

■
READ:
ANGER

Ladin
Awad
■



I find myself in a constant transitory state,
as though I haven't yet arrived
to a final feeling, emotion, or reckoning.
There seems to be a collection of inquiries each
time I think to face the wholeness of this grief, of-
ten underlined with a fear that it may just swallow
me whole.

What then is left? Is it a fear that I could entirely
erase the memory of what once was,
if I were to really accept what is gone?

What will occur once there's a sincere confronta-
tion with the scale of loss?

I think that's how grief has either settled, or refused
to settle, in my body.
If I don't fully *cave in to the feeling*, was it real?

Surely, what I do know is things will never be the
same. Oftentimes the sentiment is that it's a good
thing, being in a constant state of change.
I think about the cost of this specific change.
It's hard to know where to begin.

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It's imperative to know that the beginning wasn't
April 15th, 2023.

What's preceded is a history of colonial legacies
and counter revolutions that underpin today's ca-
strophes. Militarized state and paramilitary vi-
olence has plagued Sudan for decades. History
indeed repeats itself.

One could argue that counter revolution has had its
roots in Sudan since its independence in 1956. The
October Revolution of 1964, led in part by the Su-
danese Communist Party, ousted Ibrahim Aboud,
Sudan's first sitting president. A transitional civil-
ian led government emerged – only to be disrupted
by a failed coup that ultimately led to the election
of a new dictator president, Gaafar Nimeiry. In 1989,
another military coup, led by the National Islamic
Front, took place and established Omar Al Bashir's
nearly three decade regime.

Fast forward to 2019, resistance movements and
people of all classes in Sudan successfully led a
revolution that ousted Al Bashir, Sudan's longest





standing president (read: dictator) of 25+ years. This also led to a transitional government that demanded an end to military rule, to lead to full civilian rule, but was also disrupted by another coup in 2021. This time jointly carried out by what we now know as the RSF and SAF. Two opposing armed forces that are fighting over the control of the country today.

This is the cliff notes version.

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My mom and grandma arrived in Sudan on April 12th, 2023. My mom was set to stay a few months. Then, myself or my sisters would join so that my grandma would not be alone. My grandfather, God bless his soul, passed away in April 2021, so the home has been pretty vacant since.

My mom was going to use this time reconnecting with my family and had plans of studying for the bar exam. My grandma was longing for a return after being away for over 6 months. I know she also finds comfort in being there because it reminds her of my grandpa who built our house decades ago, and so, she couldn't be away for too long.

There was no way they could conceive what would take place only 3 days after their arrival.

No way any of us could.


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I often say my conception of time was forever altered after the first week of the war.

The days that would go by without hearing from my mother and grandmother, not knowing if they were alive. If they had reached a 'safe' zone. I believe it was four.

Four days of not hearing anything. It doesn't seem long, but those four days felt like an eternity. The panic that rushed through my body after every unanswered phone call, the anxiety that came with every undelivered message. The lump in my throat would embed itself deeper with each passing moment. I wouldn't wish this feeling on anyone to this day.

Evacuation wasn't the first inclination, perhaps there was an opportunity to wait it out, but it became





apparent once our next door neighbors home was hit by shelling that it was time to go.

Within the first week, more than 400 people had been killed in armed violence at the hands of the Rapid Support Forces and the Sudanese Armed Forces.

Within a few days, the US Department of State quickly ordered the departure of their employees and their ‘dependents’.

A security advisory read:

SECURITY ALERT: SUSPENSION OF EMBASSY OPERATIONS

*‘On April 22, 2023 the US Embassy in Khartoum suspended its operations and the DOS ordered the departure of direct hire employees and their dependents due to the continued threat from armed conflict in Sudan. The US government cannot provide routine or emergency consular services to US citizens in Sudan, due to the current **security** situation*

...

*Due to the uncertain **security** situation in Khartoum and closure of the airport (read: destruction) it is not currently safe to undertake a US government coordinated evacuation*

...

*To inform citizens of options to leave Sudan, as **security** conditions permit, we need to know your information’*

I began to question the notion of ‘security’. Who was afforded it?

Surely the current ‘armed conflict’ affected civilians the most. I thought back to the day(s) my mother and grandmother both took the oath of allegiance to become US citizens. Memorizing futile facts about the imperialist entity that is the US so as to be granted a lifetime of benefits and responsibilities. Now only to ultimately be denied the bare minimum of any meaningful assistance or guaranteed refuge in a full on war—a war that the US itself has had vested roles in creating and abetting for its own interests. Where was the allegiance the US had to its people?





Ten days passed. After a series of countless WhatsApp message threads, dropped calls, sparing service, coordinated mass evacuations from the people (and the people alone), my mother and grandmother finally made it out.

The last leg of their journey was a 32 hour trek, specifically a 16 hour bus ride to Port Sudan, and a 11+ hour ride from the port to the Saudi shores by cargo ship. My grandmother was among the Sudanese who ‘fled’ who were photographed by the Saudi press upon her and my mothers arrival. She was pictured being helped off the ship by a Saudi man, who was handing her a rose. The image went viral and made it to newsfeeds and eventually back to my family.

To this day that image haunts me. I think of my grandmother, a reserved and private woman, who like many of her generation often internalizes her pain—not simply as a ‘mechanism’, but perhaps as an act of preservation. Whether or not that is the ‘healthy’ choice, it is *her* choice, and I resent the fact that her vulnerability in that moment was taken and immortalized for the sake of a saviorist photo op.

It seems inconceivable that amidst all this I could make room for such a futile anger, but the implications of the image; the lack of consent; the performativity; the painful irony that it was being used to contribute to a righteous image of the Saudis, who are immediate beneficiaries of the war—it all just felt like a sick joke.


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As I recount what seems like microaggressions in a series of macroaggressions, I think about one’s threshold for trauma, read: anger.

I see anger and trauma as transposable. Surely both can exist within the other. But when I think about the untenable levels of trauma my family, my people, have gone through... I assimilate that to anger. How does one process that scale of trauma (read: anger)? Is that process finite? Is it enough to be granted the space to access anger?

And most importantly – can it be transmuted as a necessary tool?





I believe Black folks are often afraid to claim anger because it either affirms some of the ‘redundancies’ placed on us. Angry, sad, helpless.

It’s deemed that Sudanese people should perhaps settle for a ‘condemnation’ of violence by the state, rather than feel rightful rage at the inconceivable scale of silence and blatant disregard for our human life. Instead, we must continue to persevere, because we are a persevering people.

I quite frankly resent being a ‘persevering’ people.

To persevere: is to ‘continue in a course of action even in the face of difficulty or with little or no prospect of success’. Another definition states that to persevere is ‘to persist in a state, enterprise, or undertaking in spite of counter influences, opposition, or discouragement’.

Surely we persist, though always in spite. But what of that persistence is aimless, with no prospect of success, if it doesn’t actually create opportunities for our demands to be met? What then can be made possible if we were to understand anger as a utility?

In *The Bluest Eye*, Toni Morrison writes on behalf of the main character Pecola: ‘Anger is better. There is a sense of being in anger. A reality and presence. An awareness of worth. It is a lovely surging.’


Anger is often considered unproductive – but I counter that with a question of who gets to be angry, and what do they *do* with their anger.

I personally feel more activated through my anger. That lovely surging equips me to be more vigilant, more aware, it’s almost as though my senses sharpen. I find it extremely productive. I feel empowered to demand more, to not settle for less, to call out and clear any energies that don’t align. Audre Lorde once said in a keynote:

‘...anger expressed and translated into action in the service of our vision and our future is a liberating and strengthening act of clarification, for it is in the painful process of this translation that we identify who are our allies with whom we have grave differences, and who are our genuine enemies.

Anger is loaded with information and energy.’





In earnest, I start to wonder more strategically about violence, which also feels like a natural extension of my anger.

To wonder aloud about violence, as a Black woman, feels inappropriate. Why would we resort to such a feeling? How uncivilized, right. Why not?

Why is it that mass violence is the natural instrument of the state or warring factions to achieve their goals, and a people who have been subject to those same ills can't imagine or strategize a violence back? I risk sounding obtuse here, but I mean this sincerely.

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June Jordan writes:


*How many of my brothers and my sisters
will they kill
before I teach myself
retaliation?
Shall we pick a number?
South Africa for instance:
do we agree that more than ten thousand*

*in less than a year but that less than
five thousand slaughtered in more than six
months will
WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH ME?
I must become a menace to my enemies.*

To this day, 16 months into the war, 12 million Sudanese people (and counting) have been displaced since the start **making us the largest internally displaced population in the world, on record.** This means **one in every five displaced people in the world is a Sudanese person.** To this day, over 150,000 people have been killed in the war, and a looming famine that could starve 3 million people to death is near.

(I can't believe what I'm writing). Shall we pick a number?

It goes without saying that these are not just numbers. Every number is a real person. Given we live in an age of digital media, it feels easy to become desensitized to this sort of 'data'. But each person was killed, and to be killed is not always by a weapon: the healthcare system collapse; the heatwaves; the





quest to seek asylum; the deadly journeys across the borders – these people have not just ‘died’, they have been killed by the conditions of this war.

I think June perfectly captured the bewildering sentiment of this all, the disruption once she starts to quantify and contrast, she blurts: WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH ME?

WHAT IS THE MATTER WITH US?

What is our litmus test for when retaliation becomes warranted?

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In every sense of the word, I must become a menace to my enemies.

My enemies are the state. My enemies are the power hungry generals who are waging this war, and for what?

My enemies are the US, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Israel – these are the obvious enemies.

The less obvious are the enemies that exist within. I elaborate:

Like many Sudanese families, the fabric of mine is an amalgamation of social classes, color caste categories, military folks and anti-government folks, therefore a true and heartbreaking confluence of the ‘best’ and worst’ of Sudanese society. I say this with a critical attention to the deeply intricate nuances of this statement that can only be so accurately conveyed through verbiage, versus visceral knowing.

So, what happens when we turn the mirror on ourselves? I say this as a Sudanese woman whose immediate family is from the North, moving between Khartoum and Omdurman. My nuclear family, despite the unprecedented pain and loss we are grappling with to this day, occupy a class of Sudanese society that is affiliated with the ruling elite. The same ruling elite that has possessed a unique position and power in the ongoing wake of the war. Who have historically ignored the neighboring conflicts in other parts of Sudan for decades.





Being of any capital city implies a distinct manifestation of citizenship.

Those who make their living in the politically concentrated parts of the capital are usually direct inheritors of the orders of the state. As in, possess dual citizenship, reap benefits of expatriation, perpetuate a sort of ethnonationalism that renders them legitimate and non Northerners as obsolete or peripheral. Even in mainstream media reporting, those who “made it out” are displaced with more visibility (read: power).

That said, this war is not merely a product of two opposing generals but rather a byproduct of the counterrevolutionary fabric and genocidal ethnonationalism that has afflicted Sudan arguably since its inception. This same ethnonationalism that affords our ‘kind’ immense cultural, economic, and societal benefits.

So with that, I challenge the ongoing mainstream analyses that seem to still compute this war within a binary of enemy one vs enemy two. That pretends

that South Sudanese people don’t exist, that Darfuri people don’t exist. That could not comprehend that this war is a counterrevolutionary political and class struggle for command and resources driven solely by the interests of global capital. That despite my incessant heartbreak around the destruction of Khartoum, I can hold multiple griefs. The fact is, the RSF and SAF have both been terrorizing Darfur, the South, the Blue Nile region, and the Nuba mountains throughout Sudan’s history, and now the neighboring fighting is brought to the tripartite capital.

Khartoum isn’t Al Fasher, (North Darfur’s own capital), or Al Jinena, or Sinja, or Sennar, or Dinder. All likely unrecognizable names, but all real towns filled with real people who have been subject to state violence, resource extraction, land dispossession, mass bombardment and starvation, and who have also been forced to flee in the hundreds of thousands.

I turn to anger, again.

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In between writing this,

I received a WhatsApp message from my family's group chat.

Multiple media files sent back to back. Blurred videos and images of a familiar site – it dawned on me that it was my late grandmother's home in Omdurman. My dad's mother, Mama Yuma. She passed in 2017, may God bless her soul.

The video frames moved quickly, so as to speed through the pain of what it could illicit. 'This is our living room. This was our kitchen. This was her bedroom. This is our home, people,' narrates Bashir; a family friend, in Arabic. Bashir was sent to check on the home only to find it ransacked and destroyed *almost* beyond recognition. Except, I could recognize it. I was able to identify our front yard, once lined with colorful pots filled with plants that had been nurtured over decades. Now, demolished.

I put my phone down and let whatever emotion register. Did I just see that? I haven't written or said much of anything in this chat as, much like other

group chats, I'm overwhelmed and often inundated by all the updates. Also, subconsciously I always overthink what I could say: what can one offer in a time where the unspeakable occurs? What words of solace? What do my words mean?

It reminded me that I also haven't spent much time sitting with the fact that my other grandmother's home (on my mother's side of the family) is currently being squatted by the RSF soldiers. The same home they rushed to leave on April 18th, 2023. When I first heard that, I couldn't compute it. I'm still not sure if I can. But I know the profound grief that I feel in my heart, that literally feels like a sharp pain, is when I start to image the reality. When I imagine the soldiers laying in my late grandfather's room that was once his sanctuary, or in my mothers childhood bedroom. It's hard to envision and frankly I don't want to.

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As of late, my grandmother's exterior nonchalance has started to wane.

Previously, she would ask us to change the subject when we would start talking about Sudan. I would



notice her drift off when everyone is deep in the politicking. Glued to her phone watching videos of imams giving hadiths (her balm in these times), or pulling up satellite images of our home in Khartoum via Google Earth to ‘check on it’.



شارع الرشيدين، شارع 117

Street 117/Rashidein Street, Khartoum, Sudan;
Courtesy of Google Earth

She'd clue in to what's being discussed and proclaim 'خلاص غيرو الموضوع' or leave the room. Every so often she'll recall a memory of the house and the garden, or a song will play and she'll repeat to herself "يحليلك يا بلدي".

Given the displacement of a majority of my family, many of them have come to the States attempting to start over. That means we're sharing homes and space again, that means, every now and then my aunts, and uncles, and their kids, and my grandmother, would hop from home to home. Our house, to my aunties house, to my uncle's house. Still essentially living out of suitcases over a year later. Folks, still, aren't quite on their feet yet.

Recently, my grandmother's longing has been clearer than ever. She explicitly proclaims she just wants to go home. She's grateful for the opportunity to stay with her children, but she just wants to be home. My mother said her sadness is apparent: she's less talkative and silently sits amongst my family when they're all gathered. I, instead, understand that she is channeling her anger. Anger at a completely man made unconscionable crisis that has stripped her from her home; that has separated her from her family; and that has virtually made it impossible for her to return.

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I return to this question of threshold. How much trauma (read: anger) can one hold?

When I imagine my reflection, it's dimension is not whole, rather it's dispersed.
Like a locus of moving points.
Of unfixed feelings or sentiments.

When I find myself in the space of inquiry, of reflection, of beginning to journey inwards, I delay what could be a pivotal or critical turn of self.

I know what grounds me is knowing a few things:
Anger
and that
This is not the final feeling.

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Sources:

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A sentiment, personal archives, سوق أم درمان
Souq Omdurman , 2019

