, which is essentially aimed at building a better society.

Revolutions are created by the people but they are also connected to the places where people mobilise such revolutions. Tahrir Square is the symbol of the 2011 Egyptian revolution, Taksim Square is a historical place of protest in Istanbul (Turkey), while Habib Bourguiba Avenue represents such a place in Tunisia. In Sudan, the main symbol of protests was the sit-in in front of the army headquarters (Bakhit, 2019). The choice of this specific place represented an act of disobedience in itself, since protesters occupied a forbidden area, to which access is normally restricted and where one is not allowed to take pictures; on the other hand, this choice also had a strategic function. The security forces and the NISS repeatedly attacked protesters but that venue was simultaneously protected by those soldiers who refused to open fire on demonstrators and demonstrated support for the sit-in. The choice of location was not accidental because activists needed the military's collaboration to achieve the overthrow of al-Bashir. As suggested by Bakhit (2019), the choice represented an appropriation of a public space by the activists, who used it for their purpose. This appropriation was part of the goal that Sudanese activists were attempting to communicate with their protests.

Moreover, the street of potential was more than a logistics hub during the protests, as it was the place where not only civil disobedience was conceptualised but also where protesters defined the aim they were pursuing by engaging in this form of protest. The sit-in symbolised the potential of Sudan in that it was 'a microcosm of the future Sudan' (Bakhit, 2019), meaning a place where citizens were finally granted freedom of

expression, also through art and music. The sit-in also depicted a future Sudan because in that space, refugees and homeless were welcomed, regardless of their origin or ethnicity. All Sudanese were united inside that microcosm, despite the divisions that the ruling regime attempted to fuel. Thus, the sit-in was a symbol of solidarity in their struggle. 'We are all Darfur' was one of the protesters' slogans (Zunes, 2021, p. 17). That is, they were there demanding a change in the regime, but also fighting for the Darfur cause and denouncing the marginalisation of rural areas.

Another interesting aspect of Khartoum's street of potential is that it constituted, above all, a place of education and training. Not only did artists and musicians have a place for entertaining people but also politicians had a stage for speaking to Sudanese citizens. The street of potential was a public space where citizens discussed Darfur and South Sudan, where they could access books, and where activists defined the tactics to deploy in the protests, the nonviolent discipline, and its importance to the outcomes of their actions. It was also a place of social and political discussion about how the future Sudan should be. On that road, through an act of civil disobedience (i.e., a sit-in), Sudanese activists expressed the type of society they were attempting to build by protesting and asking for change. It was a place that symbolised the theoretical engagement of Sudanese activists in the issues of civil disobedience and nonviolence, and also in the reflections on a democratic model of government for Sudan. Even the decentralised organisation of the protests represented a conceptual and philosophical engagement. The effective functioning of the local resistance committees often replaced the official local governing bodies in dealing with citizens' daily matters; thus, it demonstrated that decentralised democratic governance can be more efficient than a centralised state ruled by an autocratic authority. This creative form of organisation provided elements for imagining the future political structure of Sudan (Zunes, 2021). Therefore, it is worth underlining that this peculiar place essentially explains why Sudanese activists were not merely protesters but were rather actively engaged in a philosophical work. While aiming at re-establishing a democratic form of government, through acts of civil disobedience, these Sudanese activists were practically executing social and political philosophy.

To understand the intellectual role of Sudanese activists in the 2019 revolution – and that they continue to have today – it is necessary to adopt the alternative perspective

suggested by Pineda (2021b). That is, one should view civil disobedience like a Sudanese activist. Through doing so, it is possible to reach

'a more capacious understanding of the work of theorizing–attending to the ways that the perceptual and interpretative categories of political life are themselves produced in action and in specific material contexts, exploring the connections between the practices of academic theorizing and the discursive work of maintaining (or challenging) structures of domination, and interrogating the uncritical performances of power that categorize some as producers of knowledge and others as its objects–or its raw materials' (Pineda, 2021b, p. 198).

This different perspective on the work of political theorising, which includes activists as producers of knowledge, opens a further reflection regarding the importance of studying civil disobedience in Sudan. Seeing civil disobedience like a Sudanese activist means understanding the meaning that this form of protest has outside of the Western democratic horizon. In other words, it means understanding that civil disobedience is not only a nonviolent form of protest, justified within democratic regimes and undertaken to bring about change in an unjust law or policy; rather, it is a form of political action, appropriate also to less democratic regimes, that produces a radical change in a political system. Observing civil disobedience from an activist's perspective, particularly from that of a Sudanese activist, allows for the desuperiorisation of Western theories of civil disobedience. Desuperiorisation refers to 'practical decolonisation from the standpoint of the violator', and it 'must be the project that flanks the African work on decolonisation' (Freter, 2018, p. 246). Western scholars and philosophers should primarily desuperiorise themselves along with their philosophies and thinking. The necessity of adopting this stance can be understood by approaching the study of civil disobedience in Sudan. As theorists, investigating a non-Western perspective on civil disobedience, challenging the mainstream Western conceptualisations, does not simply mean decolonising one's standpoint. More precisely, it means desuperiorising the Western ideas of civil disobedience by demonstrating that this form of action is also discussed and conceptualised in those contexts that are often neglected due to erroneously being categorised as nondemocratic, and therefore, as inappropriate for the practice of this

specific form of protest. The practical and theoretical work of conceptualising civil disobedience that Sudanese activists performed in the street of potential in Khartoum is an instrument for challenging the Western models of civil disobedience by desuperiorising them; that is, they can be repositioned within a network of knowledge where non-Western perspectives on this form of protest are also included, as Sudanese ideas can meaningfully inform the general philosophical debate.

In the following section, I contend that it is worth studying the Sudanese case not only to start desuperiorising the Western mainstream theories of civil disobedience but also to reflect on how to develop the research in the field of contemporary African social and political philosophy.

3. Sudanese activists do contemporary African social and political philosophy when disobeying

Thus far in this chapter, I have attempted to outline a model of civil disobedience in anocratic contexts, starting from the Sudanese experience. I have argued that the study of civil disobedience in Sudan allows for the desuperiorisation of Western conceptualisations of this form of protest, opening the reflection to its significant role outside of Western liberal democracies. In this section, I aim to suggest that the analysis of Sudanese civil disobedience represents an approach for further developing research in the field of contemporary African social and political philosophy. First, I describe what this discipline is. Then, I demonstrate that the study of civil disobedience in Sudan and in Africa can provide contemporary African social and political philosophers with an interesting approach for engaging in research in this field.

Contemporary African social and political philosophy is a relatively new discipline in African philosophy. It is commonly considered the study of theories that prominent African leaders and professional philosophers have elaborated (Kasanda, 2018), as well as the study of African citizens' reflections on their past and ongoing experiences and their responses to other political ideologies and philosophies (Osei, 2017). This philosophy has been described by many African scholars as a nationalist ideology and thus defined in terms of ideological and national thought (Kasanda, 2018). Consequently, the sources of this subject area have been mainly identified in the speeches of African

leaders and statesmen and in the contributions of African intellectuals. The African philosopher Albert Kasanda (2018) offers a more comprehensive definition of contemporary African social and political philosophy, which he conceived of

'as aiming at the clarification of concepts in use in the African social and political sphere'. It 'is a rational search for better modes of social and political organization and governance on behalf of African people and their leaders and intellectuals. This search not only includes theoretical debates and the clarification of concepts, but also deals with African people's daily challenges for a better life and creating a humanized community (*faire société*). […] African social and political philosophy is not merely a subcategory of a general philosophy, nor is it exclusively concerned with metaphysical issues. On the contrary, this philosophy also deals with matters related to people's daily lives, such as diseases, poverty, and social and political organization' (Kasanda, 2018, pp. 29–30; emphasis in original).

This definition has the following two main merits: (i) it moves beyond the idea that this philosophy only deals with African leaders and intellectuals' theories by stating that it also – and above all – discusses African people's daily challenges; and (ii) it broadens the reservoir of sources that this philosophy can draw on. Research in this subject area examines not only leaders' speeches but also African precolonial and indigenous legacies, literature, music, art, and religion. Thus, literature (i.e., creative writing) and artistic productions are likewise valuable sources of this discipline, contrary to the widespread idea among African thinkers that there is no philosophical significance in fields such as literature, art, and music. With this definition, Kasanda (2018) defends the idea that creative writers and artists themselves, as well as their productions, directly participate in social and political life, and thus, in this philosophy.

It is useful to discuss this definition because it assists in reflecting on some interesting points related to why Western philosophers should analyse practices of civil disobedience in neglected contexts, such as Sudan, and also why African philosophers should focus on the topic of civil disobedience to find ways to develop research in this field. In contemporary African social and political philosophy, African peoples' daily challenges are considered the central issues. By putting people's daily challenges as well as their

modes of political and social organisation at the centre of philosophical inquiries and by expanding the sources that can be studied, this definition attributes to African people the role of philosophers and primary producers of knowledge. This apparently obvious stance is actually an argument that demonstrates that African people can do philosophy, contrary to the array of Western philosophers who, throughout history, have argued to the contrary. Various European philosophers (notably Hume, Kant, Hegel, and Voltaire) have considered African people to be inferior as well as incapable of philosophising because of a lack of rationality and intelligence (Freter, 2018; Wanjohi, 2017). In fact, African people can appreciate and directly participate in the discussion of political issues and in social and political philosophy because they are essentially involved in said philosophy; that is, they engage in it daily. More specifically, African people participate in political discourses and practice social and political philosophy while taking to the streets to manifest their dissent, calling for democracy, justice, and peace. South African people who protested and marched against the apartheid regime, or those who 'stood for endless hours in endless lines just to have a chance to cast a ballot for the first Black African president in a peaceful, democratic and racially inclusive election' (Osei, 2017, p. 292), are emblematic examples of the direct involvement of African people in social and political philosophy. Essentially, this is because, as Osei argued, 'in so far as the man or woman in the street thinks critically about his or her own political views or those of others, or ponders on their justification, or compares them with rival ideas, to that extent he or she is a political philosopher' (2017, p. 293). This claim explains that social and political philosophy is also – and above all – done by African people themselves.

Sudanese activists exemplify such an argument. This is why, in order to understand what it means to engage in civil disobedience today in democratic or nondemocratic contexts, a fruitful approach consists of considering activists as political and social philosophers themselves. The perspective on contemporary African social and political philosophy offered by Kasanda (2018) and Osei (2017) explains, from an African standpoint, the idea proposed by Pineda that activists should be approached as political theorists, meaning that philosophers should read 'activists themselves as engaged in the work of political theory' (Pineda, 2021b, p. 18). Sudanese activists have a central role in the work of political theory, not only while practically engaging in acts of disobedience but also with their cultural, literary, artistic, and creative experiences. The analysis of civil

disobedience in Sudan demonstrates two critical things: (i) contrary to white supremacist assumptions of modern philosophers, African people do political and social philosophy, starting from discussing their everyday challenges to taking to the streets to protest; (ii) philosophers should study African activists to understand the meaning of civil disobedience today, since when practicing protests they are doing political theory, they are not only reconceptualising this form of protest but also the canonical ideas of justice and democracy. In short, the study of Sudanese civil disobedience highlights the importance of including African activists, and more broadly African people, in the work of philosophical reflection and theorisation. When undertaking actions to restore democracy in their country, Sudanese activists are contributing to philosophy from below in that they are discussing how to explain the problems that their country faces, debating strategies for tackling everyday challenges, interrogating what democracy means, and imagining which political system should be established for the future development of their country. Essentially, Sudanese activists are doing contemporary African social and political philosophy. Therefore, in African practices of civil disobedience, African contemporary philosophers can find a methodological and critical instrument for advancing this field of study.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I first outlined the model of civil disobedience that emerged from the Sudanese activists' reflections. In Sudan civil disobedience is a collective, nonviolent form of protest whose aim is to change the political system. More precisely, it is a nonviolent means necessary to instigate a revolution. I attempted to demonstrate that their ideas allow one to define the role and potential of civil disobedience, more generally, in anocratic regimes.

Therefore, I defined civil disobedience in anocracies as a (re-)democratising practice as this form of protest can have two potentials, depending on the type of anocratic country in which is undertaken. In the case of Sudan, it is a practice of *re-democratisation* aiming to restore the democratic system established in the country and later compromised by the introduction of authoritarian principles of government. While in countries that are anocratic form the outset civil disobedience can be a practice of *democratisation*, namely

it can play a transformative role by enabling the establishment of democracy for the first time.

Then, I focused on the discussion of the final goal of Sudanese civil disobedience, which is not a democracy as intended by the Western liberal paradigm. To offer a better understanding of what exactly democracy means in a country such as Sudan and more generally in Africa, I provided an overview of the experiences of democracy that have occurred on the continent. These experiences have traced a circular path – from Western representative democracies in the post-independence period, to single-party rule, and then to a return to democratic multiparty systems. I contended that discussions about the form of democracy that are appropriate to African countries should consider another trajectory that democracy is increasingly following – a deviated trajectory from democracy – namely anocracy. To analyse what democracy means in Africa today, it is useful to interrogate citizens living in anocratic countries such as Sudan. Through doing so, it is possible to understand that the political expectation of those citizens is not a Western-style democracy, but rather 'civilianship', which means a government ruled by the civilians and not the military. In anocratic contexts, such as Sudan, the military often have a dominant role; therefore, the fulfilment of democracy means establishing the rule of civilians. Herein lies the actual sense of democracy for Sudanese citizens and for other African people in search of systems of government for the development of their countries.

By interrogating Sudanese citizens' ideas about the system of government they are attempting to enact in their country, it is possible to observe that they are not merely activists engaging in acts of protests; rather, they are actively participating in the theoretical and philosophical work of defining the concepts of civil disobedience and democracy. I demonstrated that in the street of potential in Khartoum, Sudanese activists not only practically engaged in acts of disobedience but also – and above all – contributed to the work of political theorising. By studying Sudanese activists as primary producers of knowledge in the matter of civil disobedience, Western philosophers can understand the necessity of desuperiorising their theories. Only through desuperiorising the Western mainstream conceptualisations is it possible to understand civil disobedience as a radical instrument for change and as a (re-)democratising practice in anocratic contexts.

Lastly, I defended the idea that the analysis of civil disobedience in Sudan could be a meaningful inquiry not only for Western philosophers, who can thus desuperiorise their

ideas about this form of protest by capturing its role beyond the boundaries of Western liberal democracies, but also for contemporary African social and political philosophers. Sudanese activists, when taking to the streets to protest, are not simply engaged in acts of protest – they are also engaged in a broader work of conceptualising civil disobedience, nonviolence, and democracy. Therefore, for an African contemporary philosopher to investigate what civil disobedience and democracy mean in Africa, he or she should engage with activists since they are primarily producing knowledge in social and political philosophy.

Conclusions

This research work aimed to investigate the meaning and role of civil disobedience in anocratic regimes, thus in non-entirely democratic nor fully authoritarian political contexts. By analysing the practice of this form of dissent in Sudan, an anocratic country, I showed that civil disobedience in such a context is a collective, nonviolent form of protest, undertaken to oppose the ruling authority and achieve a radical change in the political system of a country. Given the particular features of anocratic Sudan, I argued that civil disobedience is a practice activists engaged in to restore a democratic order that has been altered by an authority which illegitimately seized power and then combines democratic and autocratic practices of government. Sudan has experienced parliamentary democracy, but this democratic path has been diverted by coups d'état led by military generals, such as Omar al-Bashir.

The first lesson that can be drawn from the study of civil disobedience in Sudan is that this form of protest in anocratic contexts plays a democratising role and, more accurately, it can be a practice of (re-)democratisation, that is, it is a practice which can have both a restoring and transformative role. Civil disobedience can play a *re-democratising* role, namely it can be a means to restore the democratic order previously in place, in countries that have transitioned towards anocracy, after having experienced democracy, while this form of dissent can be a *democratising* practice in anocratic countries in which democratic forms of government have never been established.

By studying the Sudanese perspective on civil disobedience, I demonstrated that this form of dissent in anocratic regimes has a transformative potential since it is considered a means necessary for instigating a revolution. In such political regimes civil disobedience and revolution are not distinct forms of action pursuing different goals, but rather civil disobedience is instrumental in bringing about a revolution in the system of government. Therefore, based on the findings of this study, I suggest that civil disobedience and revolution are not alternative concepts when it comes to describe protest phenomena in anocratic orders. To examine contemporary protests occurred in an anocracy such as Sudan the issue is not to select the concept of civil disobedience, excluding revolution or, more specifically, nonviolent revolution; or, vice versa, framing the case as a matter of nonviolent revolution, rather than civil disobedience. I elucidated

that the conceptual perimeter of civil disobedience can be broader than the mainstream definitions.

The two main reasons driving my research about what civil disobedience means and what role it can play outside democratic contexts were the following: first, the philosophical debate has focused almost exclusively on justifying civil disobedience within democratic political orders and, predominantly, within Western democratic political orders; second, in the last decade civil disobedience has returned to the agenda also in generally neglected contexts on the African continent, such as Sudan, because more and more people in such contexts have been resorting to this specific form of protest to oppose the ruling governments and transform their societies. These reasons resulted in an interest of exploring this form of dissent in political, but also geographical, social and cultural contexts different from Western democratic countries. In the first place, I challenged the widespread assumption that political regimes are either democratic or nondemocratic by deploying a different categorisation which, besides democracy and autocracy, includes also anocracy to identify political systems that combine democratic and autocratic features and practices. This additional theoretical category allowed me to frame more accurately the practice of civil disobedience in Sudan. Then, the adoption of the methodology of comparative political theory, complemented with the empirical work conducted through interviews with Sudanese citizens engaged in the protests, proved a useful approach since it enabled me to investigate a non-Western perspective regarding the idea of civil disobedience, compare it with the influential theories formulated so far in the philosophical debate, and question those theories by reappraising their Western hegemonic standpoint. The work of comparison – as defined by the subfield of political theory – highlighted that civil disobedience outside Western liberal democracy is considered a nonviolent instrument of dissent which can bring a change in an entire regime and not only in a single law. The ethnographic approach also emphasised different conceptual boundaries between notions such as civil disobedience and revolution.

I illustrated that Sudanese activists undertook civil disobedience because they attribute to this form of protest a greater role and potential than that of bringing about change in an unjust law or policy, that is the potential to transform the political structure of their country. By analysing the reflections of Sudanese protesters, I provided an answer to the question about why they chose to resort to civil disobedience even in front of tear gases

and shots of the security forces. What emerged from the interviews with activists is that they considered civil disobedience as a necessary means to achieve a radical change and that this nonviolent form of protest is used because it can bring a more lasting change compared to that potentially gained by a violent clash with the governing authority.

Persevering in this form of protest and committing to a nonviolent conduct in such a challenging context requires efforts to the extent that civil disobedience becomes a daily practice of transformation. This research also raised the question of the implications for activists who engage in this form of protest on a daily basis in a country where a significant part of the population lives in poverty. I explained that in an anocratic context the practice of civil disobedience can be very demanding, but activists engage in it and adhere to nonviolent tactics because this form of protest is an instrument to achieve a long-term radical change. Civil disobedience in anocracies could be required to resist for months in order to achieve the desired outcome, contrary to a violent and 'faster' overthrow of the ruling authority; but this form of protest is entrusted with a more significant role than that of the violent overturn of a regime.

With this study I provided insights into the goal pursued by Sudanese activists with the exercise of civil disobedience and thus into the meaning of democracy in Sudan and, more generally, in Africa. In the country here examined, this form of protest proved to be a practice through which re-establishing democracy and for Sudanese citizens democracy above all means the rule of the civilians. The aim of the 2018–2019 protest movement in Sudan was – and still is – de-militarising their country's government, to form a political system based on a civilian-led government inspired by democratic values.

Another interesting lesson deriving from the study of civil disobedience in Sudan is that this form of action constitutes not only a political, but also a cultural, creative, and imaginative form of resistance. Through this action of protest activists engaged in a work of education of fellow citizens and, above all, in a philosophical work. I offered additional evidence of how meaningful it is seeing civil disobedience like an activist and, particularly, a Sudanese activist. Moreover, this analysis confirms that activists are part of the work of political theorising. When taking to the streets and protesting they do participate in the conceptualisation of the idea of civil disobedience. In short, they are contributing to philosophy. Having analysed civil disobedience from a non-Western perspective, I concluded that the philosophical knowledge on civil disobedience should

not only be decolonised, to understand civil disobedience as a decolonising practice connecting the struggles of King, Gandhi and Nkrumah. The Western knowledge on civil disobedience should also be desuperiorised: a more comprehensive understanding of the concept of civil disobedience and its role requires theorists to rethink the predominant Western paradigms, desuperiorise their perspectives and engage more with African thought and African philosophical reflections. Establishing a meaningful discourse with non-Western contributions on civil disobedience allows us to grasp its potential which moves beyond a reformist function, namely the amendment of a law or policy.

By filling the research gap about the meaning and role of civil disobedience in anocratic regimes, the analysis of civil disobedience in Sudan could, on the one hand, inform the contemporary philosophical debate from a new viewpoint, and inspire a greater attention to the African continent, which is an interesting practical and theoretical reservoir to discuss contemporary civil disobedience as a practice to build fairer societies. While, on the other hand, this study could constitute a research pattern to advance the work of contemporary African social and political philosophy since it is emblematic evidence of the fact that this philosophy is not exclusively built around the ideas, theories, and intellectual legacy of prominent African leaders. This philosophy is also, and above all, a reflection on African people's daily challenges and on how they address these challenges, as well as a discussion of their countries' modes of social and political organisation. Sudanese activists and, more broadly, African activists contribute to the knowledge production. In this study, contemporary African social and political theorists could find ideas to frame and discuss the issues driving the inquiries of this philosophical field of research.

The first lesson to be learned from the analysis of Sudan's case concerns the transformative role civil disobedience can play in anocratic contexts, while an additional lesson concerns anocracy itself, which is not only an issue in the African continent. By reframing the contexts where acts of civil disobedience are engaged, I highlighted that, on the global scenario, there are not only purely democratic or purely nondemocratic systems, but rather a spectrum of different regimes, including mixed systems such as anocracies. This third conceptual category helps to examine the changes occurring in Sudan and various African countries, as well as in Western liberal democracies. De-democratisation or anocratic tendencies also exist within Western liberal democracies,

notably in countries governed by populist leaders (as it was the case with president Donald Trump in the United States [Center for Systemic Peace, 2022]). Therefore, by investigating the anocratic regime of Sudan, which is apparently a distant and different political context compared to Western countries, it is possible to learn meaningful lessons. Thus, this case uncovers developments which are also happening in Western liberal democracies. Moreover, this analysis highlights that anocratic tendencies and developments are not determined by external threats, but rather they are endogenous to democracy itself. This is one of the implications which follow on from the discussion of Sudan's case and which, through further research, can elucidate the tendencies of democratic regression or democratic backsliding in liberal democracies that various authors have started to investigate (Diamond, 2021; Huntington, 1991; Karolewski, 2021; Wolkenstein, 2022). A comparative approach can be productive in that, among other things, by establishing a dialogue between Western and non-Western ideas and by exploring the differences and similarities between those ideas, it can demonstrate that a feature or quality characterising a non-Western framework is not completely alien to the Western world, as it could seem. In other words, one of the implications that I wish to indicate, as following from this study, is that anocratic tendencies are not alien to the Western world and anocracy is not alien to Western liberal democracies.

What I have tried to suggest with this research is that social and political philosophy can attain interesting results not by hegemonically universalising the Western knowledge, but rather by pursuing a kind of universalism which includes all the systems of knowledge, by establishing a discourse between different perspectives. The greater lesson that philosophers and activists can draw from this case study is to cultivate openness to question their assumptions, their theories, and their thinking since this is what doing philosophy essentially means. This is possible through a practical and theoretical contamination, as the reflections of Sudanese activists further corroborate.

A thorough investigation of the implications of the theory presented here for other anocracies in different areas of the world falls outside the scope of this study. Therefore, further research might scrutinise the issue of anocracy beyond the African continent, also in the Western world, and explore the meaning and function that civil disobedience assumes in other anocratic regimes in the global arena. It would also be interesting to examine more closely what African people and African philosophers imagine for the

political future of African states, how they conceptualise the societies African citizens are trying to establish by challenging the existing regimes, as the resulting ideas and reflections may fruitfully inform researches in political theory as well the approaches to imagine such societies in the future.

References

Ackerly, B. A. (2005). Is liberalism the only way toward democracy? Confucianism and democracy. *Political Theory, 33*(4), 547–576. https://doi.org/10.1177/0090591705276879

Ackerman, P. & DuVall, J. (2000). *A force more powerful: A century of nonviolent conflict*. St. Martin's Press.

Africanews. (2020a, June 20). *Senegal opposition calls for renewed demonstrations*. Africanews. https://www.africanews.com/2022/06/20/senegal-opposition-calls-for-renewed-demonstrations/

Africanews. (2020b, April 27). *Somalians protest over fatal police shooting to enforce lockdown*. Africanews. https://www.africanews.com/2020/04/26/somalians-protest-over-fatal-police-shooting-to-enforce-lockdown/

Aitchison, G. (2018). (Un)civil disobedience. *Raisons Politiques, 69*(1), 5–12. https://www.cairn.info/revue-raisons-politiques-2018-1-page-5.htm

Al Jazeera. (2018, December 20). *Sudan protesters torch ruling party HQ over rising prices*. Al Jazeera. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/20/sudan-protesters-torch-ruling-party-hq-over-rising-prices

Al Jazeera. (2019, September 8). *Sudan's first cabinet since Omar al-Bashir's removal sworn in*. Al Jazeera. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/9/8/sudans-first-cabinet-since-omar-al-bashirs-removal-sworn-in

Al Jazeera. (2020, July 1) *One killed in Sudan as thousands rally for faster reform*. Al Jazeera. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/7/1/one-killed-in-sudan-as-thousands-rally-for-faster-reform

Al Jazeera. (2021, October 25). *Sudan security forces arrest PM Abdalla Hamdok, ministers*. Al Jazeera. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2021/10/25/sudans-abdalla-hamdok-under-arrest-report

Allen, M. (2011). Civil disobedience, transnational. In D. K. Chatterjee (Ed.), *Encyclopedia of Global Justice* (pp. 135-137). Springer.

Allen, M. (2017). *Civil disobedience in global perspective: Decency and dissent over borders, inequities, and government secrecy*. Springer.

Arendt, H. (1972). *Crises of the Republic*. Harcourt Brace & Company.

Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project. (n.d.). [Interactive dashboard showing protest events in the African continent in the time period 01/03/2020–31/12/202]. Retrieved from https://acleddata.com/dashboard/#/dashboard

Bakhit, M. A. A. (2019, April 26). *Sudan: the symbolic significance of the space protesters made their own*. The Conversation. https://theconversation.com/sudan-the-symbolic-significance-of-the-space-protesters-made-their-own-115864

Bala, S. (2009). *The performativity of nonviolent protest in South Asia (1918–1948)* [Doctoral Dissertation, Johannes Gutenberg University of Mainz]. Mainz: Universitätsbibliothek Mainz. http://doi.org/10.25358/openscience-4340

Balibar, E. (1996). What we owe to the Sans-papiers. Retrieved September 15, 2022, from https://transversal.at/transversal/0313/balibar/en

Basebang, J. T. L. (2010). *Africa needs Gandhi: The relevance of Gandhi's doctrine of nonviolence*. Claretian Publication.

Bedau, H. A. (1991). Civil disobedience and personal responsibility for injustice. In H. A. Bedau (Ed.), *Civil disobedience in focus* (pp 49–67). Routledge.

Berridge, W. J. (2014, October 20). 50 years on: Remembering Sudan's October Revolution. *African Arguments*. https://africanarguments.org/2014/10/50-years-on-remembering-sudans-october-revolution-by-willow-berridge/

Berridge, W. J. (2015). *Civil uprisings in modern Sudan: The 'Khartoum Springs' of 1964 and 1985*. Bloomsbury.

Berridge, W., Lynch, J., Makawi, R., & De Waal, A. (2022). *Sudan's unfinished democracy: The promise and betrayal of a people's revolution*. Hurst & Company.

Biswas, S. (2015, September 17). Was Mahatma Gandhi a racist? *BBC News*. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-india-34265882

Branch, A., & Mampilly, Z. (2015). *Africa uprising: Popular protest and political change*. Zed Books.

Brown, J. M. (2011). Gandhi and civil resistance in India, 1917–47: Key issues. In A. Roberts, & T. Garton Ash (Eds.), *Civil resistance and power politics: The experience of non-violent action from Gandhi to the present* (pp. 43–57). Oxford University Press.

Brownlee, K. (2012). Conscientious objection and civil disobedience. In A. Marmor (Ed.), *The Routledge companion to philosophy of law* (pp. 527–539). Taylor & Francis.

Brownlee, K. (2013). Civil disobedience. In E. N. Zalta (Ed.), *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy archive*. Stanford University. https://stanford.library.sydney.edu.au/archives/spr2017/entries/civil-disobedience/

Buchanan, A. (2017). Revolution. In E. N. Zalta, & U. Nodelman (Eds.), *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. Stanford University. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/revolution/

Cambridge Dictionary. (n.d.). Revolution. In *Cambridge Dictionary*. Retrieved July 6, 2022, from https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/revolution

Celikates, R. (2014). Civil disobedience as a practice of civic freedom. In J. Tully (Ed.), *On global citizenship: James Tully in dialogue* (pp. 207–228). Bloomsbury.

Celikates, R. (2015). Learning from the streets: Civil disobedience in theory and practice. In P. Weibel (Ed.), *Global activism: Art and conflict in the 21st century* (pp. 65–72). MIT Press.

Celikates, R. (2016a). Rethinking civil disobedience as a practice of contestation: Beyond the liberal paradigm. *Constellations, 23*(1), 37–45. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12216

Celikates, R. (2016b). Democratizing civil disobedience. *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, *42*(10), 1–13. https://doi.org/10.1177/0191453716638562

Celikates, R. (2019). Constituent power beyond exceptionalism: Irregular migration, disobedience, and (re-)constitution. *Journal of International Political Theory, 15*(1), 67–81. https://doi.org/10.1177/1755088218808311

Celikates, R. (2021). Radical democratic disobedience. In W. E. Scheuerman (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to civil disobedience* (pp 128–152). Cambridge University Press.

Center for Systemic Peace. (2018). *Polity5 project, political regime characteristics and transitions, 1800–2018*. Retrieved October 10, 2022, from https://www.systemicpeace.org/inscrdata.html

Center for Systemic Peace. (2020). *Polity5 regime narratives 2018*. Retrieved October 10, 2022, from https://www.systemicpeace.org/p5creports.html

Center for Systemic Peace. (2021). *The polity project*. Retrieved October 10, 2022, from http://www.systemicpeace.org/polityproject.html

Center for Systemic Peace. (2022). *Extremists are the tools of change for aspiring autocrats*. Retrieved November 14, 2022, from http://www.systemicpeace.org

Center for Systemic Peace (n.d.). *North Sudan*. Retrieved October 10, 2022, from http://www.systemicpeace.org/polity/P5NorthSudan2018.pdf

Chan, S. (2021). *African Political Thought: an intellectual history of the quest for freedom*. Hurst.

Chen, C. (2016). Civil disobedience as transformative power under a non-democratic regime: Does the Umbrella Movement undermine the rule of law? *Asia Pacific Law Review, 24*(2), 87–107. https://doi.org/10.1080/10192557.2016.1242917

Chenoweth, E., & Stephan, M. J. (2011). *Why civil resistance works: The strategic logic of nonviolent conflict*. Columbia University Press.

Cohen, C. (1966). Civil disobedience and the law. *Rutgers Law Review*, *21*, 1–17.

De La Boétie, E. (2008). *The politics of obedience: The discourse of voluntary servitude*. Ludwig von Mises Institute.

Delmas, C. (2018). *A duty to resist: When disobedience should be uncivil*. Oxford University Press.

Delmas, C., & Brownlee, K. (2021). Civil disobedience. In E. N. Zalta, & U. Nodelman (Eds.), *Stanford encyclopedia of philosophy*. Stanford University. https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/civil-disobedience/

De Moor, J. (2017). The 'efficacy dilemma' of transnational climate activism: The case of COP21. *Environmental Politics, 27*(6), 1079–1100. https://doi.org/10.1080/09644016.2017.1410315

Desai A., & Vahed, G. (2016). *The South African Gandhi: Stretcher-bearer of empire*. Stanford University Press.

Diamond, L. (2021) Democratic regression in comparative perspective: scope. Methods and causes. *Democratization*, *28*(1), 22–42. https://doi.org/10.1080/13510347.2020.1807517

Elmileik, A. (2018, December 26). *What prompted the protest in Sudan?* Al Jazeera. https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2018/12/26/what-prompted-the-protests-in-sudan

Elsheikh, E. (2019). Sudan after revolt: Reimagining society, surviving vengeance. *Critical Times, 2*(3), 466–478. https://doi.org/10.1215/26410478-7862560

El-Tigani, M. (2003). *October 21, 1964? Ways to return*. Sudan Tribune. https://sudantribune.com/article1440/

Eschner, K. (2017, July 12). Martin Luther King and Gandhi weren't the only ones inspired by Thoreau's 'civil disobedience'. *Smithsonian magazine*. https://www.smithsonianmag.com/smart-news/martin-luther-king-and-gandhi-werent-only-ones-inspired-thoreaus-civil-disobedience-180963972/

Encyclopaedia Britannica. (n.d.). Mohamed Bouazizi. In *Encyclopaedia Britannica*. Retrieved October 4, 2021, from https://www.britannica.com/biography/Mohamed-Bouazizi

Euben, R. L. (1999). *Enemy in the mirror: Islamic fundamentalism and the limits of modern rationalism: A work of comparative political theory*. Princeton University Press.

Euben, R. L. (2006). *Journeys to the other shore: Muslim and Western travelers in search of knowledge*. Princeton University Press.

Fanon, F. (1963). *The wretched of the earth*. Grove Press.

Freter, B. (2018). White supremacy in eurocentric epistemologies: On the West's responsibility for its philosophical heritage. *Synthesis Philosophica, 65*(1), 237–249.

Fricke, A. (2020, March 5). *'Chaos and fire': An analysis of Sudan's June 3, 2019 Khartoum Massacre*. Physicians for Human Rights. https://phr.org/our-work/resources/chaos-and-fire-an-analysis-of-sudans-june-3-2019-khartoum-massacre/

Fofi, G. (2015). *Elogio della disobbedienza civile*. Nottetempo.

Gandhi, M. K. (1968a). Satyagraha in South Africa. In Narayan S (Ed.), *The selected works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Navajivan Publishing House. https://www.mkgandhi.org/imp_bks.htm

Gandhi, M. K. (1968b). The voice of truth. In S. Narayan (Ed.), *The selected works of Mahatma Gandhi*. Navajivan Publishing House. https://www.mkgandhi.org/imp_bks.htm

Gargard, G. (2020, September 15). *African regimes are using covid-19 to stifle the third wave of protests*. The Globe Post. https://theglobepost.com/2020/09/11/covid-19-protests-africa/

Gillon, S. M. (2019). *The revolution that was 1968*. History. Retrieved October 11, 2022, from https://www.history.com/news/the-revolution-that-was-1968

Girifna. (2009). *A non-violent resistance movement to overthrow the NCP: We are all Girifna, We are all Sudan*. Retrieved October 4, 2021, from https://girifna.com/about/

Goodwin, J. (2001). *No other way out: States and revolutionary movements, 1945–1991*. Cambridge University Press.

Gunitsky, S. (2015). Lost in the gray zone: Competing measures of democracy in the former Soviet republics. In A. Coley, & J. Snyder (Eds.), *Ranking the World: Grading States as a Tool of Global Governance* (pp. 112–150). Cambridge University Press.

Gyekye, K. (1997). *Tradition and modernity: Philosophical reflections on the African experience*. Oxford University Press.

Habermas, J. (1985). Civil disobedience: Litmus test for the democratic constitutional state. *Berkeley Journal of Sociology, 30*, 95–116.

Hanson, R. L. (2021). The domestication of Henry David Thoreau. In W. E. Scheuerman (Ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to Civil Disobedience* (pp. 29–55). Cambridge University Press.

Hendrick, G. (1956). The influence of Thoreau's 'civil disobedience' on Gandhi's Satyagraha. *The New England Quarterly, 29*(4), 462–471.

Herzog, L., & Zacka, B. (2017). Fieldwork in Political Theory: Five Arguments for an Ethnographic Sensibility. *British Journal of Political Science*, *49*(2), 763-784. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123416000703

Human Rights Watch. (2010, April 26). *Sudan: Flawed elections underscore need for justice*. Human Rights Watch. https://www.hrw.org/news/2010/04/26/sudan-flawed-elections-underscore-need-justice

Huntington, S. P. (1991). *The third wave: democratization in the late twentieth century*. University of Oklahoma Press.

Jenco, L. K. (2003). Thoreau's critique of democracy. *The Review of Politics, 65*(3), 355–381.

Jenco, L. K., Idris, M., & Thomas, M. C. (2020). Comparison, connectivity, and disconnection. In L. K. Jenco, M. Idris, & M. C. Thomas (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of comparative political theory* (pp 1–37). Oxford University Press.

Karolewski, I. P. (2021) Towards a political theory of democratic backsliding? Generalising the East Central European experience. In A. Lorenz, & L.H. Anders (Eds.), *Illiberal trends and anti-EU politics in East Central Europe. Palgrave studies in European Union politics* (pp. 301–321). Palgrave Macmillan. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-54674-8_13

Kasanda, A. (2018). *Contemporary African social and political philosophy: Trends, debates, and challenges*. Routledge.

King, M. L. (1963). *Why we can't wait*. Beacon Press.

King, M. L. (1981). *Strength to love*. Beacon Press.

King, M. L. (1986). *A testament of hope: The essential writings and speeches of Martin Luther King, Jr*. (J. M. Washington, Ed.). Harper & Row.

Kolge, N. (2016). Was Gandhi a racist? His writings in South Africa. *Economic & Political Weekly, 51*(5), 88–93.

Kristof, N. (2019, January 16). *Marching toward a massacre*. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/16/opinion/sudan-protests-bashir.html

Laudani, R. (2013). *Disobedience in Western political thought: A genealogy*. Cambridge University Press.

Lodge, T. (2011). The interplay of non-violent and violent action in the movement against apartheid in South Africa, 1983–94. In A. Roberts, & T. Garton Ash (Eds.), *Civil resistance and power politics: The experience of non-violent action from Gandhi to the present* (pp. 213–230). Oxford University Press.

March, A. F. (2009). What is comparative political theory? *The Review of Politics, 71*(4), 531–565.

Markovits, D. (2005). Democratic disobedience. *The Yale Law Journal, 114*, 1897–1952.

Marshall, M. G., & Cole, B. R. (2014). *Global report 2014: Conflict, governance, and state fragility*. Center for Systemic Peace. https://www.systemicpeace.org/vlibrary/GlobalReport2014.pdf

Marshall, M. G., & Elzinga-Marshall, G. (2017). *Global report 2017: Conflict, governance, and state fragility*. Center for Systemic Peace. http://www.systemicpeace.org/vlibrary/GlobalReport2017.pdf

Mbembe, A. (2022, March 23). *Les Ateliers de la Pensée* [Video]. YouTube. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lytEek3Fh4c

Morgan, H. (2019, June 12). *Khartoum sit-in may be gone, but its dream of a democratic Sudan remains.* Al Jazeera. https://www.aljazeera.com/features/2019/6/12/khartoum-sit-in-may-be-gone-but-its-dream-of-a-democratic-sudan-remains

Mueller, L. (2018). *Political protest in contemporary Africa*. Cambridge University Press.

Nabag, E. (2022). *Tea Ladies of Sudan*. Active Cultures. https://digest-active-cultures.org/Tea-Ladies-of-Sudan-by-Ebti-Nabag

Ogunye, T. (2015). Global justice and transnational civil disobedience. *Ethics & Global Politics, 8*(1), 1–23. https://doi.org/10.3402/egp.v8.27217

Osei, J. (2017). Political philosophy in the African context. In I. E. Ukpokolo (Ed.), *Themes, issues and problems in African philosophy* (pp. 289–303). Palgrave Macmillan.

Ouziel, P. (2015). *'Vamos Lentos Porque Vamos Lejos'. Towards a dialogical understanding of Spain's 15Ms* [Doctoral Dissertation, University of Victoria]. Uvic Libraries. http://hdl.handle.net/1828/6734

Pineda, E. R. (2015). Civil disobedience and punishment: (Mis)reading justification and strategy from SNCC to Snowden. *History of the Present, 5*(1), 1–30. https://doi.org/10.5406/historypresent.5.1.0001

Pineda, E. R. (2019). Civil disobedience, and what else? Making space for uncivil forms of resistance. *European Journal of Political Theory, 0*(0), 1–8. https://doi.org/10.1177/1474885119845063

Pineda, E. R. (2021a). Martin Luther King, Jr. and the politics of disobedient civility. In W. E. Scheuerman (Ed.), *The Cambridge companion to civil disobedience* (pp. 56–79). Cambridge University Press.

Pineda, E. R. (2021b). *Seeing like an activist: Civil disobedience and the civil rights movement*. Oxford University Press.

Pineda, E. R. (2022). Beyond (and before) the transnational turn: Recovering civil disobedience as decolonising praxis. *Democratic Theory, 9*(2), 11–36. https://doi.org/10.3167/dt.2022.090202

Power, P. F. (1969). Gandhi in South Africa. *The Journal of Modern African Studies, 7*(3), 441–455. https://doi.org/10.1017/S0022278X00018590

Ramose, M. (1999). *African philosophy through Ubuntu*. Mond Books.

Rawls, J. (1999). *A theory of justice. Revised edition*. The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Raz, J. (2002). *The authority of law: Essays on law and morality.* Oxford University Press.

Ritter, D. (2009). Non-violent revolutions. In I. Ness (Ed.), *The international encyclopedia of revolution and protest*. John Wiley & Sons.

Roberts, A., & Garton Ash, T. (Eds.). (2011). *Civil resistance and power politics: The experience of non-violent action from Gandhi to the present*. Oxford University Press.

Sarr, F. (2019). *Afrotopia*. University of Minnesota Press.

Scheuerman, W. E. (2015). Recent theories of civil disobedience: An anti-legal turn? *The Journal of Political Philosophy, 23*(4), 427–449. https://doi.org/10.1111/jopp.12055

Scheuerman, W. E. (2018). *Civil disobedience*. Polity Press.

Scott, J. C. (1998). *Seeing like a state: How certain schemes to improve the human conditions have failed*. Yale University Press.

Sharp, G. (1973). *The politics of nonviolent action*. Porter Sargent Publishers.

Simmons, A. J. (2010). Disobedience and its objects. *Boston University Law Review. Boston*
University. School of Law, 90(4), 1805–1831.

Singer, P. (1973). *Democracy and disobedience*. Clarendon Press.

Smith, W. (2004). Democracy, deliberation and disobedience. *Res Publica, 10*, 353–377.

Smith, W. (2015). *Civil disobedience and deliberative democracy*. Routledge.

Souza dos Santos, E. (2022). Seeing civil disobedience like a state. *The Philosopher, 110*(1), 109–113.

Sudan Tribune. (2012, December 9). *Hundreds of students clash with police in the Sudanese capital*. Sudan Tribune. https://sudantribune.com/article44049/

Sudanese Professionals Association. (2019, January 1). *Declaration of freedom and change*. Sudanese Professionals Association. https://www.dabangasudan.org/uploads/media/5cf94b02b2055.pdf

The New York Times. (2022, July 29). *How George Floyd died, and what happened next*. The New York Times. https://www.nytimes.com/article/george-floyd.html

The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. (1964). *Civil Rights Act (1964)*. https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/civil-rights-act

The U.S. National Archives and Records Administration. (1965). *Voting Rights Act (1965)*. https://www.archives.gov/milestone-documents/voting-rights-act

Thoreau, H. D. (2013). *Essays: A fully annotated edition* (J. S. Cramer, Ed.). Yale University Press.

Thoreau, H. D. (2004). *Walden: A fully annotated edition* (J. S. Cramer, Ed.). Yale University Press.

Uldam, J., & Askanius, T. (2020, August 21). *Covid-19 and online activism: A momentum for radical change?* E-International Relations. https://www.e-ir.info/2020/08/21/covid-19-and-online-climate-activism-a-momentum-for-radical-change/

United Nations Human Rights: Office of the High Commissioner. (2012). *Conscientious objection to military service*. United Nations Publications.

Volk, C. (2018). On a radical democratic theory of political protest: potentials and shortcomings. *Critical Review of International Social and Political Philosophy*, *24*(4), 437–459. https://doi.org/10.1080/13698230.2018.1555684

Volk, C. (2022). Reform, transformation, emancipation: Conceptualizing political protest in modern democracies, *Democratic Theory, 9*(2), 56–77. https://doi.org/10.3167/dt.2022.090204

Wamba-dia-Wamba, E. (1992). Beyond elite politics of democracy in Africa. *Quest, 6*(2), 29–42.

Wanjohi, G. J. (2017). *Philosophy and liberation of Africa*. Nyaturima Publications.

Wiredu, K. (1997). Democracy and consensus in African traditional politics: A plea for a non-party polity. In E. C. Eze (Ed.), *Postcolonial African philosophy: A critical reader*. Blackwell.

Wolkenstein, F. (2022) What is democratic backsliding? *Constellations*, 1–15. https://doi.org/10.1111/1467-8675.12627

Zelizer, J. (2020). *It's been five decades since 1968, and things are somehow worse*. CNN. Retrieved October 11, 2022, from https://edition.cnn.com/2020/05/30/opinions/2020-echoes-of-1968-zelizer/index.html

Zinn, H. (1968). *Disobedience and democracy: Nine fallacies on law and order*. South End Press.

Zunes, S. (2021). *Sudan's 2019 revolution: The power of civil resistance*. International Center of Nonviolent Conflict Press.

Appendix

This appendix presents the transcriptions of the two interviews cited and discussed in the chapters of the thesis. Both the interviews were conducted online and both the interviewees were located in Khartoum (Sudan) at the time of the interviews. For reasons of safety, interviewees were anonymised. In the transcripts, any identifying information was removed and indicated with '[de-identified]'.

Interview with Interviewee A

Date: 20/05/2021

Interviewer: If it is okay, I can start asking you some questions. For example, focusing on this very recent revolution, can you please tell me, about this wave of protest started in December 2018: Why did it start? What did Sudanese people do? And were there actions of civil disobedience?

Interviewee A: All right. Yeah. I cannot say that it started in 2018. It is an accumulative efforts of different Sudanese movements, different Sudanese civil societies, different Sudanese political parties. And it took like more than 30 years of opposition work, here in Sudan, in order to take the former regime down. And part of it, some of the political parties used armed conflict like what happened in early '90s in Eritrea, and they lost the operation from there. And also, a lot of protests took place in the '90s and in the beginning of the 2000s. And this is like part of Sudanese modern political history, I can say, especially in 2005, following the signing of the CPA [Comprehensive Peace Agreement], which is…, it provides like a space for Sudanese people to be more organised within the civil societies. And this era, it witnessed the increase in the number of civil societies, number of activisms, a lot of work took place between 2005 and 2010. And this opens a space for different means, for taking this regime down. And the people are discussing different approaches about how to take this regime down. Like the people, for the cause, they took the arms and fought for long time, like 18 years, for civil rights, for justice, for different reasons.

And the same has happened after the separation of South Sudan in 2012. And that separation also, it has like an impact if we need to mark the starting of this civil disobedience in 2018, it's back to that history. It's like a community work, as I mentioned. It happened because a lot of human rights violations took place here in Sudan, limited freedom of expression, and injustice everywhere. And really the government actions and its attitude, again as a Sudanese and civilian, were like really bad and very harsh. And it left behind millions of people displaced inside Sudan. And some of them are refugees, and a lot of women rights violated here in Sudan. And that is by the law. And this, it is one of the remarkable parts of Sudanese revolution. A lot of Sudanese women of civil society, they organised themselves in different platforms. Some of them registered, some of them like [de-identified] group registered, and they…, and they stand against the regime in terms of the laws, like Article 50, this is one of the criminal laws here in Sudan. And now, thanks God, it is not there in terms of advocacy and especially also the Article 152. The former regime used these two articles against women so harsh, and gave them hard time.

Beside this, the youths group also, they got a chance to do a lot of work after the CPA. And also, it opened the window for some Sudanese students to travel outside of the country. Like open society it has also contributed in different ways for the [inaudible] group. This collective work in different format, it has driven Sudanese people to create the Sudanese Professional Association, a Sudanese people association and one of the drives of Sudanese change. In 2018, it started with three professions, journalists, medical doctors, and then they call for the other people, like teachers and others, and tried to organise people and to release statements and make a schedule for the protest. And then professors [joined the association]. And then they called the political parties to join that one. And up to the sit-in, near to the military base that, one of the crimes committed, even by the former regime, and even last Ramadan like few days ago, some people lost their life because of the actions of the government.

Generally speaking, this is the background and the history of what has been happening in 2018. And the civil society itself, it played a big role on this, academia professionals, journalists, artists, women groups. And it is a Sudanese…, really a Sudanese Revolution. It is made and designed by Sudanese people, and those people are actually seeking change here in Sudan. And they fought a lot, and a lot of people have suffered from the former

regime's attitude with them. And that is why it happened. And really, people here in Sudan, they need change. It's still, as you know, the change, it has different waves and it has advantages and disadvantages. And there is a lot of work waiting Sudanese people to do it.

In terms of civil disobedience, the old exercise, it went like peacefully. And the people, they are not using arms. They are not using anything. And it started, this is one of the remarkable things also in Sudanese revolutions – again as there are different readings. And it is not the first exercise, for Sudanese people, of civil disobedience. It happened in 1964, I'm sure a hundred percent you reviewed the history. And it happened in 1985 as well. And also, it happened in 2013. The people then tried in 2013, but the massive killings of youths and the reaction of the government at that time, it delayed this big movement up to 2018, like more organising, more [inaudible], very professional in [structuring the] ways the people [could not be taken]. Yes, it is those people, they participated. They are more or less, I cannot generalise, but I can say like more than 60% are women and youths. And those people, they are not politically affiliated. So, this, it gave them like trust, day after day. And the people built an experience, built courage, built commitment, lift for the change itself. And it's like snowballing. And this snowballing of protesting peacefully it started from…, at the Sennar area, very small area called [Maiurno?] some people on December, 13 [2018] they started, and in December, 14 in [inaudible] area, in the Blue Nile. And on the 14th and the 16th it started in Al-Fashir in North Darfur. And on the 19th of December in Atbara, North Sudan or River Nile state. And then on the 25th, it was launched in Khartoum. So, the [inaudible] those people and those states participated. This is the first time in Sudanese political history that people started a revolution outside of the capital. So, when it came to the capital, and it became like more convincing for [a] massive [number of] people, and that it helped a lot of people to participate. And also, the engagement of different categories and different groups of the society, like people living with disability, they have that part of their march. [inaudible] people, they participated, journalists, as I mentioned, and a lot of profession[als] are participating. And it's like two years, two years of work, of blocking the streets, do protest. People are using different methodologies.

And one of the things, that has helped people a lot, are the social media. I guess the people used social media in the Arab Spring, but also people used social media in very

smart ways. And they are really using Sudanese culture and history. And they are using Sudanese words. It is really connected to Sudanese culture, connected to Sudanese people, and that it helped a lot of people to join the revolution. And the big exercise for those people, the military base sit-in, this had called Sudanese people from different parts. And it is a sort of reclaiming our culture, reclaiming our diversity, reclaiming our values, reclaiming our history, and those people, they are discussing with each other, the wellbeing of the country. For me, it is a big [inaudible] for political communication in Sudan. It's really very big [inaudible].

And it has allowed us, Sudanese people, to interact with each other, because the government applied the system of federalism in early 1994, which has divided Sudanese communities into small groups and [inaudible] them. And that system, it created a lot of problems, and it created different gaps between Sudanese people. This Sudanese revolution, it brings people together. And I guess the people, they are testing their unity. And, and even this slogan, it is a very small slogan, only three words, but they are three words very expressive. The people are seeking freedom, they are seeking peace and justice. And anyone on this globe is working on these three objectives. And there are people who work very hard for these three objectives. And finally, the political part is they joined the revolution, and they release a *Declaration of Freedom and Change*, and then up to the transitional document, this law document, which is a constitutional document they said. But I have some concerns about it, because it's a little bit…, very weak. It is less than the ambitions of Sudanese people. And even now, the practice of the government, after the formulation of the government on August, 2019 I guess it's not at that level, of the ambitions and the [inaudible] of the people and the blood of the people here in Sudan. Yeah, I talk a lot, I guess.

Interviewer: No, no, no, it's perfect. Thank you very much. So, I've got some questions now with regard to what you said. For example, you…, I think you probably know that on the media, in general, on the international media, the reason why this revolution started was identified at the beginning with general economic problems. So, the rising cost of living, the suspension of subsidy to buy bread and so on. And then the picture of what happened, starting from December, 2018, was that the trigger was an economic reason, but then these grievances turned into general opposition against Bashir's regime. So, first

question is: What was the role of these economic factors? And then, the real achievement of this revolution was the end of Bashir presidency, or it was a kind of bigger achievement? And when I say bigger achievement, I think about a new form, a new political form for Sudan.

Interviewee A: Actually, the international media frame what has been happening here in Sudan from an economic point of view or from economic angle, but for the Sudanese people, it is not related to the economy. It is related to the change of the regime. This is the national frame, and the international frame is completely different. And they portray a picture of the change in Sudan in terms of economy. And actually, it's not like that. It is one of the factors that people used in order to address the change, change objective, and to address the change issue, and this happened and was announced in December, 16 by the Communist Party. They're going for the march to [inaudible] and [ask] to the government to increase the wage of the labour. And in the middle, they change the objective of the march itself. Those people used to be so smart in changing and shifting the objectives of the revolution, because they know their objectives very well and then they changed it and put it in the political format. And when you talk to the population about the economy or about the increase of wages, the people [inaudible] and the people can work with you. And then they changed the objectives from economic factors up to the political level and this is exactly what happened. For us, as Sudanese people, our national frame has changed the objective, it is not the economic one. And if you follow this revolution's slogans and [inaudible], those people are saying that we are going to the street, because of bread. We are going to the street because of change. They went to the street because of change. They did not go because of the bread or the fuel increasing prices, and these subsidies. This is one thing.

Second part of your question, I guess, it opens a window for big discussion in terms of the political framework here in Sudan. And it started with the legal framework, this constitutional document. And this constitution[al] document organised [the] relations between different actors of the change in Sudan, that include [the] military, FFC [Forces of Freedom and Change], civil societies and different groups. And it consists of about more than one hundred actors. And this big alliance took place here in Sudan, throughout Sudanese history. And this gives different people access to tell their views, to tell their

stories, which kinds of change they needed. And, following the steps of the slogans, now it opens a space for freedom of expression for different people and to connect it to the globe. Secondly, to improve the Sudanese role in terms of the region, and now we are regionally…, in terms of regional organization, Sudan is recognised. We are recognised. In terms of the relation with the international community, now Sudan is released and free[d] from this American list of terrorism. And two days ago, Sudan was in Paris. They presented a new Sudan. This the way we need Sudan, and we need to build a relation with the international community.

In addition to that, the peace process itself, at least in the last two years, since the government has been formulating it, no bombardment, no killing between the factions against the government, and a lot of Darfur people, armed groups signed the peace agreement, and are now affiliated and enrolled in the government. The [inaudible], in the Nuba Mountains, in the process, on May, 25 they're going for the second round of discussion.

And also, we can recognise that Hamdok visited Kauda, Hamdok met with different actors in the political scene here in Sudan. And they are willing. And also, now there's like a hundred percent negative peace, from my perspective. Negative peace in terms of peace making, in terms of no war. We can say there is no war. Now there is like a ceasefire from the armed groups, from the army, no plane or aircraft bombing the people in the Nuba Mountains or in Darfur, and the massive killings stopped. And even the [inaudible] they had on May, 16 like a big celebration here in Khartoum and that has never happened before, in the last 30 years. And even the government, if it is a weak or a very poor government, still it is accommodating and involving different parts of Sudan, and at least involving different part of political groups, and at least it's including different rebels' groups.

And this has changed the atmosphere of the politics here in Sudan. And it has opened a big discussion for the constitution, for the election, for different civil rights for the Sudanese people. And now, even in the war conflict area, whatever it has happened, the people go to the march and go to the street and they express their views, and they can do blockades and they can practice civil disobedience. And medical doctors, teachers, accountants in El-Obeid, everywhere, whatever happened. People, members and supporters from the former regime government still resist, I can say, and they're using the

ethnicity and ethnic groups as a factor for conflict, like what has happened in the appointment of the governor of East Sudan in Kassala, and what happened in West Darfur, for example. But still, the people are trying, they're trying to put Sudanese people in the good positions in order to have a platform where we can discuss issues.

And now it is possible to discuss issues in the public. And it is possible even for the national media to address different government forces. And this has never happened before. And a lot of activists in social media also, and influencers, they're addressing very critical issues. And also, issues related to the culture, related to the morals, to relationships, sex orientation, and even quite new topic that seemed for Sudanese people impossible to discuss about, to have [inaudible] about. At least what has been happening in the last two years, it provides a convincing environment where the people can discuss critical issues.

Interviewer: Okay. That's…

Interviewee A: Does it make sense or…?

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. No, it's perfectly clear. And if I may add a point, my last question about change, and then you mention again change, especially in relation to the slogans used during the revolution. My question about change is related to the fact that in my research, I am using, as I anticipated, this notion of anocracy. And I can briefly try to explain why I am using this category. Anocracy is more specifically a political science term, which is used to indicate those kinds of regimes which mix democratic and autocratic traits. So, anocracy is a kind of middling category between democracy and authoritarian regimes. And Sudan, according to this categorisation, which is included in the so-called *Polity5* scores, Sudan is classified as an anocracy, or better considering the period till the end of Bashir – I have to specify this. So, Sudan is classified as an anocracy. And I think that this – but I am curious to know your opinion about this point – and I think that this category of anocracy it's very interesting and in some sense, it can help to capture the political, the specific and peculiar political framework of countries such as Sudan, in order to understand then why, for example, people decided to resort to a form of protest such as civil disobedience. In fact, another question that I would like to ask you

is that, I think – or better as far as I understood by studying Sudan – I think that probably the choice of civil disobedience and, in general, of a peaceful revolution, probably it is linked with the fact that the form of government in Sudan was in some sense influenced and stopped by the introduction of autocratic traits. So, what Sudanese people want is to restore democracy. But please tell me if this kind of reconstruction can make sense because, in my opinion, probably part of the reasons for the use…, for undertaking civil disobedience and a peaceful revolution is related to this point. But my question now is, do you think now the main objective is to restore a democracy? So, Sudan needs to restore a democracy or probably a democracy, a democratic regime in Sudan has to be built anew?

Interviewee A: Okay. If I get your point, actually, we experienced democracy in different events, through the [literature?] it is recognised that. We had like three practices of democracy here in Sudan: between 1965 to 1969, before the Nimeiri regime took over; and before that, following the independence of Sudan, we experienced like a very short two years democracy; and the third one, in the middle of the '80s, 1985 up to the al-Bashir regime in 1989. This is the timeline of the democracy here in Sudan. It is in total, following the independence, about ten years, or plus, of democracy. Generally speaking, we are working to restore democracy here in Sudan. And the people they are working to restore it, and based on the political terms and category, I can say that Sudan now is in the position where it can have the democracy, through this exercise of civil disobedience and from which was born the current government. If Sudanese people succeed to end the war here in Sudan, or to bring peace to Sudan, now we are starting to build democracy, because the absence of democracy creates war and the absence of democracy creates a lot of civil rights violations here in Sudan. And in Sudan, as in many other African countries, the military are playing a big, big, big part of the politics, and one of the elites and, if al-Bashir had like 30 years and Nimeiri 16 years and Abboud like 6 years, for over 50 years Sudan, following the independence, was ruled by the military background. And this built a sense where the military have a big role in political framework here in Sudan. And if you look into the current government, also the military are very big part of the government, and they're leading and dominating the scene generally, because they're controlling the situation here in Sudan.

So, for the civil right activists, civil societies, political parties, and all those actors, we have a big work to do in terms of constitution. If we build a democratic constitution, then we can shift and restore democracy here in Sudan, and unless we do that is still the classification, the first classification it becomes valid. For the institutions now present, that classification is valid. But if we build a constitution that can guard and protect all the Sudanese rights, and build it on the democratic basis, in that time, then we can say that we have restored democracy. And also, in terms of civil society here in Sudan as well. A lot of civic education in terms of democracy, and a lot of institution in term of democracy, a lot of newspaper promoting democracy in different format and unless we educate the people in this issue. So, it is not an easy job to restore democracy, or it is not an easy job to build democracy, unless you educate the people about democracy itself. But democracy itself, it has basis here in Sudan, as I mentioned. And then that's why I can say that we are restoring democracy. Yeah. And even al-Bashir himself, he committed that crime of taking the government because he took the government from democratic regime and the people went for the multiparty election, and they voted and they formulated a government, like a coalition government. So, we also had another exercise of democracy, following the signing of the peace agreement, the CPA itself, the people in 2010 went for the exercise for multiparty election. And after we choose multiparty election, now we have another exercise we can build on. So, I can say we restore democracy.

Interviewer: Okay, this is super clear. If I understood correctly, the category of anocracy could fit because historically there was…., a democracy was in place, first of all. And then also during, if I may, during the more difficult phases, historical phases and more recent phases, you still had exercises of democracy. This is the reason why, when talking about anocracy, when explaining about this kind of regime, I usually try to clarify that anocracy is…, what can be considered formally, officially a democratic regime so, on the surface is a democratic regime, but then underneath the surface, something more autocratic at the same time happens.

Interviewee A: Yep.

Interviewer: So, you have, for example, fair democratic elections but, on the other side, you can have restrictions or restrictions of particular specific rights, or injustices, or violations of other rights, but still there were…, I really like the term you used, namely 'exercises of democracy', because it's…, it really captures the frame that you described. So, this is super, super clear. Before going to another question that I really think I have to ask you about the role of the media. I would like to ask you whether you could tell me what revolution means to you and what civil disobedience means to you, and whether you see a difference between these two terms. And if so, what is this difference?

Interviewee A: Okay. Oh, it is not a difficult question, but… [laughter]. [de-identified]. So, for me, and for a lot of people in my age, and a lot of people of my generation, we believe in peaceful means of change. [de-identified] This is the meaning of the civil disobedience. [de-identified] We did marches, we did protests, and very peaceful ones. [de-identified] So personally, I participated in those exercises like 19 years, or 18 years ago. And when this revolution has started, actually I was outside of the country, I was working abroad, and then a lot of people like me and me myself, we came back to the country again. And we participated in this revolution in terms of organising the people, talking to the people. And if they set in, in terms of educating people about different issues, about war and peace in Sudan, this one of [inaudible], I discuss it, and with different platforms. And we are trying to explain the term 'peace' as part of the slogan itself. So, in my personal experience, I love nonviolent tools, and civil disobedience is one of the nonviolent tools. And even when [de-identified], a lot of people at the university joined the armed groups. And some people tried to tease us and to provoke us, [and someone asked] why aren't you going to join those people? I said no, we do not believe in war. We believe in peace, and we can practice peace means, and with the peaceful means now we won and we took the regime down. Those people, they fought in the jungles for a long time and [there were] massive atrocities, grievances everywhere. And violation is everywhere, and even the head of the regime was taken by the ICC and held accountable. So, with civil disobedience and peaceful means of protest and political change, we won, we succeeded in taking the regime down. So, this is what civil disobedience mean to me. The revolution, as a term, it is by practice. It is in our heart and in your mind when you need or you want a better life and fight for a better life for others.

So, we are daily practicing revolution acts, by talking to the people in the street, educating the students at the university, working with the civil societies. It is…, it is an ongoing exercise. It is an ongoing one. If we coined, or to join the most common terminologies, civil disobedience and revolution are together. If we mix them together, it is described the situation here in Sudan. Some people believe in this revolution term as a mean of change, radical change. This is the revolution. But for me, civil disobedience, it is completely more comprehensive term, in terms of getting points and driving another new objective, like by…, but it's not trying an error by practice. You can [really] do something. Now we took the regime down by forming a civil government, now we have Hamdok in the government, now we have some armed groups there in the peace process, and a lot of changes in the law, a lot of changes among civil servants. And these practices of civil disobedience, for me, it is like more useful to do change bit by bit, to do change in the way that it can exist, it can be well installed. Sometimes you can do radical change, through the revolution and this radical change cannot be sustained for a long time. But with civil disobedience you can sustain the situation. Did you get my point?

Interviewer: Yeah, it's…, so yeah, I'm very interested in this point because, if I understood correctly, with revolution, in some sense, you can have a radical and, if I may, immediate change, but with no guarantees for the future. Right?

Interviewee A: Exactly. Exactly.

Interviewer: While civil disobedience is more…, a kind of slower practice because it's a day by day, or better action by action, practice. And through civil disobedience, you can hope for a more sustained change.

Interviewee A: Yes, exactly. Exactly. Exactly. So, that makes sense?

Interviewer: Yeah. You know, it does perfectly make sense. I was just wondering whether, if you have to use one of these two terms or both to describe the recent campaign, the recent events, so considering also the end of Bashir's presidency, so 'til that point, which term do you use?

Interviewee A: Uh…, to describe the situation? Civil disobedience.

Interviewer: Okay.

Interviewee A: Easy to pick that one. I can see a lot of people, they disagree with the actions and attitude of the current government, following the revolution itself, like Hamdok attitude towards different events that took place here in Sudan. And some people they have some concern about the more involvement of the military. And those people, I understand their fears. But if we hope for sustained change here in Sudan, we have to practice civil disobedience.

Interviewer: Okay. Clear. And just one curiosity or better, two curiosities. The first one, is it the term civil disobedience, a term that you can hear among Sudanese people? or is it only used by, I don't know, just one part of the population, maybe only by youths, or only by women? How is it the situation?

Interviewee A: Actually, as a situation, it is clear. It is used by women and some political parties, and especially the civil societies. And you can hear it within the youths' groups. And whenever any chaos, protesters go to the street and the police or the military try to push them back. And some people take stones. [So,] a lot of people come out from the march and tell them: 'Look, we are doing this peacefully. We are not throwing stones on the government or whatever'. And, even while having discussions and having dialogue with the government, and especially with the police in different events, the people are like: 'Look, we're not against you. We are against the police. We are against the reforms, and we need the improvement in this part. We need to do some service here. We don't have water; we don't have electricity'. And the people express that very clear, even to the police. And in the last two years, the reactions on the military part and the police, became a little bit controlled. And this was civil disobedience, because the people are trying to explain peacefully that we are civil, we are citizens, we have rights, we are trying to do this, this, this, and this. So, in that sense, it is civil disobedience by practice. If you are not here in the street, there are still people practicing it.

There were like some special event, especially with teenagers who witnessed the killings of their friends and witnessed some people being injured. We can understand their feelings, their emotions, and they like harshly reacting – and it is totally understandable that for me – but that is not the description of the general situation of the civil disobedience situation here in Sudan. That is, it's like single events taking place from time to time, or maybe [when the security forces are firing] them with the tear gas and maybe they shoot someone and then the attitude of the protestors can change. But generally, up to this morning, because I was stuck in a traffic jam because of people who were blocking the streets, and we were trying to discuss with them: 'Look guys, we totally understand your position and your situation, and we are supporting you, but you can partially open the road, and you can write small papers, white papers, and write your concerns on it, and hand it to those people driving in the streets, and they can carry your message and they can talk. Maybe someone of those people is a highly influential person, he can take an action on this issue, but by blocking the road, it is not solving the issue. It can create negative energy and negative understanding of your issue. And actually, we have like a 20 minutes discussion with them and they really understand it. And even we open to them some social media application. Look, we are with you, we are not against you, we are part of this change, but let those people pass, and then you can block it again. And even you can put like announcement. We are going to block this road from this hour up to this hour, that gives the people more understanding about your issue.

We are trying and there are different people who are trying, and this change for Sudanese people, as some people like me, [de-identified] we are trying to negotiate. We are trying to discuss; we are trying to explain. And it is considered like a daily job, with your family, with your friends, with your colleagues. Look, the situation is completely hard for the people to get a living, and we understand the economic crisis, we understand a lot of stuff, but we have our responsibility and commitment to resist change. So, we have to work to do it. And if we fail to do it, nobody else can do it. So, I know a lot of people who understand it very clearly and consider it like personal commitment. And a lot of people, they're working for it from the bottom of their hearts. Regarding their status, some people, they have a good academic profile, they have good job, they left their jobs, came back to Sudan and started from the scratch. And I know like one thousand sample of such people. And this is one of the indicators, for me, that the people take it and

consider it as personal, more than like political view. And even you can hear from the big men in the street or in the market: 'Yeah, the situation is so hard, but they kill our kids. So, we have to wait until we get…
[connection interrupted]

Interviewer: Yeah, yeah. Please tell me if we have to interrupt, because I realised that I'm stealing you a lot of time.

Interviewee A: Yeah, no, it's okay.

Interviewer: I think I can stay here and ask you questions for hours, but I promise I'll keep it brief. One question that I was thinking about, because [de-identified] is: What role the diaspora had in this revolution, in this civil disobedience?

Interviewee A: Actually, they played major role because they explained the situation of Sudan to the international community, and also, they talked to the international media as well, to explain the current situation here in Sudan. And especially the people who are living in Europe and people living in the US and everywhere they have their voice and they're supporting, and even going to the embassies over there, for instance going to the House of Commons in the UK, going to different governments [and communicating a message like:] 'Look, we have this in our Sudan, and you have to take it as concern'. And it provides like political cover for those people here on the ground. And even a lot…, if you look into the government now, a lot of the ministers, they came from abroad, and a lot of people take big position also those coming from there, because of their roles and even the protestors, they recognise their roles. And the majority of those people in the diaspora, they experienced torture. They experienced arrest. They experienced different attitudes from the al-Bashir regime. That's why they are free outside of the country. Some of them are politically affiliated with different political parties, and there is no freedom of…, for them to practice the political point of views or whatever. So, they have fled from the country. For some people, they have been abroad like for 30 years – like Hamdok himself, he has been out of Sudan for like 30 years. He came just like a prime minister,

and [de-identified]. So, because of that, as I mentioned, they [the people in the diaspora] provide like a political cover for what's going on, on the ground.

Interviewer: Okay, perfect. Yeah. And then, so the last question…, the last question I would like to ask you is about, as I said, the role of the media [de-identified] I would be…, I'm curious about the role that media played during this revolution, or better, and also the role media are playing in this transitional phase.

Interviewee A: I'm so happy with the role of the media during the revolution. I'm so happy because the people, a lot of…, one of the [groups of the] Sudanese Professionals Association, the Sudanese journalist network, it registered the [de-identified] group. It has played a key role in organising this professionals' association and in pushing it ahead. And, if you review the freedom of expression in al-Bashir regime, a lot of people stopped writing, [especially] writers, journalists and he even banned the newspapers. A lot of TV stations shut down, a lot of radio stations shut down, and the government controlled the media a hundred percent. It was propaganda and mouth of the government. So, those people broke this cycle, and they are trying to use social media as open source and platforms, like for example Facebook, Twitter, the people use them as a medium to express their views, to mobilise the people for the protest.

And for this civil disobedience, and even the government of al-Bashir cut it off the internet and they censored the mobile phone and they all had bad, bad, bad, bad, bad human right attitudes, meaning the rights to have access to information and freedom of expression. During that time, we succeeded in framing what was going on here in Sudan and in talking to the international media, talking to the regional media, talking through social media. We built a platform of influencers, using Twitter, and different other things, a really great job during the revolution.

After the revolution, namely in the present transition, I'm not happy about the work of the media. There are a lot of newspapers and new newspapers here, but still their work is not at that standard or at that level of media for the transition itself. They are not educating people and questioning the government about different things, about the justice issue and the delay in this issue. There are no journalists criticising the current government for not playing the role of accountability fully, because most of them are part of the change

process. So, they need to play a greater role on the accountability side, and this accountability improves the performance of the government and even gives them directions, and they can even give some proposals. And…, but for the national media and the government owned media the good thing is that they opened a space for the Sudanese societies to talk and to reflect their culture. It is still not up to that standard, but at least those people are trying to open a space. And even the…, if…, I'm watching the news on a daily basis and the national news, especially here in Sudan, in the national TV, it tries… [de-identified] they are still trying to balance it, because even the links of the news are quite boring for me [de-identified], but for the people living in Darfur, if some reports reporting incidents from there, people from the Nuba Mountains, people from East Sudan and different part of Sudan, they see their pictures on TV. And this contributes to the nation building. And this contributes to the representation of diversity, and it also contributes to the unity of the people and the nationhood itself. I can read it from that sense, but still, it is not at that level. And also, they're not explaining the transition to the people very clearly. I'm hoping for national media to play a big role and to lead the change, because I'm dreaming this national media to be independent and to make the government accountable. But those people are still lying about the government and, at some point, [they become] mouth of the government. But you have to be mouth of the community and mouth of the civilians, rather than being mouth of the government. The government has its communication professionals who can address and craft its stuff.

In terms of the private sector media, they're trying, but still they're hesitating because the government is the regulator of media institutions, and they're controlled by the government. It is better than the former regime – al-Bashir's regime – but still they're trying. And last thing, the new newspapers and new FM radios are internationally funded. This breaks the cycle of the information itself. And it provides balanced information for the public. They can listen to the national media and they can verify it via…, as a source of media. And it provides like a variety of choices, [you can choose] which kinds of media you can follow. Generally, it can contribute to the education of the people, but in the government, they are really lacking media policies. They are lacking of a strategic communication plan. They don't have a strategic communication plan. They're trying, but they need to put the constitutional document and the slogans of Sudanese revolution as objectives into a strategic plan of the media, and how to communicate this transition, and

how to communicate this change, on which basis we need to engage those people in the constitutional discussion, in which way we need to work for democracy, and the laws of the media, and they need to review the policies and laws for the media, and laws for the access to the information and to open the government doors to the journalists so to make them accountable about their practices and their attitudes. There was different events and different things. Yeah.
[de-identified]

Interviewer: Bye-bye. Thank you.

Interviewee A: Bye-bye. Thank you.

END OF THE INTERVIEW

Interview with Interviewee B

Date: 07/03/2022

Interviewer: If it is okay for you, I would like to start, focusing on the main topic, which is civil disobedience, and in particular, focusing on what happened starting from December 2018, because I decided to concentrate on this timeframe, this time period. So, the first question, first important question, as you saw, I think, why exactly these protests started?

Interviewee B: Yeah, I think, so my personal opinion, I think – well, a lot of people agree on this – the protesters compilation of a lot, their compilation of years of oppression, their compilation of years of economic deterioration. Compilation of also racial discrimination, religious discrimination, civil outbreak of constant civil war, and a long-time genocide, zero accountability, no transparency and increase in corruption, and increase in the gap between the rich and the poor. And bit by bit, it just became very difficult for Sudanese people to be living normally. Safety-wise, it became an implication, and it actually has been an issue outside of Khartoum for a long time. But the…, because the scale of it

became bigger and bigger, it started reaching even inside the capital city. So, the different social classes started to get affected. So initially this, the social class that was affected for a long time, I think probably, you know, ever since the early years of al-Bashir was the working class, but then it started reaching an extent where even the middle class got affected and then even the higher class got affected and then the middle class started vanishing. So, it's either they collapsed into, you know, the working class, or they happened to make it through, you know, higher class.

And then also there's the issue of the huge brain. Everyone at that point, everyone started leaving Sudan. There was no future educationally, there was no, you know, future safety-wise as well. And then the political deterioration happened where it was difficult to just come up and have…, I remember at my own house, I would be having discussions about Omar al-Bashir and someone living at my own house told me: 'Be quiet! They're watching us right now'. So, extent of, there was extent of, you know, really bad freedom of speech that by time it got worse and worse when the situation got worse and there was more backlash towards Omar al-Bashir, then they became stricter with their protocols, with their spying mechanisms through phone call, through detaining, day by day, suddenly you hear someone who speak about a doctor – especially the medical community, they were really targeted – a doctor who suddenly disappears, or an activist, an activist's disappearance, or in Khartoum a lot of the students in the University of Khartoum, it had a lot of activists, they started disappearing bit by bit. So, just that deterioration.

I think the turning point was after the separation [of South Sudan] in 2011, afterwards, the crazy downfall, the hyperinflation, like I said, it reached the point where even the middle class, that was okay, and the higher class could not have it anymore, they found it hard to survive, economically and politically. So, that was definitely the trigger where the poverty line started increasing, poverty in the inside started increasing. That was definitely the turning point for the 2000…, I don't call it the 2018 revolution. I call it the 2012 revolution, because this started a long time ago. The only thing is the media, the world was not interested enough to see, if anything, the detrimental damages in 2012 revolution, when it started was far worse than what happened in 2018. But Sudan, people didn't have their eyes on Sudan, even internally, people did not have their eyes on Sudan.

So yeah, I would say, you know, that's definitely the general triggering point to the escalation of things politically and economically at that time.

Interviewer: Okay, and you participated in the protests, right?

Interviewee B: Yeah, yes, I did.

Interviewer: So, what exactly did you do? Or better, what did you decide to do at that point?

Interviewee B: At 2012 or at 2018? Or…?

Interviewer: If you like in both moments.

Interviewee B: For me, my aim was simple as just the overthrow of the political regime. At that point it was 28 years or something, 27 years of the same regime. It was just, you know, I think I have, I am thankful that I've had the privilege of being educated and travelling, and seeing other countries, and then I come back and just look outside of my window and ask myself why aren't we like other countries yet? Why are we still having these homeless kids in every corner of Sudan? Why are we still struggling? Why are we still struggling with issues of genocide in Darfur, that was…, or [Jibali?] Nuba, or even South Sudanese people. That was my main motive, that this cannot…, if it continues the way it does, then Sudan will vanish. Because of the extent of people that were leaving, the extent of people that were dying, disappearing, Sudan would be vanishing in thousands of years. So, my aim was just as all the forgotten cases of the past, and justice for the future generations to be honest, as optimistic as it seems, but that's what motivated me to come out, to serve justice to everything, every story in mind that we've heard, the doctors, and even us firstly. Like I…, my own family was inflicted too, thankfully not like others where, you know, like we had death threats, we experienced death threats. The loss of business, that was a contributor as well. It's different backdrop to pinpoint, there are different stories and different factors at hand, you can't pinpoint one specific thing.

It's just the compilation of all that motivated me to go outside in the streets, with the aim of overthrowing the regime because it was the only thing we could do at that point.

Interviewer: Okay, and what kind of actions were undertaken? And also, what kind of actions you participated in?

Interviewee B: Okay, so what kind of actions that were taken from our side, or…?

Interviewer: Yes, exactly, from your side, 'your' as protesters.

Interviewee B: Okay, so – I mean – at the time in 2018 I spent half of my time here in Sudan and then the other half outside. So, I kind of played different roles. Initially, my fundamental role was with the Sudanese diaspora. Our role was trying to channel the information that we got from inside, channel it to the international world and report, because it's very difficult for people here outside to be with the lack of Internet, and just communication was blocked, at one point it was difficult to channel information. So, to try and keep contact with the main people that would be reporting to us and report to the outside world, to different social media platforms, to contact different reporters, to organise protests outside as well. We organised ours in [de-identified], so organised a protest in [de-identified], a silent protest. Also, placing heavy pressure on the embassies, the Sudanese embassies externally. And creating bans on any events that were created by the Sudanese embassy, that was fundamental here. And then, when I came back to Sudan it was as simple as you get a text message, they tell you today's protest is gonna be at this location and you just go out. That was the role we play, it's just as simple as making sure that this (a) rise awareness and (b) making sure that the right message is being portrayed, namely that this is not a violent protest, that this protest is in demand of a simple thing, of simple request of overthrowing the regime, overthrowing the military regime, it's not only a personal request towards Omar al-Bashir, although that was also a part of it, but it was also a request of no military rule. We are over. It's time for the civilians to take rule. So, trying to create awareness of what the message is, this was one of the roles in the wider protests here. And in the same time, making sure to have many people, getting isolated people to come up on board, because the less we are the more likely people are

gonna get harmed, the less likely the message is going to go through. So, getting everyone to come join, different ages, different ethnicities, different social classes, different genders, that was the role we put then.

Interviewer: Okay. Next question, so in part you have already answered the next question, which is about the nonviolence of your actions. As far as I know, you decided to engage only in nonviolent actions. But, let me just add that, in different sources, so through the reading of different sources, the only event – let's say violent event – classified as such, that I read about is when protesters set fire on the headquarters of the ruling party, outside of Khartoum. And I don't know if it is right or not.

Interviewee B: Yeah. They did. And it was basically, and I think that was the thing that trigger this all revolution, that was the statement that trigger and they didn't do with the measures of…, it was…, even I don't think, I don't categorise that as violence because there were no casualties. They did not intend, you see, all people don't understand that these protesters, we can easily go pick up a gun, it's…, in Sudan you can get access to guns easily, you can get access to weapons, you can get…, it's not very hard to pick up a weapon and harm one of these, you know, soldiers or militaries. But we didn't. And that's the intention. Even when they came and burned down the headquarters, the intention was not to burn down or kill someone. The intention was to have to [inaudible], to create a statement to the world and to the government itself that, you know, like we're over this, that this is it. So, it's very rare, very…, you know, even in situations where tear gases are thrown at these protesters, they come, they throw it back, not at the soldiers. Even when they throw rocks, not at the soldiers. It's very rare to hear about situations where soldiers…, and it has happened – not to say that it hasn't, realistically – it has happened as a self-defence mechanism, it has happened. And even recently actually, as a couple of weeks ago it has happened. But self-defence is not violence, in my personal perspective (a) and (b) it's very rare when it has happened. It was not intentional.

Interviewer: Okay, clear. Then, you already told me that, for you, the ultimate purpose was the overthrow of the political regime.

Interviewee B: Yeah.

Interviewer: So probably now my question is: how was it possible for you to succeed in this aim and, another question, did you expect to achieve the overthrow of Bashir?

Interviewee B: Yeah, okay, so my, just going back to your statement, my intention is to overthrow and also deserve justice. Overthrowing is not enough. Overthrowing and then Omar al-Bashir gets to go get away with, and his people get to get away with everything they've done is nothing. That's not what we want. Only we want justice to make sure that this won't happen again and there are consequences. And that similar people with same intentions, that are ruling until today, know that consequences are there and they will be held accountable. So that was one of the aims. But going back to your questions, uh I forgot your question.

Interviewer: The first was how was it possible to succeed? And did you expect the overthrow of Bashir?

Interviewee B: How was it possible to succeed?

Interviewer: How was it possible, yeah.

Interviewee B: I think with the minds and the phenomenal like, I don't know if you look into Al-Qiyada, at the time of Al-Qiyada when it was just a road of inspiration where there were a lot of protesters, before the June attacks, you would run into phenomenal human beings: the knowledge they have, the ways, the coping mechanisms, the sense of unity, the sense of respect. It's probably one of the best experiences I've had as a Sudanese, to just walk into Al-Qiyada and see what is the potential of Sudan, because that road was a road of potential. It was what Sudan can be. And I think that's how we did it. It's through determination, perseverance, through…, it was a very tough fight and until these very days it's a very tough fight that through just the determination of the youths and the knowledge of the youths, they were aware of what's happened in the past, this is what the older generations always come to tell us, that these youths that we've seen they

are unlike any other youth, they know what's going on, they're aware, they are not easy to fool. Because Omar al-Bashir and his regime got to get away with a lot of manipulation, a lot of lies, a lot of, it was easy to pull that off. This generation is like no other. They knew the truth behind things, they were educated enough to know what was right and what was wrong and I think just that form of awareness amongst the youths is what made this revolution successful. And also, the pain that they had anywhere. You speak to a lot of the people on the street and, you know, you have random people coming to you, telling you why are you risking your life, why are you going out, you do know there's a chance that you might not come back home, why you wanna do these things, and we all have a very…, there's a very…, there's a common sentence that we all say, it's like 'I'm death anyway', the type of life I am living right now is as though I'm dead. I have no future, my country is not providing me with, you know, basic living necessities. It doesn't matter anymore. I'd rather die in the name…, for the right cause, in the name of my country and for potential hope, than continue living this way. So, that pain, being put in that pain is, I think, what triggers this determination. Being put into a very uncomfortable situation, a survival mode, is what triggers a determination to make the revolution successful. I don't think…, I think al-Bashir was…, because the revolution went on for years, people say months but since 2012, I don't think al-Bashir thought that this was gonna last. And they all, they used to say this when they thought that this is just, you know, a bunch of kids who have nothing to do. They're just revolting, for something that is not clear and I think that's why he got very shocked that this just…, it just kept on going more and more and more. Did I think that it was going to happen, that we were going to overthrow? I do not think it was going to happen this soon. Part of reason is that it has been a long fight, it has been a very long fight, you know, I did not think it was gonna come in that easy, although it wasn't an easy one. And the fight is still going on until today, until this very day. It's same fight, just different enemies. So no, I didn't think it was gonna happen that soon and I am quite grateful that it isn't, it just places a lot of hope in me right now, because I do feel helpless a lot of the times that even this one, this challenge we can overcome with what we've done in the past.

Interviewer: Okay. Sorry, can you please repeat me the word that you used when describing, the places, the fundamental places. You said, at some point you had to see what was happening in? Because I think I did not catch the word.

Interviewee B: You mean the Al-Qiyada [Sharee Al-Qiyada, namely street of potential in Arabic]?

Interviewer: Yeah, exactly.

Interviewee B: Part of the street of potential. The street of potential of Sudan.

Interviewer: The street of potential. Okay.

Interviewee B: This Al-Qiyada was in front of the military headquarters.

Interviewer: Ah okay, okay. So, literally that place which was the place of the main sit-in, right?

Interviewee B: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And it…, and it was quite shocking for, I think that's why the regime, the Bashir's regime got shocked because when the protestors, the day, I don't remember the exact date, but the date the protestors rushed into that road and blocked that road for days and created a sit-in, it was a historical day, because this is a protected road. This is a road with, army men, army trucks all over. So, it was crazy how the magnitude of protestors [was] so strong that they managed to fight that, to fight, you know, fight the military, fight security forces and go in and sit in for months there. And then they turned it, it was beautiful after that, the city, it went from 'Okay, we're here to protest about, we're here to protest about the regime, overthrow the regime to…', even after the regime, the road was still there. It was still part…, there were tents, for instance like, there were different tents, there is a tent of Darfur, and then you get someone speaking about what happened in Darfur, there was a tent of South Sudan, someone who was speaking about what happened in South Sudan, there was a tent of books that were banned, political books that were banned by Bashir, that exposed al-Bashir in all of his

crimes. It was just a space of freedom of speech that had not happened in years, in such a long time. And I think that's why dispersing that area, more than obviously the deaths, the casualties, was quite painful because for the first time we have a space that expressed that, you know, speaks about everyone, you know. There were different communities coming to speak about their, you know, victims, I call them the victims, different victims, be it woman, be it people coming up, coming back from civil war or people who live a poverty life. Everyone came to tell their story. Everyone came to spread awareness within each community to see what went wrong and who contributed to this, who contributed to the crime and how we can change things from there, what the solution is. I have this really nice, I have a, like a quote that was given to me, they use to saw what they do as well is to make sure that everyone is aware of why we're protesting and what our aims. This was after, bear that in mind, this was months after they overthrew al-Bashir. So, I have this beautiful quote, I used to keep it at the back of my phone. They gave me just a couple of days before they dispersed the sit-ins. And it was…, it said that 'the revolution is not over yet. I know my friend that you are tired. I know this is exhausting, but no one gives up in the middle of a fight. Our victory is soon to come'. And young people were distributing these, you know, these papers everywhere just to remind everyone of why we're here, you know, just to make sure that we're not here just for the fun and the music and the dancing and the art. No, there's a goal that we're using all these mechanisms here to fight. Yeah.

Interviewer: Okay. So, there were definitely a lot of different people involved. So, I don't know whether I can ask you who were the main actors, but I don't know, tell me. Probably there were no main actors because different people were involved.

Interviewee B: Yeah, yeah. No, no, definitely. But it depends. So, your question is during the sit-ins or is it during the 2018 revolution? Or what do you, who are you specific? Like when, what, what time scale?

Interviewer: So again, in the time period between December, 2018 and April, 2019.

Interviewee B: That's, like you said, it's very hard to ask who was involved, because for the very first time everyone was involved, everyone was speaking about different classes,

different religions, different…, they would, in the protest for instance, they brought a priest who came out and then they brought a chef, a scholar, a Muslim scholar who came out to speak. They brought South Sudanese [people]. They brought…, it was…, it's very hard to try to like pinpoint who was involved, but there were big contributors, very active contributors too, those days to the organisation of the protests [de-identified].

And then there's also obviously the Sudanese diaspora, they were, they got things moving a lot. The Sudanese diaspora was a big contributor to that. There was also the medical committee. The medical committee, not only…, that's why one of the biggest opponents for al-Bashir regime was the medical committee. This was from far back. [de-identified] There was a very strong medical committee a long time ago. And historically – and it's still everlasting until today – they used to organise protests and they would come out with the numbers as well. They would come out with the numbers of the casualties each single day. So, medical committee is a big target actually, until today is a very big target. Lawyers as well. Lawyers were a big contributor to 2018–2019 revolution. Obviously, there are the journalists, you know, they contributed a lot, but it's very hard to pinpoint a group of people. Because this was for once by everyone.

Interviewer: Okay. Clear. Then I think the main question: during those months, there were actions of civil disobedience?

Interviewer: Yeah, there were.

Interviewer: And what exactly…, so when you think about civil disobedience, what does this word mean for you?

Interviewee B: I think it means a firm statement that even if this is going to put our jobs at stake, the magnitude of what the government has done is far, you know, it's much higher. So, it's a firm statement for…, firm statement towards the government to show that the people are not weak, that the people are strong, that the people are here for a fight, and that we're not gonna give up easily. And I think that's what civil disobedience to me personally means.

Interviewer: And then precisely, or more in details, what does it mean engaging practically in civil disobedience?

Interviewee B: That's a tough question. Engaging practically in civil disobedience is, you know, there's a huge debate right now of what engaging practically is in Sudan, because I might be able to do civil disobedience for weeks, months. But there are people who have…, who get paid on a daily basis, people who are living below the poverty line, who can't afford to be doing civil disobediences because that means they won't have any, you know, they're basically not making bread anymore. So, I honestly do not have an answer, to be honest. I do not have an answer with, with what…, I think the most, the best answer I can give you is that engaging practically is making sure that even the amount of days of the civil disobedience and the frequency of it accommodates all social classes. Especially, and I speak in the background of Sudan's activists. So, we can't do…, there are times where we drag civil disobedience and we continue to drag it for two days, and then they'll drag it for three days and four days and five days. And that wasn't practical because then, if anything, that started affecting 60%, we are talking about almost 60, 70% of a population that lives below the poverty line, that affects them. You know, the impact of it is worse on these communities. So, practicality of the duration of a civil disobedience is what would make it, I guess, successful. What would make it a successful engagement of civil disobedience in [Sudan?].

Interviewer: But let me ask you also this: Do you have, in Arabic, a world that can be somehow translated in English into civil disobedience?

Interviewee B: Yeah, yeah. 'Eisyan Madani'.

Interviewer: No. Okay. I think that I have to ask you the precise spelling of that, but I heard there is the sound of 'madania', which is peaceful, right?

Interviewee B: 'Madani' is civilian.

Interviewer: Ah, civilian. Okay.

Interviewee B: Yeah.

Interviewer: So, you have an Arabic world?

Interviewee B: Yeah. ‘Eisyan Madani’.

Interviewer: Okay. So, there were moments in which, when you organised or considering that you were part of the protestors group, there were moments in which, I don't know, you received the message or you received the communication saying, for example, starting from tomorrow, we are going to undertake or to call for civil disobedience. So, is it a word used in the protestors’ language?

Interviewee B: Yeah, yeah. It's a very common, it's one of the main words that I used, and it's not something that started in the revolution only by the way. This is a term that has been used for years and years. So, it's not the type of…, everyone would know, educated or not, would know the term 'Eisyan Madani', because of how common it has happened, how common is in Sudan, and how frequent it's happening in Sudan.

Interviewer: Okay. So, I think I have to ask this question immediately because the other problem for me is trying to understand the terminology that you use because…, so I got the point that civil disobedience is one of the main terms, but then you also use the term ‘revolution’. So, what does revolution mean?

Interviewee B: What does revolution mean in the context of civil disobedience?

Interviewer: I don't know. I do not want to influence while asking this question. Let me say the other…, the related question is: So, what does revolution mean and how or, sorry, what is the difference, if there is a difference, between revolution and civil disobedience?

Interviewee B: Okay. The way I perceive it, is that revolution has a bigger meaning. Revolution is the aftermath, the results. Civil disobedience is the way, one of the hundreds of ways that you need to go through to fulfil a revolution. So, I don't even think they go

line in line. The magnitude of revolution is bigger and civil obedience is just a mechanism to get to the revolution.

Interviewer: Okay. And let me ask you probably is my judgment coming into this conversation, but is it right that in order to achieve revolution for you the only possible means are nonviolent means. So civil disobedience is quite like one of the possible, or one of the only nonviolent means, right?

Interviewee B: Yeah, Yeah, yeah, definitely, but like I said, civil disobedience done in form of moderation because if civil disobedience is not practiced with moderation, with consideration, for the whole population that can trigger violence. It's not violence, but it can trigger violence. So, civil disobedience with moderation is what I would say.

Interviewer: But when you say it can trigger violence, what do you mean exactly? So, how is it possible that civil disobedience can trigger violence? Because I see a way, but I would like to know your opinion.

Interviewee B: My perspective is: if I'm in, let's say, I am out in the streets and what I do is selling gum. So, a lot of these people, what they do is that they sell gum, they sell nuts, snacks. And because there's a civil disobedience for three, four, five, six days, I have no customers and I'm barely making it in life. What does that trigger? It usually triggers crime, it triggers violence. And that's actually what's happening right now because the country, not because of civil disobedience, but because the country hasn't been operating normally as before, we keep on getting security messages that, 'Oh, be careful, [inaudible], car breakages, phone snatches. And that wasn't as common here. But because the situation is escalating a lot where people can't make bread and basic, people who make bread on a daily cannot survive anymore. They resort to violent ways to survive. And civil disobedience can really escalate things a lot if you don't put into consideration these basic people that earn on a daily basis, or for instance, 'sitat el shay'. 'Sitat el shay' is basically the tea lady. This is, I think this is one of the driving forces of Sudan's economy. Tea ladies are everywhere, all over Sudan, and they're big part of the culture, big part of the economy. If she can't sell a tea for a week or two, then – and this happened by the

way during COVID times – it has an impact. I think that's why people didn't take the COVID ban seriously. The impact it has had here in Sudan is a lot, because most of these people could not…, in two weeks, they had no money to give their families. They already don't barely have money. So now they had no money for sure in two weeks to, you know, feed their families. And the government had to intervene and find ways to solve that, and give just stipends and salaries to these small, individuals basically, not business owners, but people were just outside in the roads, you know what I mean? Right. Just these individuals that earn on a daily basis. I'm not sure what their term is.

Interviewer: Yeah. So, I understand that civil disobedience was, a kind of costly action in general. So, the question now is: there was an alternative to civil disobedience or not?

Interviewee B: That's a good question. The alternative is revolting, but I think you can't eradicate civil disobedience. It's proven to be successful historically. In 1963, it was one of the biggest contributors to the downfall of Abboud's regime. So not completely eradicating, but just keeping it, keeping it in with what, like I said earlier, just the duration of it. So, two days, maybe every month, three days maximum. And I think that's what they're doing now. So, when we first…, after the coup civil disobediences were more frequent, and then you could hear common complaint amongst everyone where this is not working out. We can't be missing out on work. We cannot going every single day [de-identified]. So, they're doing it less and less, but they're not completely eliminating it.

Interviewer: Okay. And you mentioned the 1964 revolution. So, another important question is: Do you have models of inspiration for civil disobedience? Is there something that inspire you when it is the moment to undertake civil disobedience or to choose civil disobedience?

Interviewee B: With all honesty, I do not have a background in civil disobedience, as I only started in Sudan. So, I can only speak about Sudan from Sudan. I don't know much about civil disobedience as being successful or even happening properly in other countries. But I think the most successful, you know, the most role model we could look up to is the 1964. All those situations were very different economically, politically, but

this was probably 80% behind the success of the downfall of Abboud. But the thing is, the problem with civil disobediences over time is that this was…, we were talking about when it was successful, this was in the early years of Sudan's independence. But the more…, the more you try the same mechanism, the more resistant the regime becomes to it. And we're seeing this a lot right now, in today's protesting, that the government is becoming more and more resistant to how we're protesting, to where we're going. Even the civil disobediences are becoming more resistant civil disobediences. So, they're prepared economically, they're prepared for the hits, if it does happen. So, it was a model back then, but whether that model can be replaced, exactly replaced or used, as a…, as one of the big contributors to successful revolution today, at this day in time in Sudan, is quite questionable.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah, in fact another question was precisely about the historical events, and especially the 1964 revolution and the 1985 revolution, because I think that especially for you, as young Sudanese citizen, it is also important to understand what these events represent for you.

Interviewee B: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: So probably there is a role these events played and are playing when you right now, today, engage in civil disobedience.

Interviewee B: Yeah, no, definitely. You hear this narrative a lot in the streets. You hear people say: 'Okay, let's look at how they manage to do it'. And they always go like: 'If they manage to do it twice, the third time can work as well'. You know, they study how it worked before, see how it worked with Nimeiri, the impacts. And I think that's why it was, it wasn't forgotten. It was one of the tools that they've learned from the past and they've implemented again to date.

Interviewer: But do you know by chance? I don't know, maybe it's quite a…, I don't know if it could be a difficult question. Do you know by chance if there are people writing

– meaning Sudanese people – writing about civil disobedience and about undertaking these kinds of actions, in the past or also right now?

Interviewee B: I honestly would not know, but I can definitely ask around for you because I know that the organisers that do…, the organisers of these protests, the team, the organising committee, they're a bunch of philosophers, intellectuals. And when they make, when they create decisions like that, they create it based on extensive research. Each and every little decision that they make is based on extensive research. So, I cannot give you answer, but there surely is some form of work on civil disobediences and whether they can [inaudible].

Interviewer: Okay. So just to sum up briefly, if you have to describe, using one term, what happened in the period between December, 2018 and April, 2019, what…, which term do you use?

Interviewee B: One term?

Interviewer: Yeah, if possible, yes.

Interviewee B: Tricky one. Before…, four months ago I would have said victory. Now it's just the narrative has changed a lot. Initially it was victory, now it's resilience.

Interviewer: Okay. And in terms of civil disobedience and revolution? Do you use both terms? Only one?

Interviewee B: They're very different to me. I look at revolution differently and I look at civil disobedience differently. So, they're different terms to me. I do not look at them as one, I don't think it's fair. It would deprive the civil disobedience, if I use revolution to explain it, or it would deprive revolution if I use civil disobedience to explain it. So, I think they're completely [different], it's like comparing…, to me how I see it, is like comparing apples to a table. Very different objects. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. Okay. And so, for you it would not be possible to say something like what happened in April can be defined as revolution. And what we did before April, 2019 was civil disobedience.

Interviewee B: I don't think…, I think we did far more than civil disobedience. I think civil disobedience was one of the hundred things that were done. What happened in April was a revolution, that I could definitely conclude. But civil disobedience was just, like I said, one of the many successful mechanisms we used to achieve the revolution.

Interviewer: Okay, perfect. So, if you have a bit of time more, I think I take this occasion also to ask you questions related to two other main topics. The first one is: protesters legitimately keep calling for democracy in Sudan, but what does it mean democracy in Sudan?

Interviewee B: They don't call for democracy. You see, that's a tricky one as well. They call for civilian law not to be ruled by the military. And democracy is a tricky one because I think my perspective is [that] democracy is…, I'm not speaking on behalf of the protestors because I think our definition of what democracy is, is still quite confusing. You speak to different people and they have a different perspective of what democracy is. But I think democracy is a Western political ideology that was…, that turned to be imposed in Sudan. And that's not fair because each country has its own fair share of history, culture, beliefs, religious beliefs, political beliefs. So, it's very difficult to impose something that was imposed in other countries miles and miles away, different ethnicities, different backgrounds, and impose it in, you know, like it can be Sudan or…, it's the same model as the Asian value model, which I really look up to, where they were also, they shoved the idea of democracy down their throat and they stopped them. And they said 'No, we have different cultural beliefs, we have different traditions. Democracy will not actually be compatible with the way we operate'. And it was actually true, and that's how the Four Tigers became the Four Tigers.

So how I envision democracy is: I don't think Sudan is ready for democracy, and I don't think most African countries are ready for democracy. If we're speaking about a country where 60% of its population is illiterate, then democracy is just gonna destroy

the country, and that's what al-Bashir used to use to his advantage. He would go to these local communities, manipulate them by showing these local communities, they don't even know, they have never seen computers, have never seen technology, have never seen anything, and they don't know what's going on in the outside world. And he would just give them an amount, certain amounts of money, give them a cow, and then they believe that al-Bashir is the best person ever when he's nothing. So, democracy can leave room for political manipulation and I don't think we're ready for that. And I think this is the reason, part of the reason why during the transitional government there was a lot of ups and downs, ups and downs, because everyone was trying to get their hands on some say, everyone was trying to come up with a…, that is not working. We're not ready for democracy yet. And not to say that we want dictatorship, because obviously dictatorship has proven to be unsuccessful again and again in Sudan. So, I think just like the Asians created their form, their own identity, their own political identity, it's time we create or own political identity. Whether it incorporates certain values of democracy or not only time can tell, only research can tell. But full-on the basics, the fundamental basics of democracy are not 100% compatible with Sudan, in my beliefs.

Interviewer: But this is clear, but when you say, it is time also for us to create our own political identity, this political identity is made of what?

Interviewee B: You see that, like I said, only time and research can tell, because this requires a lot of extensive research on, for instance, the different…, one of the main issues we have here is the diversity. So, one of the problems we've had in the past couple of months is that they formulate a constitution and then Port Sudan comes out, [inaudible] of Port Sudan comes out and he says: 'You're not representing Port Sudan. We represent Port Sudan'. The [inaudible] of Darfur, from a certain rebel group, comes out and says: 'You're not representing us'. Sudan has the highest number of tribes in the world. It has one of the largest number of languages in the world, a lot of ethnicities. So, it would be very difficult over just a phone call to try and, you know, like sum down what our political identity is. This is something that's gonna require a lot of research, but I know what it's not, and it's definitely not dictatorship and it's definitely not democracy.

Interviewer: Okay. You know that, so your answer, it's very clear, but you know that my question arose from one of the main documents during the revolution, because in the famous *Declaration of Freedom and Change* of January, 2019, one of the aims, one of the achievements declared was trying to establish a sound democratic structure, and a system based on a constitution and the rule of law.

Interviewee B: Yeah, yeah.

Interviewer: So, my question came from this point because when reading, for example, for a person like me, when reading a document saying, we would like to re-establish a sound democratic structure based on a constitution and the rule of law, of course one of the questions is: probably you are going to pursue a democratic structure, made of values similar to the representative democracy of the Western countries. So, you clarified this point, but still, I think for me, a doubt remains related to the fact that part of the protesters declared their aim and their idea about achieving that kind of result, that kind of outcome.

Interviewee B: Yeah. So that was, let's see, that's what I mean. Initially even I was a part of that. I was part of prodemocracy area to some extent. I was part of prodemocracy [group] at that time. But it's failed. And the model has failed during the transitional time of Sudan, three years, there was chaos. It was…, the political system was chaotic. They would form a constitution. They would change again, another peace treatment and another peace treatment. We have over a hundred peace treaties that were made so far again and again and again and again. So, because it's failed and Hamdok, this is why Hamdok, [it] is very interesting because at one point I believe in his leadership, he wasn't being fully democratic. He had a bit of 'authoritarianship' in him. And I think a lot of us actually respected that because had he been fully democratic, he wouldn't have lasted the time he was in. And I think at the end of the day, he didn't even last because of the magnitude of democracy in which, you know, they were being incorporated. I don't think Sudan is ready for that. I don't think they're capable. I don't think, you know, if…, I don't think there's room for everyone to be represented right now. Right now, the struggles we're struggling with are deeper than democracy or dictatorship or, right now we can't even have, you know, it's very difficult to have basic necessities, to get access to basic necessities, to get

access to basic economic stability. So, the identity, the political identity is only formulated in time[s] when these necessities are met. Then there would be a clear idea of what is compatible with Sudan and what is not. So even like, even the demands right now, you hear this is a very common here amongst everyone…, they tell you that initially, when the protestors used to go out 2018–2019, they knew what their demand is. Today, when they go out, they don't know what they want. It's not like before where they knew that they want the democratic transition, they want this and that, freedom of speech. Now they don't know what they want because they've seen how that along the line, how that hasn't in the past two years, how that hasn't been as successful. And it's, I mean, I understand why they don't know what they want because no one would know what Sudan wants, what's good for Sudan. And I thing that time will only reveal, and trial and error will reveal. And I think this is one of the error experiences where full-on Western democracy is not, is not…You cannot want to implement democracy when you're busy fighting with a mafia. We're literally fighting with a mafia right now, Hemedti, Burhan, these are a bunch of mafia. I think democracy is the least of our concerns right now. It's representation of civilians before anything and then the type of political structure comes in.

Interviewer: Okay. I think that with your answer you open the other group of concerns for my research, which is exactly and precisely related to how we describe political regimes.

Interviewee B: Yeah. Yeah.

Interviewer: I think the first question is this: considering also what you've just said, how would you classify the regime in place, after Bashir seized power?

Interviewee B: I think a weak regime, very weak regime. It could not pull up a fight. And I think that's why it led to what it led to a couple of months ago. It was definitely the best we've had in 30 years that a hundred percent agreed on. But it wasn't strong enough to create permanent progress, only temporary progress. Because right now things are going back. Literally the situation we're in today, we're literally going back to square one where

we were before al-Bashir was overthrown. The people, even the leaders that were there during al-Bashir's regime are gradually coming back within the government, day by day. The, let's say, the dollar rate is dropping again. We've had a stable dollar rate for the past six months or so, and it was a miracle to stabilise it because it's been years of fluctuations where back to fluctuated dollar rate, where back to, you know, investments are again dropping. So that shows something, that shows that the regime was weak because although it created change, which was good, it created room for discussion, it was not strong enough to fight the true issue, the true disease of Sudan today. So, that's my perspective. I think that's a common perspective you hear amongst at least a lot of the intellectuals when you come and have discussions. I remember I used to be pro-transitional government, pro-Hamdok, and this was very recently and I'll tell them, you know, and I still do highly respect Hamdok and I respect what they were trying to do, how the constitution was trying to stabilise [the balance] between military and civilians. But I remember trying to promote it so much, [de-identified]. They're good, but they're weak. And I…, it was very hard for me to accept that until the coup happened. And then everything just dropped. Everything just escalated from there, importantly.

Interviewer: Okay. But probably I should have asked you a question before this one. When you have to think about the possible regimes in general also outside of Sudan, which term do you use? Which categories do you use?

Interviewee B: For…, to explain what we want Sudan to be like?

Interviewer: No, for example, if you have to categorise different possible political regimes, do you use terms like autocracies, democracies, authoritarian regimes, or other terms?

Interviewee B: I think, we're very lenient towards…, honestly in the streets we're more lenient towards definitely democracy. There's no doubt in that. We're even, even if it's not the term democracy, we're very lenient towards the values of democracy and that's what we're promoting today. But if it's going to be a term, and I know this is not a political regime term, but civilianship. I think that's the term that best represents our stance today.

Interviewer: Okay. So civilianship, yes civilianship is your purpose, your final aim, let's say. The presidency of al-Bashir in which way could be characterised? Categorised, sorry?

Interviewee B: Dictator military rule, dictatorship military rule.

Interviewer: Okay. I was asking this question because I was curious about another categorisation. In fact, one of the questions that I inserted in the questions' list was about the term anocracy. Have you ever heard this kind of term?

Interviewee B: I have, and reason being [de-identified], but I don't think most of the population here in Sudan has heard of this term. If I was to speak on behalf of here, population in Sudan.

Interviewer: Okay. Yeah, because, I think that, no, the premise is this: there is this, for example, this research centre, whose name is Center for Systemic Peace, which is based in the US, that produced this data series annually, a data series containing scores for each country. And the interesting point, in my view, is that when considering Sudan, Sudan, according to this categorization and these scores, was classified as an anocracy and particularly as a closed anocracy. And I think, but I'm curious also to know your opinion, I think that is quite an interesting category because anocracy is this kind of regime mixing democratic and autocratic traits, and when thinking about Bashir's period, but let's say probably also when thinking about what happened last year and right now, it could be a suitable term to describe Sudan, because in some sense you have a kind of democratic surface or façade, but then you have also authoritarian elements moving more or less underneath this democratic surface. So, my starting point was considering this data about Sudan, because Sudan was assigned this core, saying that is a closed anocracy. And I think it is an interesting categorisation and anocracy could be a suitable term to describe the political regime you were in during Bashir's presidency and probably the political regime you are in. But please tell me your opinion.

Interviewee B: Wait, out of curiosity was it announced to be an anocracy during al-Bashir's time or now?

Interviewer: No, no, during al-Bashir time.

Interviewee B: That's very interesting. That's very interesting. My second question is: What, I know what an anocracy is, but what's a closed anocracy?

Interviewer: Oh, yeah, right. you're right. So, anocracies are subcategorised in open and closed anocracies, depending on the openness in the competition for power, meaning that in open anocracies there are authoritarian elements in place, but opposition groups have the chance to participate in the competition of power; while in closed anocracies, generally, opposition groups or groups that are not part of the elite in power have a kind of chance to participate in the political activity or in the competition, meaning in the elections.

Interviewee B: Okay. Fair enough. I'm very, I'm intrigued because I'm surprised how Sudan was categorised as a closed anocracy during al-Bashir regime, because no one was able to…, in elections for instance, not elites, then there were elites that stood up for elections, no one was able to break that in 30 years. So, it's quite interesting how now, I think, it is anocracy. Now, as I'm speaking, speaking before the coup, before the coup it was certainly an anocracy, there was definitely a balance of democratic role and authoritarian. Definitely. And the democratic role came from the civilian government and authoritarian role came in the military government. So, there was definitely a balance. But what's interesting is even within the civilian government, the way they wrote, like I mentioned earlier, it wasn't like Hamdok, the way he managed things is: I'm not gonna take into account every single human being. No, I'm going to take firm calls. These firm calls may be impactful negatively, but it's good, so one call he took was to try and increase with drug subsidies, which increased prices dramatically in the country. And he…, what he did is he got economists, and based on the economists' predictions, they said that this is the only way out of the crisis. He did not take opinions of everyone and sat down. It's a decision that he took exclusively to himself. And I think that was, again, it's one of the

things that showed that it's…, it did Sudan on, it did the economy welfare for a short period of time. It actually did solve a lot of problems. We started solving a lot of problems like the dollar rate. That's why I think it's probably anocracy the most suitable sort of regime for Sudan today, political goal actually for Sudan today. But right now, as we speak, we are…, I don't feel like we're an anocracy at all. I think we're literally back to square one. We're back to being under authoritarian rule, under a dictatorship rule. It's just not clear yet because we're in this transitional process. Again, we keep on changing and changing, so we're in a grey area, but based on how things have been playing out over the past few weeks, this is exactly the same traits of what it was like before the 2018 revolution, just with different leaders. So that's, and I think that's a lot of people's perspectives are still here. When you ask them: what are these military rules that are holding us right now? What…, who is Hemedti? Who is Burhan? What are their ideologies? It's the same ideologies, the dictatorship rule, they're same as dictators or the same dictators of the past. Yeah.

Interviewer: Yeah. But this is pretty clear. Just one information, for example, I have here, but then I can share other information, I have here the country report of 2010. And in that year, or better 2009 and 2010, Sudan was assigned the score –4, or better in 2009 was –4, and then 2010 was –2. So, there was a change of two points, but the range is still that of closed anocracy, just to say. But of course, I totally understand what you said about the…

Interviewee B: Yeah, I'd definitely like to do more research on that and see their justifications of why it became an anocracy, why that scale was the way it is. I'm a very, by the way, I'm a very…, I am not superstitious. I don't know if I've shared these views with you before, but these reports that come out, I question where they come out from, and I question the intentions of why they come out and whether there was bias into them. So, I'm not saying this is the source, when you said the US [laughter].

Interviewer: Yeah, I deliberately told you the origin of the source and you're perfectly right. In fact, I think it is right to pay attention on the place of origin of this source. But again, I'm not saying that this categorisation is the number one categorisation, but here I

think I agree, I really agree with an idea expressed by a civil disobedience theorist, a contemporary theorist, who at some point in her last book says: ‘Okay, you know, at this point we have to move beyond these canonical and widespread categorisations, according to which we have western liberal democracies and everywhere else.

Interviewee B: Yeah, a hundred percent.

Interviewer: And probably, I don't know, maybe I'm wrong, but probably, for example, moving to this categorisation, so including also the concept and the category of anocracy it could be a first step, in order to better grasp and to better describe contexts outside of the Western world.

Interviewee B: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And I like these definitions. Like even the term anocracy is a definition coming from the Western world again. And I think that's why, like earlier when I said Asian values, Asian values is a term that came out from the original source, the original source of what Asians are. It came from agents. It's not a term that came from the West [and] that explained agents. It's a term, political term, that was used by agents, explains agents. And I think that's why it will never be fair to fixate a term, a political term, made by the West or made by Asians, or made by whatever continent. It should be made by Africans themselves. It should be made by the continent or by the country itself. Because Africa's very diverse. Even [within] Africa politically, Sub-Saharan Africa is different from Eastern Africa. We should create our own term, our own political regime and use that to explain ourselves. It would be very unfair to use a political term that was created hundreds of years ago by a white man. And use that to explain, you know, a country all the way in Africa.

Interviewer: Yeah, you're absolutely right. You're right. And I think it's one of the…, one of the other main issues related to my research work, because I am aware of this use of, let's say, Western categorisation, but again, my first…, so the first reason behind this choice is what I've just said. So, it is an analytical reason. So, it's a way to…, it's a first step in also a decolonising process.

Interviewee B: Definitely. Definitely. Yeah.

Interviewer: Then, if I will have the possibility to know from African people what could be a term to identify the situation in Sudan or the situation in another African country, this would be the best solution. But for the moment, I am trying to decolonise the Western theorisations of civil disobedience starting from this point. Because the other main problem, which is, let's say, the starting point of my research question is that civil disobedience so far was analysed as an effective means undertaken within democratic framework. So, what I'm trying to demonstrate in this research work is that civil disobedience could be, or better, can be an effective means also outside democracies. And it could be an effective means also in peculiar, let's say peculiar – but if I have to be honest this is not so peculiar because anocracy is not something pertaining only to the African continent. We can find anocracies also in the Western world. But let's say the aim is to try to show and demonstrate that civil disobedience, or better nonviolent civil disobedience, could be an effective means also in contexts like this. So, in contexts when civilians and protesters have to face with regimes always authoritarian or regimes…, with brutal regimes, let's say.

Interviewee B: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yeah. Definitely. I definitely agree a hundred percent.

Interviewer: [de-identified].

Interviewee B: [de-identified].

Interviewer: [de-identified].

Interviewee B: I hope so. I hope so. And I think now more than ever, it should be less difficult because the world is going to this new concept of decolonisation and how colonial impact is still here. How colonial…
[connection interrupted]
I was saying that people think that colonisation ended the moment the British troops or whatever, Portuguese troops left. Colonisation is still present today. [de-identified] It's

present more than ever. The ideologies are still present. [de-identified] A lot of the political instabilities in Africa, a big major contributing factor of it was colonisation. The ideologies of colonisation that are still present today. The political framework, the economic framework, the geographical framework of a country is a result of colonisation until these very days. So, this discussion is becoming more and more common, just decolonising until today the decolonising process. [de-identified] It's a discussion that has to be…, I think it has to be brought about. [de-identified]

Interviewer: Perfect. Yeah, absolutely. Okay. So, if you have, I think, five more minutes.

Interviewee B: Yep.

Interviewer: I'm gonna ask you just this last question about the pandemic, because I am interested a bit also in knowing about what…Can you hear me now?

Interviewee B: Definitely.

Interviewer: Okay. Okay. No, because my screen was frozen. So, I was curious about knowing what happened after the outbreak of the pandemic in terms of protests, because I can say that I know that also after the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic protest continued, but I would like just to know a few words from you about what happened, what was the impact of the pandemic on the protests?

Interviewee B: The first couple of weeks of the pandemic, when everyone was still trying to understand what this disease is, what's going on, the protest did stop for a while, maybe a month and a half or two maximum. The protests wouldn't happen. But then after that, people just…, another common sentence you hear was: I used to be pro staying at home, avoid contact, and I'll be speaking to everyone, telling them, I understand there's a cause we need to fight, but going out with the spread of the disease, it might harm a lot of people, might not be the right time for protesting. And what they would say to me is: 'Listen, it's…, we have bigger problems than Corona right now'. I…, you know, Corona is the least of our problems right now. So, it did, it did not, it stopped for a month and a

half, two months. But people did not care, it did not stop them permanently. The whole world was locked up and then there was Sudan that just casually had protests full of hundreds of people, thousands of people. So, it didn't have a strong impact. The pandemic definitely didn't harm the protests as much.

Interviewer: Okay. And did you by chance know about people who refused to take to the street during the pandemic because of a legitimate fear to get the virus?

Interviewee B: They were, I was one of them. There were actually a couple of people who did…, usually the medical doctors, or people who live with their families, their old parents, their old grandparents. They, for a short time, avoided going out. But with time, there's also a common sentence you hear is: 'We've got the immunity, Sudanese people have the immunity'. We go through so many diseases and they laugh, actually. They laugh at the outside world. They go like: 'Oh, look at them making a huge issue over COVID when we have a hundred similar diseases that came through and we pulled out of it. So, we have the immunity'. They had this mindset that we have the immunity, so it shouldn't prevent us from going out.

Interviewer: Okay. This is pretty clear. As I said, I'm not focusing precisely on the pandemic period, but I was curious also because at some point I tried to reflect and write down a contribution exactly about what happened to protest in Africa during COVID-19 pandemic because generally, and Sudan in part confirms these theses, generally what happened is that in Africa people far from stopping to take to the street, continued to protest, and especially some claims and some problems that have arisen and emerged over the past years, during the pandemic in some sense reached a kind of new peak. So, people realised that, despite the restrictions and despite the general difficult situation, they have to take to the street, they have to protest and they have to fight for their claims. So, and this is pretty interesting.

Interviewee B: Yeah. And you're speaking about…, you're speaking about countries that go through…, I know COVID is…, that's why I told you it took a couple of weeks, at least for Sudan, for people to understand what this disease is, and when they understood

what it was, they said that we've been through worse, we're speaking about people who experienced Ebola. We're speaking about people that get malaria three, four times a year. You know, like…

Interviewer: mm-hmm.

Interviewee B: Certainly COVID, the magnitude of COVID in comparison to diseases, and in comparison to, not even diseases, but the lack of medical, basic medical equipment. You know, we have more hazardous implications that we experience. And if you measure the magnitude of COVID in comparison to the other hazardous implications we experience on a daily basis, it's just another funny disease that no one took seriously. So, and I think that applies to the whole of Africa, to be honest. And I also believe, I know this is a conspiracy theory I have, but I generally believe Africans have a higher immune system because they've experienced so many similar diseases, respiratory diseases that are similar and just generally like what we're exposed to here, we have higher immune system, and I think that's why the effects, you see that the effects of COVID in these African countries wasn't as impactful as other countries. But also, there's a reported issue here where no one…, you have someone who has COVID and they don't even know COVID, or they don't even know they have COVID. So that's a problem that was common, I think, in Sudan at least. But it's just the conspiracy theory. [laughter]

Interviewer: No, I don't…, I don't think it's a conspiracy theory. And I really hope there are researchers and scientists studying this element because, as you said, it is true that the African continent in general was not…, was not much affected by this pandemic. So, the point right now is trying to understand, of course it is important to work on, as you said, on medical equipment, on treatments and so on, on vaccines. But is it interesting also to study why the pandemic evolved in that sense within the continent. So…

Interviewee B: Yeah.

Interviewer: I don't think…, it is not conspiracy theory, in my view.

Interviewee B: Uh, then we see eye to eye [laughter].

Interviewer: Okay. So, I think that I can stop bothering you.

Interviewee B: There's no bothering whatsoever. It's been a pleasure just having this discussion.

Interviewer: No, it was a pleasure for me, and thank you very much for all this time, and for your patience, and for your clear answers. It was super, super interesting. Very, very interesting. Really.

END OF THE INTERVIEW