The Toub: Garment of the Ghorba

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Abstract

The Toub: Garment of the Ghorba explores what the Sudanese toub—a cultural garment worn by Sudanese women—portrays about the lived experiences of those who wear it. It explores this question through a series of creative elements: a book and a designed collection of teyaab (the plural of toub). The book was written to record the data collected for the project, for which I set up a series of interviews with eight women who each represented a diverse range of attributes, such as generation, upbringing, connection to, and opinions regarding the Sudanese toub. In the interviews, I asked questions specifically about the toub, which led us to conversations about issues such as intersectionality, culture, and politics. I noticed four themes that arose during my conversations with the women: identity, coming of age, ghorba (an Arabic expression that refers to the psychological and physical state of being away from home), and nostalgia. These themes served as a tool to explore what stories the toub help portray about these women, and create my own collection of teyaab based on their stories to execute the theory explored through my thesis question. Designing these teyaab was significant because they symbolically represent the many complex struggles and multifaceted upbringings and identities of Sudanese women, simultaneously connecting their stories as one voice from the diaspora.

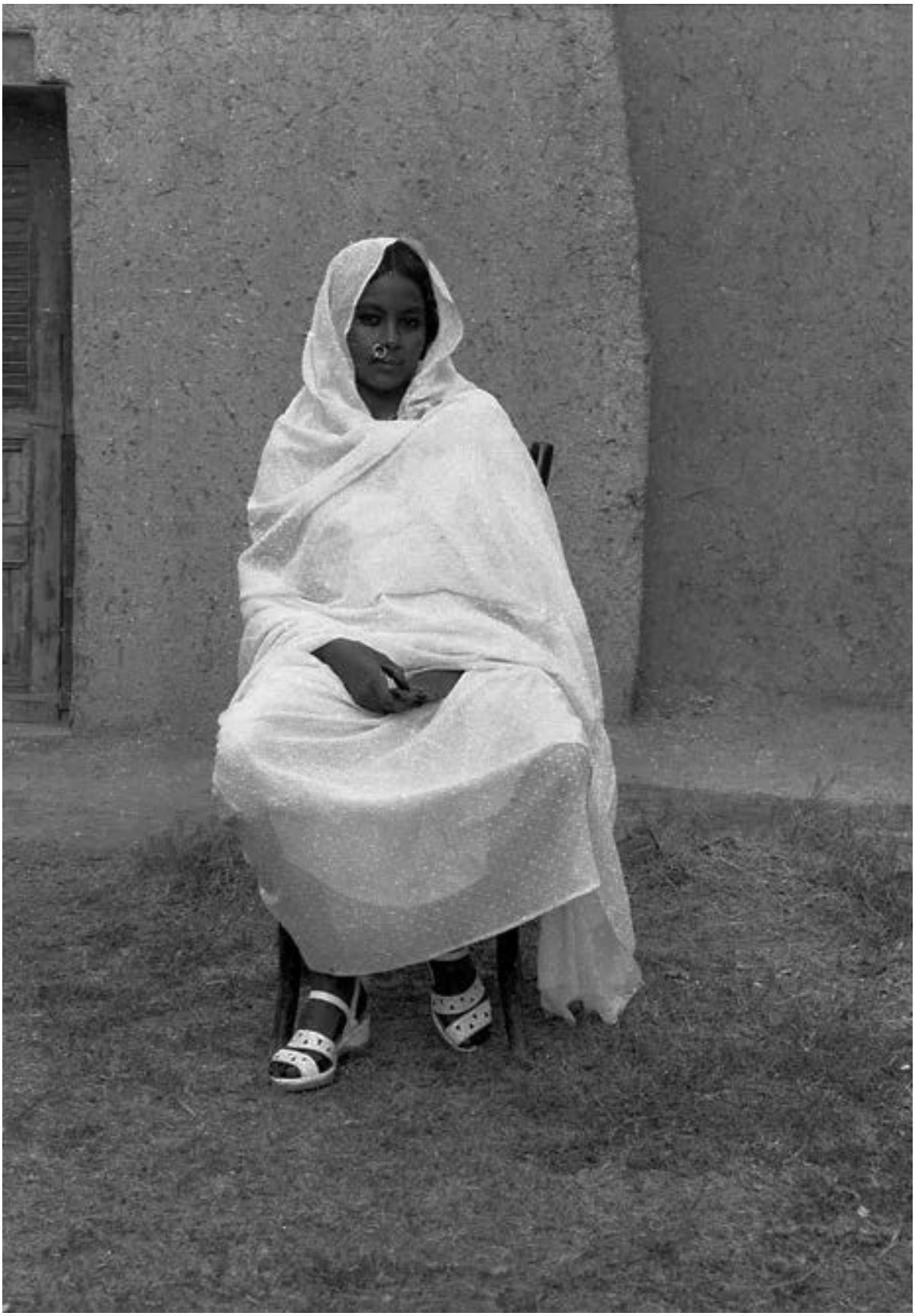
Keywords

Toub; Garment; Women Studies; Middle East; Africa; Culture; Media; Fashion; Textile Art; Identity; Sudan, Sudanese Fashion, Sudanese Textiles,

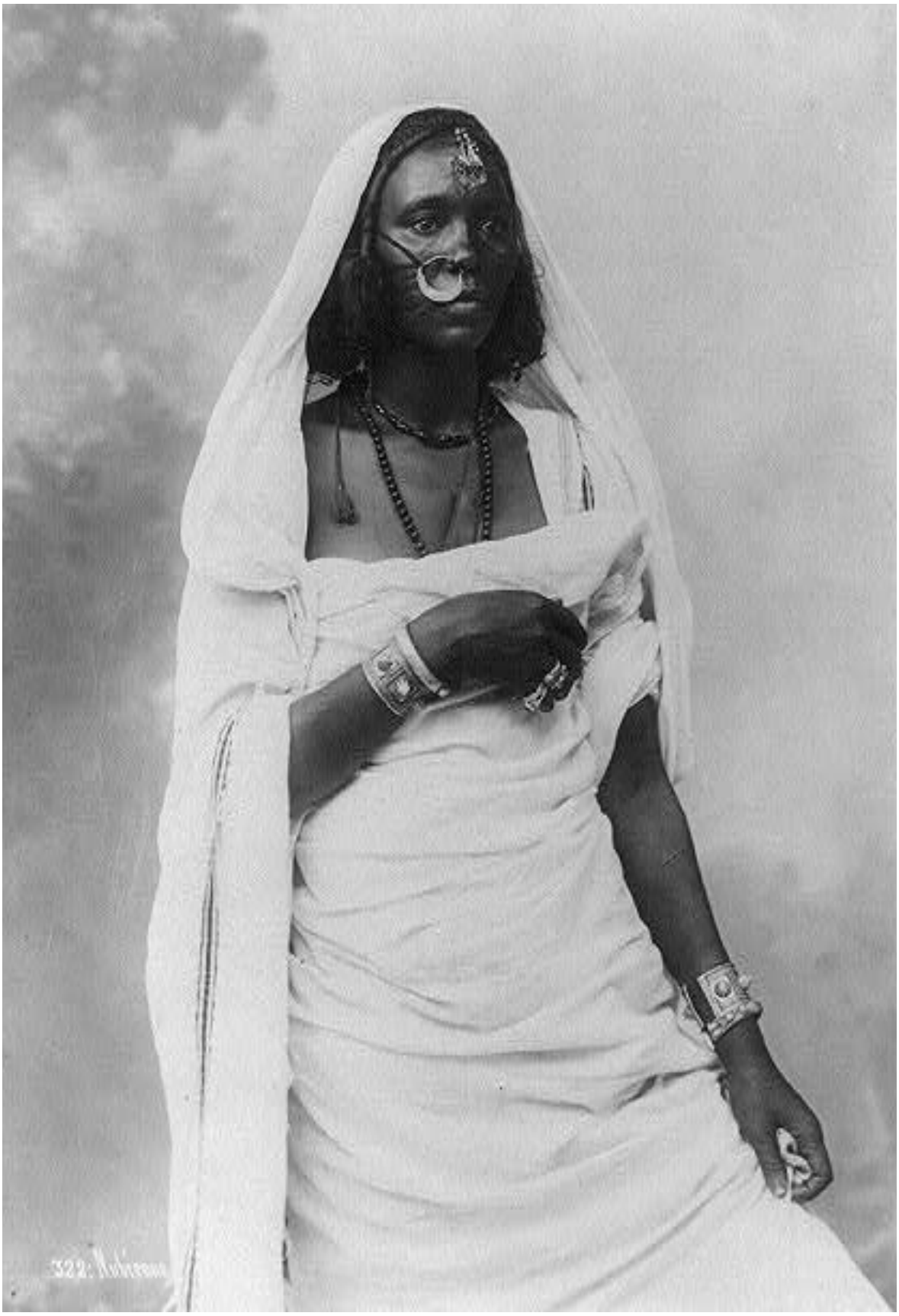
THE TOUB

GARMENT OF THE GHORBA

rund mohammed



Gadala Gubara, Sudanese woman sitting in a white toub, photograph, For Africans, "FABA Vintage: Portraits from Sudan ," 23 Apr. 2019.



Pascal Sebah, *African Woman*, about 1878, photograph, Getty Museum Collection.

dedication note

As-Sudan, is among the world's cradles of civilization. It is home to the Nile, the world's longest river, a symbol of pride and spirit. Sudan is the land of the blacks, bilad As-Sudan. The land with a reputation of ahsan nas (the best people). Sudan teems with social, cultural, and spiritual genius: artists, poets, singers, filmmakers, and influencers of contemporary art call it home. It is a land filled with natural wealth large enough to feed its intertwining regions of Africa and the Middle East.

I dedicate this book to home. The book is a love letter: I've composed it to amplify our voices and celebrate our resilience, agency, and self-expression. It is an ode to our heritage, culture, and multifaceted identities. I hope that it embodies the shared grief, heartbreak, and longing the war and destruction brought upon our beloved Sudan. Ya Rab, protect baladna: protect what has been stolen from us. Let this book remind us of who we are and what we stand for. Let the world know of our powerful ancestors, legacy, and dignity. The world will know of your beauty, ya-Sudan. Your story will be reborn. *Ameen*.

My mother, Reem Bashir, in a brown chiffon ombre toub.

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introduction

My fondness for fashion traces back to my childhood, when my mother regularly took me to a bustling fabric store in the heart of New York City's garment district. Time had been relative on those fabric runs. My mom and I could be in there for hours, captivated by the colorful hues and symphony of patterns, fibers, and fabrics. She would carefully pick out pieces of chiffon, silky satins, and playful cotton, adding to the creative palette of fabrics she used to design a toub.

As a kid, I didn't quite understand the significance of teyaab (a plural form of the word toub). As I grew older and started experimenting with my style and self-expression, I began to understand what teyaab represent, from heritage and pride to years of resistance in both colonial and post-colonial Sudan.

Growing up around so many wise and resilient Sudanese women—my mother, grandmother, and aunts—I am grateful to have experienced how active they have been in almost every aspect of our communities both in the diaspora and back home. I've come to recognize that one of the most empowering tools Sudanese women utilize in their acts of resistance is the adornment and wearing of their vibrant teyaab.

The stories of the eight women I interviewed for this book are as impressive and inspiring to me as those of the women who have shaped Sudan's history. Through this book, I've explored what the toub means to the personal, cultural, and political identities of Sudanese women both in the diaspora and in Sudan. How do everyday Sudanese women use their fashion as a tool to portray their stories and lived experiences?

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The following chapters highlight the themes that naturally arose through discussion with Sudanese women from the diasporic community, as well as through my study of female historical figures from Sudan. The teyaab that I've designed to complement this book portray the narratives that I've collected from various Sudanese women, including women who are a part of our community in New York City and New Jersey, women living abroad, women who have fled from the ongoing war, women who are toub makers, women who have experienced Imperial Sudan, and first generation Sudanese-American women like myself. With the help of a toub designer, I created four teyaab that represent each theme from the interviews. Naming each of my teyaab was inspired by the modern historical use of toub-naming, which became prevalent during the Sudanese Nationalism Movement in which toub businesses sold their teyaab with politically relevant names in order to spread awareness about social issues of the time.

With my passions so greatly linked to and rooted in the Sudanese diaspora, I want to start the conversation by exploring and creatively portraying a garment that has been an integral part of our identity, as well as a stable symbol in times of instability and the fight for liberation back home and in the diaspora.

history of *teyaab*

G. Lekegian, A Sudanese woman displaying ritual scars on her face, estimated 1890, Griffith Institute, http://www.griffith.ox.ac.uk/gri/mirage/cl11-112.html?utm_source=Pinterest&utm_medium=organic.

A toub is a long piece of fabric that is wrapped around a woman's head and body. It is a modest form of dress that is popularly worn throughout North Africa and the Middle East. It is known as the national dress of Sudan and regarded as the highest form of beauty in adornment. It has been worn for centuries, tracing back to the ancient kingdom of Kush to Anglo-Egyptian Sudan.

It symbolizes modesty and elegance as its fabric wraps around the entire body in various designs and colors, as well as social status with the quality and fabric of the toub. The garment even symbolizes resistance, as the toub was used in British Imperial Sudan to resist colonialism. Toub fabrics can range from chiffon to cotton and to silk, and are imprinted with designs inspired by nature–such as animal prints–as well as geometric shapes, solid colors, and a range of other forms.

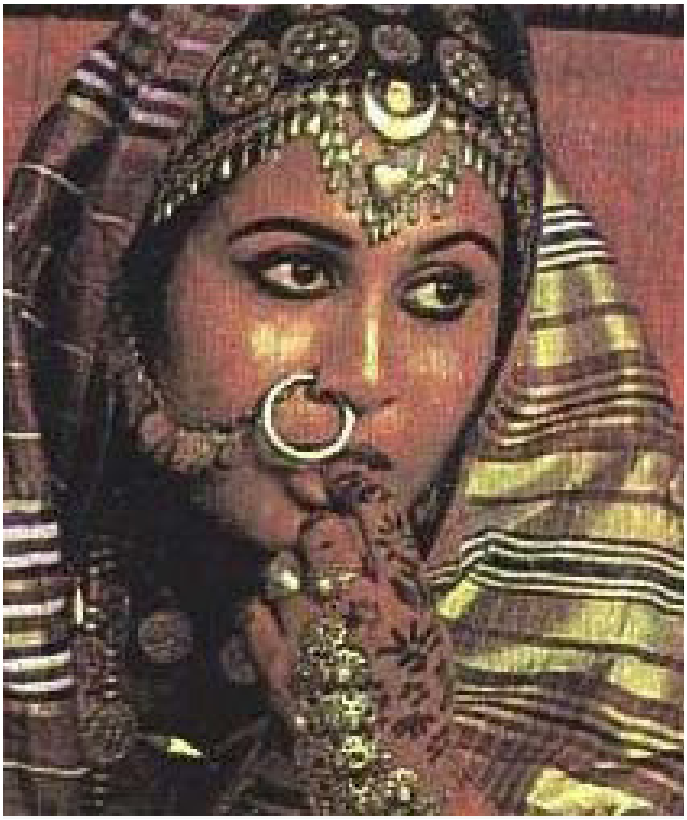


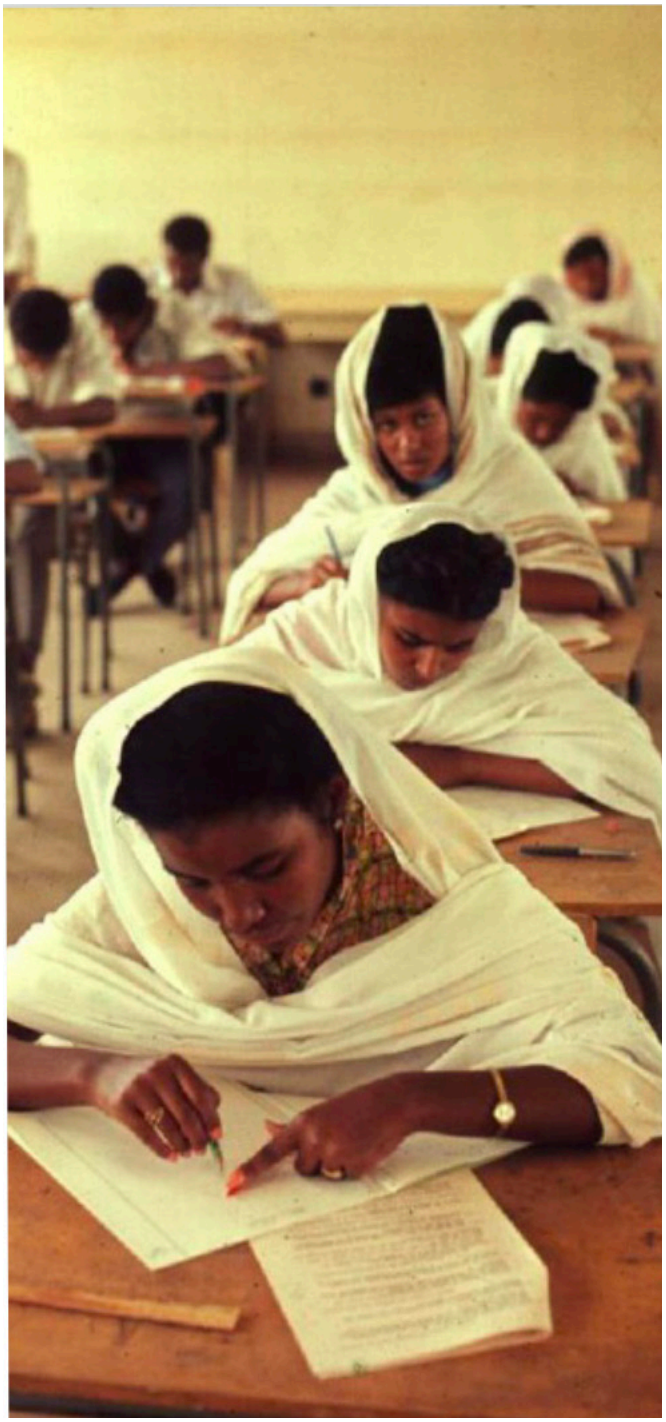
Photo credit: (@bovzblakkoutt), Image of Sudanese woman in traditional jirtig gear, photograph, Pinterest.
Photo credit: Jalabiya Tob (@jalabiyatob), Old photograph of three Sudanese women (cropped) in editorial teyaab, photograph, Tumblr, March 21, 2013.

the evolution of the white *toub*

Sudanese women were active agents in their fashion during Imperial Sudan (1899-1955), using it as a tool to mobilize themselves in a highly patriarchal and colonized society. Sudanese women using the white toub to mobilize first came about through midwifery training schools (MTS) run by the British, the first type of schooling Sudanese women were allowed to partake in.

The trainers gave MTS trainees British-style coveralls and white shift dresses that they were required to wear as uniform on training grounds and encouraged to wear in public. The British-style uniforms attempted to represent trainees as modern medicine practitioners and to symbolize progression into modernity.[1]

Nevertheless, many trainees resisted these imperialist clothes, especially when asked to wear them outside training grounds. Many wore white teyaab over their uniforms or opted for them alone. Sudanese women began to find value in their professions, and women resisted these imperialist uniforms but also desired the symbolism they displayed, which they adapted through the comfort of the white toub. The habit of wearing the white toub thus carried on long after graduation, with its familiar sight soon becoming a symbol of progression, professionalism, mobility, and autonomy in Sudanese society. [2]



[1] Marie Grace Brown, *Khartoum at Night: Fashion and Body Politics in Imperial Sudan* (Stanford University Press, 2017), 67.
[2] Brown, *Khartoum*, 67.
Photo credit: Jalabiya Tob (@jalabiyatob), Photograph of school girls in white teyaab, photograph, Tumblr, March 20, 2013.

Sitt Batul photographed riding a bike in her white uniform toub.

Sudanese women pushed boundaries further with the help of the white toub. One of Sudan's first MTS-trained midwives, Sitt Batul, is known as the first Sudanese woman (recorded) to ride a bike. Her photograph portrays the progression of Sudanese women's autonomy and mobility through the white toub, which encouraged these women to challenge normative societal conventions of staying at home.[3]

Even while under imperial rule, Sudanese women used colonial instruments of control to their advantage, and beautifully navigated ways to take back their mobility and autonomy. When they learned skills such as bike riding, sewing, or midwifery in the British colonial system, they still found ways to resist full integration into British colonial society. Dressed in their white teyaab, they fashioned themselves into something far more powerful than mere subjects of imperial rule.

[3] Brown, *Khartoum*, 75.
Photo credit: Gertrude Wolff and Mabel Wolff, Sitt Batul Riding a Bike, 1925–1935, photograph, M. E. and G. L. Wolff Collection, included in Brown, *Khartoum*, 75.

sudanese nationalism movement

After World War I, a rise in nationalism spread across Sudan as Sudanese subjects of the British Empire were inspired by their Egyptian counterparts' resistance just across the border. After many back-and-forth battles and resistance to the increasingly oppressive effects of imperial rule, the British finally decided in 1956 to sign an agreement that granted Sudan its independence.

The rise in Sudanese Nationalism sparked a trend of protests among dissatisfied female students that ultimately inspired the creation of the Sudanese Woman's Union (SWU). Inspired by the rise in nationalism, resistance to colonialism once again arose in women's teyaab, providing women entry into political spaces that were once predominately male.[4]

Fashion had already encouraged women to break barriers in the colonial past, and after Sudan gained its independence it remained as important in emboldening women to participate in political spaces. Just as white teyaab encouraged women's mobility into public spaces, the rising fashion in patterned and colorful editorial teyaab provided women entry into social and political discourse. Capitalism, its methods of production, and consumption had been recently introduced by the British to enforce an imperialist economy that would "civilize" the Sudanese. By applying and adapting methods of capitalist enforcement, Sudanese women promoted political consciousness through editorial teyaab.[5]

Marie Grace Brown's book, *Khartoum at Night: Fashion and Body Politics in Imperial Sudan*, takes its title from a popular editorial toub during the nationalism movement. In her book, she mentions teyaab with names such as "Sudanisation," and "The Political Corps," which were significant labels that became a powerful marketing strategy, as beautifully patterned teyaab that included appealing and timely names were bound to sell, and in turn, raise awareness among buyers. [6] Words had meaning in a politically charged atmosphere such as Sudan's, and phrases that spoke to people—especially women—in ways that empowered them to express their political stances were a significant way to not only raise political consciousness but encourage it through forms of fashionable dress.

[4] Brown, *Khartoum*, 113.
[5] Brown, *Khartoum*, 152.
Photo credit: Jalabi Tob, Old photograph of two school girls in white teyaab, photograph, Tumblr, April 11, 2013.

the role of teyaab in the 21st century

While the country was under the former head of state, Omar al-Bashir's dictatorship for most of the 21st century (1989-2019), Sudanese women navigated a shifting political landscape of new regulations and control over their autonomy. The most significant goal of his regime was to enact policies that reflected a strict Islamist project, as an attempt to further assimilate into Arab interpretations of Islamic codes.[6]

As women suffered from threats to their autonomy, the Sudanese government began to recognize how Sudanese women quietly protested with their teyaab and purposely targeted them, suppressing their rights in order to maintain historical patriarchy and social order.

Alaa Salah (pictured), a protestor who went viral for her poetic chants and leadership during the Sudnaese Revolution.

[6] Andreas Behnke, *The International Politics of Fashion: Being Fab in a Dangerous World* (Routledge, 2016), 101.
Photo credit: Umit Bektas / Reuters, Alaa Salah at a protest, included in Hamza Mohamed, "Sudan's female protesters leading the pro-democracy movement," *Al Jazeera*, April 23, 2019.
Photo credit: Lana H. Haroun (@lana_hago), Alaa Salah leading a chant at a protest, Twitter (now X), April 8, 2018.

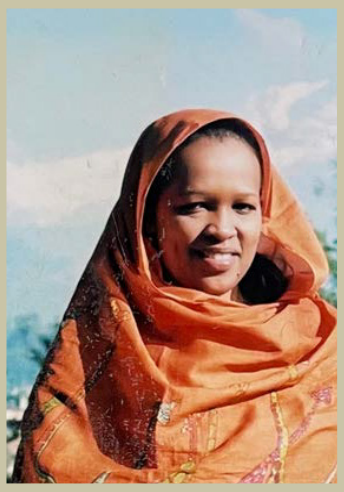
Women looked towards the white toub which had historically symbolized progression, change, and resistance to authoritarian regimes such as the British and the current Sudanese government under al-Bashir. An accessible garment, the toub not only symbolized resistance but also fashioned the idea of unity among men and women alike. For women, wearing the toub also meant bridging the gap between socioeconomic and ethnic statuses throughout Sudan, which had previously been separated by the British imperialists during British Imperial Sudan. Thus, the toub acted as the most significant unifier Jetween genders, social statuses, and people's political consciousness to protest and eventually push Omar al-Bashir out of office.

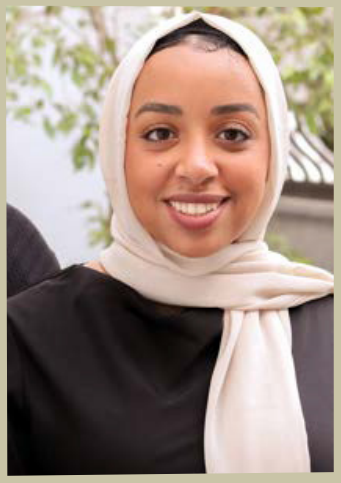
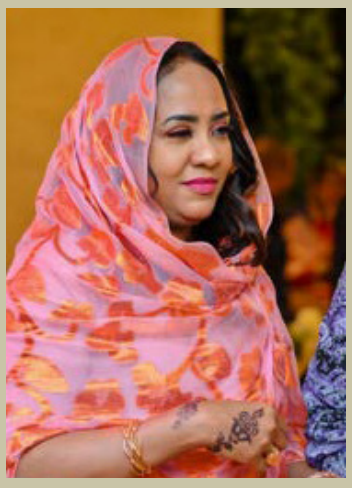
Seen at the forefront of protests were Sudanese women, wearing their symbolic teyaab in resistance to government control over their bodies, mobility, speech, and dress. Women were even said to have made up 70% of protesters across the country, thus proving that a significant amount of the people contributing to rallies and protests against the government were Sudanese women.[7] Sudanese women not only organized and led events, protests, and rallies but led them with symbolic ways for crowds to express themselves, such as using chants, poetry, and especially fashion.[8]

[7] Miriam Engeler et al., "From White Teyab to Pink Kandakat: Gender and the 2018-2019 Sudanese Revolution," *Journal of Public & International Affairs,* no. 31 (2020).
[8] Engeler et al., "Gender and the Sudanese Revolution," 3.
Photo credit: Stringer / Reuters, Sudanese demonstrators in Khartoum on April 11, 2019, photograph, included in Leela Jacinto, "Women lead the charge, and chants, in Sudan protests," *France 24*, July 10, 2019.

interviews

I set up a series of interviews with eight women, representing a diverse range of generations, upbringing, and connection to the Sudanese toub. In the interviews, I asked questions specifically related to the toub, leading to conversations about issues such as intersectionality, culture, and politics. I noticed four common themes that came up in the conversations with the women: identity, coming of age, ghorba (an Arabic expression referring to the psychological and physical state of being away from home), and nostalgia. These themes served as a tool to not only explore the stories the toub helps portray, but also to create my own collection of teyaab based on these women's stories. I designed four teyaab that represent each theme from the interviews, named Coming of Age, Feathers of the Ghorba, Diasporic Knots, and Bint Al-Neel. These teyaab symbolically represent the many complex struggles and multifaceted upbringings and identities of Sudanese women, simultaneously connecting their stories as one voice from the diaspora.




row one, left to right: reem bashir, fathia ahmed
row two: lama mohammed, walla elshekh
row three: sara, insifar abdal-majid, nazek elmostafa

Coming of Age

When asking my interviewees the delicate question, "When was the first time you wore a toub?", there was a constant recurring theme. The toub is a powerful symbol of coming of age.

Each answer reflected a theme of milestones or coming of age: wearing a toub on the first day of a new job, during a traditional wedding ceremony (al-jirtig), or even other important ceremonial events such as one's graduation. The sentimental value attached to the toub extends beyond the idea of preserving cultural heritage; it becomes a tangible representation of a woman's journey through various life stages.

"The first occasion where I wore a toub was on the day of my marriage, which is still a memory I hold dear to my heart. I remember slipping into the folds of the garment, and being overwhelmed with emotions like excitement and joy, but specifically because this was my gateway into being a woman in Sudanese society. I was a true vision of Sudanese elegance and grace that very day. I felt a surge of pride as I embodied the essence of womanhood in my culture. The toub became more than just a garment; it became a symbol of my heritage and the legacy of generations in the past. I couldn't wait for my journey and duty as a Sudanese woman that awaited me."

- sara awad osman

"People dress depending on their age. I would never dress how I did when was a young adult, I won't lie to you. I don't wear chiffon at all anymore, although it used to be my favorite. Now I even keep my jewelry minimal, and limit it to just rings and bracelets."

"When I was younger though, I used to go all out when it came to my dress. I would wear heavy jewelry, colorful teyaab—I love yellow, by the way—with colored in eyebrows, and dark kohl on my waterline.

- fathia ahmed

Coming of Age Toub

The choice of wearing the toub during significant events signifies a deliberate act of self-expression. It serves as a means for Sudanese women to affirm their identity and embrace the evolving facets of their femininity. The presence of blooming flowers adorning the toub introduces an additional layer of symbolism.

These floral embellishments take on the role of representing both the blossoming of the wearer into womanhood and the flourishing of femininity. The petals and hues mirror the intricate layers of experiences and emotions that women navigate as they move through stages of life.

The blooming flowers over the toub serve as a visual metaphor, encapsulating the beauty and resilience inherent in the coming of age, and the multifaceted femininity experienced by Sudanese women.

Feathers of the Ghorba

In addition to its social and political significance within Sudan, the toub represents the experience of women who were born and raised in Sudan, but then immigrated and lived outside of it for their entire adult lives. The garment carries no less meaning for immigrant mothers and women living within the diaspora network than it does for women who've remained in Sudan.

The Sudanese immigrant community suffers from a phenomenon they call ghorba, an Arabic expression that refers to the psychological and physical state of being away from home. Sudanese immigrants undergo an experience that is complex and multilayered, facing certain challenges that result from living outside their homeland, such as experiencing uncomfortable feelings of homesickness, including loneliness, anxiety, and a longing for familiar customs and a way of life, which can be true for immigrants of all ethnicities everywhere. Experiencing culture shock and adjusting to unfamiliar settings can take a toll on the mental well-being of immigrants. To combat the confining feelings of ghorba, one must build a sense of familiarity away from home. Teyaab act as an extension of Sudanese women's identities abroad, serving as a means by which long-lived cultural traditions and heritage are exchanged and passed on. Thus, wearing teyaab is a great asset to establishing a diasporic community and a crucial way Sudanese immigrants lessen the invasive feelings of a ghorba.

On any international day at my kids schools, I purposely would wear my toub. At both of my daughters graduations, I also wore my toub to send a message to our people back home that we made it, and we can do anything we set our minds to here in the ghorba. I also wear it to tell people in the West that Africa is very diverse, and that we don't all dress or look the same. Whenever people talk about Africa they think of one monolithic group. That's why in any international space I like to make people pay attention to and become curious about what I'm wearing. I want the global stage to accept and focus on who we are. People love it and always ask about what I'm wearing, leading them to become curious about Sudan. I'm also spreading awareness about my country by doing something as simple as wearing our cultural dress in public and international spaces."

- reem bashir

Feathers of the Ghorba Toub

The feathers in this toub represent flight, travel, and freedom, elevating the toub into a powerful emblem of individual agency and the dynamic nature of a Sudanese woman's journey in the ghorba. Feathers take on the role of representing the wearer's ability to move through life with a sense of liberty and autonomy, values important to women of the diaspora because of Sudan and colonialism's history of silencing women and limiting their autonomy by dictating their dress, movement, and bodies. They signify not only a connection to tradition and cultural heritage, but also a celebration of the wearer's capacity to embrace transformation and move through life's diverse experiences.

With this toub, I seek to portray the idea that embracing change and moving freely through life is not a departure from one's cultural roots but an evolution that adds depth and richness to one's identity. The feathers can also be seen as a reminder that, like a bird in flight, life's journey is continuous, and each stage brings new opportunities for growth and exploration.

Diasporic Knots

The name "diasporic knots" was inspired by Sudanese women that have lived their whole lives as a part of the diaspora. They are first generation Americans, Brits, and Canadians. For example: girls who are daughters of immigrant parents.

After conducting my interviews I realized that girls like myself have a particularly special connection with our Sudanese heritage. We long so much for it, yet at the same time grapple with our identities that were built upon the norms and culture of the Western societies we were born, raised, and currently reside in. I think sometimes ours can be an internalized struggle with wanting to embrace both cultures that have influenced our identities, despite the opposing natures of Western and Sudanese culture. I wanted a toub that was going to accurately depict this phenomenon, and play with the collaboration of—and tensions between—cultures.

The Sudanese American experience is different depending on the state that you live in. Growing up in Charlotte, North Carolina, I remember people our age weren't necessarily prideful of being Sudanese. It was very much a matter of fact for a very long time. When I started going to Saturday school I started developing all these negative connotations and some sense of self-hate, which I now know was rooted in racism and Islamophobia.

It wasn't until I moved to Jersey that I sensed a different vibe from the community here, and the Sudanese people our age who embraced their identity and saw a lot of beauty in it. I kind of felt like an outsider for a bit because I was so disengaged and didn't know what a lot of things were. As I've grown older I've gained more of an appreciation for our culture, especially with what's currently happening, as Sudan is always in the back of my mind."

- walla elsheikh

I feel like a constant conflict in my life has been that I was too black for the Arab kids and too Arab for the black kids. It felt like I was never really able to fit into any box. But I've grown to love our complex identity and know that I can always refer back to just being Sudanese, even though it doesn't exactly fit in a tidy box like some of the other ethnicities."

- walla elsheikh

We first lived in Kathmandu, Nepal, which was the first instance where I realibed I wasn't just American, but I was also Sudanese, and that outside the U.S. I presented as Sudanese first. That's when I began to discover what it meant to be Sudanese and what parts of the culture were special to me. To be honest, I wasn't always extremely proud of being Sudanese because when you go to an international school, you're surrounded by all different cultures, and I was sort of embarrassed to come from what we used to call the "third world" and that there was nothing to be proud about. But of course, when you come from America, you're from the country of innovation, superstars, and Hollywood. I didn't feel like there was much culture to be proud of on my Sudanese side growing up. That drastically changed as I grew older.

I think there was a brief moment when I was in Sudan during my winter break when I started paying attention to the clothes my mom would wear and pull out for social gatherings. Whenever we would visit, my mom would always pack the most extravagant clothes because she would be away for so long, and this would always be her big moment to represent herself, where she's coming from, and what she's been doing in all the years she's been gone. She just looks so stunning in the toub–I think she actually looks the most beautiful in her toub. There was this one time she was getting dressed up in this yellow toub, and she just looked so beautiful. I remember saying to my younger self, I can't wait to look like her and look as stunning in a toub when I grow up."

- lama mohammed

Diasporic Knots Toub

Rey Chow writes in the book *Primitive Passions* that genuine cultural translation between the East and the West is only possible if we move beyond separating the two as entities, and instead view them as full, materialist, and collaborative participants in contemporary world culture.

Bows were known as one of the top trends in fashion last year. Bows are not culturally linked to anything Sudanese, so I wanted to play with that juxtaposition and further symbolize the notion that embracing your different cultural influences and movement is not a departure from one's roots, but an evolution that adds depth and richness to one's identity. The bows become a bridge between the rich cultural heritage represented by the toub and the evolving expressions of personal style.

Bows also symbolize femininity and nostalgia, both being critical to my interviewee's feelings towards the toub. They serve as decorative additions to the toub, carrying connotations of elegance and celebration of our complex, intricate, and global identities.

Bint Al-Neel

Bint Al-Neel translates to "The Daughter of the Nile." The toub ultimately represents nostalgia and longing for Sudan, while also representing the desire to have a lasting generational legacy as most of us are now displaced from our ancestral homeland.

Concerns linger through our older generation's heads: will our traditions and culture remain even outside the motherland? How will we maintain and pass down Sudanese culture when there is a high possibility that the next generation of Sudanese people (many of whom will be the children of first-generation, displaced, or diasporic Sudanese people) may never grow up in or see their ancestral land? I believe that we can maintain and pass down our rich heritage and culture through a constant binding love for and remembrance of our country that we must teach our future children and grandchildren. We must teach them to love Sudan, to be proud of where they originally came from, to appreciate the stories, and to learn about their country through the experiences of their elders. We must teach our children to surround themselves in spaces and communities that normalize the longing for Sudan, and not repeat the internalized shame and disconnection that many first-generation Sudanese might have experienced growing up in the West.

"I didn't wear a Western gown for my wedding, and that's why it's my favorite. I hope my daughters can reuse my wedding toub in the future, and I still have it kept for them so that it can be passed down through generations as a symbol of maintaining our culture, tradition, and identity as we are now away from our homeland.

On my wedding day, most of the women were shocked that I didn't wear a white dress as it started getting picked up after we were colonized by the British. I wanted to send a message to all of the ladies at my wedding that we can still keep our traditions and maintain our trends that will never fail to represent our identity as Sudanese women."

- reem bashir

"Pre-war, I didn't think much about if and when I would wear the toub, and how much it would be a part of my adulthood...since the war, there are so few personal items we can cherish and continue to celebrate and highlight Sudanese culture. I definitely will wear the toub when I'm older and in community spaces, just because it's one of the last physical things we have to show and represent Sudanese culture...For Sudanese women, the rite of passage to womanhood is getting to a point where you wear the toub. I think in my journey from girlhood to womanhood, the toub will be a huge part of that. Since my mom is such a stylish toub weather, it wouldn't be doing justice to her legacy if we didn't keep part of her clothes and teyaab...Sharing teyaab down the line would be cool. I say yes all the way."

- lama mohammed

Bint Al-Neel Toub

A toub that is a canvas of emotions, woven intricately with threads of love and longing for Sudan. The toub displays a breathtaking cascade of colors, each hue whispering a tale of the land it represents. The silk fabric's ombre includes colors that depict Sudan's landscape: brown for our desert roads and rich soil, light blue for the Nile, and a mix of green for our rich agriculture. The toub should be paired with traditional Sudanese dahab (gold).

Beyond its aesthetic allure, the toub is a symbol of identity, pride, and a profound connection to Sudan. Wrapped in its embrace, a woman carries not just a garment, but a piece of home: a reminder of the land that shaped her and the memories that bind her to its soil.

The Bint Al-Neel toub is more than a work of art; it is a love letter to Sudan, a testament to the enduring bond between a people and their homeland, woven with the threads of history, culture, and the undefeatable spirit of the Sudanese people.

sudan today

On the morning of April 15th, 2023, people in Sudan woke up to the sound of bombs and heavy artillery due to the fighting that broke out between the Sudanese armed forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). These two paramilitary groups started clashing as a result of a struggle between SAF leader, Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and Mohamed Hamdan "Hemedti" Dagalo for power, resources, and control over the country.[9] After dictator Omar al-Bashir was overthrown in 2019, military groups took over. Sudan was promised a civilian-led government, but the two sides couldn't agree on a date for transition. This ultimately led to the fighting that broke out which has now turned into a long and bloody fight for power as we have now passed a year of war.

As a result, there have been so many lives taken and many people driven out of the country that the current death toll is unknown and isn't being recorded. In states such as el-Geneina, a state in West Darfur, the death toll was estimated to be 10,000-15,000 people in 2023 alone (Lodhi). The war has led to a collapse of infrastructural systems including hospitals, markets, telecommunication services, water supply, sanitation services, and transportation.

[9] Areesha Lodhi, "After a Year of War in Sudan, What Is the Situation Now?", *Al Jazeera*, April 11 2024.
Photo credit: Jood Ahmed (@seekinglight), *Photograph of Sudanese flags*, photograph, Instagram, April 15 2024.

Photo credit: Mustafa Badri (@feedomarley), *Photograph of a house in Khartoum burning*, photograph, Instagram, May 5 2024.
Photo credit: @maxartechnologies, *Satellite imagery of Khartoum International Airport*, photograph, Instagram, May 5 2024.
Photo credit: Mustafa Badri (@feedomarley), *People on a bus leaving Khartoum*, photograph, Instagram, May 5 2024

my cri de cœur: a letter

April 15th, around 9:00 in the morning, we were suddenly bombarded with an influx of phone calls, messages, videos, and news about attacks in Khartoum. Flying fighter jets, shelling, and noises of intense shooting loomed over the capital, and over the houses where our families reside. Bullets were found in my haboba (grandma) Fathia's house, and there were many calls from worried aunts and uncles about how they would rather die from acute hunger than die from the bullets being shot outside. My little cousins were robbed of innocence, haunted by fear. It was too dangerous to go out. Horror stories flooded our media: there were accounts of innocent lives taken, raided homes, and families torn apart. We thought it was temporary, and that it would die down in the next couple of days. A week went by. Then three. My family was then forced to evacuate the capital and get on a bus to Cairo, a long, arduous journey that I pray no one's family ever has to go through.

For weeks I asked myself, how is it fair I get to be in a place so incredibly far removed from a situation happening in another place I call home? A land so dear to my heart, one whose soil holds my roots.

I started to think about how I could incorporate my interest in theory, art, and fashion into a project to spread awareness. It slowly became a part of my passion to see an increased recognition of the political, societal, and cultural efforts made by Sudanese women, not just within Sudan but throughout the far-flung diaspora. I hope to invest in amplifying female Sudanese voices, by making research and archives more accessible, spreading awareness through media, and providing opportunities for self-expression through art and fashion in public spaces.

I have made it my purpose to use my privilege and available opportunities to continue speaking out not only for the Sudanese community but for all oppressed people who are currently fighting intersectional battles against colonialism and tyrannical regimes. Our countries have long been robbed of their resources, their beauty, and their right to exist in peace, justice, and freedom.

I dream that the research I do for the rest of my academic career is the beginning of something revolutionary for these women.

Faiza Bubak (@faizabubak), "A woman sitting on a chair," photograph, Instagram, January 11, 2023.

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To my ancestors, my family abroad, and my people back home, who are an extension of me: you've given me the courage and strength to amplify our voices and let the world know that we are a people of hope, love, resistance, and revolution.

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To all my Black Muslim sisters, in a world that attempts to silence our voices, let us rise and recognize that our journey is a testament to the beauty that emerges from the intersection of blackness and Islam, a beauty that radiates strength, resilience, and an unyielding commitment to justice.

To my mother and sister Lama, this work is for you.