

Virtually home:

Sudanese migrants in the Netherlands and the role of (connective)
journalists in a diasporic public sphere

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ABSTRACT

In Sudan, due to censorship of media by the government, Sudanese individuals rely heavily on the diaspora in order to obtain truthful news through digital and social media. This is not an isolated phenomenon relevant to Sudan; since the emergence of the network society, the public sphere has also undergone a transformation. In its modern shape, it has become digitized, decentralized, communication-based, and no longer relies on traditional media to enable public debates with the political realm. Furthermore, it is no longer bound by the nation-state: in a post-Westphalian and networked world, migrants can easily access and participate in diasporic public spheres. In this context, those consuming news can also become producers of news, which is also true in a diasporic context. Considered to be connective journalists, writers of news articles are themselves part of the audience they are trying to reach. In the Sudanese diaspora, too, connective journalists often contribute from their position in the diaspora.

Though diasporas have been studied extensively, the role of connective journalists in the diaspora and their liaison work with third-party allies remains unclear. This thesis aims to answer the following research question: how and why do Sudanese migrants in the Netherlands use (social) media for transnational political purposes? To do so, interviews were conducted with twelve Sudanese migrants residing in the Netherlands. As a result, five motivations for (social) media use were identified: Sudanese connective journalists in the Netherlands use (social) media to share news with other Sudanese people, assist people in Sudan, reach non-Sudanese people, and organize protests, and use connections with third-party allies (e.g. traditional media and governments) to put pressure on the Sudanese government. In conclusion, it became clear that connective journalists move through different arenas in which the public sphere exists (e.g. national or transnational), operating on each level simultaneously or alternatively. Furthermore, it was found that connective journalists do not merely contribute to the public sphere in Sudan, but that the public sphere reaches across the world and migrants actively participate. Thirdly, it was emphasized that the diaspora is heterogeneous, and each person takes on a different role. Finally, it was found that the work of connective journalists in the Sudanese diaspora is a deliberate attempt at bottom-up political reform.

KEYWORDS: *Connective journalism, diaspora, Sudan, Netherlands, public sphere*

PREFACE

In 2019, I came across the hashtag #BlueForSudan on Instagram. I am not sure if I truly knew what was going on, but – in true social media fashion – I jumped on the bandwagon, shared a post or two about the Sudan Revolution that was in full swing at the time, and changed my profile picture into a monochromatic blue circle. Not expecting to be able to do much more about it, I closed the app and opened the next: Facebook. It turned out that I had a Facebook-friend who actually went to a Sudan-related protest in the Netherlands, and right when I went to check my timeline, he posted some pictures of the gathering. A large group of people had assembled in Utrecht, carrying Sudanese flags. It fascinated me and left me with a few questions, most of all this: why were people protesting for a Sudanese cause in Utrecht?

I scoured through Dutch newspapers, but found no reports. And as I watched people's social media profiles turn blue over the course of the next few days but traditional media outlets in the Netherlands remained silent, I was even more fascinated; if what people were saying on social media were true, namely that the social media campaign was a huge success and was having a tremendous impact on the situation in Sudan, why were other media so quiet? As time progressed, social media became even louder, but traditional media did not.

Since this was around the time that I had decided to do start this master's degree the following September, a vague idea for a thesis topic came to mind: "something" about Sudan and social media. Fast forward about a year, and here is the final result. Due to COVID-19, I was forced to conduct all interviews through video conferencing services. Quite ironic for a thesis that is so heavily focused on social media. I suppose that, in a way, it is only fitting to have been reliant on Skype to write a thesis that emphasizes the importance of social media and the internet in this day and age.

Before moving on to the actual thesis, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr. Chris Aalberts, who replied to every one of my emails faster than I could hit "refresh", was always available, never complained about how chaotic I was, and contributed greatly to my thesis through incredibly insightful suggestions, critical questions, and sharp guidance; and also to each of the twelve interviewees, who were so kind as to take time out of their days to talk to me, shared with me their very personal stories, and patiently answered all of my questions.

Table of Contents

Abstract and keywords

Preface

Table of Contents

1. Introduction	4
2. Historical context.....	8
2.1. Recent history of Sudan	8
2.2. Sudanese migrants in the Netherlands	10
3. Theoretical framework	12
3.1. The public sphere	12
3.2. Public spheres in a diasporic context	15
3.3. Journalism in a public sphere	19
3.4. Connective journalism in diasporic public spheres	22
4. Methodology.....	27
4.1. Data collection and justification.....	27
4.2. Respondents and subcategories	28
4.3. Operationalization	30
4.4. Coding	32
4.5. Validity and reliability	35
5. Results	36
5.1. Some contextual remarks	36
5.2. Using (social) media to share news with other Sudanese people.....	38
5.3. Using (social) media to assist people in Sudan	42
5.4. Using social and traditional media to reach non-Sudanese people	47
5.5. Using (social) media to organize protests	50
5.6. Using third-party allies to put pressure on the Sudanese government	54
6. Conclusion.....	58
6.1. Summary of results.....	58
6.2. Discussion	60
6.3. Limitations and suggestions	63
References.....	65

1. Introduction

“Sudanese news radio from an apartment in Amsterdam,” an article in the Dutch newspaper *NRC.NEXT* headlined (Rutten, 2018). It drew attention to Radio Dabanga, a radio station which – according to *NRC.NEXT* – reaches 2.3 million Sudanese individuals across the world each week. Its purpose is to surpass the censorship on media in Sudan, which is done by sharing news through, for example, radio, WhatsApp and Facebook. The information they receive is, in turn, mainly sent to them through WhatsApp as well. “Messages come from many different places in Sudan,” Mustafa, one of the station’s eight employees, told Free Press Unlimited. “Both cities and rural areas and also from the Sudanese diaspora” (Free Press Unlimited, 2017). Truthful journalism in Sudan, the same article states, is thus mostly shared through what they call chat media (Free Press Unlimited, 2017).

New media have proven to be an important source of information for Sudan many times before. One such example are the flash floods that affected hundreds of thousands of Sudanese citizens in 2013, after which the authoritarian government failed to provide aid to those affected. An alternative, horizontal network of citizens was quickly set up to make up for the lack of government support. Information and communications technologies (ICTs) proved to play an important role in the mobilization of and communication with citizens from across the country (Bashri, 2014).

Such alternative spaces in which news is shared and transformed into action do not limit their access to Sudanese people within the country’s borders – as the example of Radio Dabanga shows – and is not unprecedented by other societies. On the contrary; according to Gada Kadoda and Sondra Hale (2015), the Arab Spring, in which pan-Arab youths famously utilized social media to create a widespread protest against their respective authoritarian governments, was only the beginning of a much wider movement of using ICTs to ignite (political) change. The same is true for many African countries, both within the African continent and in the diaspora (Bashri, 2014). In Sudan, specifically, “social media not only facilitated civil society’s mobilization and greater visibility, but they (the media) raised consciousness and drew in greater numbers” (Kadoda & Hale, 2015, p. 223). Compellingly, Kadoda and Hale (2015) also recognize that since most activists were exiled by the government, one of the main sources of government opposition is the (online) Sudanese diaspora.

One way in which to understand these news making practices is through the concept of connective journalism. Though used in different contexts by different scholars, the definition

provided by Regina Marchi and Lynn Clark seems most fitting for the purpose of this thesis: “whereas traditional journalism is associated with the practices of building an accurate *story*, connective journalism is associated with the practices of building an individual and collective *identity*” (Clark & Marchi, 2017, p. 13). Though it was shown above that at least some Sudanese connective journalists do, in fact, pride themselves in providing accurate stories, it is also true that a collective identity is an important component of the Sudanese diaspora. As Amna Naghi, a Sudanese migrant in the Netherlands, told *Haarlems Dagblad*: “we are one country, one people. But instead, Sudan is torn. Those in power constitute the Arab top layer, but the people feel African” (Haarlems Dagblad, 2019). It thus seems that a common “Africanness” contributes to the Sudanese (diasporic) identity.

Though the importance of (social) media in modern diasporic communities has been widely acknowledged, diasporic activism remains inadequately studied. The focus of such studies has been, among other things, mobilization of diasporic activists in several ethnic or national contexts (e.g. Eccarius-Kelly, 2002; Koinova, 2013), the effect such activism has on the home country’s politics (e.g. Williams, 2012), or transnational communication (e.g. Parham, 2004; Bernal, 2005). Little, however, has been said about news making practices or connective journalism in diasporic contexts, including the Sudanese diaspora.

Building on a suggestion by Jolle Demmers (2007, p. 26) to conduct more in-depth case studies on “the activities and motives of diasporas” to later utilize it to more accurately understand its implications on societies in the home country, this study aims to do precisely that. Most notably, it aims to do so from a more contemporary viewpoint, in which a particular focus is put on social media and the way they are used to inform not only Sudanese people in the diaspora, but also those still in Sudan. This way, it fills a lacuna in the existing body of literature on the topic.

Furthermore, the research topic has a societal relevance, as horizontal networks of citizens sharing news potentially contribute to political change. If this is indeed true, it has policy implications that require a better understanding of, among other things, “the different roles that different actors play in the process, the issues that enter the transnational public sphere, [and] the channels through which issues are brought into and out of the transnational public spheres” (Yang, 2002, p. 15). It is thus important to consider this phenomenon from the perspective of the diaspora.

This thesis is concerned with the following research question: how and why do Sudanese migrants in the Netherlands use (social) media for transnational political purposes? As can be derived from the way the research question is formulated, it mainly aims to look at

motivations of members of the diaspora and their reason to participate in diasporic activism through (digital) journalism in recent times. By Sudan I mean the country that is currently known as the Republic of the Sudan, excluding South-Sudan which became an independent country in 2011.

In order to be able to adequately answer the main question, four sub-questions have been formulated. These areas of questioning are based on a strategy previously used by Kari Andén-Papadopoulos and Mervi Pantti (2013), which focuses on Syrian migrants bridging social media activists inside of Syria and mainstream media outlets from outside of Syria. Though this particular study does not consider the Sudanese diasporic activists' connections with the Dutch mainstream media, inspiration can be drawn from their methodology. They identified four main areas of questioning: the way citizen journalists see their responsibilities, how they deal with local information and images, who their target audiences are, and how they use new communication technologies. Based on a slightly modified version of these areas of inquiry, the following four sub-questions or issue areas have been identified for the purpose of this study:

The first question looks at how Sudanese migrants in the Netherlands who participate in diasporic activism view their responsibilities as (connective) journalists. Though not all of them may refer to themselves as journalists, I will assume that they all have a reason for participating in practices that could be identified as connective journalism according to the definition utilized in this thesis. This question will provide insights into motivations of connective journalists to participate, touching on initial motivations to partake in such practices.

The second question asks how news about Sudan is received, handled, and shared. Despite the abundance of information available, connective journalists must inevitably make a selection of those items they find newsworthy to either share, write about, or comment on. By asking this question, our understanding of what is considered to be newsworthy will grow. It will also provide insights into how sources are handled, what is considered reliable, and how facts are being checked. These "traditional" steps in the working process of a journalist may – or may not – change in a connective, diasporic context.

Thirdly, the following question is asked: who do Sudanese connective journalists in the Netherlands aim to influence and what do they hope to achieve? Besides their initial, intrinsic motivations discussed with the first question, there are also external motivations. This question is based on the assumption that connective journalists have an objective when participating in what I define as connective journalism, though they themselves might not label themselves

“journalists”. This question aims to find the answer as to what that objective is, and, by extension, who they hope to influence in order to achieve that objective.

Finally, the following question is asked: how is (connective) journalism transformed into physical actions (e.g. protests) in the host country? When a small community is reinforced through connective journalism, protests emerge at times. Sometimes this happens unintentionally, but at times intentionally. When connective journalists ignite a willingness to partake in physical activism, one might question whether they adhere to certain traditional journalistic values, such as objectivity. This question aims to, on the one hand, try to understand how connective journalism can lead to physical activism, but on the other hand, it provides insights into potential redefinitions or reconsiderations of traditional journalistic values.

The remainder of this thesis is outlined as follows: the second chapter of this thesis will briefly discuss the historical context of Sudan as well as a brief history of migration policies in the Netherlands. The third chapter provides the build-up of a theoretical framework. By looking at, subsequently, the public sphere, the public sphere in a diasporic context, journalism in the public sphere and connective journalism in diasporic public spheres, a deeper understanding of the framework is provided, after which it will become clear where exactly the lacuna in the literature lies. The framework will also be a tool to analyze the collected data. Chapter four is concerned with the methodology, outlining how data was collected, an in-depth explanation of the areas of inquiry, and the operationalization. I will present the results of the study in chapter five. The chapter is divided into five sections, each based on a selective code that was identified through the analysis of the source material. Finally, the conclusion will be discussed in chapter six.

2. Historical context

2.1. Recent history of Sudan

Sudan's recent history is volatile and characterized by ongoing conflicts. Though it is too intricate to discuss the lengthy conflicts in the country in depth, it is imperative to briefly touch upon the most relevant and recent conflicts that have undoubtedly shaped not only the (diasporic) identities of Sudanese peoples across the world, but continue to guide and shape the issue areas Sudanese migrants deem important.

As early as thousands of years before Christ, the northern part of Sudan was heavily influenced by Arab traders and settlers, who brought with them Arab culture and practices and, centuries later, Islam. Many Sudanese peoples adopted the religion or intermarried with Arab Muslim settlers. The south, however, was heavily opposed to this Islamization and Arabization and refused to convert. Moreover, Arabs were not particularly interested in bringing their religion to the south – to them, the region merely served as a territory that allowed for slave raids to take place (Deng, 2011). Fearing that Islam would ultimately reach the south, the Catholic church started sending missionaries to the southern parts of Sudan in the 1850s, where they established schools. Still, they had little influence, as they, too, experienced resistance from the mainly Animist southern tribes (Assefa, 2019).

The hostility between the two parts of Sudan, with Islam as the divisive element, was briefly mitigated during the colonial period. According to Hizklas Assefa (2019), this period is essential in understanding future conflicts. The period was characterized by the signing of the Condominium Agreement of 1899, in which Britain and Egypt formally agreed to jointly assume rulership of Sudan. Under their – albeit in practice mainly British – rule, pacification efforts were made and slavery slowly declined. The British started funding Catholic missionary schools in the south, essentially forcing the population to convert to Christianity, changed the official language to English, and made Sunday (as opposed to Friday) the day of rest. Despite these efforts, the percentage of illiteracy in the south remained high (Assefa, 2019).

Though, on paper, the country was now consolidated, in reality it remained deeply disunited. The abovementioned practices, including the establishment of missionary schools, conversion to Christianity of the Southern Sudanese population, and changing Sunday into the day of rest, were only enforced in the south, whereas the north remained ideologically Islamic and culturally and linguistically Arab. Anglo-Egyptian policies thus reinforced the respective Arab-Muslim and African-Christian identities of the north and south, causing divisions to become greater rather than pacifying the nation (Deng, 2019). Furthermore, by the time Sudan

regained independence in 1956, the north had, throughout the colonial period, developed politically, economically, socially and culturally, while “the South remained isolated, secluded, and undeveloped” (Deng, 2019, p. 11). The differences between the two areas had become quite apparent.

Since 1956, Sudan has found itself involved in ongoing armed conflicts with brief hiatuses at times. Civil wars have been fought between the north, attempting to force Islam and Arab identity onto the south, and the south, still refusing to lose its African-Christian identity. Conflicts, fluctuating in intensity with each change of rulership but ever violent, were mainly fought alongside increasingly radical religious lines (Deng, 2019). Eventually, it resulted in the independence of South Sudan in 2011, though South Sudan itself was combating another civil war until recently (Rolandsen & Daly, 2016).

For the purpose of this thesis, however, which considers only Sudan and not South Sudan, it is crucial to consider those changes in rulership in more depth, or rather, the way in which these changes were realized. Two years after regaining independence in 1956, conflicts in Sudan turned into a civil war and eventually a military command assumed leadership. This lasted until 1964, when the military was overthrown and a democracy was established, but not for long – five years later, yet another military government took over that, over the next twenty years, would slowly establish an Islamic state. After a popular uprising (locally known as *intifada*) succeeded in causing the demise of this state in 1985, the country found itself wrapped up in still more hostilities (Deng, 2019).

In 1989, General Omar Hassan Ahmed al-Bashir seized power and established yet another Islamic state. Though he lost control of South Sudan in 2011 when the region gained independence from Sudan, Al-Bashir’s Islamic regime remained intact in Sudan until the Sudanese Revolution of 2018 and the government’s subsequent demise in 2019, leaving the country in a state of disarray to this day (Hassan & Kodouda, 2019). Though merely a brief overview, the abovementioned changes and volatility of Sudan provide insight into the complex relationship between the people and the military leaders.

Additionally, there is an economic dimension to more recent conflicts – since the country became largely socio-economically dependent on the export of oil since the 1990s, oil prices have inflated tremendously in order to fund al-Bashir’s ongoing wars with the southern parts of Sudan and Darfur. This heavily affected lives of many Sudanese peoples, causing living conditions to deteriorate quickly. In 2019, inflation had reached 70%, becoming the direct cause of the 2018 *intifada* known as the Sudan Revolution (Mahé, 2019). Particularly in a time of digital and social media, scholar W.J. Berridge states, the recent uprisings of

2018/2019 shed light on an issue heavily underrepresented in scholarly literature; namely, the non-Arab, non-Muslim majorities residing outside of Khartoum – Khartoum being considered the center of the ‘Riverain Arab-Muslim Power Bloc’ – and the population most negatively affected by the spending habits of the military regime (Berridge, 2019).

In summary, it is valuable to keep two aspects of this history in mind: on the one hand, the conflicting identities of the northern and southern parts of Sudan, and on the other hand, the relationship between the people of (northern) Sudan with their rulers. The identity conflict is particularly important to understand in this context, because in certain societies (including Sudan) “elements of identities are important factors in the sense of belonging to the nation and participation in the political, economic, and social process” (Deng, 2019, p. 14). It is therefore not an additional part of one’s identity alongside a national one; rather, these identities are deeply intertwined and determine one’s position within society.

This, in turn, brings us to the second point: the friction between Sudanese peoples and their rulers. Though the *national* identity is heavily Arab, many people are, in fact, non-Arabs, constituting the majority of the population (Deng, 2019). In a country where formalities are so profoundly connected to the (seemingly more abstract) concept of identities, large parts of the country find themselves culturally and economically marginalized. Providing insights into the true scope of disparities between the Muslim military elites and the culturally non-Arab peoples, it aids us in understanding the nature of the conflict, that is in fact not merely fought alongside the binary division between Muslims and Christians, but more intricately, is a still ongoing struggle of deprecated peoples from across the country and, with many people displaced due to decades of conflict, the Sudanese diaspora.

2.2. *Sudanese migrants in the Netherlands*

This brief outline of conflicts mentioned above provides insight into reasons as to why many Sudanese people sought refuge elsewhere. Many fled to Europe, including the Netherlands. After a wave of Turkish and Moroccan labor migrants entered the Netherlands in the 1960s, the country took little action to assist the migrants with integrating into Dutch society. Upon realizing this in 1983, the Netherlands introduced the *minderhedennota*, a policy on ethnic minorities, with the objective to reduce disadvantages that the migrants faced as well as encourage them to participate fully in society. It was thus that the Netherlands became an attractive country for new migrants (Andrew & Lukajo, 2005).

This resulted in an increase in migration to the Netherlands, including an increase in Sudanese migrants and refugees from the mid-1990s onwards. By 2005, 7.285 Sudanese had settled in the Netherlands, two-thirds of whom were men. They lived scattered across the country, due to the Dutch policy of *uitplaatsing* (meaning migrants were assigned widely dispersed housing) after being granted a residence permit (Van Heelsum, 2005).

In March 2020, the *Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek* (Statistics Netherlands) reported that 8.491 Sudanese migrants were living in the Netherlands at that time (Centraal Bureau voor de Statistiek, 2020). However, the lack of additional data reveals that they are rarely mentioned in debates regarding minorities in the Netherlands. Furthermore, little research has been conducted regarding Sudanese migrants in the Netherlands since their initial settlement. In the larger Dutch framework and debates on minorities, the general trend in migration policies and reception of refugees across the Netherlands has been one of increasing polarization among the Dutch population. In recent decades, “the country began to experience many changes in its immigration and integration policies, shifting from a multiculturalist approach to an increased emphasis on assimilatory ideals” (Paz Alencar & Tsagkroni, 2019, p. 188). This means that the focus shifted to encouraging refugees and other migrants to integrate especially politically and economically.

Across the world, however, it has been noted that diaspora groups play an active role in international development and transnational politics. Darfuris in the United States, too, seem to have taken on such a role: one study discusses how networks of Sudanese migrants in the USA work closely with other groups with similar goals, such as NGOs. Though the level of equality within the relationship between diasporic activist groups and NGOs may be contested, according to the study, it does point to the importance of diasporic activism in general as well as, in a larger geographical framework, the Sudanese diaspora specifically (Budabin, 2014).

The lack of knowledge regarding the Sudanese community in the Netherlands as well as the abovementioned study pointing towards transnational diasporic activity of Sudanese migrants in other parts of the world reveal a major lacuna in the literature both discussing diasporic activism and the Sudanese community in the Netherlands. Through this thesis, I hope to contribute to both of these academic discussions. Building on the outlines of the framework provided in this chapter, the next chapter will construct a theoretical framework through which the diasporic activism of (citizen) journalists in the Sudanese diaspora in the Netherlands may be understood.

3. Theoretical framework

3.1. The public sphere

Historically, the public and private realms of daily life were intertwined and mostly inseparable. This changed, according to Jürgen Habermas (1972), by the end of the eighteenth century, when the nature of state authority shifted from absolute rulers and feudal relationships - in which the sole public activity was the physical presentation of the ruler to his subjects - to a more fragmented reality of aspects previously related to the largely private princely court. This caused private individuals, specifically the bourgeoisie, to assemble into a public body, using newspapers to publicly discuss matters with the ruling class and to express public opinion. The main demand from this public body, or the public sphere, was that information regarding power be made public so as to be able to supervise the ruling authority.

At the time of Habermas's publication, the public sphere had changed drastically again. It was no longer a matter of the bourgeoisie, but accessible to all, and had been fundamentally reshaped by the emergence of party politics which caused it to become 'a field for the competition of interests, competitions which assume the form of violent conflict' (Habermas, 1972, p. 54). Radio, television, newspapers, and magazines remained important aspects and continued to be the media of the public sphere. The mediator between state authority and private individuals in the public sphere had become large organizations, defeating the previous notion that interrelated private individuals themselves could assemble and demand change. At the time, Habermas warned readers that reorganization of the public sphere was needed lest it disintegrates (Habermas, 1972).

Since the emergence of the internet, however, this is no longer the case. Sociologist Manuel Castells (2000) states that modern society, which he dubbed the network society, is characterized by, among other things, a globalized, digital culture, the demise of the nation state, and scientific developments that reshaped humanity's world view. Furthermore, emerging ICTs allowed the network society to become decentralized, meaning large institutions (such as traditional media outlets) were no longer needed to mediate between the political realm and the public sphere, but instead individuals could communicate freely through digitized media. Communication networks were now based on interconnected nodes that constantly expand and contract, greatly affecting and reshaping societal structures (Castells, 2000). This communication-based public sphere has been theorized as the networked public sphere (e.g. Benkler, 2006; Friedland et al., 2006; Reese & Shoemaker, 2016).

Another crucial difference between “traditional” and networked public spheres is the difference in geographical boundaries. While Habermas’ public sphere was largely confined to a geographically concise area, providing a breeding ground for its characteristic hierarchical societal make-up, networked public spheres, according to Fraser (2007), may exist transregionally, transnationally or transculturally. Migrants, such as the Sudanese diaspora in the Netherlands, are thus able to participate in a Sudan-focused public sphere from any place in the world. This concept moves past ideas that a public sphere is attached to a traditional nation-state.

Later, in 2014, Fraser expands on this idea. She reflects on Habermas’s limited view of the public sphere, which she refers to as the ‘Westphalian frame’, an idea she adhered to as well in earlier decades. This Westphalian frame relies heavily on (1) the assumption that a public sphere is confined to the borders of a nation-state and (2) that the public sphere finds expression in the interactions between ‘the people’ and ‘the state’. However, though much of daily life remains directed within the borders of a nation-state and therefore we cannot entirely abandon Habermas’s interpretation of the public sphere, she proposes to broaden the understanding of the concept. In considering Habermas’s limitations, she states:

A public sphere is conceived as a vehicle for marshalling public opinion as a political force. Mobilizing the considered sense of civil society, publicity is supposed to hold officials accountable and to assure that the actions of the state express the will of the citizenry. Thus, a public sphere should correlate with a sovereign power. Together, these two ideas – the *normative legitimacy* and *political efficacy* of public opinion – are essential to the concept of the public sphere in critical theory. (Fraser, 2014, p. 28)

These assumptions are heavily based on the idea that participants in the public sphere live within a democratic nation-state and that all can, at least in theory, participate. This had been widely contested; for example, some state that this idea is based on the ‘continuity with traditions that are historically and geo-politically specific’ and that ‘history is littered with examples of the public sphere not working, or the debates being ignored, misrepresented, quashed’ (Bell, 2007, p. 2). Furthermore, Fraser states that in contemporary society the Westphalian take of the public sphere is (because of the effects of the network society on the societal fabric) too restrictive (Fraser, 2014).

What that post-Westphalian public sphere looks like in practice is more difficult to imagine due to its abstract nature. Where Habermas’s interpretation was, in some ways,

frameable, the transnational public sphere does not allow for such a straight-forward (at least within the Westphalian framework) definition. What is needed, then, is a more intersectional approach, that includes feminist, ecological, state-theoretical, colonial/post-colonial and transnational perspectives, all heavily influenced by capitalism and, in turn, closely connected to the modern public sphere (Fraser, 2014; Bargu & Bottici, 2017). For the purpose of this thesis, we will now focus on the practical nature of transnational public spheres.

When rejecting the limited Westphalian framework of the public sphere, many basic assumptions of the theory are thrown out with it. For the purpose of this thesis, the most important one will be discussed briefly. We need to understand that transnational public spheres, according to Fraser's definition, have no regard for borders. In what Fraser (2014) calls the 'all-affected' principle, there is a need for the institutionalization of a transnational public sphere that is available to anyone, across the world, who might feel affected by a company that is not located within the traditional boundaries of their nation-state of residence. In the words of Bell (2007, p. 2) "Fraser seeks to promote a transnational ethic, one that makes political critiques, interventions and movements operate outside nationalistic considerations, and that finds a source of hope in the new solidarities of the World Social Forum." The key word here is *institutionalization* – rather than an abstract concept of political action across the world, Fraser seems to be moving towards transnational, even global institutes – again, *in addition* to traditional national institutes – that create global (or at the very least, supra- or transnational) public spheres.

However, this theory has also been criticized by others. One criticism that has been raised, as outlined by Bell (2007), is that Fraser's understanding assumes that actors across the world have a similar perception of the global societal make-up or development. In other words, Fraser's theory relies heavily on a sort of linear-global world view, that moves from Westphalian to post-Westphalian, from local/national to supranational to global. This is often seen as Eurocentric (e.g. Randeria, 2007). Another criticism, by Shalini Randeria (2007), is that Fraser takes for granted that certain aspects of civil society and public spheres (e.g. elections to utilize political power), without taking into account that modern public spheres (including, or especially, transnational ones) do not parallel traditional public spheres on all levels except geographical ones. For example, it becomes increasingly difficult to identify the addressee of the political actions and it is no longer self-evident to exercise political power through elections and representation. This seems especially true for diasporic public spheres and will be further discussed in the next section.

Concluding this section, then, a few last considerations are important to keep in mind before continuing. Though the basic premise of the public sphere as outlined by Habermas (1972) (i.e. civil society exercising political power) remains unchanged, much of the heavily Westphalian perspective of the initial theory has been contested since. Considering the very purpose of this thesis is to understand a public sphere that has no regard for borders – that is, diasporic politics – the definition proposed by Habermas is altogether too limited. Therefore, it relies heavily on Fraser's (2007; 2014) redefinition of the public sphere, placing it in a post-Westphalian and transnational context, while also appreciating the criticisms of especially Randeria (2007) who states that exercising political influence does not happen “naturally” (for lack of a better word) through elections and representation in a post-Westphalian world. Furthermore, this transnational public sphere is considered to have been increasingly enabled by the network society, using ICTs to virtually cross borders in a matter of seconds, increasing the efficacy of such a public sphere. In brief, our understanding of the public sphere, from now on, is thus as follows: public spheres can transcend borders, physically and through ICTs, aiming to move past traditional notions of the nation-state in geographical, political and relational terms, though not completely disregarding but rather existing alongside those traditional notions.

3.2. Public spheres in a diasporic context

Public spheres emerging in diasporic contexts have often been called diasporic public spheres (Laguerre, 2005). These should not be confused with transnational public spheres – though diasporic public spheres make sense only when accepting the framework of the transnational public sphere because it allows for a public sphere to exist beyond a democratic nation-state and thus transcends the traditional Westphalian limitations, the transnational public sphere does not refer *only* to diasporas. Laguerre (2005), however, emphasizes that diasporic public spheres specifically refer to public spheres and political activity in a migratory context, where they discuss issues concerning the homeland and the diaspora. Though adopting certain aspects of traditional public spheres while, quite literally, transcending borders, or expanding across borders and over several nation-states, they are only concerned with those issues relating to the diaspora in question. Transnational public spheres, on the other hand, may, for example, be concerned with inter-, supra- or transnational issues.

On the topic of diasporic public spheres, research has previously been done in, for example, the conflicting identities and subsequent pluralization of the South Asian public

sphere in Britain (Werbner, 2004), social media and how it enables migration (Dekker & Engbersen, 2014), identity construction and maintenance through social media (e.g. Komito, 2011; Skjerdal, 2011), and the creation of temporary, single-issue public spheres (Moyo, 2007). One example of a single-issue public sphere, alternatively called an alternative public sphere, is the horizontal network of Sudanese citizens providing aid to the victims of the flash floods in Sudan in 2013 (Bashri, 2014). In terms of media use, research has been done on diasporic media consumption (e.g. Ogunyemi, 2014; Christiansen, 2004) and media representation in traditional media outlets of the host country (e.g. Nolan et al., 2011; Georgiou, 2013; Wong, 2017).

The network society has, as previous research shows, drastically altered the nature of the public sphere. Although understanding of the complex transformation of the public sphere grows, diasporic public spheres remain less understood than more traditional, or geographically more concise, public spheres. The abundance of terms used to explain similar concepts in a diasporic context, as the abovementioned examples show, struggle to grasp the essence of such public spheres and the reconceptualization of the public sphere Castells (2000) states that the introduction of the network society demands. Especially news making practices and social media use for the purpose of distributing news in a diasporic context, in the way that, for example, Radio Dabanga does, are little understood.

For clarity purposes, I will use the term “diasporic public sphere” in the remainder of this study when I wish to refer to a networked public sphere in a diasporic context. This is based on the assumptions that (1) the public sphere needs, at this point in time, to be understood through a post-Westphalian, or transnational, lens, based on the theory of Fraser (2014) and (2) that contemporary society is best understood through the lens of the network society, and thus that many public spheres have become networked in nature, which is based on Castells (2000). Especially diasporic public spheres, whose very essence is transnational, take shape considerably easier in such a networked context. Therefore, when the term “diasporic public sphere” is used, it is automatically assumed that it is networked in nature, unless explicitly stated otherwise.

This does, however, require some nuance; though the network society has had an enormous transformative effect, it has not yet succeeded in replacing older societal structures altogether, as the previous section showed. This includes the traditional, “Habermasian” public sphere (Benkler, 2006). The best a networked public sphere can do, then, is coexisting alongside traditional, geographically bound public spheres, and emerge in certain (often temporary) issue-areas in a transnational, networked context when the political and

communicational conditions are favorable and allow for such a development to take place (Crack, 2007). In some cases, such as Sudan, these diasporic public spheres seem to exist for continuous periods of time.

What is especially interesting when looking at diasporic public spheres is the, to an extent, hybridity of it. As mentioned in the previous section, Randeria (2007) rightfully critiques Fraser's limited discussion of implications of the transnationalization of the public sphere on political activities. She states:

Citizens are increasingly using courts at all levels rather than elections to render governments accountable. Many of the new social movements, be they national or transnational, or at both scales simultaneously or in succession, are concerned with surveillance and judgment rather than with issues of legitimacy, participation and representation. A broader grammar of governance has thus emerged, one that has extended the vocabulary of citizenship both within the nation-state and outside it. But, paradoxically, this parallels the shrinking space for politics within democracies. [...] Activists differ in their assessment of the efficacy of using local, national or transnational arenas either exclusively, consecutively or simultaneously. (Randeria, 2007, p. 39)

When putting this criticism in a diasporic, and networked, perspective, it seems especially valid. In a diasporic context, where the focus areas are issues and identities in the diaspora as well as politics in the home country (e.g. Parham, 2004), it sometimes seems difficult to know where to direct political efforts. Sometimes these find expression in physical protests in the host country (e.g. Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003), while at other times this might be expressed through online or physical discussion forums (Moyo, 2007; Skjerdal, 2011). Sometimes they exist on national levels in the host- or home country, for example through communication and reform efforts through the host country's government, and at other times they might be on an inter-, trans- or supranational level, working closely with (inter)national NGOs (Koinova & Karabegovic, 2017).

In the Sudanese diaspora, specifically, one study examined how Sudanese migrants in the United Kingdom participated in (or rather, resisted) homeland peacebuilding in 2014. Cathy Wilcock (2019) found that resistance from the diaspora was expressed primarily through two channels: through the National Dialogue (a state-led dialogue addressing poverty, political reform and national identity, started as a result of tribal and religious disputes in Sudan) and

through civil society building, which was mostly led by the diaspora. Wilcock's study focused mainly on discrepancies between desires of Sudanese nationals based in the diaspora and those based in Sudan, and while that perspective is not the purpose of this study, it does provide some insight into the complexity of diasporic public spheres; while the initial impulse might be that they are an extension of, in this case, the Sudanese public sphere that is 'stretched out' past the Sudanese border, this study shows that the diasporic public sphere may actually be distinct from the national one in both focus and goals. It is, therefore, important to keep in mind the diasporic context of this study; the results provide insights into the Sudanese diasporic public sphere only, and reflects experiences and opinions of Sudanese individual residing in the diaspora, specifically the Netherlands.

Interestingly, and in line with this thesis, Parham (2004) places much significance on informational networks and their role in forging common identities and communities of diasporas – specifically online forums and their effects on offline realities of the diaspora. Paired with the abovementioned study, this may point towards a distinct diasporic identity. Based on this possibility, we will treat the identity of the Sudanese diaspora in the Netherlands as distinct; again, no conclusions about the situation *in Sudan* can be drawn from findings put forth in this project.

This thesis aims to contribute to the process of reconceptualization of the public sphere, by studying the role of (social) media in a transnational network of migrants. Though it does not attempt to claim that it can answer the question as to what the public sphere, as a whole, entails, it does provide insights into individual activities within this networked public sphere. By taking the network society and the (networked) public sphere as a theoretical framework (Castells, 2000; Benkler, 2006; Crack, 2007), transnational political activities of a diasporic community can be understood as a product of a global development, rather than an isolated incident concerning migrants. By studying it from the perspective of individual migrants themselves, it enables us to more closely understand the bottom-up process of transnational political activity, and how the public sphere is (trans)formed through such practices, as well as contributing to an increased understanding of news making and news sharing practices within a diasporic context. In the next section, theories regarding these news making and news sharing practices will be examined in more depth.

3.3. Journalism in a public sphere

As mentioned earlier, Habermas (1972) acknowledged the importance of news media as media of the public sphere. He mostly focused on traditional media: newspapers, radio, and later television. The network society, however, dramatically changed (and continues to change) not only the public sphere itself, but also the media of the public sphere; Ingrid Volkmer (2003) points out the transformation of journalism as a discipline, influenced by globalization and digitization of news, and how it affects traditional notions of the public sphere.

In the network society, a global news sphere emerges. To Volkmer (2003), this global news sphere is characterized by three factors in particular. First, a growing accessibility to national news outlets from around the globe, that exist alongside national news channels. For example, someone in the Netherlands might access the national news channel of Sudan or vice versa. This is what she calls parallelism. Second, through the internet a new world news order is created, surpassing agenda-setting practices and legitimizing transregional events. One example of this might be Radio Dabanga. Third, new types of media outlets emerge that are not merely national channels aiming to deliver international news to their target audiences but are fundamentally transnational in their very essence. Examples of this phenomenon are social media channels such as Facebook and Twitter.

It is imperative, however, to ensure that we do not reduce the concept of a public sphere to its newsmaking practices. Though important, the public sphere encompasses much more - 'it is the cultural/informational repository of the ideas and projects that feed public debate. It is through the public sphere that diverse forms of civil society enact this public debate, ultimately influencing the decisions of the state' (Castells, 2008, p. 79). Still, the media system of the public sphere plays a crucial role in (re)shaping debates - Castells (2008), too, recognizes that the modern public sphere is largely communication-based. In the networked public sphere, citizens themselves can potentially have a greater impact on shaping the public opinion through information sharing on internet platforms than through traditional news channels (Benkler, 2006).

Once citizens themselves participate in such news making practices, new forms of journalism emerge. Concepts such as citizen journalism (e.g. Tilley & Cokley, 2007), public journalism (e.g. Glasser, 1999), amateur journalism (e.g. Pedley, 2005; Atton, 2009), and connective journalism (e.g. Clark & Marchi, 2017) have been coined by scholars to explain this phenomenon. Essentially, they describe similar concepts, though nuances differ. In this study, "citizen journalism" is considered to be an umbrella term for a myriad of underlying

concepts; “connective journalism” is one of those. Though, as will become clear, the term “citizen journalism” is quite fluid and, at times, unclear.

Elsbeth Tilley and John Cokley (2007) state that the perception of what citizen journalism is depends on who is asked; citizen journalists themselves, for example, would define their role in society differently than professional (traditional) journalists would describe the role of citizen journalists. Citizen journalists generally believe that “it provides greater truthfulness, less bias, more open access information, more ‘freedom’ to report what is seen, and greater plurality of perspectives” (Tilley & Cokley, 2007, p. 9), while professional journalists emphasize that the emergence of citizen journalism threatens paid employment opportunities and the quality of journalism, because they often state citizen journalists do not respect ethical values of journalism as a profession, making the quality of the work written by citizen journalists insufficient.

When considering the concept from an academic point of view, there might be even more disagreement surrounding the topic – what exactly *is* citizen journalism? According to one study, it refers to “an assemblage of broadly journalistic activities [...] which are characterized by specific practical and technological affordances: they draw on voluntary contributions of a wide-ranging and distributed network of self-selected participants” (Bruns, Highfield & Lind, 2012, p. 4). Essential in this definition are thus the ideas that the work is voluntary, wide-ranged and based on technological affordances (which we, in this thesis, have been calling “networked”). This definition is quite broad and ambiguous; *anyone* who participates in “journalistic activities”, on whichever platform, would in this case be considered a citizen journalist.

Chris Atton (2009), addressing a similar topic but dubbing it “alternative journalism” or “amateur journalism”, also embraces the ambiguity of the concept, emphasizing that media content should always be considered journalism – including personal postings such as blogs and fanzines. Similarly, Seth Lewis and colleagues (2010) state that citizen journalism is participatory, user-centered, and enables those who were formerly considered to be the audience to actively participate.

Finally, Luke Goode (2009, p. 1288) also opts for a broad definition, and he explains why such ambiguity is not only common, but necessary, seeing as a “narrower conception creates artificial distinctions within a complex network of participatory practices”. In other words, in order to properly understand the essence of citizen journalism – which, according to Goode, is inseparable from the network of participatory practices in which it exists – we should consider every kind of participation to be citizen journalism. This, then, includes many

“journalistic activities”, from commenting on newspaper articles, to sharing news on social media platforms such as Twitter and Facebook, to writing a news article on a personal blog.

Building on previous definitions, this thesis, too, will adhere to such a broad definition of the practices that constitute citizen journalism. In this sense, anyone who participates in the sharing or writing of news is, to some extent, a citizen journalist – even if they might not consider themselves journalists. This is based on the belief that in a diasporic public sphere, even the slightest contribution to the public discourse through the sharing or writing of a news item (including, for example, Facebook posts and blog entries) is significant in the same way that traditional media were for the traditional public sphere (Volkmer, 2003). This is, again, not to say these types of journalism replace traditional news altogether – they merely add a new, highly significant, dimension to the field (Benkler, 2006).

This connection between “traditional” or “Habermasian” and networked public spheres has been suggested by Ibrahim (2013), who found that online discussions about political, socio-economic and societal issues significantly influenced the attitudes and motivation of protestors “on the frontlines” in real time. Facebook, for example, was used to organize protests. This study, however, took place within the borders of a nation-state – the question remains whether this phenomenon is also true transnationally. Either way, there is enough justifiable reason to at least investigate whether this is the case.

When the definition of “citizen journalist” is as broad and ambiguous as suggested here and the public spheres in which they participate comprise both the online networks and the “Habermasian” public sphere, it may seem as if this is an impossibly immense realm to study. However, since the thesis focuses on a particular group within society – Sudanese migrants in the Netherlands – the network of participatory practices that Goode (2009) speaks of becomes considerably smaller. Though the broad definition of “journalistic activities” can still be enforced in such a limited group, there is some possibility to narrow down aspects of the definition. This will be done by specifically using the concept of “connective journalism” – a type of citizen journalism, but more specific.

As mentioned in the introduction, connective journalism is, according to the definition used in this study, characterized by fueling a collective identity among those the news is aimed at. Another important aspect of connective journalism as per this definition is that those who produce the news are themselves part of the target audience (Clark & Marchi, 2017). This proves especially important in diasporic contexts, when news is created for only a small target audience (namely the diasporic community). When looking at Radio Dabanga, for example, it becomes clear that the content they produce is open to, but not necessarily targeted at, the entire

world population. It only produces and distributes news related to Sudan, by Sudanese migrants – it is, essentially, a local or community resource. By local, I do not mean a locality in the geographical sense, but the communal sense – in this case, a transnational one. The role of connective journalism in a diasporic public sphere, specifically, will be explored more deeply below.

Whichever way citizen journalism is looked at, it is undeniable that the network society has created an open-access public sphere, as it were, that allows multitudes of people to directly contribute to and participate in discourses, with little to no interference from traditional news media (e.g. Benkler, 2006; Castells, 2008). However, as mentioned before, these traditional news media have not disappeared, and it would be erroneous to assume that they have lost their power in shaping public debates altogether (e.g. Benkler, 2006). However, as the above discussion shows, it has severely altered the exclusivity – and, arguably, the authority – of traditional news outlets. The audience is no longer merely the audience – they simultaneously consume, create, and participate, made possible by, among other things, social media platforms. Though, as has also been shown, citizen journalism is prevalent in every aspect of the (networked) public sphere, it is particularly impactful in a diasporic context (e.g. Plascencia, 2016). The implications of this will be discussed in the next section.

3.4. Connective journalism in diasporic public spheres

Considering citizen journalism in a network society connects both the “Habermasian” and networked public spheres, and these connections, in turn, make it possible for these journalists to directly influence what is happening “on the ground” (e.g. Ibrahim, 2013), it seems justified to regard connective journalism as being part of grassroots (diasporic) activism. This is true, to some extent, but here, too, nuance is required due to the networked and transnational nature of the framework through which I will be studying this topic.

While some scholars regard grassroots activism as local, non-hierarchical and networked (e.g. Brodtkin, 2007; Castells, 2015), Kadoda and Hale (2015) point out that especially the aspect of it being a local movement can be contested. Members of *Girifna*, a Sudanese politicized youth movement, have mostly been exiled over the past years. Yet, its existence as a grassroots movement persists. It could be argued that *Girifna* can no longer be regarded as a grassroots movement. However, I will choose to follow Kadoda and Hale in recognizing the importance of *Girifna* not only in its own influence on Sudanese society, but also “that their importance rests on the fact that their ideas inspired the continuous formation

of new groups such as *Abena*, *Isena*, and creative organizing (using text messaging, Facebook, and Twitter for mobilization” (Kadoda and Hale, 2015, p. 223). Connective journalism can therefore be regarded as a form of horizontal (i.e. non-hierarchical), grassroots activism, as the definition of “grassroots” used in this thesis does not consider locality to be part of its definition.

The idea that ICTs can be used to mobilize people, as Kadoda and Hale as well as Ibrahim suggest, is not confined to a country’s borders either. Chris Tenove (2019) states that ICTs can be used to participate in demanding justice in migrants’ home countries by initiating transnational mobilizations (such as protests in the host country) and documenting human rights violations. Based on Tenove’s conclusion, it might be stated that connective journalism in a diasporic public sphere can ignite action by mobilizing migrants into organizing transnational protests in the host country. As discussed in the previous chapter, this connection between networked and traditional public spheres had already been legitimized by Ibrahim (2013).

The idea that activism can be studied in a networked context has been theorized as connective action, introduced by Bennett and Segerberg (2012), and is heavily based on the emergence of the network society. Whereas the traditional public sphere required formal institutions to organize action - for example, in the form of protests - the network society enables individuals or (grassroots) groups to engage in connective (i.e. through digital networks) action without the necessity of a third party, allowing them to use connective journalism to do so.

In fact, at least one study (Plascencia, 2016) found that ICTs – and more specifically, social media – do not merely serve as an enabler, but a catalyst of (transnational) political action. He states:

Social media has had a huge impact not only as a novel communication channel that supports migration networks, but as an important factor that actively transforms the nature of these networks, encouraging not only human mobility but the transfer of information and knowledge, that are of extreme value not only for those who want to migrate, diminishing risks, but for non-profit organizations and public dependencies that play an active role in this process. (Plascencia, 2016, p. 83)

It thus seems to have completely transformed how one should think about activism; it increases, enables and catalyzes mobility of both people and information, but also facilitates relationships

and collaborations between third parties and formal organizations. Furthermore, he states that it has made the process safer. This is in part due to the swiftness with which information can be distributed.

However, this increased velocity and mobility brings with it its own challenges. It is useful, then, to refer back to Randeria, who was quoted in an earlier chapter saying that social movements of all kinds have shifted their focus from issues such as legitimacy, participation and representation to issues concerning judgment and surveillance, and that “activists differ in their assessment of the efficacy of using local, national or transnational arenas either exclusively, consecutively or simultaneously” (2007, p. 39). What is left, then, in a diasporic context, is a single public sphere in which issues of a single country are discussed, but where individual actors might operate on different levels – or arenas, as Randeria calls them – and in differing capacities. Adding to this the idea that citizens in diasporas and citizens remaining in the home country – in this case, Sudan - might differ in desires and tactics regarding political or social reform (Wilcock, 2019), we are left with uncertainty regarding the organizational or practical aspects of this diasporic public sphere, or in other words, the arenas in which transnational journalists and activists act.

Though no studies have been found specifically concerning the Sudanese diaspora, insights from (the limited amount of) studies on other diasporas and (citizen) journalists in diasporas may equip us with some insight into possible trends in the Sudanese diaspora. One finding, for example, is that Afghan refugees in Turkey use localized activism by putting pressure on the Ankara government for improved residency rights, while at the same time being active transnationally in that they have a network of (Afghan) refugees to address international NGOs for this same purpose. Furthermore, solidarity groups for this movement enter this conversation with similar demands – when focusing on the transnational aspects of both of those movements (solidarity groups as well as the refugee groups themselves), “allows us to see solidarity groups as well as migrant/refugee groups not as distinct categories, but as interwoven and transformative collectivities” (Ataç, Rygiel & Stierl, 2016, p. 539). They do not, however, mention or recognize the role of (social) media. Furthermore, it is important to note that these findings were not concerned with transnational activism regarding the home country of the refugees, but of the situation of the refugees vis-à-vis the host country.

Regardless, when connecting this statement to Plascencia’s (2016) abovementioned idea concerning the role of social media in such a context, there is reason to believe that the public sphere in which third party allies (i.e. non-profit organizations and public dependencies)

move are indeed interwoven with the public sphere of the refugees themselves in a networked context.

This can be somewhat attested to by a study conducted by Rivetti (2013), who studied the relationship between non-governmental organizations and refugees through a case study of Iranian refugees in Turkey. She found that this relationship is, though cloaked in positive words such as “empowerment”, are often oppressive in nature, in that non-governmental organizations take on the role of agents that determine the transnational identity of refugees. They then push refugees into a category where they are expected to be activists for human rights in Iran from the diaspora, while simultaneously taking away the refugees’ ownership in modifying their own identity. The pervasive rhetoric, then, becomes one that is shaped in terms of human rights, which is adopted (through oppression) by the refugees. In other words, Rivetti assigns a much bigger role onto non-governmental organizations than the studies we have discussed so far. It thus seems that relationships between the diaspora and third-party allies are complex and multi-dimensional.

The abovementioned studies do not provide specific insights into the Sudanese diaspora, but previous insights from other diasporas do contribute to the framework we have been building, through which the Sudanese diaspora can be studied. Lastly, an important aspect – the focus of this study – is missing from the abovementioned research: the role of (connective journalists). Not only do the other studies fail to recognize the importance of social media – for example, Ataç, Rygiel & Stierl (2016) do not once mention social media - they often view the body of migrants as a homogeneous entity with equal roles, underestimating the diversity of the community. Especially the disregard for the role of (connective) journalists leaves an enormous gap in these theories, since these journalists are connective by nature – however informal their role as journalist might be – and therefore most likely provide important insights into the network of both the diaspora, the home country, and the third-party allies, thus aiding us in building an increased understanding of the complex dynamics between those three categories of people and organizations as they move at different levels through interconnected public spheres.

In considering these ideas about the role of connective journalism, its function as a grassroots politicized movement, and its potential role in bringing about action, this chapter can be concluded with a final summary connecting the diasporic public sphere with the role of connective journalism in the context of the Sudanese diaspora in the Netherlands. The diasporic public sphere, in the definition I propose, is dependent on the network society in that its existence is created through networks, combining the theories of Laguerre (2005) and Castells

(2008). At the very basis of this is an understanding of the post-Westphalian, transnational public sphere (Fraser, 2014), which moves past the theory of the public sphere as connected to the geographical borders of a nation-state and introduces the notion of a diasporic public sphere.

Within the realms of this networked diaspora, then, connective journalism thrives, as it creates a space for those individuals both in de diaspora and in the home country where they can participate in grassroots activism of the diasporic public sphere, both online and, at times, through physical protests brought about by connective action, combining the findings of mainly Ibrahim (2013) and Bennett and Segerberg (2012).

Radio stations such as Radio Dabanga are, in this context, an explicable development, but the exact role and objective of connective journalists within the diaspora remains unclear. This is in part due, I propose, to the improper treatment of migrant groups in academic literature, often considering the diaspora to be a homogeneous entity in which each individual has a more or less similar role. However, as we have seen by exploring the definition of connective journalism (Clark & Marchi, 2017) and connective activism (Bennett & Segerberg, 2012), connective journalists play an important role in creating an identity within the diaspora (Parham, 2004), as well as mobilizing and enabling fellow migrants (Plascencia, 2016). How these journalists navigate in the complex network of the diasporic residents, people in the home country, and third-party allies, however, remains uncertain, as does their role in terms of the interconnectedness of these three entities.

4. Methodology

4.1. Data collection and justification

This thesis aims to answer the following research question: how and why do Sudanese migrants in the Netherlands use (social) media for transnational political purposes? This question is best answered through qualitative research because this allows for an in-depth analysis of attitudes and underlying causes of behaviors (Fischer & Julsing, 2019).

Specifically, this study is an example of inductive case study research. Though, to an extent, it explores those ideas mentioned in the theoretical framework, its main purpose is to provide new insights into the theories on connective journalism in a diasporic public sphere, participating in (online) diasporic news making practices. “Migrants”, in this context, refers to people originally from Sudan but currently residing in the Netherlands, also known as first generation migrants. (Online) diasporic news making practices are defined in terms of citizen journalism. As further explained in the previous chapter, this refers to any person that might partake in a wide array of journalistic practices, though they themselves might not formally consider themselves journalists (e.g. Bruns, Highfield & Lind, 2012; Atton, 2009; Goode, 2009). Specifically, citizen journalists interviewed for the purpose of this thesis fall into the category of “connective journalists”; people who are themselves part of a group in which their journalism contributes to the forging of a common identity (Clark & Marchi, 2017).

Because the aim of the study is to understand the perspective of Sudanese migrants in the Netherlands on connective journalism as a means to contribute to the diasporic public sphere, it is important to be able to ask specific questions that can clarify unclarities. These unclarities may stem from lacunas in the theoretical framework, or new insights may arise that have not been previously discussed. Semi-structured interviews, therefore, seem to be the most suitable qualitative research method. Furthermore, there is a possibility that sensitive topics are discussed during the interviews, as Sudan is a volatile country in which a respondent may have experienced events that would be inappropriate to share in, for example, focus groups or surveys. The sensitivity of certain topics is therefore more appropriately discussed in the safe environment of a one-on-one in-depth interview than in, for example, a focus group (Harrell & Bradley, 2009).

Therefore, the main data used for this thesis consist of twelve in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Sudanese migrants currently residing in the Netherlands, who partake in (online) diasporic news making practices. It was decided that twelve interviews were sufficient, when reaching saturation after having conducted nine interviews. This means that during

interviews no new information was obtained and no new codes were found during transcription (Fusch & Ness, 2015). Three final interviews were then conducted to ensure data saturation.

4.2. Respondents and subcategories

Respondents were at least eighteen years of age at the time of the interview and there was a roughly equal distribution between male and female respondents to prevent gender bias from affecting the data as much as possible. In total, twelve people have been interviewed. Specifically, there were seven female and five male participants. The youngest participant was nineteen years of age and the oldest was 47 years old. They all came to the Netherlands sometime in between the 1990s and 2018, but the vast majority of the respondents arrived sometime between 2011 and 2018. No distinctions have been made between their reasons for migration. Names used to refer to the respondents are henceforth pseudonyms. An overview of the respondents can be found in table 4.1.

Table 4.1: Table with an overview of information about the twelve respondents.

Pseudonym	Sex	Age	Arrival in the Netherlands	Subcategory	Occupation
Nafisa	Female	20	2017	Occasional Sharer	Student
Mustafa	Male	31	2011	Occasional Sharer	Road worker
Amira	Female	35	2014	Occasional Sharer	Unemployed
Rabab	Female	~35	2011	Occasional Sharer	Teacher
Kamal	Male	21	2016	Active Participant	Student
Nadia	Female	~40	1998	Active Participant	Volunteer
Ali	Male	~30	2015	Active Participant	Activist
Asma	Female	~30	1990s	Active Participant	Office worker
Sara	Female	~25	2018	Professional	Activist
Nasr	Male	~30	2017	Professional	Activist
Fatima	Female	47	1997	Professional	Activist
Ahmed	Male	~45	2011	Professional	Journalist

Respondents were initially contacted through existing Sudanese online news sharing platforms in the Netherlands such Radio Dabanga, which was mentioned in the introduction, and Facebook groups aimed at Sudanese individuals residing in the Netherlands. After finding the first three respondents, the other interviewees were found through snowball sampling: “informants whom the researcher meets are those who supply the referrals” (Noy, 2008, p.

334). The first three respondents thus referred me to their friends and acquaintances who fit the description. The interviews were subsequently conducted through Skype.

As seen in table 4.1, the group of respondents has been divided into three sub-categories of connective journalists with a slightly different set of questions created for each category, depending on the extent to which the respondents were professional journalists. This subcategorization is based on previous research, that has been able to identify different types of citizen journalists – these categories are, in turn, also applicable on the connective journalists interviewed for this study. This will be discussed below.

Several studies have classified citizen journalists into categories. One such study by Fackson Banda (2010) focuses mainly on citizen journalism in Africa. He makes a distinction between *non-institutional* and *institutional* citizen journalism. Non-institutional journalism is heavily individual based, relies on (social) networking, and is unprofessional in nature. Such citizen journalists voluntarily share and produce news through, for example, their personal social media accounts or membership-based websites such as forums. On the other hand, institutional citizen journalism ‘refers to that type of citizen journalism which has a form of organizational structure or constraining ability, complete with external constraints, however minimal’ (Banda, 2010, p. 29). This means that citizen journalists are being monitored and “moderated” by (semi-)formal institutions, arguably professionalizing the content that is being produced by such citizen journalists. This might be the difference between individuals utilizing their Facebook platforms to spread information and those journalists writing on behalf of, for example, Radio Dabanga or other organizations.

Based on the interviews conducted for this study, however, two categories did not seem to suffice – there is an additional nuance within the pool of citizen journalists interviewed for this project. In order to sufficiently appreciate the heterogeneity of the Sudanese diaspora, the respondents are grouped into categories that allow for an understanding of the pool of diasporic citizen journalists as diverse. Building on the abovementioned study by Banda (2010), this study proposes to recreate the subcategories into three new ones suitable for the citizen journalists interviewed for its purpose: the Professional, the Active Participant, and the Occasional Sharer. I deem this necessary, because despite the clear distinction between institutional and non-institutional citizen journalism, I found that there is an additional distinction to be found within the category of non-institutionalized journalism, specifically in terms of intensity of participation in journalistic practices. Additionally, three categories make it possible to appreciate the heterogeneity of the pool of interviewees to a greater extent, preventing this study from erroneously assuming all Sudanese diasporic citizen journalists to

be alike. Because the interviewees are all Sudanese activists to some extent, I take for granted that they believe that their journalistic practices – regardless of the intensity thereof and whether or not they would label themselves to be “journalists” – have societal value. This is, therefore, implicit in each category.

The Professional is not unlike Banda’s (2010) institutional citizen journalists, as they are part of, and moderated by, a professional institution, such as Radio Dabanga or other (journalistic) platforms, but also non-profit organizations or activist groups. A Professional journalist acknowledges their role as a journalist and addresses themselves as such, at least to the extent that they believe they perform journalistic activities. These journalists are either under the paid employment of an institution or are explicitly recognized as a volunteer by an institution – in any case, they are known to be affiliated with an institution and alter their (online) behavior accordingly. Four of the respondents fit into this category.

The Active Participant is not under the employment of a formal institution, but actively engages in the generating, producing and sharing of news on online social platforms. These platforms may vary from issue-specific platforms such as a Sudan-related forum to their personal Facebook or Twitter page. They actively keep in touch with sources or contacts in Sudan and report new findings onto their preferred platform regularly. They consider themselves to make a valuable contribution to the field of journalism and view their practices as necessary additions to professional news outlets, without necessarily considering themselves to be journalists. Four of the respondents fit the requirements of the Active Participant.

Finally, the Occasional Sharer only passively contributes to the journalistic products on Sudan, in the sense that they do not produce news themselves, but only share content created by others. They might either do this on their personal social media pages, or they may be active members on issue-specific platforms, but in either case they only comment or share existing material and do not post their own work. They do not call themselves citizen journalists. They do, however, consider their role to be important – they view their work as actively participating in social reform regarding Sudan. Four of the respondents fit into this category.

4.3. Operationalization

As mentioned in the introduction, areas of questioning are based on a strategy previously used by Kari Andén-Papadopoulos and Mervi Pantti (2013). To them, areas of inquiry were concerned with (a) self-imposed responsibilities of citizen journalists, (b) how they deal with

local information and images, (c) who their target audiences are, and (d) how they use communication technologies.

Three of the areas of inquiry of this study (areas a, b and c) have been based on the questions set forth by Andén-Papadopoulos and Pantti. Area (d) has been reformulated into a question that, I believe, describes more accurately the purpose of this study. It still looks at ICTs, but more specifically into how they are used to ignite connective action. This results in a final topic list created for the purpose of this study that focuses on the following areas of inquiry: role as a connective journalist, handling news related to Sudan, the objective of connective journalism, and physical activism. For each category of journalists, the questions connected to each topic has been slightly altered to fit the category most appropriately.

Role as a connective journalist. Questions in this category center around the importance of staying informed about the situation in and news about Sudan as an individual, the importance of sharing this with others, the importance of the Sudanese community in the Netherlands staying informed collectively, perceptions of responsibility, and selecting “shareable” news about Sudan. For each category of respondents, the focus of these questions, however, is slightly different. For the Professional, since they acknowledge that they are journalists to some extent, questions mainly focus on the role of journalism in transnational situations *an sich*, e.g. why it is important to have journalists producing content about transnational news and how they perceive their responsibility. For the Active Participant, since they also consider themselves to be citizen (or connective) journalists, questions for this topic in this category are similar to those of the Professional. However, since Active Participants are not being monitored by outside forces but determine themselves what they consider to be newsworthy, of sufficient quality, and reliable, questions for this topic center around that decision. Finally, since Occasional Sharers do not view themselves as journalists, the questions in the first topic are fundamentally different than in the other two categories. Instead of asking how they see their roles as journalists, questions center simply around *how* they perceive themselves – if not journalists, then what? And (why) is it their responsibility to share news?

Handling the news related to Sudan. In this category, questions center mostly around decision-making with regards to news sharing and making. I ask about how news is collected, how they distribute their time when doing so, how they safeguard reliability of their news and their sources, who their sources are and how they determine the news value. For the Professional, this topic focuses mostly on how they determine which news is worthy of further investigation and which news is not. For instance, questions center around reliability of sources and determining which news is worthy, but also relate to discussions about, for example,

objectivity. For the Active Participant, these questions were roughly the same, since they, too, recognize the journalistic nature of their work. Though questions for the Occasional Sharer were also similar, they are more passive than their journalistic counterparts and therefore questions center more heavily around reliability and shareability, such as how to determine whether something is worth sharing, or perhaps even important to share.

The objective of connective journalism. Questions in this category are concerned with what the participants hope to achieve with the news sharing or writing, whether and how they hope to influence action, and whether and how they believe they could have some impact in Sudan or in the diaspora. For the Professional, this means taking a broader perspective on the role as a connective journalist as a whole; how do Professionals think their job affects the Sudanese diaspora and which results do they hope to get by sharing, and is it important to have “true” journalists in the diaspora? Again, since Active Participants consider themselves to be journalists as well, questions are similar for them. For Occasional Sharers I, again, do not focus on connective journalism as such, but rather on the objective of the news sharing practices. Questions, then, center around the purpose of sharing such news items.

Physical activism. In this topic, questions are concerned with whether igniting physical protests is a specific objective and why, how they aim to inspire people to participate in action, whether they consider it important that the diaspora, specifically, participates in activism, and how they viewed their role vis-à-vis people still living in Sudan. For the Professional, questions center around the purpose of journalism in such a context and why, and if, journalism should or should not ignite such actions, especially considering the institutional (and thus more monitored) nature of their jobs. For the Active Participant, these questions are similar, though, of course there is no mention of conflict between their actions and an institution. As for the Occasional Sharer, due to the more passive nature of their activism, the questions are mostly concerned with how they view their role in this dynamic between the online and physical world, and whether they believe their sharing habits had any influence on this synergetic relationship.

4.4. Coding

After conducting each interview, the recordings of the conversations are transcribed verbatim. The transcripts are first provided with open, selective and axial codes. This process of coding starts with providing the interview transcripts with open codes, which means that all collected data is divided into fragments. These fragments, then, are “compared among each other, grouped into categories dealing with the same subject, and labelled with a code” (Boeije,

2009, p. 96). The process of comparing the fragments within a single interview is also referred to as ‘constant comparison’ (Boeije, 2002).

Since the participants are divided into different categories (Occasional Sharer, Active Participant, and Professional), the next type of analysis is done within each of the groups. This is done through constant comparison of the open codes that were found in each of the interviews, in order to detect similarities and differences between the data. Similarities, then, are also grouped into categories and provided with an axial code, resulting in a list of axial codes relevant for the interviews within a category (Boeije, 2002). This is repeated for the other two categories as well.

After this, the categories will be compared to each other. This is done because the different groups are treated as potentially having differing perspectives and experiences regarding diasporic activism, which a comparison of the data from the groups will reveal. The purpose of this step “is aimed at deepening the insights and completing the information” (Boeije, 2002). In principle, no new codes are made, but differences and similarities between the categories become clear.

The final step in the coding process is sorting, reorganizing, and reassembling all of the axial codes and moving on to selective coding. This step aims to find connections between the categories, which are then assembled into a new, selective code. According to Boeije (2009, p. 115), formulating selective codes is the most important step of the analysis, as “they will most certainly become part of the theoretical model.” In other words, the selective codes are the foundation of newly proposed theoretical concepts.

At this stage, through constant comparison within and between interviews and categories, patterns have been discovered that can provide insights into, confirm, or contest ideas set forth in the theoretical framework (Boeije, 2002; Eisenhardt, 1989). After coding all transcripts, several axial and five selective codes were found, that have been assembled into a code tree. The code tree is displayed below in table 4.2. From top to bottom, the first three selective codes were found in all categories. The fourth selective code was only true for categories Active Participant and Professional, and the fifth only for Professionals. This will be explored more thoroughly in the next chapter.

Based on this code tree, the results of the study will be discussed in the next chapter. Important in this endeavor is that, throughout the process of doing field research (i.e. interviews), I continuously referred back to existing literature, to compare and contrast my findings in the field. Similar, already existing findings can contribute to the validity of my proposed ideas (Eisenhardt, 1989).

Table 4.2: Code tree with axial and selective codes based on interviews 1 to 12.

Selective codes	Axial codes
<i>Connective journalists use (social) media to share news with other Sudanese people</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Using WhatsApp and Facebook groups to immediately share news • Setting up organizations in the Netherlands to discuss the latest news • Using social media to spread and have access to the most trustworthy news • Using an extensive network of Sudanese acquaintances across the world to validate news
<i>Connective journalists use (social) media to assist people in Sudan</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educating people in Sudan • Offering emotional support to people in Sudan • Offering financial support to people in Sudan • Amplifying the voices of people in Sudan
<i>Connective journalists use social and traditional media to reach non-Sudanese people</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Creating worldwide awareness through social media • Creating awareness amongst Dutch people through traditional media
<i>Connective journalists use (social) media to organize protests</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assisting with protests in Sudan • Organizing protests in the diaspora to create awareness • Organizing protests in The Hague to demand justice
<i>Connective journalists use third-party allies to put pressure on the Sudanese government</i>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Legitimizing requests for help from foreign governments • Pressuring the Sudanese government into reforms • Notifying human rights organizations of human rights violations

4.5. Validity and reliability

As it is a small-scale case study, the validity is somewhat affected. The small sample size somewhat affects the validity of the new findings the study aims to provide and the reliability of the conclusion (Eisenhardt, 1989; Fusch & Ness, 2015). However, since saturation was reached within the scope of this study, it can be considered valid despite the small size (Fusch & Ness, 2015).

There are also strengths associated with case study research in general. Case study researchers are often faced with contradicting evidence, but rather than it being a problem, the “constant juxtaposition of conflicting realities tends to ‘unfreeze’ thinking, and so the process has the potential to generate theory with less researcher bias than theory built from incremental studies” (Eisenhardt, 1989, pp. 546-547). The hypotheses that are generated through this creativity are easily testable and reproduced (Eisenhardt, 1989), which again increases the validity and reliability of this research, regardless of its small sample size.

5. Results

5.1. *Some contextual remarks*

Before exploring the results of the interviews that have been conducted in more depth, it is important to make some additional remarks on the context in which the diasporic activism studied for the purpose of this thesis took and takes place. These contextual insights are essential in understanding the environment in which the findings emerged. Though these remarks may not directly answer the research question of this thesis, they provide a framework through which both the inner workings of the Sudanese diaspora as well as the collective and cultural identities of the participants can be better understood.

From the interviews that have been conducted emerged an understanding of the Sudanese diaspora as a politically active, highly organized, and close-knit transnational community, as will become clear while reading through the results. Though not every person was active in the community to the same extent, with some even choosing to refrain from mingling with the community altogether, they unanimously emphasized their love for, and connection with, their homeland and the role it played in their desire to contribute to improving the country in some way. One of the participants, Fatima, explains this desire as follows:

It's kind of like a repayment, actually, that's how I see it. Not that it's a requirement, but it's more like involvement, it's who you are. You're a plant that can grow everywhere if you're in the right soil and if you get love and care, but on the other hand, you always take with you who you are. And it doesn't matter who you are, if you can mean something to your people, why not? (Fatima, Professional)

For Fatima, this seems to be a way of explaining why she chose to be involved in diasporic activities. From her casual use of words, it becomes clear that this activism is an obvious choice for her, a logical consequence of feeling love for one's country. This is, perhaps, the reason as to why she would be considered a Professional according to this study: an individual who is affiliated with an institution, making journalism their primary way of contributing to the Sudan.

The connection between the love for one's country and involvement in diasporic activism, however, proves to be less consistent throughout the interviews than Fatima's remark may suggest. Another participant, Asma, describes her love for the country and her desire to keep up with the news in Sudan in the following manner:

If you love a place or a person, you would like to know a lot of information about him or that place. So that's my land. That's my country, my country of origin. And I liked her and I never thought in my life I would apply for asylum and live outside of Sudan. So, it comes out of care and love for the country that I am from, for the people there, and, yeah, that's how I feel. (Asma, Occasional Sharer)

Interestingly, despite both her love for the country and her desire to remain informed about the situation in Sudan are quite similar to Fatima's reasoning, Asma falls into the category of Occasional Sharer: someone who only occasionally shares content, but does not write their own work. To her, love for the country thus did not equal activism.

In addition to this, she states that she had little contact with the Sudanese community in the Netherlands. Her reasoning for this was having disclosed to other people that she was an ex-Muslim (Asma, Occasional Sharer), as did Nafisa (Occasional Sharer), who coincidentally falls into the same category of connective journalists. Though two accounts do not point towards any type of connection between one's religion and the intensity of involvement in the Sudanese community whatsoever, it does provide insight into some cultural aspects of the Sudanese community in the Netherlands. Reflections on the identity of the community by other participants attest to this claim. Kamal, for example, describes it as follows when asked about the Sudanese identity: "For me it's just religion, in the first place, and then language, and just, norms and values" (Kamal, Active Participant). Kamal falls into the category of Active Participant; someone who is not personally affiliated with an institution, but actively engages in generating, producing, and sharing of news. This study is, of course, not aimed at examining the cultural make-up of the Sudanese community in the Netherlands, so there is no way of recreating a comprehensive account of the community based on these remarks.

Participants in this thesis could be assigned to either one of the following three categories: Occasional Sharer, Active Participant, or Professional. As discussed in the methodology, the individuals belonging to the different categories participated in diasporic activism in different intensities. It will be shown, however, that many similarities and patterns remain.

Furthermore, as mentioned in the introduction and historical context, Sudan has a deeply rooted history of racist or essentialist practices amongst tribes in the country. Though the diasporic community is still divided in some ways, as will be shown in the next paragraph, this is, for the most part, not based on openly shown hostility. On an individual level, however, some sense of superiority amongst some people remains:

[Racism] happens a lot in Sudan, but when you come here to the Netherlands and you find Sudanese people, and they're different, like their tribes are different, but they can't tell you in your face that they are racist, you know. But sometimes you can feel it. But it doesn't happen a lot like it happens in Sudan. [...] You will find racist people, but there are very few. (Sara, Professional)

This, in combination with the different organizations discussed below, suggests that the Sudanese diaspora and its activism cannot be considered a wholly unified movement or community. Some divisions that exist within the country's borders remain in a transnational context, but to a lesser extent. Though, based on this study, there were no indications that this had an effect on the way in which someone participated in diasporic activism, it is important to acknowledge that the Sudanese diaspora, despite its vast amounts of collective activism, is not homogeneous, but rather a diverse community of individuals participating in different capacities.

As mentioned before, in considering these contextual remarks we should be careful not to make hasty conclusions regarding the nature of the Sudanese diaspora, as studying its make-up was not the purpose of this study. I deem it important to have mentioned some of these considerations nonetheless, to prevent the patterns explained below from creating a false narrative that disregards the Sudanese diaspora's heterogeneity. Instead, the results should be considered in the way the study intends it to be: an insight into the role of connective journalists in a Sudanese diasporic context.

5.2. Using (social) media to share news with other Sudanese people

The first manner in which connective journalists utilize (social) media is through sharing news with other people in the diaspora. More specifically, there are four ways in which they do so: through using WhatsApp and Facebook groups to share news immediately, by setting up organizations in the Netherlands to discuss news and political, social and cultural matters regarding Sudan and the diaspora, by using (open access) social media to spread and have access to the most trustworthy news, and by using their extensive network of Sudanese acquaintances – both in Sudan and the diaspora – to validate news items they encounter.

Apart from three respondents who, for varying reasons and belonging to various categories, state not to participate in Sudanese group activities (Amira, Occasional Sharer;

Nafisa; Occasional Sharer; Nasr, Professional), all of the other respondents explain that their primary way of obtaining the latest news is through WhatsApp group chats and closed Facebook groups. Rabab (Occasional Sharer), for example, states that it is easier to carry around a phone than to rely on television for news, because a phone is accessible everywhere and at any time.

Ahmed (Professional) explains that these chats and groups, like the rest of Sudanese society, are divided according to tribe, political party, or topic of conversation, such as human rights. Usually, they provide an immediate connection between people in Sudan and people in, in this case, the Netherlands, but sometimes also from elsewhere in the diaspora. Mustafa (Occasional Sharer) elaborates on his experiences with such groups as follows: “I know [the people in the groups] personally. They are just different people who live in the Netherlands, and they are in the group, and some of them live in Sudan, and we also have them in the group, and everyone just shares their own things”. Such groups, therefore, are examples of extensive networks of Sudanese people who live across the world, participating in information-sharing.

Many groups aimed at diasporic activism, however, are not limited to virtual spaces. Participants explain that those residing in the same country often meet in person, for a myriad of reasons. In the Netherlands, there does not seem to be a national branch or organization that connects smaller groups scattered across the host country (e.g. Nadia, Active Participant). In fact, due to the political tensions that remain in the diaspora, Kamal argues that such an umbrella-organization is undesirable:

There is a community that founded an organization called the Sudanese communal group. But not all of us agree with that. Because if you start such a group, you have to invite everyone, and then you can start it. But they didn't invite everyone and just chose a few people to be on the board. [...] They are now using our names, and they do all kinds of stuff with our names, but we just don't agree. They're saying like, well, we're the Sudanese community, and we want money, but maybe they're getting money with our names, starting activities with our names, but maybe they're spreading ideologies with our names that we don't agree with. But some people in the group are also from the government, the old government. (Kamal, Active Participant)

This, again, hints at the (ideological) diversity that exists within the diaspora, and the accompanying conflict amongst Sudanese people that remains intact long past the borders of Sudan.

Despite this friction amongst some groups, smaller organizations in the Netherlands seem to be quite active in various fields, though most participants stated that bigger communities are generally more active than smaller ones, especially in terms of political activism (e.g. Nadia, Active Participant; Nafisa, Occasional Sharer). Bigger communities are usually identified to be Utrecht, Amsterdam and The Hague. Regardless, all organizations, despite their size, seem to organize different kinds of activities: Rabab (Occasional Sharer), for example, explains that there are many meetings (both formal and informal), workshops, and courses, ranging from Sudanese parties to courses on successful integration of Sudanese migrants in the Netherlands.

The role for connective journalists within these organizations, then, becomes apparent when directing the focus to political activities. Addressing an account regarding her organization from the time period leading up to the revolution of 2018, Asma recalls:

Nearby, we have this center where a lot of meetings take place. There were also political leaders that came to give lectures, and they shared their visions and stuff. They would explain it to others, and a lot of them came from Sudan. So they really knew the latest news. (Asma, Active Participant)

Similarly, Sara (Professional) admits that her involvement in politics started in such an environment; through attending lectures and workshops, she was asked by other Sudanese activists to join their efforts in activism. She explains that she was assigned duties, once she accepted, which included writing articles and organizing demonstrations in the Netherlands. Through the Sudanese organization she attended, she was catapulted into her position as a connective journalist.

In all of these scenarios where (trans)national networks – both virtual and physical – are at the heart of political activism, the most important source of information was explained to be social media, because the national news outlets of Sudan (which they can watch from the diaspora as well) paint a picture inconsistent with what is shown on social media. The main reason for this is the fact that the national news outlets in Sudan are considered to be unreliable. Ahmed (Professional), for example, explained that based in his experience of being a professional journalist in Sudan, journalists in Sudan had to be careful about what to write out of fear for their safety, especially during the reign of Al-Bashir's regime. Furthermore, he recalls that the government employed strict censorship over the traditional news media of the

country – every morning government employees would check the newspapers and remove undesirable news items before releasing them for distribution.

Social and digital media, then, are the only way in which the people could (without much effort) access truthful news. Sara (Professional) explains the role of social and digital media as follows: “If you look at our local newspaper, it’s owned by the government, so they write what they want and not what is really happening. Here we write what is really, what is actually happening.” Ali (Active Participant) even states, referring to the diaspora: “This is our responsibility, to reflect it, you know. [...] The human rights.” He thus considers it his responsibility to display a truthful account of the situation in Sudan. This could be directed towards both people in Sudan who might not know what is going on in other parts of the country as well as people inside.

One way in which the truthfulness of a news item is ensured, participants explained, is through the Live function of social media platforms such as Facebook, which allows users to broadcast a live-streamed video on their profile pages. When this is done by people in Sudan, the diaspora can directly view what is happening in the country. Because the video broadcasts the situation in real time, the viewers are ensured of the news being truthful (e.g. Ali, Active Participant).

Truthfulness is not only important when consuming news, but also when writing or sharing news. This is, again, where the transnational network of individuals becomes important. Fatima explains the significance of fact-checking as follows:

It’s important to me that I don’t post any messages if I’m unsure of its truthfulness. We live in a world that knows a lot of fake news, so I try to find the news with another person. To see if it’s real. So for example, if someone comes to tell me that this or that building belongs to the secret service, or whatever, then I’ll try to find out through other people if that’s true. Because if you are going to use this kind of information in correspondence with, for example, international organizations, you need to make sure it’s true. You can’t do anything if it’s fake news, or gossip, or something. So news is easy to find, but making sure that it’s good news or that it’s really the truth, that takes some effort. (Fatima, Professional)

Despite the connective journalists not being professionals, necessarily, the importance of truthfulness and reliability becomes increasingly important in a situation such as the Sudanese Revolution of 2018, during which Sudanese people arose against the government and

government-induced inequalities in the country, but also in general when the topic of the news concerns a country such as Sudan, which for a long time was devoid of reliable news sources altogether.

Finally, the actual process of fact-checking, then, is done in a variety of ways. Some state that they call friends or family in Sudan (e.g. Amira, Occasional Sharer; Mustafa, Occasional Sharer), or acquaintances who witnessed the event in question (e.g. Rabab, Occasional Sharer). Some claim to be in touch with activists in Sudan, who provide them with information (e.g. Nasr, Professional), or journalists who have proven to be trustworthy (e.g. Ahmed, Professional; Mustafa, Occasional Sharer). Others state that they compare several sources before posting news (e.g. Kamal, Active Participant). Often, people use a number of ways to fact-check, but in any case, fact-checking is considered to be extremely valuable.

In concluding this section, then, some final remarks can be made. To Sudanese people across the world, their extensive network is of the utmost importance when it comes to providing truthful news. In a country where local news sources are deemed unreliable, social media seems to be crucial. However, social media is also a breeding ground for fake news – the role of the diaspora, it seems, is to weed out the bad articles and make sure that they provide the people in Sudan and across the world with truthful, trustworthy news. These worldwide networks are said to emerge mostly through WhatsApp and Facebook. Sudanese communities in de diaspora play an important role in this process, as they meet regularly, provide workshops and seminars, and, at times, assign specific tasks to those attending often. Important to note is that in all of these situations, the news generally seems to be related to events in Sudan or in the diaspora. Finally, these findings seem to be relevant cross-categorically: all participants state to partake in some form news-sharing; usually it seems to primarily be in the form of group chats, but even those who state not to be members of such groups are part of the transnational network through immediate contacts.

5.3. Using (social) media to assist people in Sudan

The news discussed above is not shared without a purpose. Being connective journalists in a diasporic public sphere, their purpose seems true to their roles, and can be explained through four main areas of activity: educating people in Sudan, offering emotional support to people in Sudan, offering financial support to people in Sudan, and amplifying the voices of people in Sudan. In this order, the results regarding these topics will be discussed in this section.

As discussed in the previous section, Sudanese people in the diaspora have access to more information than those still in Sudan. However, the previous section only discussed the benefits of this in terms of providing truthful news. From the interviews, it is suggested that the diaspora has a second role related to this: educating those in Sudan, by sharing intellectual resources from their respective countries. This seems to happen in several ways.

Firstly, through sharing any education a Sudanese person may receive in, in this case, the Netherlands. This does not have to be information that is directly relevant for the immediate situation in Sudan at large, but might be directed at personal development of Sudanese individuals. Nadia, for example, explains it as follows:

Let's say the Sudanese people are studying here, university or HBO or MBO, whatever it is. And the studies here are more developed than in Sudan. So what you're gaining from here, do not just keep it for you. Or not just keep it for here. Share it with other people in Sudan, to apply, to help their mind to gain new information from you. This is my message for all the Sudanese people here, in the Netherlands. Don't keep the information just for yourself. What you gain, don't keep it for yourself. Share it with others, especially people in Sudan, because they're far away, still there's a lot of people in Sudan far away from many many things. (Nadia, Active Participant)

The diaspora, according to Nadia, can therefore make a fruitful contribution to the development of both the country and individuals in Sudan. Amira (Occasional Sharer) similarly thinks research and academics are the best long-term solutions to the problems Sudan currently faces, not in terms of political issues, but other areas such as technology and long-term development of the country.

There are, however, also more short-term ways in which the diaspora aims to educate Sudanese people who are still in Sudan. When asked about his goal with regards to sharing news on his social media platforms, Kamal (Active Participant) answers: "I think I just want to make people aware. And tell them what their rights and duties are. I think that's the most important thing, if you know what you have to do and what you're entitled to receive." His approach and the language he employs mostly take the shape of empowerment.

A more concrete example of this goal can be found in Fatima's interview: she uses the recent example of the COVID-19 regulations, which included having to stay inside the house for an extensive period of time. She states that, due to the history of mistrusting the government, Sudanese people were initially skeptical of the regulations and ignored the guidelines. From

her position in the diaspora, and as a connective journalist who had proven to be trustworthy, she was able to convince her readers that it was, in fact, important to listen to the government in this case. Her ultimate goal when she shares news items, is “awareness. It’s a cliché, but I think knowledge is power” (Fatima, Professional). She, too, employs language that centers empowerment of Sudanese people.

Furthermore, in political and social reform, specifically, Ahmed indicates that the diaspora and its social media use has been of great influence as well. As a Professional, he spends much of his time on professional journalism. When asked about his objective when posting his news articles on social media, he states: “For me, it is important that people know their rights. Or that they change their opinions and know what their rights are. And what the government has to do, that is the most important thing for me. Because now, with the Sudanese people, the 2018 Revolution was not sudden. That took time. People having discussions, people writing, people publishing lots about what the government is doing” (Ahmed, Professional). He seems to emphasize both the importance of social media and the importance of the diaspora, while simultaneously suggesting that indirectly, it was the availability of social media that allowed for the Revolution to happen at all.

In educating people, the role of the diaspora seems especially significant. By being a part of the broader Sudanese community themselves, as well as having proven, over time, that they are trustworthy, the diaspora seems to be able to influence ways of thinking of Sudanese people. Because they are Sudanese themselves and their unique position of being in the diaspora seems so important, their roles as connective journalists seem to be of notable value in these situations.

Another way in which the diaspora assists the people in Sudan is through emotional support. This manifests in two ways: motivating people through writing, and providing emotional support through sharing pictures and accounts of solidarity protests around the world. Firstly, the following explanation by Sara, a Professional, provides insight into the reason she believes writing can serve as an important way to motivate people:

For me, writing is good because [...] I believe in the power of the pen more than the power of the weapon. Really, when you write, it could actually lead to political change. Because when this Revolution [of 2018], for example, started, people were not so excited. So we were afraid that maybe people, they will only, like, protest for one week, and then that's it. And then maybe they would go back to their homes and nothing. But when we kept posting on social media, we wrote a lot and we had some videos, we

motivated them. We kept that motivation, like, you have to continue. That's why you can find that this Revolution went on for one year. It started in December and it continued. Even though the violence was a lot, even so the people were protesting every day. So we, the Sudanese, who lived outside of Sudan, the only contribution that we can give to Sudan is actually by writing about it. (Sara, Professional)

Again, this account, too, provides insight into the unique role of the diaspora in this endeavor. From the perspective of those in the diaspora, the diaspora played a crucial role in continuing the protests, or at the very least that was their goal.

On the other hand, (social) media is also used to display accounts of solidarity, usually in the form of protests. Solidarity protests – not to be confused with other types of protests, which will be discussed in a later section – are mostly meant to provide emotional support to those in Sudan. One account from Rabab, an Occasional Sharer, dating from around the time of the revolution, for example, states the following:

It's meant to bring people together, to work for one goal. That goal is to emotionally support people in Sudan. Who sleep outside, in the streets, day and night. And we're like, okay, we're also there with you and we're feeling what you're feeling, and we'll have your back, and those kinds of feelings. (Rabab, Occasional Sharer)

This, in turn, will be shared on social media to remind those protesting in Sudan of the support from the diaspora. Though these protests seem to be largely symbolic, many other participants assign great importance to solidarity protests, because they consider the emotional support it provided during the revolution to have been an essential motivational force (e.g. Sara, Professional; Nasr, Professional).

A more practical way of assisting the people in Sudan is through offering financial support. Especially during the revolution this proved to be important, due to the large amounts of protestors participating in the protests for months on end, thus missing months of income. As explained by Asma (Active Participant), a fundraiser was started by a Sudanese doctor in the United States, after which it virtually traveled across the world as the diaspora shared the fundraiser and donated. After this, she continues, many others followed, allowing the protestors to continue protesting until the government stepped down. Rabab (Occasional Sharer) and Sara (Professional), too, acknowledge the importance of collecting both money and goods to send to Sudan, as well as medical supplies. However, the financial support does not limit itself to

the protests; now that the revolution has ended, Mustafa (Occasional Sharer) states that he still considers it important to send material assistance to Sudan, considering his privileged position of living in the Netherlands and having a job.

Sara (Professional), furthermore, emphasizes again the importance of the vast network of Sudanese migrants across the world and how it enables these types of fundraisers. In order to make sure the money and goods end up in the right places, she states, it is sent to someone in Sudan whom the organizers of the fundraiser personally know and trust. Direct connections between those in the diaspora and Sudan seem, in many instances, to be based on mutual trust.

Having discussed these three ways of assisting Sudanese people in Sudan, the focus thus far has been the empowerment, in various ways, of the people in Sudan as enabled by the diaspora. Professional Nasr, however, emphasizes that those in Sudan are not voiceless; in fact, he states, the diaspora needs to *amplify* the voices of those in Sudan, rather than take over the work from abroad. For this purpose, he created an organization and platform on Facebook. He explains:

The only thing that I can do is that I can show the voice of my friends and my family there, and they are suffering there and I can show their voice here, through the international organizations. Because by myself I cannot do something. The only thing is that I can show their voice. You can just have hope. Because if me, I work here, I am only one person, if I work here and other people do the same, at least the world is going to know what's happening in Sudan. This is my country and this is my family and these are my friends, they are suffering there, if I did not do something for my country or my friends or my family, for who shall I do it? (Nasr, Professional)

Again, a sense of duty shapes the argument in this account. Nasr furthermore explains that he uses his platform to share the videos, messages, and photos his contacts send him, in order to more effectively amplify the message those in Sudan want to send to the outside world. He explains that his purpose, ultimately, is to educate others – a topic that will be discussed in more depth in the next section.

What exactly, then, is the difference between amplifying voices and educating the “outside” world? In the end, they are very closely related: through the amplification of the voices of people in Sudan, the outside world will be educated. There is, however, an important difference in intention between the two. Whereas the purpose of educating non-Sudanese

people, as discussed in the next session, is exactly that, the purpose of amplifying voices perhaps seems best explained through this comment from Ali:

We have Sudanese activists in Darfur and especially in refugee camps. It's difficult for the government to get inside [the refugee camps]. [...] And we have people over there, we have people over there to contact us and to tell us what's going on. And if they are going live, if they speak, if they try to speak about the situation and the violence, [the government] can put them in prison or something like that. And that's why, us in the diaspora, we're trying to reflect the rights or reflect the things that our people there, they are suffering there. (Ali, Active Participant)

The role of the connective journalist in these situations, as becomes clear here, is to *assist* the Sudanese person in question with the spreading of their message and the amplification of their voice, rather than *educating* non-Sudanese people.

In conclusion, connective journalists seem to believe they can assist those in Sudan in many ways. Sometimes this is best expressed through empowerment, when those in the diaspora have access to intellectual, emotional or financial resources that people in Sudan lack, or through the amplification of Sudanese voices, when it is too dangerous or otherwise impossible for people in Sudan to share their message. In any case, the unique role of the connective journalist becomes clear again, as being part of the community themselves seems to allow for an important bond of trust between Sudanese people in the diaspora and Sudanese people in Sudan. These activities, like those discussed in the previous section, seem to be part of the activism of participants in all categories; no distinction, based on this study, can be found between the different categories of connective journalists when considering the areas of activity discussed thus far.

5.4. Using social and traditional media to reach non-Sudanese people

Having briefly touched on creating awareness in the previous section, this section will explore the role of the connective journalist when the purpose *is* to spread awareness. From the interviews, it became clear that the Sudanese diaspora has two ways in which they spread awareness: when the aim is to reach an audience that is as broad as possible or worldwide, they tend to use social media. When the purpose is more specific, however, and the diaspora in the

Netherlands aims to raise awareness amongst Dutch people, they tend to seek assistance from traditional media outlets in the Netherlands.

Firstly, the role of connective journalists in reaching non-Sudanese people. Except for Amira (Occasional Sharer), who says not to participate in raising awareness at all and only using some social media to stay informed about news regarding Sudan, all of the participants across categories state that using social media was one of the most important ways to raise awareness about the issues in Sudan. Their ideas about how they would be able to influence people, however, differs slightly.

Occasional Sharer Nafisa, for example, does state that she shares news about Sudan often, because raising awareness is important and she thinks many people are ignorant about the hardships Sudanese people face. Sharing, however, is all she states she and other people can do: “For them, it’s just knowledge. They can’t do anything. To become aware about this. But they can’t help, you know. Even me, I can’t help it” (Nafisa, Occasional Sharer). Interestingly, even though she considers it important to share news for the sake of raising awareness, she does not have another goal after that.

This is not the case for all participants. For Rabab (Occasional Sharer), the purpose of sharing is not only to create awareness amongst non-Sudanese people, but also to create a conversation and compassion with others who might not know what is happening in Sudan. “We can talk about it together,” she states, “and that way we’ll be able to understand each other better, because we’re all far away, and we’d all like to do something.” For others, such as Nasr, a Professional, it is important to create awareness to give them the opportunity to help. When he created his platform, he states, he realized that it gave him the opportunity to show the truth better than other news outlets such as the Sudanese media or news outlets that rely on Sudanese media (Nasr, Professional).

In order to create worldwide attention, the diaspora created the hashtag #BlueForSudan during the Revolution of 2018. The hashtag, along with the accompanying blue profile picture, became a success. Kamal, an Active Participant, states that when one hears something many times, it becomes stuck in one’s head; that is what he is trying to accomplish when sharing news on his social media repeatedly. Specifically, he said, #BlueForSudan created much worldwide awareness, because celebrities from across the world, such as Trevor Noah and Famke Louise, started raising awareness for the Sudanese revolution (Kamal, Active Participant).

It thus seems that for most connective journalists in the diaspora, when targeting a worldwide audience, the purpose was to merely raise awareness for the situation in Sudan. On

a more personal level, however, when sharing something on their personal page or directed at closer friends or acquaintances, it sometimes seems to go further than that. This is, for example, the case with Occasional Sharer Rabab, who wants to create a mutual understanding between her and her friends who did not go through what she went through, so that they could sympathize with her.

On the other hand, in order to reach Dutch people, specifically, the diaspora seems to rely on more traditional media. Professional Sara, for example, sometimes writes articles for an online media platform. She writes these in Arabic, but has a friend who sometimes translates them to Dutch, so that she reaches a Dutch audience. She states:

I had many Dutch people who were asking: what's actually happening in the Sudan Revolution? They had no idea, so for me, I think it's a good thing if people can really know what is happening in my country and they stand in solidarity with us. [...] It's good to have the Dutch attention, or the Dutch media attention. It's very good, it helps us to spread our message to the whole world. And since I am living in the Netherlands, and I have many many Dutch friends, so I said okay, why not? So they can understand what my country has been through or what I have been through. And they did help.
(Sara, Professional)

In other words, Sara states that Dutch media attention, amongst other things, assists the diaspora in spreading the awareness about Sudan amongst Dutch people and, by extension, to rest of the world. Similarly, Kamal (Active Participant) recalls a time where he was asked to tell his story on a national Dutch television show, after which people looked him up and flooded him with messages professing support. Being represented in Dutch media, he says, made his audience grow, which provided him with a platform to talk about Sudan.

In conclusion, there are two ways through which the Sudanese diaspora – in the Netherlands, specifically – aims to spread awareness: through social media and through traditional Dutch media outlets. The significance of this section is, above all, the way in which it showcases the interconnectedness between the traditional and networked public spheres. On the one hand, traditional media seem to be used to create awareness in the Dutch public sphere; social media, on the other hand, are used to influence the worldwide networked public sphere. The driving factor in either scenario seems to be, again, the connective journalist. Furthermore, it is noteworthy that the underlying purpose of spreading awareness seems to differ for each individual, unrelated to the categories of the connective journalists; no relations between the

participants' categories and their objectives behind their attempts to raise awareness can be found based on the interviews conducted for this study.

5.5. Using (social) media to organize protests

Many participants emphasize the important role the diaspora played when it came to protesting during the 2018 Revolution. From the analysis of the interviews, it seems that the Sudanese diaspora in the Netherlands contribute to and through protesting in primarily three ways: assisting, in several ways, with the protests in Sudan, organizing protests in the diaspora with the objective of creating awareness amongst others, and organizing protests in The Hague, specifically, to demand justice at the headquarters of the International Criminal Court (ICC). This last type of protesting, many interviewees state, was specifically a task for the diaspora in the Netherlands due to the location of the ICC. Though the Revolution has ended, especially this last type of protesting seems to be continuing until the present day.

Firstly, some respondents point at the role of the diaspora in organizing the protests in Sudan. Though some say that they know of people who went to Sudan to protest (e.g. Ahmed, Professional; Fatima, Professional), none of the interviewees indicate to have traveled to Sudan for that specific purpose themselves. Instead, they assisted in other ways.

During the Sudanese Revolution of 2018, the internet and, specifically, social media seem to have been especially important in organizing protests in the country. Sara, a Professional, states to have been actively involved in this process from her position in the diaspora. An organization in Sudan with anonymous leaders, she explains, were behind the organizing of these protests. The anonymity of the organizers was ensured because they mainly used Facebook to share the dates, times and locations of the next protests. Sara (Professional) explains that "people were just waiting for the maps for tomorrow". When the government cut off the internet, this option disappeared. Asma (Active Participant) explains that she interpreted the shutdown of the internet as follows: "At the time, if [the people in Sudan] started writing, they would have been blocked immediately, or there would be a lockdown of the internet, or they just would block everything for them, actually. Yes, you also saw that with the last demonstrations against Omar Al-Bashir. He shut down the internet." Though it is, based on the interviews that have been conducted, impossible to make any claims regarding the reasoning behind the shutdown of the internet by Al-Bashir, the respondents seem to have interpreted it as an attempt of the government to hinder the people from organizing protests.

Having explored this, the interviewees then went on to explaining what the response of the diaspora was. Sara for example, explains it as follows:

The situation at that time required everybody, like, you have to do something, you know. So that's what we did actually. Like me myself, I was calling, direct calls, to my friends, even family, to understand what was actually happening. And then, that was all the information I got from them, and then I would have like a live video. I even wrote and published a lot on Twitter, Sudanese online websites, and also on Facebook. So people can really, even the whole world can know what is actually going on. Because the internet was blocked. But we had a big influence on the whole world, you know.
(Sara, Professional)

Again, Sara seems to emphasize on the one hand the importance of direct connections with people in Sudan, and on the other hand the need to reach non-Sudanese individuals across the world. In accentuating the fact that the diaspora's accessibility to the internet played an important role, at least or especially during the month that Al-Bashir had shut down the internet, the influence of the interconnected network of Sudanese people across the world is, once again, demonstrated.

Though the abovementioned examples only speak of situations that specifically concerned the internet shut down during the Revolution, other participants also state that the diaspora has been helpful during the protests in Sudan in other ways. For example, Fatima (Professional) explains that – when the shutdown was not in place – she spent much time watching the Facebook Live videos of people protesting in Sudan. That way, when they were arrested while streaming the video, she could immediately contact people or organizations in Sudan so they could ensure the safety of the person in question. According to Fatima, some people's lives were saved through this method. Another contribution, according to Nadia (Active Participant), was writing motivational social media posts. Nadia states that when she stopped writing those, many of her followers told her to continue because it helped and motivated those who were protesting in Sudan. It thus seems that, both through social media and through a network of direct connections between the diaspora and Sudanese people in Sudan, those in the diaspora believe to have assisted in the Revolution in many ways.

In the diaspora itself, many people organized protests as well. Ahmed (Professional) states that “Sudanese people think that the, for example, the influence in Sudan comes from the European Union and European countries and also from America and such. Many people

think it's important that people here protest." From the interviews, it seems that two types of protests were specifically important for those in the diaspora who were living in the Netherlands: on the one hand, protests that were organized by the diaspora across the globe with the purpose of drawing attention to the problems in Sudan and creating awareness (from either passersby, the media, or governments), and on the other hand, protests that were organized in The Hague, specifically, to demand from the ICC that former president Omar Al-Bashir be tried for the crimes he committed. They will be discussed below.

Firstly, protests for the sake of creating awareness seem to be able to take on a variety of shapes. Some, such as Ali (Active Participant), state that protests have happened throughout an abundance of politically important cities throughout the world, such as The Hague (to address the Dutch Ministry of Justice) or Brussels. Others, such as Ahmed (Professional), seem to point towards the equal importance of an integrated approach between writing and protesting, as he explains that it is important to clearly write down demands, thoughts and opinions about Sudan in order to clearly articulate what is needed from, for example, Ministries of Foreign Affairs. Ahmed (Professional) also states that attention from traditional media is important, as this draws a larger audience. This is similar to the way in which the importance of media attention was discussed in an earlier section; the difference, however, is that in the previous scenario, the media attention was drawn through social media (such as the hashtag #BlueForSudan), and in this situation the attention is drawn through protesting. Lastly, there is an element of visibility to protesting in public spaces. Active Participant Asma (Active Participant), for example, explained that through protests, passersby often ask about who they are and what they are protesting for.

The other way around, however, the same is true, according to some participants: social media increased the visibility of the protests. This interaction is perhaps best explained through the words of Active Participant Kamal, who states:

Sometimes it is difficult to get media attention, but if you just host a demonstration and a lot of people just show up, the media will show up by itself. So that way you immediately get attention. So people start taking pictures and stuff. And if you make a lot of posters, and you write "Sudan" on there, and "Al-Bashir", and a few hashtags or whatever, and people take pictures and share that, that is also just good. If so many people only see "Sudan", and then they just Google "Sudan", and then they will see oh, Sudan is not doing very well or Sudan is doing good. (Kamal, Active Participant)

This, then, shows how the participants explain that protests are both used to raise awareness and draw media attention to them, as well as how the Sudanese community was counting on passersby to share pictures and information about the protests on social media so it would increase visibility.

Another type of protest is those that demanded justice at the steps of the building of the ICC in The Hague. This seems to be a specific goal of the community in the Netherlands, considering the unique position of the ICC and the accessibility for Sudanese people in the Netherlands. Ali (p. 6), an Active Participant, states that although the Dutch community is in contact with communities from across the world where they encourage each other to protest in their respective cities, the focus of the Dutch community is on the ICC because of its location. Almost all participants explain that it is important to them that Al-Bashir be tried at the ICC with the charge of crimes against humanity (e.g. Mustafa, Occasional Sharer; Ahmed, Professional).

The important role of the diaspora in this process is perhaps best explained by Ali, who interprets the situation as follows:

We, as victims in the Netherlands, we have to work hard and continue in this case, you know. The responsibility of us is very big, bigger than people who are living over there right now, in Sudan. Because we have our rights here, to go live and to explain it, or to do demonstrations in front of the ICC in The Hague. And that's something, they have not found it, you know, the people in Sudan have not found it. I think some of them, they need to come here. To explain what's happened, you know. They are really victims, they need to get a chance to come to The Hague, in order to explain what's the actions that happened in Sudan or in Darfur, and in the Nuba mountains and in Blue Nile, you know. (Ali, Active Participant)

In other words, he explains that the diaspora has a freedom of expression that the people in Sudan do not have. Therefore, he states, it is important that the diaspora steps up on behalf of the people in Sudan.

The reason that it is important to place all of these types of protests in the diaspora in the context of connective journalism, then, is the way in which they are organized. The participants explain that they are mainly coordinated through social media; Active Participant Asma (Active Participant), for example, states that both sending invitations for and hosting meetings about worldwide protests rely heavily on social media, as invitations were sent

through various social media platforms and meetings happened mainly on Skype. The participants thus state that in all protests – both in the diaspora and in Sudan – social media access from the diaspora played a crucial role.

In pursuance of a concluding remark on this section, then, it is important to note that not all participants participate equally in the organizing process of demonstrations, whether these demonstrations be in Sudan or in the Netherlands. While Occasional Sharers may participate in the demonstration *passively* – that is, physically attending the protest as an activist – they do not seem to have an organizational role in the demonstrations. Out of all the participants interviewed for the sake of this thesis, only those falling into the categories of Active Participant or Professional indicated to have had a part in organizing one or multiple of the protests. This emphasizes once again the suggestion made earlier, referring to the heterogeneity of the connective journalists in the Sudanese diaspora.

5.6. Using third-party allies to put pressure on the Sudanese government

Finally, the last topic that could be identified from the interviews points towards the collaboration between connective journalists and third-party allies, such as traditional news outlets and human rights organizations. The connective journalists explain that they act as a driving force behind traditional media and other third-party allies, and the pressure they subsequently put on the Sudanese government, in three ways: legitimizing requests for help from foreign governments, pressuring the Sudanese government into reforms, and notifying human rights organizations of human rights violations. Important to note is that this connection is only detectable in the interviews with those who, in this study, fall into the category of Professional. The participants falling into this category are Ahmed, Sara, Nasr, and Fatima. This does not mean that participants who fall into one of the other categories do not refer to practices such as the ones that will be explored below. However, in this section, a differentiation is made between those *acknowledging* the existence of these connections, and those who actively *engage* in these collaborations, either directly or through association with an organization that does. Only the Professionals participated in the latter.

One relationship that is repeatedly being recognized as important by the participants is the relationship between the Sudanese diasporic organizations and human rights organizations. The organizations that the participants are in contact with seem to often be small human rights organizations in the Netherlands (e.g. Sara, Professional), but also human rights organizations in general (Ahmed, Professional; Nasr, Professional). Ali (Active Participant) explains that

human rights organizations, when recognizing the needs of the Sudanese people, “They can reflect it, our problems. They can reflect it to other national organizations. Or to the government, the Dutch government.” In other words, it seems that Ali believes that good relations with the organizations legitimizes the requests of the Sudanese people towards other organizations and the Dutch government. Again, however, it is important to note that Ali himself is – according to this study – not considered a Professional, so his interpretation is based on what he has seen other people do. Furthermore, Kamal (Active Participant) and Sara (Professional) explain that putting more pressure on the (Dutch) government might then pressure them into recognizing the needs of the Sudanese people, both in the Netherlands and those in Sudan.

Fatima, a Professional, sheds more light onto the role of the connective journalist in this process of contacting (international) human rights organizations. Firstly, she states that it is not individual Sudanese people contacting the human rights organizations on their own merit, but Sudanese organizations in the Netherlands on behalf of which volunteers contact the organizations. Then, she explains the process as follows: “In these volunteer organizations that we have, we have people who take it upon themselves to seek contact with certain people. We have contacts at Amnesty, for example, or these kinds of organizations. Then we know who to contact, or who we can write to” (Fatima, Professional). The role of the (Professional) connective journalist, specifically, therefore, seems to be keeping close contacts and good relations with (inter)national human rights organizations. They do not, however, offer proof for this claim; the participants merely explained their interpretations of their role in such relations.

Human rights organizations seem to also serve a second function. Besides legitimizing requests for help from the Dutch government, they seem to be asked for help when pressure on the Sudanese government is needed as well. Though not himself a professional, Ali still provides an explanation of this process during the Sudanese Revolution. He explains that “the human rights organizations can watch what the government is doing about the Darfurian people or the people who are outside, in the middle or north of Sudan. And they can stay in contact with the government and tell them hey, take care of those people, they have to live safely or have to get their rights” (Ali, Active Participant). It therefore seems that he interprets the role of the human rights organizations as putting pressure on the Sudanese government to implement reforms.

Another way to put direct pressure on, ultimately, the Sudanese government directly, seems to be through traditional media outlets. Mustafa – who is not a Professional either and

therefore does not have direct contact with the media for this purpose – explains that media exposure throughout the world “scared” the government into reforms. In his words: “If you share it with international media, the Sudanese government will just get a little scared, that they will get problems, or punishments” (Mustafa, Occasional Sharer). In other words, Mustafa states that media exposure puts extra pressure on the Sudanese government.

The exact role of the Professional in these relationships with the media, specifically, becomes more clear through Sara’s (Professional) explanation. She states that many Sudanese people in the diaspora who do work in journalism – ergo, connective journalists – write in Arabic, but once people learn the language of the host country they live in she considered it important for them to write in other languages, such as English or French, as well. Even if the migrants do not yet speak the language, however, Sara says they can still influence traditional media. In Sara’s case, she will write articles in Arabic, and let a Dutch friend translate the articles into Dutch. This way, she has had several articles published in Dutch newspapers already, which increases exposure to both other (Dutch) people as well as put pressure on the Sudanese government. For example, she wrote a journalistic account of the role of women in the Sudanese Revolution of 2018, as well as other articles about topics relating to this Revolution and opinion pieces about (in)equalities or human rights issues.

One final way in which the connections with third-party allies assist the diaspora is through safeguarding the well-being of those people who are still in Sudan. Though this role does not seem to be as prominent as the abovementioned ones, at least as it relates to activism in the diaspora, and it seems to have been mainly practiced in relation to the Sudan Revolution, specifically, it is still noteworthy to mention because of the important role the diaspora played in this regard. During the Revolution, many photo and video materials were sent to the diaspora, so they could explain to the world what was happening. Up until now, we have only discussed how these materials serve as an educational tool. There is, however, another reason Professionals imply that the materials are important. In Fatima’s words:

So people who were in [Sudan] could take videos, they could send video messages, for example through Facebook Live or social media. If someone goes live, those of us who are abroad actually want to record them immediately. Because this is also material that you can use later on, to prove that if people, if protesters were out on the streets, and they were actually, how should I put it, if the regime would violently remove the protesters from the streets and stuff. Shooting, people were murdered. There have been moments where a person died, and that was recorded too, in that moment. So these

materials, you want to save them, because right now, as we speak, there is a kind of committee that is working hard to collect all the evidence. (Fatima, Professional)

The role of the connective journalist in these processes is thus the collecting of evidence, and ultimately also to make sure the collected evidence is delivered to the right parties. These might be human rights organizations, such as Amnesty (Fatima, Professional), but those in the diaspora also, for example, compile memos of the information available, which are then offered to the ICC to serve as evidence in the official trial against Omar Al-Bashir (Ahmed, Professional).

In exploring the connective force of the Professional connective journalist between the rest of the diaspora and third-party allies, it is again important to emphasize that especially in this section, we need to keep in mind that the process, function and influence of the situations as explained above are merely interpretations by the participants of this study. The intentions behind certain actions from the diasporic perspective, however, seem clear: to establish direct connections with third-party allies, such as international media and human rights organizations, in order to pressure the Sudanese government into reforms.

6. Conclusion

This thesis is concerned with an exploration of the role of connective journalists in the Sudanese diaspora in the Netherlands. This is important, because although understandings of the (diasporic) public sphere have evolved and improved over the past decades, there is still little information about the role of connective journalists in this process. Connective journalists can be defined as citizen journalists who are themselves part of the group they are trying to reach – in this case, Sudanese migrants trying to reach the global Sudanese population – operating in a networked public sphere, meaning it is largely based on communication through social and digital media. The main question of this thesis is as follows: how and why do Sudanese migrants in the Netherlands use (social) media for transnational political purposes? It is important to emphasize that the objective of this thesis is thus to understand the interpretations of connective journalists on their roles within the diaspora. In order to adequately answer this question, I conducted twelve in-depth, semi-structured interviews with Sudanese people residing in the Netherlands. Based on existing literature, I divided them into three categories: Occasional Sharers, who participate in information exchanges on social media, but only passively; Active Participants, who share, write and comment on news articles, share them on social media, and participate actively in activities related to Sudanese organizations in the Netherlands, but are not themselves connected to a professional organization or media outlet; and Professionals, who act similarly to Active Participants, but work directly for or with professional organizations and media outlets as well.

6.1. Summary of results

Although the pool of participants for this thesis was diverse in terms of categories of connective journalists, sex, age, and time of arrival in the Netherlands, their reasoning behind participation in news sharing and news making practices were similar. Without exception, the participants state they consider it to be their responsibility to, in some way, participate in and contribute to the sharing and creation of news relating to Sudan. They justify this sense of responsibility by saying they still consider Sudan to be “their” country. When asked to elaborate, many state it would be unfair for them to leave Sudan in search for a better life, and leave the ones left behind in such excruciating circumstances: a totalitarian, Islamic regime and many inequalities among the people of Sudan, ultimately causing in the Sudan Revolution of 2018. The result of the Revolution was the removal of President Omar Al-Bashir. In a position

of privilege, they feel it is necessary and right to contribute to the situation back home, while often finding (social) media and connective journalism the best and most productive way to do so.

Social media are mostly used to keep each other informed both within Sudan and in the diaspora, by sharing news with each other. This is not just for entertainment purposes – in fact, they all consider the national press of Sudan to be highly corrupt, and social media are the sole way to surpass government monitoring to some extent. WhatsApp and Facebook groups, to which people from across the world and in Sudan are added, seem to be the most used method to effectively distribute news. In the Netherlands, specifically, Sudanese migrants have organized into smaller communities, that regularly meet in person to discuss the latest news and participate in workshops and lectures. Sometimes, people from Sudan come to the Netherlands to host such events and provide migrants with the latest news. Indications of direct contacts with people from across the world seem to reveal an extensive, complex network between individuals in Sudan and the diaspora, as well as organizations that, at times, collaborate with each other.

Social media are also used to assist people within Sudan, and not merely for the distribution of factual information. The participants indicate that people in Sudan are often unaware of their rights. People in the diaspora, therefore, explain that they aim to provide people with truthful educational social media posts, as they all hold reliability and truthfulness in high regard. In these instances, they mostly use social media to explain to the people in Sudan what their rights and duties are as citizens. Furthermore, they offer emotional support through social media – for example, through Facebook Lives and motivational posts – as well as organizing fundraisers that, through social media, can be distributed across the world. Finally, a significant way of helping seems to be through the amplification of Sudanese voices, by sharing pictures, videos and stories of and by people in Sudan.

Thirdly, connective journalists in the Netherlands use social media as well as traditional media to reach non-Sudanese people. This happens in two ways: by attempting to create worldwide awareness through social media, and by reaching the local, Dutch audience through articles in local newspapers. On a global level, hashtags were created, such as #BlueForSudan, to quickly capture people's attention, while also making it easier to share news about human rights violations and the Revolution in Sudan, making it more likely for the global audience to rapidly grow. On the other hand, traditional media are contacted, in order to raise awareness amongst Dutch people who may not have access to social media or are more likely to read

traditional media outlets. According to the interviewees, the exposure in traditional media is especially important, as it reached a broader audience.

The fourth way in which the diaspora in the Netherlands explained to contribute to the situation in Sudan was through organizing protests. This happens on several levels: contributing to protests in Sudan directly, protests in the diaspora to create awareness, and in the Netherlands, specifically, protests were organized at the International Criminal Court (ICC) to demand justice for the people in Sudan and pressure them into accelerating their trial against President Omar Al-Bashir. In the case of the first, people in the diaspora seemed to have been of importance mainly when Al-Bashir shut down the internet for month during the revolution. Social media had previously been the main way in which protests were organized, but now the diaspora made direct calls to people in Sudan and across the world to ensure that the latest information regarding the protests could still be distributed. Throughout the diaspora, the participants explain, protests are organized to create awareness amongst passersby and to draw media attention in their respective countries, including the Netherlands. Only Active Participants and Professionals contributed to organizing protests.

Finally, those falling into the category of Professional play an important role in connecting third-party allies – such as traditional media outlets, human rights organizations, and foreign governments – with the rest of the diaspora. They state to have three different purposes: legitimizing requests for help from foreign governments, pressuring the Sudanese government into reforms, and notifying human rights organizations of human rights violations. Through working closely with (international) human rights organizations, they legitimized calls for help towards the Dutch government, because of the reputation of the international organizations. Working closely with large organizations and traditional media outlets is intended to rattle the Sudanese government and pressured them into reforms, which is why collaboration with these third-party allies was deemed important. Lastly, through monitoring and recording social media posts from people in Sudan, much evidence has been collected over time, which the diaspora is now planning to deliver to parties responsible for the trial of Al-Bashir. The role of the Professionals, specifically, in this process, is that they state to have contacts within many organizations, making it possible to quickly notify third-party allies of both urgent and long-term matters regarding Sudan.

6.2. Discussion

Based on the findings as explored in chapter five, it is not only the role of the connective journalist, but the make-up of the public sphere in Sudan and the diaspora that deserve some

attention. Since theories such as the network society (Castells, 2000; 2008) and subsequently the networked public sphere (e.g. Benkler, 2006; Reese & Shoemaker, 2016) have emerged, some traditional notions about the public sphere (i.e. civil society exercising political influence) as outlined by Habermas (1972) have become obsolete while other aspects exist alongside the evolved public sphere. However, the make-up of the newly theorized networked public sphere, as we have seen, has been widely debated. Fraser (2007; 2014) understands that the public sphere has moved into a post-Westphalian state. She calls for institutionalization of a transnational public sphere – something that Randeria (2007) has criticized, because she states the exercising of political influence does not happen naturally through elections and representation in a post-Westphalian world.

In carefully considering the results of this study, however, it becomes clear that transnational and/or diasporic public spheres do not take shape in either one way or the other. That is, the divisions are not quite so rigorous: in the case of the Sudanese diaspora, at least in the Netherlands, individuals exercising their political influence (in the case of this study, connective journalists) move simultaneously and subsequently through an institutionalized transnational arena in the way Fraser imagines it (e.g. the ICC, the United Nations, the European Union) and through a non-democratic, non-institutionalized, non-hierarchical, post-Westphalian public sphere (with the help of, for example, WhatsApp group chats). As the results suggest, (westernized) democracies are therefore no longer inextricably linked to public spheres, or vice versa: if the public sphere is defined as the arena in which political influence is exercised, the imaginary borders of this arena seem fluid as connective journalists move swiftly from addressing entities on a national (national governments), international (ICC, United Nations), supranational (European Union), non-governmental (human rights organizations) and diasporic (through social media on a horizontal level) level. However, this does not happen in a hierarchical way, as Fraser (2007) suggested, but simultaneously or alternately, nor does it completely disregard traditional notions of election and representation, as many activists recognize the power and influence traditional political entities (e.g. governments and international institutions) have.

Elaborating on the practical aspects of this phenomenon, then, with the help of previous research in a diasporic context, it has been suggested that political influence is exercised through protests in the host country (e.g. Østergaard-Nielsen, 2003), through online discussions (e.g. Moyo, 2007; Skjerdal, 2011), or through communication and lobbying efforts with the host country's government or third-party allies (Koinova & Karabegovic, 2017). An earlier study on the Sudanese diaspora in the United Kingdom, specifically, suggests that the Sudanese

diaspora is mainly concerned with participating in the state-led National Dialogue and through civil society building in Sudan (Wilcock, 2019). Likewise, Kadoda and Hale (2015) assign much importance to the role social media, specifically, plays in increasing the visibility and mobilization of Sudanese civil society.

Firstly, based on the results, it seems that the arena(s) in which diasporic activism takes place are not easily defined based on existing understandings of the Sudanese (diasporic) public sphere, specifically, nor does the ‘mobilization’ or ‘building’ of civil society quite appreciate the complexity of the extensive horizontal networks that reach people across the world. Firstly, it is noteworthy that both Wilcock (2019) and Kadoda and Hale (2015), despite acknowledging the transnational nature of diasporic activism and the public sphere, seem to have a localized (that is, limited to the borders of a nation-state) understanding of civil society. I would argue that this does not do justice to the complexity of the subject; civil society, too, can be transnational. Through online groups, information easily migrates, allowing public discourse – political and otherwise – to continue evolving transnationally. Additionally, based on the results it seems that Sudanese activists, too, physically move between countries, from Sudan to the diaspora to address Sudanese people in the diaspora on both political and societal matters, or from the diaspora to Sudan to assist with activism, which seemed to be the case during the Revolution. Both in a digitized and physical context, civil society as well as the public sphere do not limit themselves to the borders of the nation-state that is Sudan. Therefore, I would argue, connective journalists in the diaspora do not only contribute to the mobilization and building of civil society *in* Sudan, but actively participate from the diaspora, in the sense that the imaginary borders of the Sudanese public sphere are stretched out across the diaspora. I do agree with Kadoda and Hale (2015), however, that social media use from the diaspora, specifically, contributed to the visibility of Sudanese people within Sudan, specifically; even in times of national disconnect, the diaspora’s objective was to create worldwide awareness about the situation in the country.

The way in which the diaspora aims to do this practically, then, is through grassroots transnational activism, directed mainly by connective journalists. As mentioned earlier, previous studies on other diasporas have suggested several ways in which migrants contribute to this, such as online discussions or protests in the host country. It has been suggested that ICTs, specifically, can mobilize people transnationally (e.g. Bennett & Segerberg, 2012; Ibrahim, 2013; Tenove, 2019). In non-diasporic contexts, Clark and Marchi (2017) have already pointed out the importance of connective journalists in this process of mobilizing people through ICTS and, additionally, in forging a common identity. Building on findings by

Parham (2004) and Plascencia (2016), I would suggest that connective journalists in the Sudanese diaspora also, or especially, play an important role in both forging an identity within the diaspora and mobilizing and enabling fellow migrants.

Nonetheless, I wish to point out the diversity of the roles even among connective journalists. I would argue that previous studies have erroneously treated diasporas as homogeneous entities, assuming each actor had a similar role in the process of diasporic activism (e.g. Ataç, Rygiel & Stierl, 2016). Through the results of this study, however, it became clear that everyone, in fact, takes on a different role, each contributing according to their capacities. Divided into three categories, some take on more labor-intensive roles than others. Everyone participated in using a horizontal, global network of Sudanese people to share and consume news and to thoroughly fact-check news, assisting people in Sudan with, for example, educational or financial needs, and in using social media and traditional media to reach and try to educate non-Sudanese people. Only Active Participants and Professionals participated in *organizing* protests, though Occasional Sharers might still attend these protests and that way participate in a more passive way. Finally, Professionals were the only people contacting third-party allies, such as governments, human rights organizations and traditional media, with the aim to ask for assistance with their political activism. Especially this last finding, I suggest, provides us with two final, relevant suggestions to consider: (1) that despite the horizontal nature of the diasporic network, only Professional connective journalists carry out liaison work the diaspora and third-party allies which means this is, at least to some extent, professionalized and thus legitimizes the appeal to treat diasporas as heterogeneous, and (2) that from the perspective of connective journalists in the Sudanese diaspora, grassroots (transnational) activism, both formal and informal, is intentionally organized to be a bottom-up movement, meaning that they attempt to shape the public debate (both in Sudan and in the diaspora) using social media or foreign news outlets, rather than allowing Sudanese media to do so. This suggests that Sudanese media has become almost entirely expendable.

6.3. Limitations and suggestions

Being a small-scale case study, this thesis, of course, has its limitations. Firstly, based on the methods utilized in this thesis, it is not possible to make any claims regarding the outcomes of the diasporic activism. Since it was merely an exploration of intentions of connective journalists' diasporic activism and the way in which they operate in different political arenas, it can only provide insights into those aspects; whether or not their activism did, in fact,

influence third-party allies, the Sudanese government, Sudanese media, or even Sudanese citizens, is not demonstrable based on this study. It does, however, beg the question as to whether the diasporic, mediated activism of Sudanese connective journalists truly influenced the situation in Sudan as impactfully as they believe. My suggestion, then, would be to continue studying the situation on several levels, as the Sudanese Revolution and surrounding activism could serve as an insightful case study into the true impact of diasporic connective journalists on political reform and shaping public discourse. One example of such a study would be through policy examinations on both international and national levels, with the aim to understand the reasoning behind any policy changes.

On a more generally applicable level, I would like to suggest one final consideration for future academic endeavors, but also for policy makers – both in the Netherlands and abroad – and other entities playing an impactful role in shaping public discourse. As discussed, both in academic and political settings, migrant groups are often erroneously treated as homogeneous. This study, though only focusing on connective journalists, already provides some insights into the heterogeneity of migrant groups. It is imperative, I believe, to treat such groups accordingly. This will not only benefit the accuracy of academic inquiries, but also migrant groups as policies will appreciate their true diversity. Since this thesis only took into account how the categories of connective journalists affected their roles and behaviors, but failed to efficiently incorporate, for example, racial, political and ethnic differences, it may have overlooked differences in intentions and behavior that are essential to understanding the inner workings of the Sudanese diasporic public sphere even better and may reveal additional patterns or practices, as well as aiding us in ever increasing our understanding of transnational or diasporic public spheres.

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