“Beit el Ers”

EXPLORING THE POTENTIAL ROLE OF SUDANESE TRADITIONAL WEDDING CEREMONIES IN PROMOTING RESILIENCE, RESISTANCE, AND HEALING AMONG DISPLACED SUDANESE POPULATION IN EGYPT

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The bride and the groom during "El-Jertik"

[1] *"The wedding's house*", however, in Arabic, it sounds much warmer. This title was chosen by Malaz. The Kind young woman from Sudan who sought refuge in Egypt and who helped me with this research.

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To Mamy, Papy, Fifi, and Amoun: Thank you for everything. I hope you're proud of me.

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TO THOSE WHO MADE ME FEEL AT HOME IN MY OWN COUNTRY, EVEN WHEN THEY WERE FAR FROM THEIRS.

TO REMAZ, MALAZ, KHALTOU MAGDA
TO ALL MY BELOVED PEOPLE OF SUDAN

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Abstract

This research explores the potential role of traditional Sudanese wedding ceremonies in the lives of displaced Sudanese communities in Egypt. The research is grounded on a decolonial framework to examine how these traditional weddings can enhance resilience, resistance, and the healing journeys of the Displaced population in Egypt. The research focuses on shifting the narrative from only on the hardships and challenges they face to viewing them as whole individuals to emphasizing their agency, cultural richness, and capacity for joy and continuity even amidst displacement

The findings reveal how traditional Sudanese weddings adapt to new contexts, foster community cohesion and economic sustainability. It also reveals how these celebrations can offer a platform to resist cultural erasure and cultural erasure for refugee populations.

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Keywords: Displaced population. Weddings, Resilience, Resistence, Cultural Practices, Rituals

Framing The Research: Key Concepts And Their Definitions

This research paper explores the potential role of traditional Sudanese weddings in promoting resistance, resilience, and healing among Sudanese refugees in Egypt. As this journey significantly relies on several key concepts, it's crucial to begin by defining them to establish a common understanding and provide clarity about their application in this paper. In this regard, the following section is comprised of the definitions of the key concepts in this paper.

1. **Celebration:** the act of engaging in activities that express joy, commemorate a specific event, or honor an individual or group

2. **Ceremony:** is a formalized sequence of actions or rituals performed on special occasions, often imbued with symbolic meaning that reinforces cultural, religious, or social values

3. **Cultural Memory:** is an institutionalized and formalized memory. It includes the symbolic heritages that are kept and preserved through texts, rituals, monuments, and others that immediately evoke certain collective experiences and meanings. Collective memory is passed down through generations and can last for millennia, unlike communicative memory, which is made of everyday conversations that are filled with personal stories and experiences and focuses on the not-so-distant past, usually within three to four generations or about 80 to 110 years. (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995)

4. **Cultural Practices:** are comprised of different visible and subtle patterns of social interactions and behaviors. They involve the use of tangible products such as paintings, and intangible products such as dances and sacred rituals, among others. These practices frame the societies' knowledge of "what to do when and where", and they're learned and passed on through different generations (National Standards in Foreign Language Education Project, 1999). At its heart, cultural practices are built, shaped, and

refined over time and can be seen as both the result of human actions and a guide that shapes how people react in different situations. (Spencer-Oatey, 2012)

5. **Healing Journey:** starts when the person's state of balance is disrupted due to an illness _physical or mental_ or a trauma. It's simply the path towards regaining this balance (Hsu et al., 2008)

6. **Identity:** The sets of characteristics, beliefs, self-awareness, and experiences that shape people's personalities. It also forms individuals' perspectives towards themselves, social roles, and relationships. Identity is the primary element in developing an individual's sense of belonging and affiliation to different groups and communities. (Guenther, Wilton and Fernandes, 2020)

7. **Resilience:** The ability to adapt to adversity, trauma, and/or significant stress (Windle, 2011)

8. **Resistance:** The act of refusing and opposing a certain power dynamic within social, economic, and political structures. Resistance can take the form of physical action but also can be an emotional stance (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004).

9. **Rituals:** Prescribed behaviors and/or actions that are repeated in specific contexts and occasions. (Hobson et al., 2018

10. **Refugee:** This paper will be using the definition of refugees as stated in 1951 Refugee Convention of the United Nations Human Rights Commision UNHCR. Under this interpretation, a refugee is “someone who, owing to a well-founded fear of persecution based on race, religion, nationality, political opinion, or membership in a particular social group, has fled their country of origin and is unable or unwilling to return.” (UNHCR, 1951) For someone to be considered a refugee, they must leave their own country and cross an international border to find safety in another country. A refugee has legal status under international law and therefore the right to protection under international law (UNHCR, 1951).

11. Internally Displaced person (IDPs) is defined by The United Nations as "individuals or groups who are forced to flee their homes or places of habitual residence due to conflict, violence, human rights violations, or disasters but who remain within the borders of their own country".(United Nations, 1998) IDPs do not benefit from legal protections under international law, and therefore they must rely on their governments for security. However, when state protection is inadequate international humanitarian support is often necessary (United Nations, 1998).

12. As a young Arab girl, living in Europe, that has a deep connection with the Sudanese community but still not affected by the war. I had the luxury to experience the positive aspects of the community rather than the negative ones. This has put me in a position to try to promote and spread the good side in Sudan other than the horrific damage and dehumanization of the Sudanese community. This may influence me to interpret the current events in a romanticized way. However, I'm well aware of the tragic events and the level of oppression and injustices present in such a context.

13. Traditional: The colonial perspective on traditions and customs usually view them as inferior and focuses on the negative aspects. This research tries to give another view on what is traditional. The paper uses a decolonial lens to examine traditions to change the narratives that have historically marginalized Indigenous knowledge systems. The traditions in this research are a set of practices and knowledge that are dynamic and evolved rather than only focused on the past. Indigenous cultures have legitimacy and can fit in the contemporary world through its adaptability and relevance. Saying that, the research also highlights the practices within culture that can be harmful without using a white supremacist lens but rather acknowledging them to try to make a change while respecting the culture of the people.

14. In the context of traditional Sudanese weddings, the boundaries between celebration, ceremony, and ritual often blur, creating a dynamic interplay where all three coexist seamlessly. These elements are deeply interwoven in each step in the preparation and execution of a Sudanese wedding.

Introduction:

I have always held a deep admiration for cultural practices and intangible heritages, especially those that embody collective memories, linking people to their ancestors and bridging the past, present, and future. A few years ago, I discovered a unique passion for wedding ceremonies, particularly traditional ones. The fusion of music, dance, and celebration has always captivated me. Traditional weddings, I believe, hold a special power—despite their diversity, they share common threads of resilience and cultural preservation.

In 2018, my journey into traditional weddings began when a Sudanese friend invited me to her wedding in Khartoum. She encouraged me to arrive a week early to fully experience Sudanese wedding traditions. From the moment I arrived, I was struck by the warmth and generosity with which the bride's and groom's families welcomed all the guests. This remarkable hospitality extended to hosting 14 foreign guests, including myself, in their homes.

I vividly recall accompanying my friend Samreen to a shop filled with stunning festive attire. She selected three crowns, dresses, and a "Sudanese toub," explaining the significance of each pre-wedding celebration leading up to the grand day. The week was filled with enchanting traditions that left an indelible mark on my heart.

When the war erupted in Sudan in April 2023, my thoughts turned to the Sudanese people forced to flee their homes. I wondered if they could continue their vibrant rituals and traditions or if displacement had silenced them. In October 2023, as the atrocities in Gaza escalated, social media circulated images of a displaced Palestinian couple marrying in a camp, only to be tragically killed days later by an Israeli strike (Horn & ABC Staff, 2024). These images deepened my reflections on how traditional wedding ceremonies could serve as acts of resilience, bridging past and present while providing hope for the future.

This led me to question the very definition of human. For me, the ability to practice rituals and ceremonies is as essential as access to food or shelter. Inspired by this

perspective, I embarked on a journey to explore how displaced Sudanese communities in Egypt use traditional wedding ceremonies to foster resilience, resistance, and healing. Cairo, with its significant Sudanese refugee population and my existing connections, became the focal point for this investigation.

I chose to undertake my research in Egypt for several interconnected reasons. First and foremost, Egypt is my home country, making it easier for me to navigate its cultural, social, and logistical landscape with a deeper understanding and familiarity. Additionally, Egypt has become one of the primary host countries for Sudanese refugees since the eruption of the war in Sudan in 2023, offering a significant context to explore the experiences of displaced populations.

My personal connections also played a vital role in this decision. Having many Sudanese friends in Cairo provided me with a network that could facilitate access to displaced communities, ensuring that I approached this research with trust and cultural sensitivity. Furthermore, conducting the research in Egypt was a practical choice. As an unsponsored study, staying within my home country allowed me to manage the financial aspects of this project more effectively while ensuring that I could dedicate my resources to the depth and quality of the research itself. This combination of accessibility, relevance, and cost-effectiveness made Egypt an ideal setting for my study.

Background

Refugees often endure profound isolation, humiliation, and immense losses, some of which are existential, including the loss of loved ones, homeland, culture, identity, hope, trust, meaning in life, and faith in a just world (Burnett & Thompson, 2005). Sudan, once the largest country in Africa and among the world's poorest, has historically been home to approximately 600 tribes, 400 languages and dialects, and multiple religions (Richmond & Gestrin, 1998; Tempany, 2009). This immense diversity has shaped Sudan's unique cultural identity but has also contributed to its prolonged and complex conflicts.

In recent decades, an unprecedented number of individuals have been forced to flee their homes, leaving behind their lives in search of refuge in various parts of the world. Conflicts and natural hazards remain the primary drivers of forced displacement (GIZ, 2018). This rising number of displaced populations presents a significant global challenge, with far-reaching social, political, and economic implications. Countries are increasingly struggling with dual pressures: managing internal displacement and accommodating those displaced from abroad, while many fear future crises that could displace their own populations.

Sudan is currently one of the most severely affected countries by conflict. While regions such as Darfur have experienced protracted crises for decades, the rest of the country remained relatively stable until April 2023. During Ramadan, a devastating war erupted in Khartoum—the capital—between the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF). Vickie Hawkins, General Director of Doctors Without Borders (MSF) Netherlands, described the conflict as rapidly intensifying and exceeding the capabilities of MSF teams (MSF, 2024). According to UNHCR, from the onset of the war in April 2023 to October 27, 2024, over 11 million individuals have been forcibly displaced, with 2 million seeking refuge in neighboring countries such as Chad, South Sudan, and Egypt. Of these, 1.2 million people have sought refuge in Egypt, making it the largest host country for Sudanese refugees.

The experiences of displaced populations vary widely depending on the social, economic, and political circumstances of their host communities. However, displaced

individuals frequently face dire physical, social, emotional, and psychological conditions, often depriving them of access to fundamental human rights and needs (Tempany, 2009).

This research challenges the widespread narrative that dehumanizes displaced populations, portraying them merely as suffering bodies dependent on external aid to meet basic needs. Instead, it highlights the reality that displaced people are far more than victims. They are members of communities with histories deeply rooted in their territories and distinct ways of being, doing, relating, and knowing. Their displacement represents not only the loss of physical possessions but also the rupture of the ties that bind them to their heritage, land, and collective identity.

In this context, cultural practices emerge as powerful tools for displaced populations to reconstruct these disrupted links. Celebration is not merely a preservation of culture but an honoring of what continues to thrive despite displacement. Celebrations provide opportunities for individuals and communities to connect with their histories, reaffirm their collective identities, and assert their humanity. These practices counter the cultural erasure and marginalization often faced by displaced populations, serving as acts of both resistance and renewal.

Cultural practices within displaced populations offer a means by which they, alongside external assistance, can actively resist the forces that seek to erase their identities. These practices affirm that displaced people are not passive recipients of aid but active agents of resilience, capable of preserving and adapting their heritage even in the face of adversity.

The enjoyment of culture is a fundamental human right. Cultural practices, particularly celebrations, within displaced communities contribute to a sense of renewed existence and strength. They counter the increasing threat of cultural disappearance, provide opportunities for healing, and foster connections within host communities. Celebrations are not merely events but dynamic expressions of survival and defiance against the odds.

To this end, this research explores the critical role of cultural traditions—specifically traditional Sudanese wedding ceremonies—in fostering caring

and supportive communities amidst displacement. It examines how these practices help displaced populations navigate their loss, preserve their identity, and build resilience, resistance, and healing within host communities. Through this lens, the study underscores the transformative potential of cultural heritage as a vital resource for displaced populations in the face of adversity.

Research Objectives

- To explore how traditional Sudanese wedding ceremonies enhance the resilience of displaced Sudanese individuals by fostering a sense of belonging and community.
- To examine the ways in which these ceremonies serve as acts of cultural resistance, preserving identity and traditions amidst displacement.
- To analyze the adaptability of Sudanese wedding traditions in Egypt and the strategies employed to maintain their cultural essence.
- To investigate the role of wedding ceremonies in the healing process of displaced Sudanese communities by providing emotional and psychological relief.
- To document the multifaceted economic, social, and cultural impacts of traditional wedding practices on the lives of displaced Sudanese individuals in Egypt.

Research Questions

Main research question: How do traditional Sudanese wedding ceremonies promote resilience, resistance, and healing among displaced Sudanese communities in Egypt?

Sub-Questions:

1. How do displaced Sudanese communities in Egypt adapt traditional wedding practices to their new context, and what challenges do they face in doing so?

2. In what ways do traditional Sudanese weddings function as acts of cultural resistance against displacement and cultural erasure?

3. What role do these ceremonies play in fostering emotional and social healing for displaced individuals and their communities?

Justification and relevance of this research

The importance of this research stems from the fact that it aims at filling an oversight aspect of the cultural practices among displaced populations. The research intends to underscore the significant effect of culture, particularly focusing on traditional wedding celebrations, and explore how these ceremonies can play a key role in maintaining a sense of identity, community belonging, and re-existence for displaced people. It also delves deep into how these celebrations help preserve intangible heritages and cultural practices while contributing to the resilience and healing of displaced populations. Additionally, the research aims to bridge the gap between the three elements of the research: resistance, resilience, and healing.

Positionality

While acknowledging my positionality as a young, privileged North African and Middle Eastern woman studying in Europe and conducting research in my home country, it is essential to recognize that I am not confined to these roles. Positionality is fluid and dynamic, shaped by context, relationships, and the interplay of personal and collective experiences rather than being a fixed identity (Cairo, 2021).

Moreover, I was aware of the complexities of conducting research in Egypt during a time of heightened tensions between Sudanese refugees and Egyptians. A dominant narrative blamed the influx of Sudanese refugees to be the reason behind the significant rise in rent prices across many areas in Egypt. These tensions added

a layer of sensitivity to my research necessitating a careful navigation and a culturally informed approach.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

The research theoretical framework draws on Maria Lugones' concept of world-traveling, which offers a powerful lens to explore Sudanese refugee weddings in Egypt, as a potential site of healing, resilience, and resistance. Through this lens, the rituals and traditions of Sudanese refugee weddings are explored not as isolated practices but as dynamic, deeply human events shaped by displacement, cultural memory, and intersubjective experiences.(Lugones, 1987)

Maria Lugones introduces world-traveling as crossing into the worlds of others not to claim ownership or understanding but to engage in a relational process of connection. She further critiques the limitations of empathy that stem from guilt, arguing that it risks centering the researcher's perspective and assuming an ability to fully "feel" the experiences of others. By contrast, Lugones suggests that embracing the impossibility of fully understanding the pain, joy, or cultural contexts of the other is a strength point as It enhances the humility and openness of the researcher, which enables the development of relationships based on respect and curiosity.

Through world-traveling, participants are empowered to articulate their lived experiences, creating a mutual understanding that bridges the emotional and cultural gaps caused by displacement. This relational process not only enables participants to reclaim their agency but also offers a space where their traditions and narratives are validated and celebrated. By situating these weddings within a broader socio-political and cultural framework, the researcher can highlight how displaced communities use rituals as acts of resistance and resilience, redefining their identities in contexts of adversity.

On another note, the world-traveling theory is strongly relevant to examining the potential role of Sudanese weddings, as willfully exercising world-traveling while being

playful entails the plurality of self. Playfulness allows the researcher to embrace a multiplicity of perspectives, moving beyond rigid categories of identity to view participants' experiences as fluid and interdependent. This approach enriches the understanding of how displaced Sudanese communities navigate the intersections of tradition and adaptation.

In this regard, I'm aware of my inability to grasp the full experiences of the people I work with. Instead, I'm remaining permeable to the emotions and meanings shared, allowing these interactions to transform my understanding and knowledge. This process acknowledges the limits of individual interpretation and emphasizes the collective creation of meaning through relational engagement. Equally, considering my responsibility as a researcher, I'm committed to relational accountability and will ensure that I build respectful relationships with the ideas I'm researching.

By adopting this framework, the research acknowledges the inherently dynamic and reciprocal nature of cultural practices. It emphasizes that Sudanese weddings in displacement are not merely events of cultural preservation but also sites of creativity, negotiation, and solidarity that enable displaced individuals to assert their presence, heal from trauma, and rebuild fragmented communities.

1. CULTURAL PRACTICES' ADAPTATION, HEALING, AND RESILIENCE IN DISPLACEMENT

The majority of displaced populations carry with them their traditions, memories, knowledge, and intangible cultural heritage. Many times, it becomes one of the most valuable things someone can own and keep while away from home, linking the soul, body, and mind to the land, past reality, and identity. Usually, performing and enjoying these cultural practices and rituals are the reasons they can endure the hardships they often encounter during their displacement journey. These rituals, especially when practiced in groups, help maintain a sense of belonging. Even after losing their land and home, they retain connections to their identity and, often, themselves.

Throughout history, many cultures have succeeded in adapting to new conditions to ensure and safeguard their continuity. For instance, as mentioned by O'Byrne (2022),

South Sudanese Acholi refugees in New Zealand adjusted cultural practices, specifically their wedding traditions, to preserve their identity and foster a sense of belonging while aligning with their host environment. Similarly, livelihoods disrupted by displacement necessitated that South Sudanese in Benito monetize the bridewealth, traditionally paid in cattle (Stites, 2022). This example underscores the adaptability of cultural ceremonies to meet contextual demands, maintaining their essence while promoting cohesion and healing in new settings.

Relatively, Stites (2022) emphasizes the importance of culture as not being abstract but inherently symbolic. Rituals carry deep meanings for displaced populations when performed, often embedded with sacred beliefs. For example, the exchange of cattle in traditional marriages symbolizes the merging of two families, demonstrating the profound symbolic weight carried by such practices. Even when adapted—such as replacing cattle with monetary payments—the rituals still foster solidarity, closeness, and cultural continuity. This adaptability is crucial for displaced families, helping them retain their sense of belonging and resilience.

Cultural practices are also central to resilience, defined by Mokline and Ben Abdallah (2021) as the ability to overcome trauma and adapt to challenging life circumstances. Rituals not only allow individuals to navigate emotional and psychological challenges but also foster behavioral flexibility that facilitates healing. For displaced populations, rituals become anchors, providing stability in uncertain environments and serving as tools for rebuilding disrupted lives. These practices often integrate personal and communal healing, where individuals find strength in the shared cultural experience of their communities.

Rituals, especially within displaced contexts, are also powerful vehicles for preserving collective memory. Meckien (2013) notes that memory, while often perceived as static, is dynamic, connecting the past, present, and future. Cultural practices like weddings evoke memories of a homeland and a way of life that may otherwise be threatened by erasure. These rituals become spaces where cultural knowledge is transmitted intergenerationally, fostering continuity and safeguarding intangible heritage even amid displacement.

However, the role of cultural practices in displacement is not without complexity. While rituals can reinforce identity and resilience, they can also trigger painful memories of loss or trauma, as discussed by Засєкіна (2020). For instance, performing rituals that remind individuals of absent loved ones or disrupted communities can evoke grief alongside resilience. This duality highlights the importance of contextual sensitivity when examining cultural practices in displacement settings.

Given the communal nature of weddings, their role in enhancing mutual aid networks cannot be overlooked. Similar to the self-help groups described by Cairo et al. (2023), weddings serve as informal but powerful spaces for displaced populations to build connections and access social support. These interactions reaffirm that displaced individuals are not merely victims of their circumstances but active agents of their survival and recovery.

Furthermore, the performance of cultural practices contributes to forming and reinforcing collective identities. The revival and continuation of these traditions in displacement act as a counter-narrative to cultural erasure, enabling displaced communities to assert their agency and cultural sovereignty. By ensuring the transmission of indigenous knowledge, rituals like Sudanese weddings foster cultural pride and cohesion, even in unfamiliar or challenging contexts.

Though remembrance and the revival of cultural practices often lead to healing, they can also serve as acts of resistance. Beyond preserving tradition, these practices challenge dominant narratives that often marginalize displaced populations, asserting their presence and identity within new sociopolitical landscapes. Cultural practices not only provide emotional and psychological sustenance but also act as strategies for defiance and reclamation.

2. WEDDING CEREMONIES AS ACTS OF RESISTANCE

Culture has continually demonstrated its ability to resist challenges such as cultural erasure, social injustices, and human rights violations (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004; Hobson et al., 2018). Throughout history, performative art has been a fundamental way to challenge dominant systems and advocate for change. Performative art is a form of art

that includes live, embodied actions that carry symbolic and cultural meaning. It's a fusion between artistic expression and activism, meaning that it can serve as both a platform for resistance and a means of preserving cultural identity amidst socio-political challenges.(Paavolainen, 2022).

Although Sudanese wedding ceremonies are not categorized as performative art, recently, in Cairo, performances that demonstrate the traditional wedding ceremonies has started to be widely spread. These demonstrations of traditional weddings have created spaces for displaced Sudanese communities to express their cultural heritage in new ways.

Teemu Paavolainen's discusses (2022), how performative protest operates on a dual axis: it can either disrupt societal norms or preserve cultural traditions, depending on the circumstances. This dual function allows displaced Sudanese communities to use the events that demonstrate wedding ceremonies to both challenge exclusion and marginalization while ensuring the continuity of their traditions amidst displacement.
Thus, Sudanese wedding ceremonies, reimagined as performative arts and performative protest, transcend their immediate celebratory and entertaining purpose to become powerful expressions of identity, resistance, and hope.

The intergenerational transmission of this heritage, as the grandmothers being described in Salt Houses, becomes a key form of resistance. The Continuation of weddings traditions and rituals during wartime, despite the instability and displacement, mirrors the transfer of memory and reflects the endurance of cultural identity (Gheytasi, 2024).

Similarly, according to Gheytasi, S. (2024), The preservation of these rituals doesn't only assist in maintaining cultural norms but also asserts the existence of collective identity. that storytelling and other cultural practices act as resistance, weddings become a declaration of defiance against the upheaval caused by war. These ceremonies allow communities to challenge the attempts to erase or alter their cultural norms.

Through the act of remembrance and the celebration of traditional weddings during wartime, communities embody their resilience and affirm their cultural strength in defiance of external forces. As these ceremonies are dynamic expressions of cultural memory, they actively resist the attempts to erase and/or suppress historical and societal narratives.

To this end, remembrance and memory of wedding traditions not just ensure that they're not being diminished by the chaos of war, but their significance is heightened because they stand as powerful symbols of the community's determination to preserve and protect their societal norms.

3. GENDER AND WEDDING CEREMONIES

It is important to emphasize that this research aims solely to discover the potential role that Sudanese wedding traditions and rituals may play in the resilience, resistance, and healing of displaced populations, rather than exploring the gender dynamics and inequalities that marriage institutions and traditions might cause to women.

In general, and in African societies in particular, culture plays a fundamental role in shaping gender roles and responsibilities. Wedding traditions and rituals, as essential pillars of African culture, often reflect these roles, making them an integral part of understanding societal dynamics. However, as Ogunde (2016) highlights, the relationship between culture and women's rights is significantly complicated. Applying Ssenyonjo's (2007) metaphors of the "shadow" and "light" of cultural practices, wedding rituals can embody both positive and negative dimensions. On the one hand, these traditions may reinforce existing forms of gender inequality or even generate new ones, leading to emotional, physical, or psychological harm for women (shadow). On the other hand, they can act as mechanisms to challenge patriarchal norms, promote women's empowerment, and bridge gaps in societal imbalances (light).

Premised on the above, it's critical to examine cultural practices within their specific contexts, avoiding cultural relativism that might rationalize human rights violations, particularly those affecting women's rights. Cultural practices are not static; they evolve in response to societal changes. Recognizing this fluidity is essential for identifying

opportunities to adapt traditions in ways that uphold human rights principles while respecting cultural integrity. Balancing the performance of cultural rituals with the promotion of equality and freedom across society is thus imperative.

Sudanese wedding traditions often reflect patriarchal principles, but they also provide platforms for women to negotiate and redefine these values. For instance, rituals such as *El-Jebena* or *El-Dokhan* place women at the center of communal activities, allowing them to assert their roles within family and community settings. These moments, while steeped in tradition, can also be spaces where women's agency is amplified, showcasing their ability to navigate and challenge societal expectations.

Moreover, it's worth noting that weddings often serve as microcosms of broader gender dynamics within society. For example, the role of women as knowledge bearers in wedding preparations, from crafting perfumes to orchestrating ceremonial practices, underscores their influence within cultural preservation. Yet, as these responsibilities are often unpaid and taken for granted, they also reveal the unequal distribution of labor within these rituals. Recognizing these dynamics is essential for understanding the interplay between tradition and gender equity.

Abu-Lughod (1990) underlines the interconnected relationship between resistance and power within the Bedouin woman community. Her analysis demonstrates how cultural practices, including those surrounding weddings, can reveal profound power dynamics while providing opportunities for women to assert agency. Similarly, Ahn (2012) explores how rituals can serve as resistance by marginalized populations, offering platforms to maneuver and challenge established power structures. Sudanese wedding ceremonies exemplify this duality, blending compliance with tradition and subtle forms of resistance that challenge patriarchal norms.

For displaced Sudanese communities, wedding rituals take on additional layers of complexity. While these traditions can reinforce gender norms, they also offer women opportunities to lead and adapt cultural practices in displacement contexts. In some cases, displacement necessitates reinterpreting rituals to reflect new economic or social realities, which can create space for renegotiating traditional gender roles. For example, women's

central role in preserving and adapting cultural practices ensures continuity, highlighting their importance as cultural custodians and agents of resilience.

Ultimately, the negotiation of gender dynamics within Sudanese wedding rituals illustrates the dual potential of cultural practices to perpetuate inequality or foster empowerment. By situating these traditions within a framework that values both cultural preservation and gender equity, it becomes possible to celebrate their transformative potential while addressing the challenges they may present.

Methodology

The research adopted a qualitative research methodology to study the significant effect of culture, particularly focusing on traditional wedding celebrations, and explore how these ceremonies can play a key role in maintaining a sense of identity, community belonging, and re-existence for displaced people. A qualitative approach was selected for its ability to provide an in-depth exploration of social phenomena in context, emphasizing interpretation and process. This methodology integrated participatory observation, semi-structured interviews, storytelling, and decolonial research methods to ensure a comprehensive understanding of the subject matter.

Decolonial approaches, most specifically, working with others, give the space to collectively decide on the research topics and set common objectives with the people we're doing the research with. Decolonial research methods don't force us to disregard our true selves; by contrast, they encourage us to feel and sense as a way of knowledge—"Sentipensar" (Escobar, 2020). This perspective emphasizes the interconnection between emotions and intellect, underscoring the importance of engaging with communities through a relational and empathetic approach rather than through hierarchical or extractive methodologies.

Similarly, these methods lift the pressure of the necessity to constantly discover and introduce new information and knowledge. Instead, they normalize the fact that research might simply be to honor and revitalize previous discoveries and experiences (Gerber, 2024). By doing so, decolonial approaches challenge the traditional paradigms of knowledge production, which often prioritize innovation over the lived realities and cultural wisdom of marginalized communities. They emphasize reciprocity and accountability, encouraging researchers to engage in processes that benefit and empower participants rather than simply extracting data for academic purposes.

These approaches also promote the idea of relational accountability—building and maintaining respectful relationships with the individuals and communities involved in the research. By recognizing the shared humanity and interconnectedness of all participants,

decolonial methods create a space where co-learning and co-creation of knowledge thrive, transforming the research process into one of mutual respect and empowerment. This approach not only reshapes the role of the researcher but also contributes to deconstructing power dynamics inherent in traditional research frameworks.

Participatory observations capture the day-to-day activities of the participants and a wide range of relationship dynamics, resonating deeply with the context of this research. By immersing the researcher in the participants' lived realities, this approach provides invaluable insights into the intricate social fabric and cultural practices of the Sudanese refugee community. This method not only helps contextualize the experiences of individuals but also enables the researcher to observe unspoken gestures, rituals, and interactions that may not be conveyed through interviews alone.

Storytelling emerged as a critical tool in the research process, allowing the researcher to investigate the constructed meanings of wedding ceremonies in the present as they relate to the past. This approach offers unique insights into how these rituals serve as a bridge between memory and identity, revealing the evolving significance of wedding traditions over time. Story, as a narrative framework, provides an avenue for delving into the complexity of human experiences and relationships (Webster and Mertova, 2007). Through storytelling, participants are empowered to articulate their lived realities, providing a rich tapestry of personal and collective histories that deepen the understanding of cultural resilience and transformation.

Semi-structured interviews further enriched the research by facilitating open-ended discussions. These interviews offered a platform to explore participants' thoughts, feelings, and beliefs about wedding ceremonies, creating space for nuanced reflections on personal and, at times, sensitive topics. This method allowed the researcher to delve deeply into the emotional and symbolic layers of the wedding rituals, uncovering their multifaceted roles in fostering identity, belonging, and healing within the community.

In addition to primary data collection, the study incorporated a desk review of existing literature as well as videos. The visual materials complemented the fieldwork, providing an additional layer of understanding about Sudanese wedding traditions and their adaptation in displacement contexts.

The methodology aligns with a world-traveling framework, which serves as a foundation for creating "holding spaces" where trust and respect are shared between the researcher and the research community (Cairo, 2021). This approach encourages vulnerability and mutual engagement, fostering an environment where authentic connections can thrive. Consequently, sensing as a way of knowing—"Sentipensar" (Escobar, 2020)—is naturally enhanced through the storytelling process. This framework not only facilitates the act of sharing and learning but also encourages the celebration and reimagination of cultural practices, allowing both the researcher and the participants to engage in a journey of living, learning, and unlearning together.

These approaches regard people as interconnected communities rather than isolated individuals (Solera, 2024). They emphasize relational accountability, urging researchers to reflect deeply on their positionality and the ways in which they can report back to and reciprocate the communities they engage with (Pots and Brown, 2005). By prioritizing community-centered research processes, this methodology reinforces the importance of ethical engagement, ensuring that the knowledge co-created through this study is meaningful, respectful, and empowering for all involved.

Sample Size and Selection

Based on the topic of this research and the inherent challenges of reaching Sudanese refugees in Egypt, I initially relied on my personal network and friends to connect me with potential participants. Unfortunately, this approach did not yield the number of participants I needed, presenting a significant challenge in the early stages of data collection. To overcome this, I turned to Facebook groups dedicated to Sudanese brides and weddings, leveraging social media as a tool to reach a wider audience. I began posting about my research on traditional Sudanese weddings, expressing my interest in attending ceremonies as part of my study.

While many messages and invitations did not align with my timeframe, several did, and these connections proved invaluable. This is how I met Malaz. I still vividly remember the moment she tagged me in a comment, writing, "I can invite you to my sister's wedding, and you're more than welcome to join us and experience it firsthand."

From that moment, my relationship with Malaz and her wonderful family began, becoming a cornerstone of this research journey. This connection exemplified the generosity and openness characteristic of the Sudanese community, which was a recurring theme throughout the research process.

Of the 15 individuals I formally interviewed, only three were from my initial network. The remaining participants were people I had never met before but who trusted me and generously welcomed me into their lives to support this research. Beyond the formal interviews, my time living with Malaz and her family provided a unique opportunity to interact with over 20 individuals from their extended network. These informal interactions enriched my understanding of Sudanese culture, traditions, and everyday life, offering in-depth insights that went far beyond what structured interviews could capture. Their hospitality and willingness to share their experiences underscored the resilience and tight-knit nature of the Sudanese community, making this work not only possible but profoundly meaningful.

Aligned with the principle that decolonial research approaches view people as communities rather than isolated individuals (Solera, 2024), this methodology encouraged deep reflection on my positionality and responsibility toward the community. Decolonial approaches prioritize reciprocal relationships, urging researchers to consider how to give back to the communities they engage with (Pots and Brown, 2005). When I first met Malaz, I asked her how I could express my gratitude for her support in this research. Together, we developed a practical and culturally appropriate arrangement: since I was in my home country and familiar with local shops, pricing, and logistics, I could assist her family with wedding preparations. Having access to a car also allowed me to help with errands and transportation.

We agreed that my way of saying thank you would be to help with their wedding preparations, running errands, and transporting items. This arrangement not only lightened their workload especially during the hectic pre-wedding period when families often feel overwhelmed—but also gave me a unique opportunity to immerse myself in their culture. By participating in the preparation process, I gained a deeper, more intimate understanding of Sudanese traditions and the intricate details of wedding ceremonies. This hands-on involvement allowed me to experience firsthand the layers of cultural

meaning embedded in these practices, from the preparation of traditional perfumes and incense to the organization of celebratory events.

In addition to enhancing my research, this arrangement reinforced the importance of relational accountability in decolonial methodologies. It ensured that the research was a collaborative effort and a meaningful exchange, where I could contribute to the community as much as I was learning from them. Through this process, I not only collected data but also built relationships rooted in mutual respect, trust, and shared cultural experiences.

Figure 1: Malaz and I running errands for the wedding (Elfeky,2024)

The wedding and its home

العِرس و بيته

In this chapter, through sharing the story of "Beit Ers Remaz"1 I'll illustrate, in detail, the Sudanese wedding traditions and rituals that symbolize many Sudanese values and beliefs. This sharing and memorization journey will not be based only on reading different sources and watching various videos, but most importantly, depending on my own experiences while "world-traveling" to participate in Sudanese weddings. It's worth noting that most of the knowledge I'm about to share is developed by "Sentipensar" which is a decolonial research approach that depends on feeling and sensing as a way of knowing. Till now, I've been fortunate enough to "world-travel" (Lugones, 1987) several times, many of them were to participate in and experience traditional Sudanese weddings. The first time I experienced a Sudanese wedding was when I attended my best friend's wedding in Khartum, Sudan; and the second time was in Egypt while working on this research. During these weddings and their accompanying traditions and rituals, I embraced my plurality of selves, and with a loving perception , I lived, loved, and enjoyed the vibrant traditions and rituals of Sudanese weddings. Not just on the main big days, but also in the day-to-day preparation for these days.

These weddings revealed the intricate interplay of tradition, memory, and adaptation. Each ritual, from the simplest act of grinding sandalwood for incense to the grandeur of the wedding day, carries profound symbolic meaning. They reflect the resilience of a community striving to preserve its cultural identity while adapting to the realities of displacement. Through these experiences, I not only witnessed the vitality of Sudanese customs but also understood the emotional healing and resistance embedded in these practices.

During the wedding in Khartoum, I world-traveled, both literally and metaphorically. Literally, when I traveled from Ethiopia to Sudan just to attend the wedding of "Samreen", and metaphorically, when I world-traveled from being a young

Egyptian woman in Sudan to a loving family member in a welcoming Sudanese family happily celebrating the marriage of their daughter in their warm home and county. This journey highlighted the fluidity of identity and belonging as I found myself seamlessly integrated into their familial bonds. It was not just the wedding itself but the warmth of their hospitality, the sharing of stories, and the collaborative efforts in preparation that gave me a profound sense of connection. It was a testament to how cultural practices transcend geographical boundaries, creating bridges of solidarity and affection.

On the other hand, for the wedding I attended/was supposed to attend in Egypt, I also world-traveled from The Netherlands, where I study to Egypt, my home country, and metaphorically from being a young woman in her homeland to being part of a beautiful Sudanese family that sought refuge in Egypt because of an ongoing vicious war in Sudan.

This experience illuminated the adaptability of Sudanese traditions in a diasporic context. Despite the challenges of displacement, the family's dedication to recreating their cultural practices demonstrated the strength of their collective identity. They transformed their Cairo home into a symbolic extension of Sudan, filled with the scents, sounds, and colors of their heritage. For me, it was not just a chance to observe but to actively participate in their rituals, further deepening my understanding of the role of weddings in fostering resilience and unity.

Remaz comes from a Sudanese family who flew to Egypt from an atrocious war. In Cairo, she has her twin sister "Malaz", and two other sisters, her niece, besides her parents, and many other family members. Also, she still has two brothers living in Sudan. They refused to leave their homeland even at its worst. Remaz continued her last year of Nursing online. Ali_the groom_ came with his family all the way from Aswan to meet Remaz's family in Cairo.

The meeting between the families was not only a significant cultural milestone but also an emotional event that reflected the blending of two worlds—one shaped by the displacement in Egypt and the other by the continuation of traditional practices in Aswan. The gathering was filled with joy and mutual respect, setting the stage for the elaborate rituals and ceremonies that followed.

1- The statement of good. “Golet el kheir” “قولة الخير”

It indicates a gathering where the elderly people of both families meet to get to know each other and attest to each other's reputation, ancestry's legacy, and heritage. Typically, during this meeting, the uncle or the father (the eldest of the groom’s family) will request the “bride’s hand” from her elderly family member. In fact, because of the strong bond of the Sudanese communities, before and/or after the statement of good gathering, both families will keep checking the reputation of the other family through their respective networks. The groom’s family usually brings different gifts such as chocolates. (Elfadel, and El Kenani, 2024). I didn’t manage to attend this step with Remaz. However, the family made sure to offer me some chocolates from the one the groom got to include me even if I didn’t attend it.

Figure 2: The chocolates of “Golet El Kheir” (Elfeky,2024)

The significance of *“Golet el kheir”* goes beyond its immediate purpose of formalizing the engagement; it serves as a cultural anchor that reinforces the values of kinship, reputation, and shared identity. It is a moment where the families take pride in their heritage and reassert their connection to their community’s social fabric. Moreover,

the gifts exchanged during this gathering—while seemingly simple—symbolize the beginning of a new relationship, rooted in mutual trust and hospitality.

For many displaced Sudanese families in Egypt, this ritual also takes on a deeper meaning. It becomes a way to preserve their cultural identity in a foreign land, reaffirming their traditions despite the challenges of displacement. The act of gathering, exchanging gifts, and sharing stories helps to recreate a sense of home and belonging, even in an unfamiliar environment.

2- Dowry. “Sad El Mal” سد المال

This is the phase in which the actual preparations for the wedding start. It’s one of the main pillars of the Sudanese wedding traditions. According to traditions, the groom is supposed to get everything for the bride. As described by Malaz, “ *Her groom takes her only with what she’s putting on; anything else, he’s the one to buy*.” The dowry money is usually negotiated and decided by both families. It depends on the groom’s financial status of the groom. Hence, its amount differs from one wedding to another. This money is for the bride to spend it as she willing but also it’s usued to buy **“El-Habssa”** and **“El-Shela”** products.

2.1 El-Habssa "الحبسة"

literary translates into **“ The imprisonment.”** From this phase, the bride is not supposed to leave the house except to run errands related to the wedding. Also, from this moment, neither the groom nor his friends and family can see her. As she is treated like a queen during the whole wedding rituals, the idea behind **“El-Habssa”** is that the bride should relax at home, eat well, and only take care of her health and beauty. She’s not even supposed to do any of the house chores. *“I’m the bride, I’m not supposed to do anything at home.”* Saied Remaz, teasing her sisters while they were preparing lunch.

For **El-Habssa** The groom's family would come to the bride's house ululating and singing to bring her lots of Kilos of pasta, rice, chocolates, legumes, and many more foodstuffs so that the bride would eat well. In Sudan, the more the bride gains weight, the more beautiful she is and the more wealth she shows. **El-Habssa** goods also include lots of skincare and haircare products as well as specific wood and perfumes to prepare **"El-Dokhan."**

2.2 El-Dokhan "الدخان"

is a traditional steam. It's also one of the cornerstones of the Sudanese wedding. It comprises of a specific wooden chair called "El-Rahala" which has a hole in the middle. The bride shall sit on this chair with no cloth on, and underneath this chair, a specific kind of wood is being burned along with some particular perfumes. The bride is then covered with a thick piece of cloth to ensure the steam is kept around her. For the month that precedes the wedding, the bride is supposed to do **"El-Dokhan"** every day. This phase leaves the skin of the bride softer, brighter, and with a good and attractive smell. (ElHady, 2024)

In Sudan, because of how the Sudanese houses are, El Dokhan/El Rahala is slightly different. The chair is usually built in the house, and the hole underneath is dug into the ground. Also, It's usually affordable to set in a fairly open place to allow the smoke to go away. In this regard, It's worth noting that El-Dokhan, in particular, has been one of the controversial points between the Sudanese and the Egyptians. Because houses are rare in Egypt, and apartments are the common type especially in the big cities, the reason why it's more challenging to do Eldokhan in apartments because the smoke can easily

Figure 3: Malaz after buying "El-Rahala" (Elfeky,2024)

As the groom is residing in Aswan[2], and his family is not in Cairo, he sent the money wirelessly to the bride's family so they could get her "El-Habssa" stuff. *"I've made everyone wait for you to have breakfast together before we go, "* said Malaz when I went to pick her up to get "El-Habssa" things. She continued by sharing with me that, on her way to the exam[3], Remaz, the bride, got stolen, and all the money that the groom had sent was gone. She then said, *"I'll use the money I have for my college fees to get "El-Habssa" stuff, and I'll hopefully manage soon to collect this money again."*

Following the bride's aunt's description, we managed to arrive at a shop that was only for Sudanese goods and products. This shop is for a young man called Mohamed, a smiley, kind, and welcoming person who did nothing but confirm and assure that

[2] Far from Cairo by almost 900 km

[3] Remaz and Malaz continued their studies in Egypt as their universities has continued the studies online and booked specific places for Sudanese students to undertake their exams.

Sudanese people remain generous despite all circumstances. Besides dropping the prices for us and giving Malaz some gifts, Mohamed insisted on giving me many packs of specific Sudanese biscuits the moment he knew I like them. He kept swearing that it would be a shame if he took the biscuits' money from me while asking me, *" Don't you know the Sudanese generosity?!"*

Figure 4:Malaz and Mohamed while buying "El-habssa" (Elfeky,2024)

2.3 El-shela الشيلة""

is all the things that the bride may need, including but not limited to clothes, shoes, bags, lingerie, perfumes, different sets of gold accessories, skincare, and beauty stuff…etc. As the bride and the groom are considered and treated like kings and queens, the groom designates one of his very close friends to be his minister. The groom's minister is tasked with going with the bride and her closest ones, carrying the money, to shop whatever she wants. The minister typically follows the bride and waits for her outside of the shop, and once she picks what she wants, he heads straight to the cashier to pay without any negotiations with the bride.

Figure 5: The groom's minister while waiting for the bride to pick what she wants (Elfeky,2024)

As always, after inviting me for lunch, the bride, her sisters, her cousin, the minister of the groom, and I went to buy **"El-shela".** In 8 hours, we visited more than ten shops, and according to the bride, that was still the beginning. While buying the stuff, the bride insisted more than two times for me to choose clothes for her. This is how included I was. They made sure I shared my opinion about what they would wear during **"El-Jertek"**[4] asked me to be one of the bridesmaids and wear red, which would only worn by her sisters, not even her cousin

Relatedly, it's worth mentioning that one of the shops we visited was owned by a Syrian man. While the bride and her sister were negotiating the price of three dresses with an Egyptian young man working in the shop, the owner suddenly interfered and let the bride pay only for two dresses and gave her the third as a gift. He then added, "*We were in your situation a few years ago*[5]*; we should help each other in this world. Congratulations, bride, go enjoy your wedding.*" We all left the shop happy but tired. Malaz broke the silence by saying, *" I felt we aren't alone in this situation and that we aren't the only people passing through this."*

[4] Explanation is coming below.
[5] Referring to his experience seeking refuge in Egypt when the war in Syria erupted.

Figure 6: Remaz and her sisters while buying "El-Shela" (Elfeky,2024)

3- "El-Jebena" "الجَبَنة"

Jebena is a specific flask that is made out of pottery in which coffee is being prepared. It's commonly used in Ethiopia and Eritrea during what is called the " Coffee Ceremony." It's also widely used in Sudan and in some parts of Egypt. In the Sudanese wedding context, "EL-Jebena" refers to a house party to which the bride's female friends and family are invited to eat, drink coffee, sing, and dance.

At Remaz's wedding ceremonies, the house was full of Sudanese people, but also the Egyptian neighbours from which Malaz borrowed the speakers to play the Sudanese wedding songs. Happiness, laughter, and enjoyment surrounded the place until the bride

and her mother burst into tears. Time stopped for a few moments, and then the family got busy again, and everyone continued with the preparations for the day.

While some were preparing and organizing lots of fruits, nuts, sweets, and crackers in a very artistic way, others were brainstorming how to decorate the house. The mother then brought her **"Toub"** [6], the one she was planning to wear in the wedding, and asked her daughters to hang it as a decoration. It was very colorful The family then commenced making the coffee from scratch, starting from grinding and roasting it until adding it to the "Jebena," boiling, pouring, and serving it to the people. Parallelly, everyone was happily singing and/or dancing while the smell of the coffee was mixed with the smell of the Sudanese essence.

Figure 7: On the left, the mother's "Toub" decorating the house (Elfeky,2024)

Figure 8: On the right Remaz and her mother serving the coffee and sweets during "El-Jebena" (Elfeky,2024)

[6] Sudanese traditional attire.

4. Grinding Perfumes and Breaking sandalwood, (Dag el riha, we kasr el Sandal) "دق الريحة و كسر الصندل"

It starts with “El-Ezouma,” to which the bride’s aunts and close neighbors are invited. They all spread a wide piece of cloth on the floor and sit around it. In the middle, they put a big stainless-steel tray on which they place all the perfume substances _ the dry and the liquid ones_ that are extracted from natural aromatic plants to commence preparing the incense and the perfumes for the bride.

Firstly, to make the incense of the sandalwood, women ululate, sing, and clap on “ElDalouka[7]” beats, while setting a rock or a wooden fragment on which they start breakin the Oud of the Sandalwood. After breaking it into small pieces, they start burning sugar, and once its color changes to brown, they mix it with the broken pieces of Sandalwood, add perfumes, and finish by packing them in jars.

Secondly, to prepare the perfumes for the bride, they grind the sandalwood completely, sieve it meticulously, add it to a pot, put it on fire, and mix it with different aromatic oils, perfumes, and incense. They keep stirring all these ingredients together until their color becomes red; they then start to pour them into specific glass vessels for fragrances and perfumes.

Figure 9: Remaz’s perfumes and incenses *(Elfeky,2024)*

[7] Special traditional Sudanese drums.

5. The contract, El Agd "العقد"

Figure 10: During "El-Agd" (Elfeky, 2024)

It's the step where the marriage is officially documented on papers. The marriage contract is officiated by the Islamic marriage officiant in the presence of the bride's guardian and the groom's representative. Quranic verses are recited, and the attendees are reminded of the benefits of marriage for society. The bride's guardian announces his consent, and the groom's representative responds with acceptance based on the agreed-upon dowry.

In Sudan, the contract usually doesn't get registered, and only two copies of the contract are made, one is kept with the bride's family and the other with the groom's family. Unless the bride and the groom are traveling abroad, the contract then would need to be registered at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In Egypt, Sudanese couples who get married have to register the contract at the Sudanese embassy in Egypt which was done by Remaz and Ali (ElHady, 2024).

5.1 The marriage contract banquet (Walimet el Agd), وليمة العقد

As described by Kudi (2024), the marriage contract banquet is a huge feast to which everyone is invited, and it's an essential ritual for both Muslim and Christian Sudanese. He proceeds by stating the differences between holding it in Sudan and in Egypt. In Sudan, as it has many roundabouts, the Banquet area used to be made in the streets, and

usually, the whole neighbourhood is invited to it. Whereas, in Egypt, establishing such huge banquet areas is challenging; consequently, some people rent halls to prepare the contract banquets, pack meals in takeaway boxes, and distribute them to the guests.

For Christian Sudanese, it is more challenging to do “El Agd” and its banquet in Egypt (Kudi, 2024). In Sudan, when Churches are booked, they are booked for the whole day, which gives ample time for the newlyweds and their families to welcome guests and enjoy the celebration. Unlike Egypt, in which Churches are mostly available to be booked only for one hour. Also, while Sudanese Churches usually have wide spaces to organize the Marriage banquet, Egyptian Churches lack this aspect, which adds another obstacle to this tradition to be fully realized.

For Remaz and Ali’s wedding, El Agd was held at Remaz’s family house and was followed by its banquet. The whole family spent almost two full days preparing and packing the food in takeaway boxes so they could distribute it to the visiting guests.

Figure 11: “El-Kaa’k” Special cookies for the guests (Elfeky,2024)

6. The Groom’s Feast, Fotour El Ariss, فطور العريس

The mother of the bride prepares lots of traditional food, baked goods, and pastries. Also, she prepares a box full of perfumes and gifts to the mother of the groom. All these goods are delivered to the groom's house in a cheerful convoy that is accompanied with drum beats, songs and dances.

As explained by el Tayeb (2024), most of the groom's family used to await the feast in fron the house with drums, and singing. When they then arrive, it almost becomes a contest of who sings, dances and plays drums better. On the other hand, the groom's mother would prepare lots of gifts to give to the mother and the sisters of the bride as a thank you for bringing the groom's feast.

7. El henna "الحنة"

El-Henna is a party that is held separately for both the bride and the groom. It's where the bride, the groom, their family, and friends draw the famous Sudanese Henna on their bodies, and it's typically done before the wedding with a few days. These parties usually take place in the houses; however, some people may decide to make it outside of it. Henna parties are also full of food, singing, and dancing.

Though her brother was not in Egypt with her, Remaz's family did "El-henna" for both Remaz and her brother, who was also getting married in Sudan and had his henna on the same day. Nothing has changed or been made special to "Elhena" preparations. It was just the intention, and they kept filming everything for him. But, according to Malaz (2024), they wanted to feel that they were all together despite the distance.

For Remaz's groom, he did two "Hennas," one with his close friends and family at the house he rented for them as their marital home, and the other one he reserved a Nile Cruise to which more people were invited. Although in Sudan the bride is not supposed to go to the groom's henna, Remaz went to the groom's both "Hennas" as she explained, "I found that all my family was going, so why not me?."

Figure 12: Remaz's Henna (Elfeky,2024)

Figure 13: Ali's Henna (Elfeky,2024)

8. The bridal dance, Ragis El Arouss, رقيص العروس

It’s a party where the bride dances different dances from different Sudanese tribes on the beats of el Dalouka. She usually trains to know the different dance movements by heart to match the lyrics of the songs being sung. Brides may take months to prepare for this party; sometimes, they even hire a lady to teach them these dances. This tradition aims for the bride to show her beauty to everyone, especially the groom’s family.

One of the movements she would learn is at some parts of the songs; she would pretend that she’s about to fall, and it’s the groom’s responsibility to catch her. If he catches her, then the groom scores the goal; if she falls, this means that the bride is the one who has scored a goal, and with each goal the bride scores, the groom has to pay a certain amount of money. This part of the bridal dance symbolizes the capability of the groom to protect his bride from what they may encounter in life.

Not long ago, “Ragis el Arouss” used to take place in the streets. A banquet would be established with a stage on which the bride dances in front of everyone to show her beauty. (Suliman, 2022)However, as time passes and mobile devices and social media advance, to avoid the sensual dancing of the bride being filmed and spread, almost all “Ragis el Arouss” parties are now being held in closed halls in which only women, the groom, and sometimes her father and brothers are allowed in. The security of these halls is very strict, and there are usually women dedicated only to taking all electronic gadgets from all guests so they can be allowed in.

Relatedly, it’s worth noting that some brides _like Remaz_ don’t feel comfortable doing the dances because they feel shy. Others are not allowed by their families and/or their husbands to dance, either because they’re scared of the evil eye or because the groom would feel jealous seeing his wife performing such a sensual dance, even if it’s only in front of women. .On another note, some feminist movements started to advocate not to undertake the bridal dance. They argue that in its essence the bride is trying to seduce the groom, show him her beauty, and make sure he likes her.

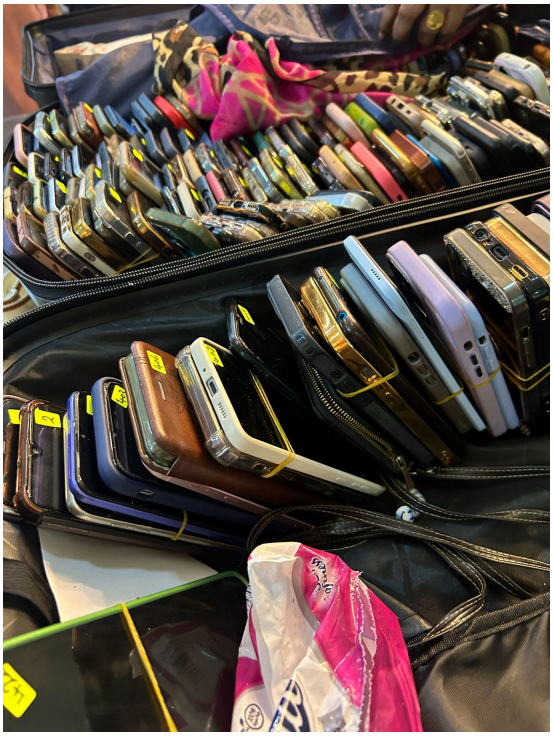

Figure 14: *Phone collection before "Bridal Dance" (Elfeky,2024)*

9. The wedding, El Zefaf (الزفاف)

It's the most popular party around the world in which the bride wears a white dress while her groom wears a tuxedo. It also involves lots of food, singing, and dancing. Remaz and Ali decided to do their "Zefaf" in a rented hall. After which, they went back to Remaz's family house so they could change their clothes and start one of the most essential rituals of the Sudanese wedding "ElJertik".

Figure 15: The wedding day (Elfeky, 2024)

10. “El Jertek” الجرتك

“El-jertek” is not an Arabic word, and doesn’t exist in different Arabic dictionaries such as “ El-Mohit”, also, neither the word nor its associated rituals have any trace within Arabic societies and/or history. Many scholars have tried to determine the origin of the word “JertiK”; including Afaf Salim Shalabi, who believes that it originated from the Nubian language. Afaf argues that the term stems specifically from the word “Jeti”, which refers to the sumit stone that is significantly used during “El-Jertik”.

Differently, Ahmed Mutasim Al-Sheikʿ, among others, traces it back to the ancient Sudanese kingdom of Meroe, which lasted for almost ten centuries (800 BCE–350 CE). He suggests that the word “Jertek” comes from the Meroitic term **QOR**, meaning "king," combined with the suffix **TIG** that refers to “the act of doing” or “ to do”, and by merging them **“QORTIG”** or **“JARTIG”** was initiated which translated into “ Make a king” or “ the inauguration of a king.”
In the same vein, El-Sheikh backs up his argument with the engravement found on a small finger ring from The Meroitic Queen Amanishakheto's collection. He believes that this engraving was inspired by picturing an actual “Jertik” ceremony. (ElSadek, 2024). And, hence, Jertik is a deeply rooted ritual within Sudanese culture that has been passed on through generations for many centuries now.

According to Elsadek (2024), “El-Jertek” is an essential ritual within Sudanese culture for marriages and many other life occasions. El Sadek (2024) continues by explaining how “El jertek” represents different life transition phases and that is the reason why there is a jertek for the circumcision of male children, for pregnancy, and giving birth and for weddings.

For Muslim Sudanese people, “ El-Jertic” Ritual along with “ElAgd’ are the most important elements of the Sudanese wedding traditions. Many Sudanese people believe that it’s a ritual that ensures the continuity and prosperity of the marriage, as well as protecting it from the evil eye and envy. Also, a lot of people believe that not having a Jertik is considered as a bad luck to the couples who are getting married.

It’s a party in which the women, specially the elderly ones, are the main actors and are they are the ones that take the lead in it. The bride and the groom typically sit on a traditional couch called “ ElAngarib” العنقريب with a tray on a table that has many items, namely a Tray, plate, jug, incense burners, perfume sprinkler, and a glass of milk. The couple are usually surrounded by many elderly women who chant different songs that are prayers in their essence. They also read some verses from the Qur’an with the intention of blessing and wishing prosperity and happiness for the couple. but carry deep cultural and spiritual meaning,

In a very joyful environment full of ululation, singing, and dancing, elderly women start to guide the couple to perform several things that are in their core unspoken language. For instance, they make the couple tie around each other's hands a red bracelet made out of silk to symbolize the eternity of love. Similarly, they ask the groom to give his bride a handful of cultivated corn grains, which she returns to him and repeat this seven times as a symbol of optimism, prosperity, and goodness in their marriage. Also, they ask them to drink pure milk together; each takes a sip and then sprinkles it on the other, signifying purity of intention and sincerity, but also entails that as long as they manage to tolerate such action, they will be able to tolerate each other for the rest of their lives. called "Rahad" around her waist.

FIgure 16:Remaz, and Ali during "El-Jertik" (Elfeky,2024)

Findings and Discussion

The following section will be divided into three (3) main thematic areas. Each will demonstrate a distinct lens on the research findings to provide a comprehensive understanding and deeper engagement with the data collected. This section will also examine how the research findings reinforce, extend, or challenge existing academic context.

3.1. Resistance, Resilience, and Healing

3.1.1. Resistance

Concerning the potential role Sudanese weddings can play in promoting resistance for Sudanese refugees in Egypt, all participants strongly agreed that conducting a traditional Sudanese wedding while being forcibly displaced enhances their resistance against different dominant power dynamics. In this regard, the participants differentiated between three (3) types of Resistance, namely, **Political Resistance, Cultural Erasure Resistance, and Sadness Resistance.**

On one hand, some participants viewed the wedding of the Sudanese refugees in Egypt as an act of **Political Resistance**. For instance, according to Dania (2024), uploading a wedding video on social media platforms symbolizes resistance against those who upload their videos while looting homes in Sudan. She further explained how she grasped the significant impact of such videos on Rapid Support Forces (RSF) personnel because they assert to them the community's ability to continue living and celebrating despite displacement. Dania’s view aligns with Paavolainen’s argument that cultural practices challenge power dynamics by affirming life and joy amid turmoil, symbolizing defiance against forces attempting to disrupt the community.

On the other hand, many participants consider Sudanese weddings in Egypt as an act of **Cultural Erasure Resistance.** They shared how their cultures and traditions, including the ones related to weddings might be in danger because of displacement. To overcome this concern, they are keen to keep all traditions alive and put significant effort into teaching and passing these cultures to the younger generations to reaffirm collective identity and intergenerational memory. To illustrate, in the interview, Hamida (2024) expressed how, during the preparation for her elder daughter's wedding, she made sure her younger daughter was involved and learned everything about the traditional processes of making Sudanese perfumes and incense for brides "Dag-Elreeha." It's worth noting that Hamida's approach resonates with Gheytasi's view about the role of rituals in maintaining cultural heritage and bridging generational gaps, ensuring cultural continuity despite displacement

Relatedly, participants identified another perspective of Resistance, which they called **The Sadness Resistance,** which highlights the ability of Sudanese wedding traditions to overcome sadness and defeat it. "War took everything from us but didn't succeed in taking our happiness. We managed to celebrate and be happy despite everything" (Reem Kinani, 2024)

3.1.2 Resilience and Adaptation to Context

In regards to the role of Sudanese wedding traditions in enhancing resilience among the Sudanese refugee communities in Egypt, participants supported the positive effect of traditional wedding ceremonies in increasing their sense of resilience and promoting their adaptation skills to coexist with their new realities. They referred to the immersive support they're feeling and the sense of belonging they enjoy during the wedding ceremonies and rituals. As described by Reem (2024), " I saw all these people at the wedding, and then I realized that I'm not alone in this. It gave me the strength to continue and adapt as much as possible to the current status quo."

Reem continued by reflecting on how wedding ceremonies were adjusted in several ways to accommodate the changes between Sudan and Egypt while maintaining the

essence of their cultural practices. For instance, despite the fact that the number of wedding guests drastically decreased due to financial and logistical reasons, Sudanese people stayed as generous as they were in Sudan. And, as in Sudan, everyone may invite anyone to the wedding; it's not something exclusive to the bride and groom's family. Reems then resumed by sharing that during her sister's wedding, she met many Sudanese people whom neither she nor her family knew they had moved to Egypt. Such acts exemplify cultural adaptation, as documented by O'Byrne (2022) in the South Sudanese Acholi community.

On another note, as described by Zainab (2024), the fusion between the Egyptian and Sudanese cultures in wedding preparations, from food to music, illustrates how cultural practices evolve in response to displacement while retaining their core significance.

3.1.3 Healing

Unlike resistance and resilience, participants found that Sudanese weddings can positively and negatively affect healing. As Hoda (2024) shared, "During wedding ceremonies, I feel both solace but also enormous grief because of the absence of my family members and the feeling of loss.

This duality reflects the complex role of rituals in the emotional lives of displaced individuals. On the one hand, traditional Sudanese wedding ceremonies create spaces where displaced people can reconnect with their cultural roots, reaffirm collective identity, and foster social bonding. These elements can contribute significantly to the psychosocial healing process by offering moments of joy, stability, and cultural continuity amidst the chaos of displacement. The act of participating in familiar traditions anchors individuals to their pre-displacement lives, reinforcing a sense of normalcy and cultural pride.

However, these ceremonies also evoke memories of absent loved ones and the homeland, intensifying feelings of grief and loss. While rituals foster emotional closure and solidarity, their adaptation in displacement settings can deepen feelings of disconnection when traditional elements are missing due to logistical or financial constraints.

Despite these challenges, many participants blend Sudanese and Egyptian cultural elements, creating new sources of joy and connection. This adaptation highlights healing as a dynamic process, where reclaiming and evolving cultural practices offer both comfort and resilience amidst grief.

3.2. The Economy of Sudanese Weddings in Egypt

Sudanese weddings in Egypt have developed a significant economic sector. Many Sudanese created an informal but thriving economy around weddings, including tailors, wedding organizers, and caterers. For example, Hoda's family runs a business of making traditional perfume and incense, besides renting the costumes of "Ragis-ElArouss" and "El-Jertk". These ventures not only sustain cultural practices but also provide essential income for displaced families navigating economic challenges in a new environment.

Figure 17: During an event just for the Sudanese bride in Cairo (Elfeky, 2024).

Though hiring a Sudanese singer can cost up to 6,000 USD per night, interestingly, many participants mentioned that weddings in Egypt, while still costly, are less expensive than in Sudan. This economic façade of the traditional Sudanese weddings aligns with Stites' (2022) findings on the monetization of cultural practices in displacement, where traditions adapt to new financial realities.

3.3. Rituals and the Plurality of Community

Sudanese wedding rituals highlight the plurality and diversity within the refugee community in Egypt. For instance, while practices such as "ElJertik" are central for Muslim Sudanese, Christian Sudanese do not practice it, which underscores the diversity within the Sudanese refugee community in Egypt. It also challenges the monolithic representations of the Sudanese culture. In the same vein, wedding rituals serve as a repository for collective memory, as in almost all the accompanying ceremonies of the Sudanese wedding tradition, elderly people play a central role in transmitting knowledge to younger generations.

In the same vein, wedding rituals serve as a repository for collective memory, as in almost all the accompanying ceremonies of the Sudanese wedding tradition, elderly people play a central role in transmitting knowledge to younger generations. This intergenerational transfer ensures the continuity of cultural practices despite displacement and fosters a sense of identity and belonging among the younger members of the community. Including specific examples, such as the preparation of perfumes or incense (*Dag-ElReeha*), could further illustrate how these rituals maintain connections to Sudanese heritage.

Similarly, wedding rituals unveil dynamics of class, privilege, and power within the Sudanese refugee community in Egypt. The ability to perform elaborate rituals often depends on financial resources, highlighting disparities even within displaced populations.

For instance, as mentioned by Altayeb, (2024), Sudanese feminist activists started to advocate against "El-dokhan" as it's believed that it tightens the vagina of women which gives more pleasure to men while causing more pain to women. This resonates with Ssenyonjo's (2007) "shadow and light" metaphor, which acknowledges the potential for cultural practices to both perpetuate gender inequality and serve as platforms for inclusive justice.

Research Challenges and Limitations.

The most persistent challenge I faced while conducting the research was the constant rescheduling of Remaz's wedding dates. While I was residing in the Netherlands and the research was conducted in Egypt, I changed my flights twice to accommodate the date changes, which required re-planning the research schedule each time. Despite these adjustments, I was unable to change my flight ticket for the third rescheduling, resulting in my inability to attend one of the most important rituals within Remaz's wedding ceremonies, El-Jertik. Missing this central event limited my ability to fully immerse myself in and observe the cultural significance of this ritual. This highlights a common challenge in fieldwork—balancing logistical realities with the fluidity and

unpredictability of real-life events, particularly in the context of displacement and community dynamics.

Furthermore, with no external funding or sponsorship, financial constraints added another layer of complexity to the research process. Covering the full cost of travel adjustments and managing frequent changes in flight schedules placed significant strain on my resources. This underscores the broader challenges faced by independent researchers, especially those conducting ethnographic research in unpredictable and resource-intensive environments. The financial strain, combined with logistical hurdles, restricted my ability to expand the scope of my research or conduct supplementary observations.

Additionally, the multifaceted nature of Sudanese wedding traditions posed a challenge in itself. These traditions involve numerous steps, materials, utensils, gestures, and symbolic practices, many of which are deeply rooted in cultural beliefs and unspoken languages. Each element carries specific meanings and varies across regions, tribes, and religions. Given the time constraints of this research, it was not feasible to cover all these aspects comprehensively. The vastness and richness of Sudanese wedding traditions require prolonged engagement and repeated observation to capture their full essence. As a result, while this study provides meaningful insights, it inevitably presents a partial view of the intricate and diverse practices within these traditions.

Moreover, conducting research with displaced communities introduced additional complexities. Establishing trust and gaining access to participants required significant time and effort, particularly given the sensitivities surrounding displacement and the ongoing trauma of war. Navigating these sensitivities while ensuring ethical engagement sometimes delayed data collection or limited the depth of conversations, as some participants were understandably hesitant to share personal or painful memories.

Finally, language and cultural nuances added another dimension to the research challenges. While I have a strong cultural connection with Sudanese communities, certain idioms, gestures, or symbolic actions within the rituals may not have been fully understood or interpreted in their entirety. This underscores the importance of sustained cultural immersion and collaboration with local cultural informants to bridge potential gaps in understanding and interpretation.

Despite these challenges, the exploration journey was deeply enriching and full of invaluable learning experiences. These hurdles also emphasized the importance of flexibility, resourcefulness, and adaptability in ethnographic research, particularly when working with displaced populations whose lives are marked by constant flux and unpredictability.

Conclusion

Traditional Sudanese weddings hold a profound potential as multifaceted cultural practices that transcend their immediate celebratory purposes. While addressing the psychological and emotional impacts of displacement (Hollander and Einwohner, 2004; Tempany, 2009), the traditions that accompany the Sudanese weddings serve as a powerful platform for resilience, resistance, and healing among the displaced population in Egypt.

They stand as living testaments to the endurance of cultural memory and the communal bonds that persist despite geographical dislocation and systemic challenges. These weddings reaffirm the agency of displaced individuals, allowing them to resist erasure and assert their identities through the active celebration of their heritage.

Sudanese weddings are exceptionally rich with various rituals. Their preparations take months. For instance, while this research covers 11 rituals of the traditional Sudanese wedding, it still misses many others. The difficulty of fully understanding the Traditional Sudanese weddings stems from the fact that there is not only one traditional wedding across Sudan but, as a tribal country, wedding traditions vary from one region to another and from religion to another.

This diversity highlights the adaptability and richness of Sudanese culture, where traditions evolve to reflect local contexts while preserving their essence. By exploring these rituals, the research contributes to a deeper understanding of how displaced populations maintain their cultural mosaic and challenge reductive narratives about cultural homogenization in displacement.

Furthermore, Sudanese Weddings in Egypt foster a sense of resilience among displaced people. They reaffirm collective identity, create spaces of emotional stability, and enhance intergenerational connections. They also play a pivotal role in encouraging economic opportunities within the Sudanese community in Egypt.

These actions significantly contribute to building a foundation for adaptive strength (Windle, 2011).

Beyond individual resilience, these weddings serve as collective acts of renewal, where displaced communities rebuild social networks, share responsibilities, and create moments of normalcy amid displacement's instability. These ceremonies symbolize the community's collective will to thrive, providing not only hope but also practical mechanisms for solidarity and mutual aid.

The ability to recalibrate traditions to fit their new contexts without compromising their symbolic essence underscores the dynamic nature of resilience in displacement (Lechleitner, 2017; Spencer-Oatey, 2012).

This recalibration also demonstrates how displaced populations creatively navigate the challenges of resource constraints and unfamiliar environments, showcasing their cultural ingenuity and capacity for adaptation. By adjusting to new contexts, these traditions continue to inspire future generations, ensuring their cultural legacy endures.

Also, Sudanese weddings can serve as an act of resistance; they assert cultural heritage and resist cultural erasure by sustaining traditions, celebrating diversity, and collective memory (Assmann and Czaplicka, 1995). In addition, Sudanese wedding traditions might be used to challenge power dynamics by using public celebrations as a visible affirmation of survival and agency, even in the face of displacement and systemic adversity (Hobson et al., 2018; Paavolainen, 2022).

Resistance through these celebrations is not just about defying the erasure of cultural identity but also about reclaiming spaces of joy and normalcy. By continuing to perform their traditions, displaced Sudanese populations challenge narratives of victimhood, asserting their presence and vibrancy as a community with rich cultural and social contributions.

Regarding the Healing Journey of displaced people, traditional Sudanese weddings create spaces for social bonding, emotional release, and communal

solidarity. While acknowledging the shared grief of displacement, they simultaneously offer moments of joy, hope, and reconnection that facilitate both individual and collective recovery (Hsu et al., 2008; Cairo, 2021).

This research underscores the enduring significance of cultural practices in displacement contexts. It highlights the necessity of supporting and sustaining these traditions within displaced populations, as they foster individual and communal resilience, promote resistance, and can contribute to healing journeys. Similarly, Traditional Sudanese weddings demonstrate how cultural heritage can act as a vital resource for displaced populations to navigate the complexities of loss, identity, and belonging caused by displacement.

The research contributes to filling a critical gap within the existing academic discourse and literature as it explores traditional wedding ceremonies' role in fostering resistance, resilience, and healing among displaced populations in Egypt. The significance of the research lies not only in the subject matter but also in its participatory approach. The research centers on Sudanese voices and perspectives to determine the research's focus, which ensures that the study is both grounded in a cultural context and aligned with the everyday realities of the displaced Sudanese community in Egypt(Vaughn et al., 2016)

Furthermore, this research contributes to the literature that rehumanizes the displaced population by shifting the narrative from only the hardships and challenges they face to viewing them as whole individuals to emphasizing their agency, cultural richness, and capacity for joy and continuity even amidst displacement. This perspective challenges dominant discourses that often regard displaced populations only as victims and offer a nuanced and empowering portrayal.

Moving forward, the research advocates collaborative efforts involving community leaders, humanitarian actors, policymakers, and cultural organizations not just to sustain and support these traditions, their continuity, and their significant

effect in fostering resilience, resistance, and healing among displaced populations. Also, such collaborations will enhance valuing and integrating cultural heritage into humanitarian responses, which are more holistic, culturally sensitive, and ultimately more effective in supporting displaced communities through crises. Besides, such collaboration will enhance the understanding of cultural differences, which will consequently facilitate the integration of the displaced population within their host community.

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Appendix

Semi Structured Interviews:

Personal Questions

1. Name:
2. Age:
3. Gender:
4. Marital status:
5. Educational level:
6. Are you employed? If yes, profession:
7. Geographical area- Egypt:
8. Geographical area- Sudan:
9. How long have you been in Egypt?

A. General Questions

10. Tell me about your experience while preparing your wedding?
11. What are the most important elements or rituals of a Sudanese wedding ceremony?
12. What are the obstacles and challenges (institutional, logistical, financial, Egyptian societal, Sudanese culture) you face while preparing your wedding to maintain these traditions in Egypt?
13. In your point of view, can you get married without the Sudanese wedding traditions
14. How have these wedding ceremonies changed or stayed the same since you and your community have been displaced in Egypt?
15. How do younger members of the community view these wedding ceremonies? Do they participate in the same way as older generations?
16. Do you think that the rate of Sudanese weddings in Egypt are more than in Sudan?

B. Healing

17. How do you think traditional wedding ceremonies contribute to the emotional healing process for individuals and the community?
18. Can you share any experiences where participating in or attending a wedding helped you or others cope with difficult emotions, such as loss or displacement?
19. Are there particular moments in the ceremony that are especially meaningful for you in terms of healing or support?
20. Do you think these traditions can have negative impact on your emotional wellbeing?
21. Do you experience different emotions or feelings compared to what would you feel if you're in Sudan?

C. Resilience

22. Do you think that keeping these traditions have made the ceremonies more meaningful or resilient in some ways?

23. In what ways do wedding ceremonies strengthen the bonds between families and communities here?
24. How do these ceremonies help you and others in the community feel connected to your culture and homeland?
25. Do you think that keeping these traditions can strengthen your energy to cope with current status quo? هل شايف/ة ان العادات دي بتديك/ي طاقة انك تكمل؟

D. Resistance

26. Do you see traditional wedding ceremonies as acts of resistance, especially in the context of displacement and living as a Sudanese person in Egypt?
    i. In your point of view, what do you resist?
    ii. How do traditional weddings act as a form of resistance?
27. How do these ceremonies allow you to assert or preserve your Sudanese identity, despite the challenges of displacement? برغم من اللي بيحصل وكونك في ثقافة مختلفة عنك الى حد ما، هل شايف/ة انك بالتمسك بالطقوس دي بتقوي هويتك وتحافظ عليها وبالتالي بتأثر على ازاي بتتعامل في المجتمع؟

E. Conclusion

28. Are there any efforts within the community to teach or preserve these ceremonies for future generations?
29. In your opinion, what can the government or society provide to help you keep these traditions?
30. How did you feel when I asked you to participate in this research?
31. Why did you accept to be part of this research
32. How do you feel now after the interview?