

**EXPLORING *AGHANI AL-BANAT*: A POSTCOLONIAL ETHNOGRAPHIC
APPROACH TO SUDANESE WOMEN'S SONGS, CULTURE, AND
PERFORMANCE**

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Saadia I. Malik

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This dissertation entitled
EXPLORING *AGHANI AL-BANAT*: A POSTCOLONIAL ETHNOGRAPHIC
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BY
SAADIA I. MALIK

has been approved for
the School of Telecommunications
and the College of Communications by

Norma Pecora
Associate Professor of Telecommunications

Kathy A. Krendl
Dean, College of Communication

ABSTRACT

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This dissertation explores the musical and personal experiences of three Sudanese women performers and understanding the textual meanings of a particular type of women's songs labeled as "*aghani al-banat*" that is usually performed at women's gatherings in Central Sudan, specifically in Greater Khartoum. The study argues that because there are many discourses about "womanhood", culture, and gender by the post-colonial state of Sudan, *aghani al-banat* could stand as another narrative or another discursive space for negotiating gender/power relations and identity formation by the Sudanese women.

The postcolonial theoretical approach adopted in this research attempts to provide an alternative understanding and an alternative way of knowing, that challenges those provided by imperial and western discourses, about the "realities" of the "Other" (the "third world"). In addition, the research combines different methods of data collection and data analysis. First, the work here uses in-depth individual interviews with three women performers and group discussions with some audiences, especially living in the diaspora. The study also adopts historical-textual analysis to the lyrics of *aghani al-banat* and narrative analysis to the in-depth interviews with the performers.

The in-depth interviews with the three women performers in Greater Khartoum demonstrated the way the performers are negotiating their subject positions as performers (the “other”) and resisting norms of patriarchy, tradition, and gender discourses that all work toward controlling Sudanese women’s positions and agencies. Moreover, the historical-textual analysis of the songs showed that despite being labeled as “loose” and “bad” singing, *aghani al-banat* provided a discursive space through which the Sudanese women voiced their alternative narratives of social and gender relations. The songs offered both a framework of negotiating the existing relations as well as a dream of improvement.

The study concludes that Sudanese women, especially the pioneering performers of ex-slave descendent origin, created their own culture and popular literature in which they contextualize the past, the present, and the future of their varied realities and fantasies.

Approved: Norma Pecora

Associate Professor of Telecommunications

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CHAPTER ONE

A PRELUDE TO THE STUDY OF *AGHANI AL-BANAT* AND SUDANESE WOMEN PERFORMERS

The song is among the most influential components of culture because it is a literature and an art. The song is literature because originally it is a symbolic text. Furthermore, the song is an art because it is a lyric, a melody, a rhythm, and a performance", (Farouq, n. d. p. 10, Trans.).

I am always interested in exploring Sudanese women's lives by focusing on the poems and songs composed by Sudanese women to express their experiences. In 1995 I wrote my Master thesis titled: *Displaced Women Speak* on the displaced (rural-urban migrants) Sudanese women and the poems and songs they composed expressing their feelings about the urban structure of Greater Khartoum and its urban population. I perceive this study on *aghani al-banat* (girls' songs) and the performers as a continuation of my interest in documenting the musical and literal/poetic experiences of Sudanese women.

This research adopts postcolonial and feminist critical theoretical approaches and ethnographic methods to explore *aghani al-banat*, women, culture, and communication in Central Sudan, more specifically in Greater Khartoum. Thus this study is interested in understanding the musical and personal experiences of three particular Sudanese women performers, understanding the metaphors and textual meanings of *aghani al-banat*. The understanding of the text of *aghani al-banat* also includes the performance context as a cultural space in which these songs are communicated and delivered. Subsequently, the study discusses how issues of migration and culture are reflected in *aghani al-banat* (the text) and the performance context. In addition, I am interested in reflecting the views of

some women audiences, especially living in the diaspora, about the lyrics of *aghani al-banat*.

The main argument of the research is that because there are many discourses about “womanhood”, culture, “authenticity”, and gender by the post-colonial state of Sudan, *aghani al-banat* could stand as another narrative or another discursive space for negotiating gender/power relations and identity formation (sexuality and femininity) by the Sudanese women.

By *aghani al-banat* I am referring to the songs that are sung in the cities of Central Sudan, specifically in Greater Khartoum, in social celebrations such as: wedding, circumcision, naming parties, and other women’s gatherings. *Aghani al-banat* can be divided into two types: The first type is about popular songs without a known composer that have been sung by many generations and witnessed a continuous process of change in their content. Women usually add or eliminate some phrases and words in these songs through out the successive generations. The other type of *aghani al-banat* includes songs that are composed and performed by some of the *ghanayaat* [songsters] themselves.

However, this research largely focuses on *tom-tom* songs. *Tom-tom* songs are a type of *aghani al-banat* that discusses love, sexuality, social, political, and economic issues and they are named after the triple rhythm called *tom-tom*. *Tom-tom* songs marked the popular culture of women’s performance in Central Sudan that has been pioneered by ex-slave Sudanese women and could be classified as working-class songs. Yet the generic term “*aghani al-banat*” is used throughout this research because it is the dominant term in the contemporary musical debate in Sudan through which the complex and varied styles of women’s singing are put under the label *aghani al-banat*. More

importantly, the study tries to deconstruct the experiences of *aghani al-banat* by exploring their history and meanings as well as exploring the narratives and views of the three performers of *aghani al-banat* and some of the audiences. Deconstructing the label *aghani al-banat* could also be made through asking the question: Why is *aghani al-banat* gendered?

Greater Khartoum is a triangle that includes the three cities of Khartoum, Khartoum North, and Omdurman. I have chosen Greater Khartoum to be the focus of this study because it is the political, cultural, musical, commercial, and media center of Sudan in which most of the popular male and female singers and musicians live and work.

Research Problem

Postcolonial feminists such as Mohanty (1991) and Shome (1996) argued that in western feminist discourses, cultural differences between women of various third world cultures are often effaced in order to construct a monolithic image of a third world woman as passive, powerless, backward, uneducated, and victimized. In other words the third world women are put in “categories that are easily interchangeable for the ‘other’ must always be generic ‘other’ if the task of discursive colonization is to be made manageable”(Shome, 1996, p.44). Shome’s argument was supported by some postcolonial and feminist researchers who examined the ways in which the third world “other” is being objectified in western media. In this respect, researchers (Graham-Brown, 1988; Mabro, 1991; Wilkins, 1995; Campbell, 1995; Fair, 1996; Malik, 1999)

showed that the third world woman is perceived by western media as “traditional”, non “modern”, and an “exotic” “other.”

Research on Africa and music in first world scholarship is rare; few examine the discursive space created by music in African popular culture. The scholarship that does exist tends to consider images of disaster, catastrophe, hunger, dependency, and violence (Hester, 1971; Lent, 1977; Righter, 1978; Rosenblum, 1979; Pratt 1980; Haule, 1984; Hachten and Biel 1985; Abu-Hasabu 1989; Hawk 1992). Moreover, African women are seldom perceived by western scholarship and western media, as well as by postcolonial national discourses, as creators and producers of meaning.

Harbach (1995) argued that although much has changed in the research on women in musicology through the 20th century, contemporary women continue to be marginalized in musical activities and continue to lack recognition for composing and performing music in traditional and popular music. This argument is true for women and music in Sudan. Women performers in Sudan continue to bear the stereotype of “bad/loose” women performing “loose” singing (*aghani al-banat*).

The limited literature on women and music, especially the songs of Sudanese women, seems to be descriptive and identifies women’s musical and lyric practices with the “traditional” domain of *rites de passage* (Abu-Isa, 1992). Moreover, discussions of popular culture “consumed” by Sudanese women is gendered (*aghani al-banat*), and therefore particular. Whereas, on the other hand, discussion on popular music consumed by men is ungendered and therefore universal.

Research Objectives

This research brings the experiences and narratives of three *fananaat* (artists)/*ghanayaat* (songsters) into the center of an academic scholarship by understanding their musical experiences and also by understanding how the performers negotiate the label *ghanaya* or *fanana*: the “other”, the “loose”, the entertainer. Moreover, the research objective is to provide a space for the performers to shape their own representation(s). The production of this kind of work by a "third world feminist" to a western audience makes dealing with the issue of representation an inescapable task. Certainly, feminist research in communication cannot escape "representation". As Hegde (1998) stated "if we take feminist research in communication seriously, the representation of women's lives is our intervention". In this respect, research on Sudanese women and the songs they perform is not aiming at representing a "positive" image of the Sudanese women to western audience but it is about constructing alternative sites of knowing.

Second, the research aims at analyzing some of the lyrics of *aghani al-banat* as a text within a specific context. Subsequently, emphasis is on understanding the concepts, metaphors, and relations of power the songs emphasize and on the cultural, gender, ethnic, economic, and political processes that produce *aghani al-banat* (i.e. the context from which the songs emerge). The goal is to understand how *aghani al-banat* and their performers negotiate, reflect, or negate these processes. Finally, the aim of the study is to reflect on the interaction of some Sudanese women audiences, especially in the diaspora, with the meanings of these songs. The concern here is about how the songs do contribute to shaping the understanding of Sudanese women of their identity as Sudanese women, and to what extent the songs connect them with “home”.

General Outlines to the Conceptual Framework of the Study

Postcolonial theory as represented by Hegde (1998) is a critical approach to discourses of Eurocentrism and imperialism about the "other". The theory attempts to provide an alternative understanding and alternative ways of knowing, other than those provided by imperial and western discourses, about the “realities” and the “identities” of "Other" (read: the "third world").

It is important to add that postcolonial criticism also includes various critiques of “indigenous” nationalisms by scholars from many post-colonial and third world countries who demonstrate the often homogenizing elitist and colonialist inflections of these national discourses (Shome, 1996).

Postcolonial approach to critical ethnography aims at deconstructing the “fieldwork” to not only include living the text or the data but to include the other field of

re-presentation (the academy). Lal (1999) argued that in moving from “living” to “writing” the text, we can work against reproducing colonizing discourses if we assiduously maintain the perception of the academy as just another “field” location and of writing as a continuation of “fieldwork” (Lal, 1999). This research also adopts historical-textual and narrative analysis to the lyrics of *aghani al-banat* and to the in-depth interviews with the three performers respectively.

It is equally important in this introduction to highlight the issue of essentialization in writing about the third world woman. Postcolonial critics have always been faced by the problem of “essentializing” certain group as “audience” or as “performers” or “third world women” when they challenge the discursive constructions of nonwhite cultures and racially oppressed peoples of the world in western hegemonic discourses. Yet, Spivack (1988) stated that: “in deconstructive critical practice, you have to be aware that you are going to essentialize anyway” (p.51). Accordingly, Spivack provided the notion of *strategic essentialism*. So then, Spivack argued, strategically you can look at essentialism, not as descriptions of the way things are, but something one must adopt to produce a critique of anything. *Strategic essentialism*, then, is only a political tool that the postcolonial and feminist critique, Raka (1996) argued, and I would argue, often has to adopt to resist any kind of hegemony. The important point about *strategic essentialism* is that the critic always remains aware that she or he is essentializing only in order to realize certain political goals. In this research I would view some heterogeneous Sudanese women as a “community of performers” and a “community of audience”. This strategic essentialism is meant to view the narrative(s) of some Sudanese women and their meaning(s) to the lyrics as growing out of dialectical relationships between the

margins and the center. It is a political act to view the voice(s) of some Sudanese women through singing and giving meaning to the songs as another narrative, other (other would not necessarily mean negating) than the dominant postcolonial discourse, about gender and social relations in the Sudanese society.

By adopting postcolonial feminist approaches to critical ethnography, I am departing in this research from my own multiple and partial locations as a third world feminist researcher and a consumer (an audience) of these songs. I hope, from these multiple locations I will contribute to the discussion on women and music in Africa, especially Sudan, and add to methodological questions concerning the role of the postcolonial ethnographic researcher in the "field" (i.e. issues of self-reflexivity and representation).

The Significance of the Study

This research as part of scholarship on African women and music is important due to the following:

First, this research contributes to the literature on African women and music and inevitably contributes to providing space for the western reader to experience (through reading) the lives and the words of some Sudanese women.

Secondly, the significance of this study lies in its attempt to document the lives, experiences, and oral narratives of three performers that represent the historical development of the musical performance of the Sudanese women. The roles of the Sudanese women as performers have been underrepresented in academic research by Sudanese researchers and western researchers as well. In the limited literature available for this study the Sudanese woman and her contribution in music has been recognized in

scattered paragraphs here and there. No study ever has made the narratives, voices, histories, and experiences of the Sudanese *ghanayaat* a core of its discussion and one of the objectives of its scholarship.

Finally, the importance of this study also stems from its combination of different methods of “data collection” and different methods of analysis. The incorporation of narrative into the analysis of this research is meant to broaden the scope of theory. Postcolonial theorists such as Narayan (1993) argued that it is people who populate our texts, and that we allow people to speak out from our writings. Narratives are told for particular purpose, from a particular point of view: thus they are incipiently analytical, enacting theory.

The Structure of the Study

The second chapter contains discussion of the literature review and the theoretical framework of the thesis. Accordingly, Chapter Two places this research within the literature on feminist studies on popular culture; postcolonial and feminist research on the representation of the “third world”/Muslim women in western scholarship and western media; research on women and music in Africa/ Sudan; and research on gender relations in Sudan. Chapter Three is a historical review of the position of the Sudanese women and the discourses of gender and identity politics by the post-colonial state in Sudan. The chapter also provides a general review to the different types of women’s singing in central Sudan and highlights the relationship of the media institutions in Greater Khartoum with *aghani al-banat* and their performers. Chapter Four describes the methodology of this project as it focuses on postcolonial feminist approaches to critical ethnographic research that tries to work the hyphen of “insider” researcher and “outsider”

researcher (subject-object division). Moreover, the methodology also focuses on issues of representation and politics of location by the researcher. Chapter Five and Chapter Six are devoted to the narratives of three performers and the historical textual analysis of *ghani al-banat* respectively. Chapter Five (the textual analysis of *aghani al-banat*) includes the views of the Sudanese women audiences about the lyrics of these songs. It is the chapter that joins my voice as a researcher and an audience with the diasporic voices of the audiences. These two chapters are meant to answer the research questions that will be discussed in the following chapter. The final Chapter highlights the main conclusions and arguments of this dissertation and also concerns itself with the issue of self-reflexivity experienced by the researcher throughout the research process.

CHAPTER TWO

FEMINIST SCHOLARSHIP AND THE POSTCOLONIAL FEMINIST THEORETICAL APPROACH TO *AGHANI AL-BANAT*

This chapter consists of two parts. The first part outlines the literature on feminist scholarship in musicology, anthropological approach to performance, feminist approaches on popular music, and postcolonial feminist research on popular culture. The first part of the chapter also reviews some literature concerning feminist studies on women and music in international non-western societies and reviews literature on gender relations in the Sudan. The second part of this chapter focuses on postcolonial and feminist theories and how they inform the research on *aghani al-banat* in Sudan.

Feminist Scholarship in Musicology

It is only in the late 1980s that feminist scholarship in musicology emerged, and with it the publication of a number of studies that identified gender as a distinct social force and sought to examine its ramifications within musical culture (Macdonald, 1995).

Bowers (1989) in her article *Feminist scholarship and the field of musicology I* emphasized the impact of feminist scholarship on the field of musicology by identifying two general areas of inquiry. First, historical studies have investigated how socially constructed attitudes towards gender have influenced the degree to which women have created, performed, and achieved in music. Moreover, historical approaches have examined the varieties of women's musical expression. Second, feminist criticism has analyzed the way gender is constructed in musical discourse; for example, how women or the feminine is represented in musical works.

Bowers (1989) stressed the importance of developing new methodologies and new approaches to women and music in order to challenge the assumptions of the past that have led to the exclusion of women and gender issues from serious musical discourse. Moreover, Bowers stated that “if more than scant attention were paid to the interaction of music history with social history, as well as to the attempt to understand music as an aspect of and in relation to culture in the large-areas which have been virtually neglected within musicology-women would become more essential subject for study” (Bowers, 1989, p. 84).

Feminist research on musicology applying anthropological approaches showed that performance genres do not merely reflect a given social system. Rather, the relationship between them is reciprocal and reflexive, in the sense that a performance is often a critique, direct or veiled, of the social life out of which it grows (Turner, 1986). Ethnomusicologist Koskoff (1987) argued that musical performance provides one of the best contexts for observing and understanding the gender structure of any society. She mentioned that while some performances confirm and maintain the established social/sexual arrangements rather directly, and others seem to protest, yet maintain, the sexual order, still other performances challenge and threaten the established order. Accordingly she called researchers and students of performance to look at all aspects of genre, not just its verbal and musical texts.

The anthropological approach to feminist musicology to a large extent informs my study on *aghani al-banat*. In this study I am not only interested in analyzing the text of *aghani al-banat* but also interested in exploring the performance context of *aghani al-*

banat as an important area for understanding how the messages of *aghani al-banat* are delivered and negotiated in a festive context of performance.

Feminist Research on Popular Music

Feminist research on popular music largely focused on women and girls' uses of popular music. For instance, McRobbie (1984) focused on how the experience of dance by girls subverts the patriarchal ideal. Some other research emphasized how popular music videos empower young girls (e.g. Lewis, 1990). Lengel (1995) argued that this type of feminist scholarship has focused on cultural activities around music-dance, music videos-rather than on music itself. One of the rare exceptions would be Angela Davis' (1998) work *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*. This book is an examination of the work of three women artists who played decisive roles in shaping the history of popular music in the United States. The book attempted to explore the feminist implications of the recorded performances of three women. Two of whom, Ma Rainey and Bessie Smith, defined classic blues era, and one, Billie Holiday, ushered in the period of modern jazz (Davis, 1998). The performance of the three women illuminate the politics of gender and sexuality in working class Black communities.

Davis' work demonstrated that feminist traditions are not only written, "they are oral, and these oralities reveal not only rewrote African cultural traces, but also the genius with which former slaves forged new traditions that simultaneously contested the slave past and preserved some of the rich cultural products of slavery" (Davis, 1998, p.10).

The work of Angela Davis (1998) is an inspiring contribution to my work about *aghani al-banat* in Sudan. Davis' analysis linked the experiences of the three women

performers (i.e. the history of slavery and the position of women during slavery) of Blues to the lyrics they perform. This type of analysis demonstrates how the personal experiences of the three women performers are encoded in the meanings of sexuality, love and personal freedom the lyrics call for. Like Davis, my work about *aghani al-banat* in Sudan focuses on the experiences of three Sudanese women performers, thus highlights three historical stages on the development of *aghani al-banat* as a genre. Yet, I am adopting a postcolonial feminist perspective to understand the musical and personal experiences of the three performers. In this respect, I am interested in how women's performers negotiate their identity as performers and how the songs they perform represent and negotiate the discourses of "woman"/ "womanhood", gender relations, and class relations. Moreover, my work also reflects the role of the postcolonial ethnographic researcher ("native"/non-"native", insider/outsider) in the research process.

Postcolonial Feminist Research on Popular Culture

Among the most important core issues in postcolonial research in media is the issue of representation of the third world "other" in the western media (Graham-Brown, 1988; Mabro, 1991; Shohat, 1991; Wilkins, 1995; Campbell, 1995). These studies have shown that the majority of photographic images of Muslim women in western media continues to follow ahistorical frameworks which were established more than a century ago showing the Muslim and North African women within the confines of veil and the *harim* [a place of depravity] institution. Accordingly, media are one of the main areas of concern of postcolonial or multicultural feminist intervention.

Valdivia (1995) argued that feminist work in communications has tended to simplify the multicultural experience. "Although most authors begin their work by acknowledging that race, ethnicity, class, sexuality, age, and global issues intersect with the topic of gender and the media, the vast majority of books and articles available on this topic focus primarily on white middle-class Western women" (Valdivia, 1995, p.9). Postcolonial feminist researchers in media and communication, such as Valdivia (1995), call for the need to bring gender and minority studies into international communication debate.

One of the excellent contributions of postcolonial feminist research on popular culture and audience is a study carried by Anjali Ram's (2002) *Framing the Feminine: Diasporic Readings of Gender in Popular Indian Cinema*. The study focused on the ways on which Indian immigrant women actively engage and interpret Indian cinema. Situating her study within the "reception studies", Ram's work moved between the readers' readings and film texts in order to locate how Indian cinema mediates the constitution of gendered identities in the diaspora. Ram's study shaped my enquiry about the diasporic audiences of *aghani al-banat* and also informed my own subject position as an immigrant audience. In this respect, I share with Ram the interest of unpacking the talk of immigrant audiences (Sudanese women) about *aghani al-banat* to examine the ways by which they negotiate issues of identity, community/"home", and subjectivity.

African/Muslim Women and Music

A review of the limited western scholarship on women and music in the African and the Islamic worlds reveals that the literature focuses on male music (e.g. Waterman,

1990) and on female stars such as Umm Kulthum (Fernea and Bezirgan, 1997). Most importantly, the few studies on women in Muslim societies in Africa and music largely concentrated on North Africa (Danielson, 1991; Eddy, 1990; Toop, 1990; Brandes, 1991; Walter, 1993). Thus women in other parts of Africa were left underrepresented.

One example of the work is Nieuwkerk (1995) book titled: *A Trade like Any Other: Female Singers and Dancers in Egypt* that is mainly about historicizing and contextualizing the entertainment trade in Egypt, the perspective of the “significant others”, and finally the views of the people under study (i.e. the singers and the dancers). In relation to changes in the historical development of entertainment trade the author argued that: “ due to the process of professionalization, the different forms of entertainment have become separate activities as well... Acting, music, and singing have gained prestige through academies and conservatories. Dancing-that is, the local belly dancing- has lost esteem and has been overshadowed by dance forms that require formal training, such as folk dancing and ballet” (P. 180). Moreover, by distinguishing the views of the different classes of Egyptian society, the author showed how the dishonor and marginality of the entertainers are differentiated. Thus, the largest group of society, the lower and lower-middle classes, unlike the upper class, are the entertainers’ “significant others” because they live in the same neighborhood of the entertainers they generally accept male entertainers as ordinary citizens and do not stigmatize them. In relation to gender, on the other hand, and its impact on the perception of the Egyptian society on female entertainers the author argued that in many ways female entertainers are perceived as women like other women-that is, as sexual beings who can seduce. “They may differ from ‘decent’ women because they use their bodies to make a living

instead of hiding them as much as possible” (P. 184). Regarding women entertainers’ perception to their bodies and their identity Nieuwkerk argued that the female performers try to neutralize and even deny the femininity of their bodies in order to counterbalance the image of looseness or immorality.

Nieuwkerk’s book focused on an important area of Egyptian women performers or entertainers and the book is a significant addition to the literature on women and music in Africa. My research on women performers in Sudan could not escape one of main areas discussed by Nieuwkerk regarding the perception of the performers to their identity or their subject position in the Sudanese society as *ghanayaat*. Like the Egyptian Muslim society the Sudanese society has labeled the female performers as “bad” and “loose” women. My dissertation differs from Nieuwkerk work in that it does not concern itself with studying the entertainment trade in Sudan. *Aghani al-banat* in my dissertation are perceived as popular music that has been devalued and understudied by academic scholarship.

In her book Pastimes and Politics, L. Fair (2001) studied the music and lyrics of a famous Zanzibari female singer called Siti binti Saad (1890-1945). Fair argued that the music of Siti binti Saad is a site for creating community, crafting identity, and negotiating power through *Taarab* (a form of nineteenth-century courtly praise music performed in Arabic for Zanaibar’s sultans (1870-1888)). L. Fair’s work is important to my work because it weaves the complex class, gender, and power relations that characterize the inter-war period (1890-1945) in Zanzibar. Contextualizing *aghani al-banat* in the Sudan within the context of gender, class, ethnicity, and power relations of urban Sudan will

help in approaching the songs, as L. Fair argued, not only as a mirror to these relations but also shaping these relations and other historical processes.

One study on Somali women and songs was entitled *Sittaat: Somali women's songs for "the mothers of the believers"* by Kapteijns (1995). The *sittaat* sung by Somali women for distinguished women of early Islam. These songs are part of a wider orature of popular, largely Sufi, Islamic expression. On the other hand, the songs belong to a wider context of women's culture and orature.

Kapteijns argued that in Somali society, age and gender have always been strong determinants of the social roles, obligations, opportunities, and status of its members. "Married women are (and have always been) a distinct social group with many common duties, rights, and challenges related to their position as wives and mothers" (P. 19). Accordingly, in *sittaat* sessions the Somali women emphasize their identities as women, wives, and mothers by singing songs of praise to the women (mothers, wives, and daughters) of early Islam. In this respect, Kapteijns mentioned "Somali women call upon the "Mothers of the Believers" as women, hoping to learn from them how to become better Muslim wives and mothers so they may gain paradise" (P. 19).

Another interesting study about women's music in Tunisia by Jones (1991) adopted historical and ethnomethodological methods to reflect on female professional musicians in Tunisia since ancient (slave-girl) origin to the contemporary professional artists. However, as Lengel (1995) argued Jones "excluded socio-cultural dimensions in favor of a historical survey of Tunisian women's 'music-making' and its 'context'" (P.19). Accordingly, Lengel (1995) stepped in to fill the gap produced by Jones and

others in the literature about international cultural studies scholarship on women and music.

Lengel's study focused on how music made by Tunisian women affected women's advancement in Tunisia, how it functioned as a means of helping negotiate female identity, how it redefined women's position within the larger society, and how negotiating tendencies of mass communication played in these processes. According to Lengel "the study interrogates Tunisian women's active role in both traditional and popular musical production and performance" (P.2).

The main questions of Lengel's work are: Does music act as a force of possible empowerment for women, or is it conversely, a force of patriarchal ideology? Might it be both simultaneously? Do Tunisian women find empowerment in their musical experience, and if so, what is the nature and function of this empowerment? How do cultural institutions, especially mass media, work to serve or hinder this process? How does music affect the development of the social position of women in Islamic culture?

Lengel concluded that the words of Tunisian women musicians illuminate connections among sexuality, family honor, and the production and consumption of popular music in Tunisia. "Tunisian women's words and lives also reveal inconsistencies between rhetoric of women's advancement and emancipation and the reality of women's lived experiences" (P.183). Lengel's study is interesting and inspiring to my work because of methodological debate and the types of questions raised by the author about the spaces of the researcher and the "researched" during the research process. The study also focused on epistemological issues concerning the nature of knowledge as a part of the lived experiences of women. Besides, Lengel's work brings the international

dimension of media. In this respect Lengle considered the interaction between the first and the third worlds' media and how these forces influence and shape ideas about women.

In fact my research adopts many of Lengle's research questions, concerns, and themes. My research, as Lengle's, is concerned with musical experiences of the performers. The research is also concerned with understanding how the singers cope with their multiple identities as singer, women, wives, etc. However, my research on *aghani al-banat* in Sudan differs in many respects from Lengle's. First, cultural studies research on audience, like Lengle's, that uses ethnographic methods, usually focuses on the audience as an interpretive "community". In this respect, as Zacharias (2000) argued, audiences are represented as a natural community with a homogenous subjectivity. "The naturalistic conceptions of the audience have been critiqued as essentializing certain audiences (such as women) without recognizing that the subjectivities of the audience are not ontologically inherent qualities, but discursive effects of specific power relations" (Zacharias, 2000, p.233). Accordingly, in this postcolonial research on *aghani al-banat*, the audiences and the performers are theorized as subjects of a postcolonial state discourse that view them as performers and consumers of the "other": "bad" "loose" singing.

Secondly, the importance of the postcolonial feminist position, as Shome (1996) argued, to any scholarly practice is that "it urges us to analyze our academic discourses and connect them to the larger political practices of our nations" (1996, p.45).

Accordingly, as mentioned in the Introduction, my work gives emphasis to postcolonial state's discourses about the Sudanese woman, specially the Islamist discourses of

“authenticity”, and emphasizes some global influences on the Sudanese culture (i.e. the issues of migration and culture).

Literature on Women and Gender Relations in Sudan

Research on development/underdevelopment-related issues dominates literature on women in Sudan. Accordingly, women in Sudan have become an object of many western and non-western studies that mainly focus on women as an element of economic, educational, agricultural and political processes taking place in the country (Hall and Amin, 1981; Newman 1985). The objectification of Sudanese women by many Sudanese and western researchers is more obvious in studies about the 1983/84 and the 1990 famines in Sudan. The studies revolved around the coping and surviving strategies taken by women during famine times (Grawert, 1992; El-Tigani, 1995; Abu-Sin, 1995; El-Nagar, 1995).

On a cultural level, studies about Sudanese women focused on specific cultural practices such as female circumcision and the *zar* possession cult (El-Nagar, 1980; El-Dareer, 1982). In this respect, the studies highlighted the role of women in reproducing these practices that were viewed by researchers as either harmful (e.g. female circumcision) or backward (e.g. *zar* possession cult). Accordingly, the reader is left with no clear and deep perspective as to how women perceive themselves, their lives, and the cultural practices they perform.

Ethnographic studies about Sudanese women took the challenge to present a deeper analysis of lives and daily experiences of women mainly through participant observation and through becoming part of the research process and the lives of the

Sudanese women. The study *Wombs and alien spirits: Women, men and the zar cult in Northern Sudan* by Janice Boddy (1989) is among the few studies that tried to contextualize the two practices of female circumcision and the *zar* within the cultural and gender relations of the Northern Sudan. Boddy (1989) related the understanding of the two cultural practices to the cultural idioms of the Sudanese society and to the understanding of Sudanese women to the practices.

Among the most important studies on gender relations in Sudan are the studies by Hale (1996) and El-Ahmadi (1994) about the Islamist ideology of Sudan and its perception to gender relations and the identity of the “woman”. Hale (1996) and El-Ahamadi (1994) argued that the postcolonial state in Sudan has been seeking tight control over women’s access to power and privilege. Subsequently, the politics of “authenticity” and identity politics of the current Islamist postcolonial state of Sudan manipulated the participation of women in cultural and economic practices that the state views as not suitable for the “ideal” Muslim Sudanese woman.

Sudanese Women and Popular Music

Two studies on *aghani al-banat* in Sudan that are not available to the west were carried by Rajab (1979) and Abu-Isa (1992). Rajab (1979) in her analysis of *aghani al-banat* applied an analytical approach that primarily focuses on class analysis. In this respect, Rajab mentioned that historically the economic structure of the Sudan consists of two competing relations of production between the “traditional” and “modern” sectors. She added that the economic structure of Sudan reflects the stage on which the traditional economic sector with its superstructure (ideology and art) is fading away and the modern

sector with its superstructure (ideology and art) is rising. At the stage of competing superstructures *aghani al-banat* emerged as a realm or a platform from which the Sudanese woman speaks about her limited aspirations.

Rajab in her analysis to *aghani al-banat* argued that the songs directly reflect the conflict between the “modern” and “traditional” economic structures of the Sudanese society as well as reflect the conflict between the economic structure and the superstructure of each one of these sectors. According to this class analysis, Rajab classified *aghani al-banat* into two categories. The first category represents the songs that are dominated by the values of the feudal/traditional society, while the second category consists of songs that are dominated by the values of the bourgeoisie society. Moreover, Rajab mentioned that the main theme of *aghani al-banat* is marriage.

On the other hand, Abu Isa’s study perceived *aghani al-banat* as a folk culture and as a women-culture. The songs, in this respect, are viewed as a *rite de passage* into marriage ceremonies in Sudan. Abu-Isa tried to answer the question of whether these songs are an “expression of social reality and consciousness of the society towards women’s roles, or whether they are an expression to the consciousness of the Sudanese women about the society’s social-political and economic structures?” (Abu-Isa, 1992, p.2).

Abu-Isa’s research is descriptive and does not concern itself with issues of culture and meaning and the role of the ‘song’ as a medium of communication among women. As well, the study has no deep discussion on issues of methodology and epistemology. Accordingly, Rajab’s study of *aghani al-banat* in Omdurman is more valuable to my work on *aghani al-banat* than Abu Isa’s due to the class analysis adopted by Rajab in her

analysis of the songs. However, Rajab's exclusive dependence on a Marxist class-based approach in analyzing and classifying the songs excluded other factors such as gender, ethnicity, culture, and ideology. The adoption of a more holistic approach that emphasizes the interconnection of these factors in producing and reproducing *aghani al-banat* is vital for providing a deeper understanding to the lyrics as a text and their context.

Subsequently, a feminist postcolonial approach to *aghani al-banat* could fill the gap in the Marxist approach to *aghani al-banat*. Moreover, my work also fills the gap in Rajab's (1979) work regarding the voices of the singers and the audiences. My work brings to the center the voices of the Sudanese women singers and audiences in Sudan and the diaspora. Neither a Sudanese nor an international scholar has ever studied *aghani al-banat* pulling all these complex and diverse elements of the research together.

Situating the Research on *Aghani al-banat*, and Their Performers

This research belongs to the literature about feminist studies, on music, performance, and feminist musicology. More specifically the research belongs to feminist criticism in musicology that focuses on how issues of femininity and gender are represented and incorporated in the lyrics of *aghani al-banat*. My research belongs to the critical postcolonial approaches to the representation of third world women in western scholarship and the representation of third world women in national postcolonial discourses and narratives. Thus, the literature on the position of women and gender relations in Sudan and the discourses about women and gender constitutes an important contribution to the research effort in theorizing on the Sudanese women performers and

some of the audiences as subjects of national discourses on identity, culture, womanhood, and authenticity. Thus, the following research questions are informed by the literature reviewed on women, popular music, and performance.

Research Questions

The musical experiences of the three performers:

How do the *ghanayaat* (re) present their contribution to music and their experiences with singing? What is the relationship between the *fananaat* and the media institutions and the record production companies in Greater Khartoum? How do the performers perceive *aghani al-banat*?

The personal experiences of the performers:

How do the *ghanayaat* negotiate the label “*ghanaya/fanana*” in their daily life in the Muslim Sudanese society? How do the performers negotiate their relationships with their own families? How do the *ghanayaat* and the educated *fananat* perceive themselves and identify themselves in relation to each “other”? Finally how do the performers represent themselves in their narratives? And how do issues of modernity and tradition are incorporated in the narratives of the *ghanayaat*?

Aghani al-banat as a text:

How do the words, concepts, and metaphors used in the lyrics represent body image(s), sexuality, femininity, and gender? How are gender, class, and ethnic relations presented in these songs? What influence does the processes of globalization of cultural values and diasporic identities (migration) have on *aghani al-banat* as a text and how are

these reflected in the performance of *aghani al-banat* (context). Did the songs and the context on which the songs are performed provide a discursive space for negotiating the dominant Islamist ideology and the cultural discourse about gender relations in Sudan?

The views of the Sudanese women audience in Sudan and in the diaspora:

To what extent do the songs contribute to shaping the understanding of Sudanese women of their identity as women? How Sudanese women living in the U.S. gain representation as women and as Sudanese through these songs? How are they connected to 'home' through this music? How do issue of women's pleasure and the politics of feminism "empowerment" interact in the consumption process.

The issue of self-reflexivity:

To what extent does the whole process of research and the postcolonial approach to critical ethnographic methods add to and empower me as a researcher, a Sudanese woman, a western educated scholar, and a consumer of these songs?

The Theoretical Framework of the Research

Postcolonial theory, as argued by Shome (1996), is a critical perspective that primarily seeks to expose Eurocentrism and imperialism of western discourses (both academic and public). Moreover, Prakash (1992) argued that postcolonial criticism forces a radical re-thinking and re-formation of forms of knowledge and social identities authored and authorized by colonialism and western domination. Postcolonial theory

foregrounds a politics of opposition and struggle, and problematizes the key relationship between the center and the periphery.

Postcolonial theory and criticism have significantly influenced a wide range of fields and areas across the humanities such as sociology, anthropology, education, literature, cultural studies, and even some areas in communication such as mass communication and development communication.

It is important to note that postcolonial theory is not a unified field. Some postcolonial theorists concerned themselves with theorizing the west and its discursive construction of the third world. In this respect, postcolonial theorists primarily challenge the colonizing and imperialistic tendencies manifest in the discursive practices of the first world countries in their constructions and representations of the subjects of third world countries and/or racially oppressed people of the world. The construction of the people of non-western cultures as an insignificant “other”-an object of “study” and “interests” in the “first world” discourses was defined by Said (1978) as “Orientalism”. Thus, Said’s *Orientalism* is a pioneering work regarding a critique to the western representation of the third world.

Moreover, there are postcolonial/ third world feminists such as Mohanty (1992) who questions the relationship between western/first world feminism and third world feminism. She also argued for the rewriting of history based on the specific locations and histories of struggle of people of color and postcolonial people, and on the day-to-day strategies of survival utilized by such people. Within this broad term of third world feminism there are other critics who are concerned with articulating issues of race, gender, and self reflexivity (reference to bell hooks) to provide a bridge between Black

intellectuals and Black communities. Moreover, there are other postcolonial feminist theorists who are concerned with analyzing the systemic integration of women in the third world into nationalist (postcolonial) discourses (Kandiyoti, 1993).

Postcolonial theory is not only about critiquing western discursive imperialism and postcolonial discourses. There are other postcolonial theorists who have concerned themselves with theorizing colonized cultures and anti-colonial resistance. Among those theorists or critics are Gayatri Spivak and Homi Bhabha who are concerned with deconstructing the colonizer/colonized polarity using deconstruction and psychoanalytic approaches respectively. For instance Bhabha (1992) introduced concepts of *borderlands* and *hybridity*. For him a postcolonial perspective argues for recognition of the “hybrid location of cultural values”. He argued that instead of holding onto some notions of indigenous cultural or national identity as a means to reject and resist western hegemony, the point is to recognize that today, with increasing globalization of the world, it is not possible to conceive cultures and nations monolithically. Thus, postcolonial scholarship represents a global discourse that emphasizes interdependencies and dialectical interconnections. Sangari (1990) noted that the west and non-west are not discrete identities, but rather have shaped and been shaped by one another in specific and specifiable ways.

On the other hand, feminist scholarship is driven by a common recognition of women's conditions of subordination and a commitment to the analytical centrality of gender. This goal has brought a critical self-consciousness about epistemological concerns, and a very important part of feminist theory has been to critique ways and methods of knowing. Therefore, feminist research focuses on criticizing and interrupting

the “conventional” (positivist) perspectives of science and research that contributed to the invisibility or distortion of women and their experiences. Epistemologically, feminist research aims at legitimizing women’s experiences and ways of knowing. Thus Haraway’s (1991) concept of *situated knowledge* is central to the theoretical framework of this research. The main argument of Haraway concerning *situated knowledge* is that the ideological doctrines of scientific method about epistemology were made to shift our attention from getting to know the world effectively by practicing the science.

Adopting the concept *Situated knowledge* in this research requires that “the object of knowledge be pictured as an actor and agent, not a screen or a ground or a source, never finally as a slave to the master that closes off the dialectic in unique agency and authorship of ‘objective’ knowledge” (Haraway, 1991, p. 98). Moreover, Haraway defined *situated knowledge* as feminist objectivity. Feminist objectivity is about limited locations and situated knowledge, not about transcendence and splitting of subject and object. “Only partial perspective promises objective vision. Being partial is locatable, critical knowledge” (Haraway, 1991, p. 190).

Towards a Postcolonial Feminist Theoretical Approach to *Aghani al-banat*

First, feminist scholarship gains its momentum from its efforts to bridge the gap between theory and practice. Accordingly, Haraway’s situated knowledge is adopted in this research in order to incorporate women’s knowledge, active agency, voices, narratives, and experiences into theory.

Second, postcolonial scholarship represents a global discourse that emphasizes interdependencies and dialectical interconnection. In this respect, postcolonial

scholarship problematizes culture as a “pure” and homogenous entity. Many postcolonial theorists (Hedge, 1998; Dirlik, 1990; Spivak, 1992) believe that rendering cultures as homogenous and coherent mystifies and erases the sociopolitical forces that constitute them. Subsequently, a critical reading of culture as ideological requires viewing culture as an activity or process that is bound up with operations of social relations and expresses contradiction as much as it does cohesion.

Concepts such as hybridity and diasporic identities could provide an epistemological shift in feminist theorizing from departing from the standpoint of the lived experiences of women locally to viewing the local and the global as interconnected dialectically. However, in this research I apply the concept *enactment of hybridity* developed by Narayan (1993) by which she argued for an emerging style in anthropological writing that combines both narrative and rigorous analysis (see Rose, 1987; Kondo, 1990; Abu-Lughod 1993; Behar, 1993). By *enactment* Narayan views the specificity of experience as not opposed to theory; it enact and embodies theory. By *hybridity* Narayan not only refers to the cultural hybridity of the west and the non-west discussed above but also she argued that every anthropologist carries both a personal and an ethnographic self. “We must all take the responsibility for how our personal locations feed not just into our fieldwork interactions but also our scholarly texts” (Narayan, 1993, p. 681).

Thirdly postcolonial theory offers to my research not only new venues of theorizing but also emphasizes the importance and significance of locations from where we, as feminist communication researchers, speak. Postcolonial scholarship made it clear that in a changing international context, issues and locations intersect on various levels.

As such, for feminist scholars who are concerned with transnational issues, there is a need to think of research practices in more culturally interactive ways. A postcolonial-feminist location could be an attempt to understand gendered identities and culture as dynamic and ideologically situated processes and not as facts that can stand still.

The politics of "*location from where to speak*" offered by postcolonial debate is an important step to be recognized in locating myself in the research on the Sudanese women and their interaction with popular culture. Being a Sudanese woman educated in a western institution, a consumer of *aghani al-banat* and trying to understand these songs and its complex construction of gender identities, femininity, ethnic, and class relations in the Sudanese context at this global moment means I am speaking from multiple locations.

The importance of the postcolonial position to any scholarly practice, as Shome (1996) argued, is its *academic self-reflexivity*. In this respect, the postcolonial question to ask is to what extent do our scholarly practices legitimize the hegemony of western power structures? *Self-reflexivity* from a postcolonial perspective is that, instead of merely uncovering hegemony in western discourses, the postcolonial critic also needs to examine the power relations that structure her/his own discourses.

Texts from a postcolonial perspective, like cultural studies, are sites of struggle over ideology, meaning, and representation. Postcolonial critiques view texts as sites of power that are reproduced by their social conditions (Shome, 1996). Then neocolonial, racial, and gender forces are, to some extent, always written into our texts. It is again necessary to view text and context as overlapping and reproducing each other.

Here I agree with Fairclough (1992) in approaching text and language as social constructs. Fairclough argued that language is changing as long as social relations are

changing. Furthermore, Fairclough argued that people can resist the structuring of discourses coming from above, as well as merely go along with them. Accordingly Fairclough's definition of texts and language is useful to this research because it represents them as sites of power relations in which the dominant meanings and ideologies could be negotiated or resisted. Moreover, I agree with Mishra and Hodge (1994) in conceptualizing meaning as constantly deferred; meaning grows out of the dialectical process of relationship between the margins and the center.

With the increased globalization of the world, whereby identities, ideas, ethnic groups constantly cross borders, largely everyone is at a cultural intersection. Thus, for postcolonial researchers *culture* and *identity* are conflictual and contingent and not the same as urbane multiplicity. Bhabha (1994) noted that it is only from the space of negotiation and translation that we can begin to conceptualize an international culture based not on the exoticism of multiculturalism (i.e. the static display of multiple cultural forms) or the diversity of cultures, but on the inscription and articulation of hybridity. Thus issues of migration and cultural hybridity are very important to be incorporated in the analysis of *aghani al-banat*.

With regard to approaching/theorizing the audience and the performers, Zacharias (2000) argued that the difficulties involved in theorizing a particular audience as a community arises precisely when one attempts to build a community on the basis of its role as an "audience". In this research I am aware that the *ghanayaat* who performs *aghani al-banat* and the audience of these songs are heterogeneous in terms of class, ethnic origins, age, education, professions, etc. Moreover, I perceive the views and the narrative(s) of the "audience" and the "performers" as emerging out of their subjectivities

and their discursive formation by the dominant discourse as performers and consumers of *aghani al-banat* (the “other”, the trivial, the loose, the indecent, etc.). Yet, I would view these heterogeneous categories of Sudanese women as “audience” (a “community”) and “*ghanayaat*” because they share the very act of performing and consuming the songs respectively.

I would argue that because I am adopting a postcolonial approach to explore *aghani al-banat* and the narratives of the performers, I should be aware that hearing and writing about the “other” (the Sudanese women) should not essentialize the “other”. Moreover, I am viewing the narratives and views of the Sudanese women, the *ghanayaat* and audience in this stage, from a feminist perspective that politically seeks to find avenues for shared experiences and shared meanings among women. In other words, differences among women, from the feminist perspective I am applying, should not stand in opposition to shared views and shared experiences with music.

CHAPTER THREE
THE POSTCOLONIAL DISCOURSE ABOUT THE SUDANESE WOMAN AND
A HISTORICAL REVIEW TO *AGHANI AL-BANAT*

The aim of this chapter is to provide a general review of the postcolonial discourses about the Sudanese woman and facilitate the understanding of the social and economic processes that are integrated in the production of *aghani al-banat* as popular music. The chapter consists of two parts: The first part is concerned with reviewing the post-colonial (national) discourses that shaped the positions of the heterogeneous category of the “Sudanese woman”. Moreover, emphasis on the first part of this chapter is on the social and economic positions of the slave/ex-slave Sudanese women who then become the pioneering performers of *aghani al-banat*, especially the *tom-tom* songs. Although recently the *ghanayaat* became a category of mixed ethnic groups, yet the majority of the *ghanayaat* are ex-slave descendents.

The second part of the chapter is devoted to the discussion of the history of *aghani al-banat*, the labeling process of *aghani al-banat*, and the role of the media in the course of the development of *aghani al-banat*. Due to the lack of written literature about the history of *aghani al-banat*, the second part of this chapter depends on the individual interviews I conducted in Sudan with some intellectual (i.e. researchers and academicians) Sudanese men and women about the history of *aghani al-banat*.

The Positions of Women in Colonial and Postcolonial Sudan

A variety of regimes and governments have ruled Sudan within the last two centuries: colonial regimes (e.g. Ottoman and Anglo-Egyptian), Islamic states (e.g. the

Funj and the Mahdist), parliamentary democracies (1956-58, 1964-69, 1986-89), military regimes (1958- 64 and 1969-85) and now (1989-2002) a military theocracy. Hale (1996) argued that since the 1970s multinational corporations, non-governmental organizations and foreign aid projects (American, European and Arab) have influenced Sudan's economic and political processes as well as largely altered its gender and cultural arrangements.

Between the sixteenth and the nineteenth centuries the Northern two third of the Sudan were ruled by the Funj and Fur Kingdoms. “The Funj society was broadly divided into two hereditary classes of nobility and the subjects and a category of slaves¹. Relations between the nobility and their subjects were based on dependence and subordination. While the former controlled the political institutions and economic resources, the latter provided labor and paid tribute” (Sikainga, 1996, p. 2). This division was maintained by customary law and was reflected in property ownership, legal rights, and marriage patterns. Furthermore, Sikainga argued that in Funj and Fur kingdoms as soon as female slaves reached adolescence they became easy prey for the male owners’ of the household and their guests. In old age female slaves were relegated to the field or hired as servants.

¹ According to Sikainga (1996) the slave among the Arabic-speaking northern Sudanese, in the nineteenth century, is an absolute property. “The term ‘abd (for male slave) and khadim (for female slave) are clearly defined in Muslim law. According to sharia rules, the only legal method for enslaving a person was that he or she was a non-Muslim who was captured in the course of jihad (holy war). A freeborn Muslim can not be enslaved. . . Technically the owner owned both the slave and what the slave possessed; but if a contract of manumission had been entered into, a male slave was allowed to earn money to purchase his freedom and similarly to pay bride wealth” (Pp. 4 & 5). In the Fur and Funj kingdoms in central Sudan slaves were obtained through organized raids from the non-Muslim population in the southern hinterland of the kingdom and from the Nuba Mountains in western Sudan. Thus, slavery in Sudan was highly connected with ethnicity.

During the Turko-Egyptian rule in 1821-1898 the Sudanese society was transformed into a new economic structure mainly based on slave trade in Egypt and on the Red Sea. The Turko-Egyptian regime's demand for taxation, commerce, military recruitment, and land tenure generated great demand for slaves and created massive social dislocation as a result of exportation of slaves abroad and as a result of migration by slaves from rural areas to the newly emerging centers.

The economic development of the Sudan during the colonial era (1898-1956) was concentrated on the Nile Valley, Khartoum, the Blue and White Nile areas, and southern parts of Kasala, Eastern Sudan. This unequal distribution of economic schemes by the colonial system led to unequal development between rural and urban areas and also led to social stratification within the Sudanese society. By the end of the colonial regime, the Sudanese society was divided into three categories of a bourgeoisie class that consisted of bureaucrats, tribal chiefs, and religious leaders who owned large irrigated schemes in Sudan, especially in Eastern Sudan (Niblock, 1978). The second category was composed of junior personnel and government employees. The third category was composed of rural impoverished people and urban poor laborers descended from ex-slave Sudanese men and women and other ethnic groups.

Sikainga (1996) argued that there was a strong link between slave emancipation, ethnicity, and labor from the point of view of the British regime. Accordingly, Sikainga stated, "the Arabic speaking northern Sudanese were considered indolent and averse to manual labor, while the slaves were regarded as energetic but in need of discipline, and were, therefore, targets for labor recruitment" (pp.185& 186). Although the official abolition of slavery by the British system brought economic independence to many ex-

slaves and their descendants, they are still considered socially and culturally inferior in the Sudanese society.

The ex-slave women in the urban milieu of Greater Khartoum during the colonial system faced many obstacles regarding their position as an urban working class. Lacking education and the skills to compete over the limited wage employment opportunities, and also facing marginalization in the city as ex-slaves, most of the ex-slave women were incorporated into prostitution and in brewing and selling local drink in *anadi* [social clubs/local bars] in the urban slums called *Daims*. According to Sikainga these *Daims* were considered by the colonial administration as a “Native Lodging Area” thus they were outside the official classification scheme and were not entitled to any health or social services. In other cities of Sudan, such as Kosti, these urban slums are referred to as *Radaifs*. Most importantly, many researchers I interviewed in Sudan believe that the *tom-tom* as a rhythm and lyric of *aghani al-banat* appeared in these urban slums and specifically in the *anadi* (Eltyib, 1996). Since that time, Arwa argued, the *tom-tom*, in the mind of the Sudanese society, has always been connected with *anadi* and *al-khumour* local alcohol drinks (A. Al-Rabi, personal communication, June 20, 2001).

Women’s education during the colonial rule was also limited. In fact, the first girls’ school in Sudan was opened by a Sudanese Skaikh called Babiker Badri in 1907 in Rufa’a in Central Sudan. Then, in 1911 the British government opened five primary schools for girls in different cities. The British regime also introduced female training in limited fields of nursing, teaching, and midwifery training. Sikainga mentioned that: “a few ex-slave women received formal education and embarked on pioneering careers such as teaching, or nursing. In this respect, these fortunate few were better off than freeborn

women who faced great difficulties in gaining access to education and employment” (p. 115).

The state in Sudan, after getting its political independence in 1956, started playing its role in "economic development" which then reflected state biases towards specific categories or classes in the Sudanese social formation. This bias resulted in enlarging the gulf between rural/ urban areas, and between the urban/its peripheries, as well as enlarging gender and power relations.

Urban poor women, including ex-slave women, have been marginalized by the postcolonial state by the very terms of their integration into the capitalist economy of the state as cheap providers of labor in the service sector. Although slavery was abolished before Sudan's independence, the conditions of the ex-slaves and their descendants were far behind other categories of the Sudanese society because the ideology about slavery and slaves was not yet abolished. The Sudanese society, like the British colonial ideology, associates labor with ethnicity. In this respect, Halim argued that domination of the fields of nursing and midwifery education by ex-slave women since the Turko-Egyptian rule has made these two jobs ideologically labeled by the Sudanese society as jobs of ex-slave women (A. Halim, personal communication, May 5, 2002). Moreover, I am adding, women's jobs such as *hanana* (*hina* decorator), *ghanaya* with *daloka*, and hairdresser are always degraded by the Sudanese society as they have been classified as jobs of ex-slave uneducated women.

The Islamist Discourses of Identity and “Authenticity” in Sudan

In the early years after Sudan's independence in 1956, the state emphasized that Sudan's development needed emancipated women. As Hale argued, at that time with the express need to build up the urban workforce, the term "emancipated" was thought of as synonymous with a "literate, educated wage-earner". The gender discourse of the state at that time was reflected in the national songs, performed by men, that portrayed women as mothers of the new male generations, the backbone of the newly independent Sudan. In the early 1970s, the state in Sudan adopted a Communist ideology basically seeking political and financial support from the USSR at that time. Although the ideology of the state at that time was a communist, it had never questioned Islam and the position of women in Islamic *Sharia* laws. In this respect, the Communist party in Sudan, Hale (1996) argued, coexisted or worked within an Islamic framework.

The Communist party viewed women as future workers, mothers of workers, and half of the population and therefore a potential political force. This perception influenced some elite women to form the Sudanese Women's Union in the 1970s. For the Communist party and its women's union in the 1970s the enemy of Sudanese women was "backwardness". Subsequently, the Communists focused on ways to "modernize" women by mobilizing them against some cultural practices (such as female circumcision and the *zar* possession cult) that are perceived by the Party as "backward" (Hall and Amin, 1981). However, “modernization” as targeted by the state, for Sudanese women, always means modern-but- modest. For the Communists, as anti-Western capitalism, “modernization” does not mean westernization. “Modernization” for the Communist State of Sudan was a

call for searching for the "authentic" Sudanese masses that are anti-traditional and anti-capitalist values.

The proliferation of the Islamic movement and the emergence of the National Islamic Front (NIF) in Sudanese politics in 1978/79 gave the postcolonial state in Sudan another role as a safeguard of Islam and the Islamic "authentic" culture. The main ideology of the NIF, the current de facto government of Sudan, is based on reviving Islam (mainly the *Sharia* principle of Islam) as a political power against the West. The Islamist orientation of the state culminated in 1983 with the declaration of *Sharia* Islamic laws by Nimeiri's regime.

El-Ahmadi (1994) referred to the term Islamization as a dogmatic politicization of religion that its main aim is power. Moreover, Islamism or Islamization is the politics of identity that presupposes the core of religion is doctrine rather than ritual. Islamism in the Sudanese context sees "pure" and "authentic" Islam as Sudan's only defense and cultural salvation against the west and the only solution to Sudan's economic crisis. While for the Communist the main crisis of the women's positions is "backwardness" for the Islamists the main crisis the Sudanese women encounter is "foreignness". Thus as a solution to the crisis of Sudan and the Sudanese women the Islamist state of Sudan asks what are the "authentic" roots of Sudan's Islam? These politics of authenticity and identity politics of the Sudanese State manipulated the participation of women in cultural and economic practices that the state views as not suitable for the "ideal" Muslim Sudanese woman.

Central to Islamist ideology of the current government of Sudan and cultural authenticity is the family and woman. The Islamists view family as a nucleus of the "ideal" Islamist society. Women ('the woman'), on the other hand, are perceived as essential to the socialization of children. Accordingly, women as the safeguard of Islamic culture should be committed to the "ideal" Islamic image of a woman. Hale argued that in the name of the "ideal" woman, as morally central to the ideal family, Sudanese women's behavior is, thus, ideologically manipulated.

This essentialist representation of women requires the re-domestication of women, the reconstruction of the moral fabrics of the society and the assignment of women as agents of that reconstruction (Malik, 1995). Thus, in 1992 the Islamist State in Sudan formulated many regulations to control women's physical activities and to control women's sexuality especially in urban areas of Sudan with the exception of the South because of the civil war. Famous among these regulations is the 1992 Khartoum Act according to which women should wear *hijab* (Islamic dress). Moreover, women should not mix with men in public places and in transportation, women should not travel without the company of a *muhrim* (a father, a husband, a brother, or son) and women, especially urban poor street vendors, should not work in the early morning and late evenings. The government also issued a curfew, that is still active, by which parties and celebrations should not continue after 11 p.m., men and women should not intermingle with each other in these gatherings, and no *ghanaya* is allowed to dance in public.

The post-colonial state in Sudan has been seeking tight control over women's access to power and privilege. Ironically enough, the Islamist elite men positioned the Sudanese women as the carriers of morality at the same time they are guided by the same

men. In all cases the state and its ideologies objectify women. Furthermore, at the social level, differentiation between public and private domains in the Sudanese society like other Muslim societies stood as an obstacle for women's advancement. Family pressures provided additional obstacles for women's education and professional achievements. Sudanese families, especially in the 1920s and 1930s, like Lengel (1995) mentioned about Tunisian families, forbade daughters to participate in public activities especially mediated activities such as music and dance, resulting from the thought that women performers function as prostitutes for male audiences. Despite these ideological and cultural obstacles, the Sudanese woman played a historical role in shaping and molding the musical map of the Sudan.

Women's Songs in Sudan

The singing of the Sudanese woman has many styles and different rhythms. There are *hamasa* songs that praise and cheer men and soldiers during times of war. Moreover, there is *sirah* singing [songs asking for blessings to the groom during his march from his house to the bride's house], *arda* singing and rhythm, *manaha* singing [mourning songs], *al-hakkamat* singing [the singing that praises the tribesmen during fights]. In addition there is *zar* [spirit possession cult] singing performed by a *shaikha* [mostly a slave decedent woman who knows how to ease the spirit from the ill woman]. However, *aghani al-banat* that usually performed in celebrations predominantly *tom-tom* songs. The following example is a *tom-tom* love song composed by Hawa (her narrative is the focus of Chapter Five):

The one who cursed me with his love,

Sitting on his gardens...I wasn't expecting he already forgot about me

Sitting on comfort... I wasn't expecting he already forgot about me

My lover, the one my heart needs...I don't know how to get along with him.

Al-bi-radio ibtalani...ma qayla binsani,

Jalis fi najaylo...ma qayla binsani,

Wa mutwasid wasairo...ma qayla binsani,

Habeebi al-qalbi dairo wa kief aqdar asiro...ma qayla binsani.

Another song that expose the woman's body:

“O” Bahiya...all this fat and all this flesh

“O” Bahiya your big bottom

Ya Bahiya al-shaham da wal-laham da

Ya Bahiya al-solob da.

***Tom-tom* Singing: A Rhythm and A Popular Culture of Performance**

Tom-tom is a triple rhythm that consists of three hits and is played by *daloka* [a drum made of clay and covered by animal skin]. As mentioned earlier Eltayib (1996) believed that, historically the slave women in Sudan are those who propagated the *tom-tom* type of singing and started performing in the *anadi* using the *daloka*. Thus, *tom-tom* singing and the *daloka* became connected with slave women and with the *anadi*. In fact, the connection of the *daloka* with the *anadi* made many Sudanese families unwilling to allow their daughter to play *daloka*. Almost all the *ghanayaat* who know how to play *daloka* are ex-slave descendents. The *ghanayaat* from other ethnic groups, especially Arab descended ethnic groups, in the Sudan could perform *aghani al-banat* with the

company of a “modern” musical instrument or with the company of another ex-slave woman playing the *daloka*.

El-Tahir (1995) believes that the *tom-tom* rhythm and songs first appeared in the city of Kosti in 1935. At that time, Kosti was a famous trading center from which the agricultural products were transported to Khartoum. In that atmosphere, the *tom-tom* rhythm appeared in the singing of two slave-descendants twin sisters called Um Bashir and Um Jabair who lived in the *Radiefs*. Arawa mentioned that the rhythm and the songs of these two sisters transferred from Kosti to Khartoum through wedding parties (A. Al-Rabi’, personal communication, June 20, 2001).

The appearance of *tom-tom* as a popular music in the 1930s is related to many social and economic processes taking place in the urban centers of Sudan and other parts of the African continent. For instance, L. Fair (2001) argued that the “1920s and 1930s were important decades all across the African continent as young urban men and women negotiated new standards and practices...the urban milieu offered new opportunities for personal freedom and romantic experimentation” (pp.210 & 211). In Sudan, as Sikainga (1996) has argued, the 1920s and 1930s were important decades for former Sudanese slaves because they experienced autonomy and they worked for the creation of their own communities and molding their own resilient and festive culture in the urban centers of Sudan. Thus, *tom-tom* singing appeared in these decades as working-class singing by ex-slave Sudanese women reflecting the new relations of production and the new standards in the urban milieu of Sudan. They were expressing their aspirations as free, autonomous individuals in these urban structures. These new standards were reflected in the appearance of the capitalist relations of production since the 1920s and 1930s resulted in

the development of cotton projects in central Sudan, the development of irrigation schemes, the emergence of other industrial Sudanese corporations, and the related movements by workers and laborers.

Moreover, these “modernization” and urbanization processes have impacted the creation of the sense of an independent personality in the Sudanese society. That sense of independent personality and individuality had influenced the social relations and the worldviews of the Sudanese person. Accordingly, the forms of musical expressions have turned to be individualistic and not ethnic or group singing. Subsequently, *tom-tom* songs appeared as a popular culture of performance by Sudanese women in the 1930s and with it the borders of performers and audience became increasingly differentiated. That was apparent in the 1930s and 1940s in single performances by *fananaat* or *ghanayaat* such as Rabiha *tom-tom*, Fatma Khamies, Aisha al-Falatiyya (a Sudanese singer from West African origin), Mona al-Kheir, and Fatima al-Haj.

The Influence of *Tom-tom* on the Musical Practices of the 1930s and 1940s

The rhythm found a great acceptance in Khartoum because the *tom-tom* is a light and danceable rhythm. Most importantly in wedding celebrations the bridal dance played an important role in spreading the *tom-tom* songs over the country. The bridal dance is very important to the discussion of this research. As I mentioned in the introduction of this thesis the performance context of *aghani al-banat* (i.e. wedding rituals; specifically the bridal dance) is perceived in this research as a discursive space through which the messages of *aghani al-banat* are being communicated and delivered to audiences through body language as the chapter about the analysis of the songs will show. Further more, the

wedding celebrations have been the only means of communication through which *aghani al-banat* spread from home to home and from city to city (Rajab, 1979).

Successfully, *tom-tom* songs shaped its own place within the musical and cultural map of the Sudan. El-Tahir argued that the *tom-tom* actually imposed itself on the other prevailing type of singing of the 1940s in Omdurman.

In this respect, the *tom-tom* shaped a strong attack on *al-hageeba*, the dominant vocal type of male singing since the 1920s in Omdurman. In this respect, the popularity of the *tom-tom* songs imposed a type of competition on the dominant school of music, which was male-dominated. As a result *al-Hageeba* male singers began to compose songs on *tom-tom* rhythm in order to please their audience. Zingar, for instance, was a famous performer of *al-hageeba* who sung in the late 1930s and was the first male singer to perform *tom-tom* using or borrowing a camouflaged voice in which he imitated the voice of a woman (El-Tahir, 1995). Then other male singers of *al-hageeba* started to compose their own lyrics to fit in the *tom-tom* singing in order to preserve their singing from losing ground and popularity. Ironically the public and the media, Arwa argued, called the *tom-tom* songs that were composed by well-known poets for *al-hageeba* singers *tom-tom raqi* (sophisticated *tom-tom*). Example:

My Sudan...on my heart... I love you

His sky has sheltered me and his love has lifted me, I love you

My Sudan...on my heart...I love you.

Sudani al-jooah wijdani....barieedoh

Samaho dallani wa hawaho allani, barieedoh

Sudani al-Jooah wijdani...baraieedoh.

The Labeling Process of *Aghani al-banat*

Aghani al-banat has been given many labels throughout the history of the Sudan. I agree with Wood (1985) that labeling and naming is always a political act that embodies the risk of decomposing the story of the labeled and over time institutionalizes the label through stereotyping. This is true for *aghani al-banat* as a generic label is always been connected with “bad” or “loose”, or nonsense singing.

I asked Al-Dao about when the label “*aghani al-banat*” appeared in the Sudanese musical literature. He responded as follow: “t is evident that before the label ‘*aghani al-banat*’ there was the label ‘*ghani al-sabatah*’ in the 1920s for songs composed and sung by Sudanese women in wedding celebrations in the cities. *Al-sabatah* is type of a rug on which the girls used to sit at wedding occasions with their faces toward the walls and sing without showing their faces to the public or the men in the celebration. Then in the early 1980s the label *aghani al-banat* took place” (A. Al-Dao, personal communication, July 22, 2001).

Musa argued that label “*aghani al-banat*” is gendered because the poetic and melodic texts are produced and composed by the girls (*al-banat*). Musa added that the label “*aghani al-banat*” is also necessary to distinguish this type of singing from songs that are composed and sung by men. For him, in the 1930 when the contemporary song appeared in Sudan it was called *al-hageebah* songs. The label “*al-hageebah*” distinguished the emerging *hageeba* songs at that time composed by well-known poets from the conventional singing of the “tribe”. Thus for Musa, the label “*aghani al-banat*” was not meant to trivialize this type of singing. The words and the texts of these songs,

he mentioned, reveal the fact that women said them. The topics are mainly about a woman that talks about her lover, a woman who describes her lover's good looking, or a woman who describes her lover's car.

On the other hand, Dr. Afaf said: "I started debating the label '*aghani al-banat*' since the late 1979. I had a serious debate with the director of the Radio Omdurman about my opinion that the songs sung by Sudanese women should not be called '*aghani al-banat*' because they have been sung by the child, the adolescent, and by the elder woman (A. El-Sadiq, personal communication, June 10, 2001)." Therefore for Afaf, the song is not a girl's song since the term 'girl' is always determined by specific age range and seen from specific perspective. Thus, she suggested since 1979 that these songs should be referred to by their old name "*aghani al-sabatah*".

The Relationship between the Media and *Aghani al-Banat*

Musa said: "Radio Omdurman was established by the British colonial rule in the 1941. That period witnessed the appearance of some 'decent' female singers such as Aisha al-falatiyyah". It is very important to point out here that Musa and other media affiliated and Sudanese researchers refer to Aisha al-Falatiya, Muna al-Kheir and others who performed in Radio Omdurman in 1940s as "decent *fananaat*" because they followed the *hageeba* male singers in performing the sophisticated *tom-tom* (*tom-tom raqi*) composed by male poets.

However, Sikainga (1996) mentioned that the hostility that Aisha Al-falatiyya faced as a female performer and as a Fallata² prompted her to consider seriously returning for good to Nigeria. Meaning that ethnicity and gender were among the most important social constructs that the performers must negotiate in order to find a place within the male dominated media institution (the Radio of Omdurman). Moreover, I would argue that the appearance of media (Radio and Television) as a “modern” institution in the 1940s Sudan brought up the distinction between the *ghanaya* and the *fanana*. All female singers who sing songs that are approved by the media institutions of Sudan are referred to as *fananaat*. The other performers who perform songs that are composed by women and criticized by the media and use “traditional” instrument such as the *daloka* are referred to as *ghanayaat* such as Hawa in this research. However, as Halim argued in our interview, the *ghanaya* could be called *fanana* but the *fanana* such as Amal in this research can never be named *ghanaya* (A. Halim, personal communication, May 5, 2002). The chapter about the narratives of the women performers takes this debate further.

Important to this discussion is to mention that the Sudanese state as an "overdeveloped" institution controls every aspect of the Sudanese life. The state controls the economy, education, and most importantly the media. Thus, during the interview with Musa I asked to what extent the media in the Sudan helped in promoting or hindering the publicity of *aghani al-banat* in Sudan? Musa argued that the media, or the radio, couldn't broadcast any type of singing because it is a government institution that

² The term “fallata was a pejorative term applied by Arab-speaking northern Sudanese to all immigrants from West Africa and Dar Fur, who had settled in the Sudan for several centuries. The term ‘fallata’ was associated with hard, menial, and unskilled agricultural work (Sikainga, 1996).

implements specific moral strategy towards the audience. As a government institution the media (radio and television) has specific parameters for a good and constructive song” (E. Musa, personal communication, May 17, 2001).

Musa argued that the late 1970s and the beginning of the 1980s witnessed the appearance of the privately owned music production companies in Khartoum. The most famous among these record production companies were the Mansour Phone Company and the *Hasad* (harvest) Company has produced many tapes for the *fanana* Hanan Bolo Bolo (her narrative will be presented later). The numbers of these recording companies started to increase till it recently reached forty-two companies in Greater Khartoum alone. He added the 1970s and 1980s witnessed an increasing number of *fananaat*, accordingly, the Council for Classifying Literary and Artistic Texts was established in the late 1970s in order to supervise the production of these companies and to direct the artistic movement in Sudan. The Council, he mentioned, is a part of the international organizations such as UNESCO and WIBO that promote and secure the private ownership of any cultural performance including singing.

The Council obliged the singers to put their performance under close supervision by the different committees of the Council. These committees should approve the voice of the singer. The voice of the singer should be approved according to scientific international parameters (Alto, Soprano, etc.). The second stage is about the written text of the song (the lyric). The company should bring the text under the supervision of another committee to approve or not. The third stage is about approving the melody of the lyric by another committee. The final stage is about approving the photo of the

fanana at the cover of the audiocassette tape. The *fanana* in that photo should appear with a conservative look and a conservative dress (*muhtashima*).

Nowadays, Musa said, “there are many *fananaat* that accepted these parameters and have their songs within the library of the Radio of Omdurman. However, Musa and Suliman agreed that the songs that submitted to the parameters and to the ideology of the Council could not be called *aghani al-banat* because these songs have a known male composer and belong to a known singer (A. Suliman, personal communication, June 20, 2001). As such, the contemporary songs performed by the *fananaat*, Musa added, become a shared effort of the singer, the composer, and the lyric writer. However, Musa complained, despite the parameters made by the Council and its related committees there are many reported incidents of the distribution of audiocassette tapes that did not conform to the strategies and aims of the Council. As such, the Council confiscated many audiocassette tapes of *aghani al-banat* that the Council perceives as *habita* [loose] and inconsistent with the Islamic values of the society. Then, I asked Musa if there were specific singers that have been forbidden from singing through the media institutions in the Sudan? Musa said: “I remembered in the 1980s that director of Television of Omdurman (the national television of Sudan) stopped the recording of songs and the broadcasting of the performance of the *fanana* Hanan Bolo Bolo because of her dance and the naivete of her songs”.

It is very crucial to mention here that the measures used by the mass media and its related institutions to control the performance of the *ghanayaat* also extended to control the *fananaat* who perform other types of singing. Those *fananaat* recently turned to perform *aghani al-banat* because they were left with no option other than to perform in

private wedding occasions, the domain of *aghani al-banat*. The postcolonial Islamist discourse of womanhood works consciously to limit the public participation of the Sudanese woman.

Conclusion

This chapter has shown that the control of women and their sexuality is central to the politics of national and cultural authenticity of the Islamist state in Sudan. Women bear the burden of being “mothers of the nation”, as well as being those who produce the boundaries of ethnic/national groups, and who transmit the Sudanese Culture. The urban Sudanese women have been facing conflicting state ideologies and have experienced continuous forms of control by the same state and the gender relations of the Sudanese society.

The chapter argued that the *tom-tom* songs appeared in the 1930s as songs of working class urban ex-slave poor women living in *Radifs* and *Daims* of urban centers of the Sudan. Since its appearance in the 1930s *tom-tom* singing heavily influenced the prevalent *Al-hageeba* male type of singing in Omdurman. The discussion also emphasized the role of the media (the Radio) in the 1940s in controlling women’s performance. In this respect, I argued that through the radio appeared the division between *tom-tom raqi* [sophisticated], propagated by *Al-hageeba* male singers to compete with the female performers of the 1930s, and unsophisticated *tom-tom*. Subsequently the divisions between *fanana*, who perform sophisticated *tom-tom* on the radio, and the *ghanaya* who perform in wedding celebrations, took place through the Radio institution in the 1940s.

Aghani al-banat as a cultural practice or popular music by Sudanese women has been an “object” of many debates and an “object” of the continuous processes of labeling. The main objective of these labeling processes is to control the Sudanese woman’s participation in Culture. In trying to understand why *aghani al-banat* is gendered, I asked many informants about their opinions. The informants tried to obscure the realization that *aghani al-banat* have been controlled and trivialized by the print and mass media. In fact, the conflicting labeling processes of this type of singing is a clear proof of the media control over women and their singing. The question still remains: Why have other types of singing dominated by men never been labeled as men’s/boys’ singing? It is evident, as I mentioned in Chapter One, that popular culture consumed by women is gendered and therefore particular, whereas popular culture consumed by men is ungendered and therefore universal.

CHAPTER FOUR

EXPANDING THE SCOPE OF ETHNOGRAPHY

This chapter focuses on postcolonial and feminist approaches to methodology and critical ethnography. The chapter discusses the data gathering/data analysis methods applied in this research. The chapter also includes a discussion on the interviewing process during the “fieldwork” in Sudan and a discussion on how I locate myself in the interviewing process/living the data. Thus, the chapter discusses how the politics of location and representation are being incorporated in this methodology. Combining the postcolonial approach to critical ethnography and interpretive research methods this chapter provides a means through which the research questions are addressed.

Postcolonial/Feminist Approaches to Methodology and Critical Ethnography

Postcolonial theory tries to apply epistemological issues of subjectivity/agency, representation, politics of location, and methodological approaches, usually ethnographic methods that displace the colonial discourse about the third world. Critical ethnography “problematizes ethnographic work by self-reflexively questioning the ethnographic researchers within the field. Rather than raising consciousness of the “researched”, critical work raises consciousness of the researcher” (Lengel, 1995, p.27). In this respect, a postcolonial approach to critical ethnography enables postcolonial researchers to engage themselves in questions about the extent to which their methods and arguments legitimize or displace the colonialist discourse about the “other”.

There is a small but growing literature about third world scholars who migrated to the U.S. and are returning home to study their own cultures (Narayan, 1993; Lal, 1999).

This postcolonial ethnographic research foregrounds the author/ity of the researcher-ethnographer and ethnographic texts. “Issues of nativity have once again come to the fore analyses of ‘non-western’ and ‘third world’ societies, but it is now the nativity of the *researcher* rather than the research subject that is problematized” (Lal, 1999, p.101, emphasis original). This ‘return of the native’ in recent anthropological debates, as Narayan (1993) argued, specifically problematizes the assumption of an “authentic insider”, arguing instead for the recognition that we all occupy multiple and fluid locations.

The critique of dualisms such as, subject/object, researcher/researched, specifically insider/ outsider has been furthered to decolonize anthropology by postmodern ethnographers and by feminists questioning the role of the native female researcher (e.g. Abu-Lughod, 1991; Narayan, 1993; Lal, 1999). Subsequently, there have been recent attempts to theorize from locations of multiple and hybrid identities. The argument is that we all live in contradictory locations. “As a politics it is a feminist and anti-colonial intellectual location that we choose to position ourselves into, rather than being assigned into it on the basis of our gender, class, race, ethnicity, sexuality, nationality or other identity-based ontological categories” (Lal, 1999, p. 115).

The ‘returning home’ postcolonial feminist researchers applying ethnography in their research concerned themselves, Lal argued, with two important issues: politics of location and politics of representation. Regarding the issue of politics of location in living the text in the field the researchers discuss the implications for the author/ity of the text in the light of academic discourses of epistemic privilege and the presumed authenticity of native accounts. Therefore, the postcolonial feminist politics of location

enjoins us to focus our attention on the hyphen at which Self-Other join in the research process and to work against inscribing the “Other”. As Haraway (1988), argued the politics and epistemologies of location questions our relationships as researchers with those whom we study and represent to ensure that the “object of knowledge is pictured as an actor and agent, not as a screen or a ground or a resource” (p. 592).

On the other hand, postcolonial methodologies are concerned with issues of politics of representation. In this respect, the politics of representation refers to the need to situate research responses into a larger historical and societal contexts that can frame a meaning, in order to avoid the risk of either giving voice *to* stereotypes or perpetuating stereotypes *about* one’s research subjects. Moreover, postcolonial feminist researchers explore the politics of representation in writing the text by “examining how engaging with research subjects’ agency and resistance to ethnographic authority provide their own (less partial) account through self-representations” (Lal, 1999, p.102). Subsequently, postcolonial feminist researchers engaging in the discussions of politics of location and politics of representation are seeking to explicate the manner in which the ‘*problem of the voice*’ (‘speaking for’ and ‘speaking to’) intersects with the problem of place (speaking ‘from’ and speaking ‘of’) (Lal, 1999).

Ethnographic research methods, applied by feminist scholars ‘returning home’, more specifically in-depth interviewing, are applied in my work in order to reflect on the musical and life experience(s) of three Sudanese women performers. Moreover, the issue of self-reflexivity practiced by ethnographic postcolonial researchers help in situating my views and my voice as a feminist postcolonial researcher that work against the grain of the totalizing voice of authority that determines an “authentic” racial or cultural identity.

The Ethnography of Living the Text (The Songs)

As mentioned earlier I used to listen to the lyrics of *aghani al-banat* since I was a little girl because the songs are part of many rituals and occasions in Sudan. However, listening to the lyrics through the ears of a researcher (who is working toward analyzing the songs) is a difficult yet a challenging experience.

I started my listening process as a researcher since before I left for Sudan where I listened to the tapes and tried to produce my own meanings to the lyrics. When I reached Sudan I listened to more tapes and I listened to live performance of Hawa when she sang some of the songs she composed during our discussion (chatting). Thus listening was the sense I developed and strengthened more during the whole research process.

Because *aghani al-banat* are usually sung at wedding occasions I attended two wedding celebrations in Khartoum in order to listen to the songs within their context. The two wedding celebrations I attended gave me an insight to the recent developments in wedding festivals. Attending these two wedding occasions allowed me to experience, through participant observation, how issues of cultural hybridity and the importation of popular cultural elements from other nations are being incorporated into *aghani al-banat* and how are they molded and delivered by the *ghanayaat*. Thus being part of these two parties gave me a deeper insight (as a researcher) to the role of the *ghanayah* in the wedding rituals. I attended these invitations as a guest with the eyes and ears of a researcher.

Research Methods

In this research I depended on interpretive methods of data collection and data analysis mostly applied by postcolonial and feminist researchers such as Lal (1999) and Lengel (1995) respectively. Interpretive research is an inductive procedure to arrive at empirically grounded understandings and explanations of social phenomena. In this interpretive research I used the following qualitative methods of data gathering.

In-depth Interviews

I applied in-depth interviews as a method of data collection with the three Sudanese women singers. In this regard the interviews were open-ended. I decided on a conversation theme with which I entered into a dialogue with the singers. My choice of open-ended or in-depth interviewing depends on the purpose of the research enquiry. The research aims at understanding the experiences of Sudanese women, in the public domain as performers, and their personal experiences as women. Thus the atmosphere of (chatting) about the issues of music and singing, generated by open-ended interviews, helped in enabling the informants to express their experiences as interrelated and not as isolated and relevant to the research phenomenon only.

Moreover, in-depth interviews are also more suitable to this research than other methods of data gathering because they are applied as a tool to provide a space to historicize and document the narratives and experiences of the Sudanese women singers. In this respect the in-depth interviews I carried out with the women singers is chosen as a means to help in transforming the oral history of these singers into a written historical text.

There are large numbers of Sudanese women performers but the study confines itself to applying in-depth interviews to three performers. I deliberately chose three performers (Hawa, Hanan, and Amal) who live in Greater Khartoum and represent different generations of Sudanese women singers. Hawa was chosen because she is one of a few *ghanayaat* who compose their own lyrics of *aghani al-banat* and also because she is among the few Sudanese women who took a leading political role during the fight against colonialism in Sudan. Hanan is a performer who “modernized” *aghani al-banat* by introducing new musical instruments to her performance as well as the first *ghanaya* to become a dancer in public forums.

Amal was chosen as a part of the new wave of *fananat* who gained publicity through the media and newly entered the experience of performing *aghani al-banat*. Amal is basically known for performing other style of singing dominated by male performers. Yet Amal’s narrative is important to be included as part of the narratives of the performers of *aghani al-banat* because this research is approaching *aghani al-banat* and the performers of *aghani al-banat* as part of, and not isolated from, the broad musical history of Sudan. In other words methodologically, I am interested in viewing the periphery *aghani al-banat*: the “trivial” or the “loose” and the center (the classical and other forms of music in Greater Khartoum) as overlapping and informing each other in a specific way. Worth of note is the different musical experiences of the three performers provide space for exploring the relationship between the *ghanayaat/fananaat*, media, and discourses of modernity.

The three performers included in this research reflect the non-homogeneity of the performers and their experiences regarding their class, education, age, and ethnicity. One

of the three performers included in the research Amal belongs to an educated middle class family. While, on the other hand, Hawa and Hanan are two singers from lower class families and have limited education.

The three performers represent different age groups. Hawa, is in her late seventies and the eldest of the three singers, and she started singing in the 1930s. While, on the other hand Amal and Hanan are in their late thirties and early forties, and started singing in the mid 1980s and the beginning of 1980 respectively.

Hawa originally came from El-Obieyd in Western Sudan and she moved to Omdurman in the 1930s. Hanan lives in Odurman and is believed to be of Ethiopian origins. Amal originally came from Wad Medani (central Sudan) and now lives in Khartoum. Thus, it is important to note that the voices and experiences of the three singers, included in this research, should be understood as examples of voices of some Sudanese women performers in Sudan and are not in any way a generalization about Sudanese women performers.

The need to include the stories and narratives of the *ghanayaat* is a postcolonial political act. In this respect, the attempt is to understand the discourse(s) of the lyrics from those who live the realities rather than from “our imperialist academic vantage points, ever ready to appropriate the experience of others into our preordained theoretical categories” (Smith, 1987; Hale, 1988; Lal, 1999). For a postcolonial critique what is at stake is to view the past/recent, colonial/post-colonial, and text/context as informing each other in specific and specifiable ways.

Structured Individual Interviews

Beside the in-depth interviews I applied individual interviews that included defined topics for discussion with seven Sudanese men and women. These individual interviews included two Sudanese women researchers, a male poet/media affiliated, and a researcher in the department of Folklore Studies at Khartoum University. The interviews also included a male singer living in the diaspora (Iowa City), a Ph.D. candidate at Ohio University, and a professor at the Institute of Music and Drama in Khartoum. The individual interviews are applied in order to fill in the lack of written literature about *aghani al-banat* in terms of history, labeling/naming process, and in terms of the relationship of the media institutions in Greater Khartoum with *aghani al-banat* and the *ghanayaat*. Worth mentioning is that these seven individual interviews ranged from 1 hour –1.1/2 hours with each person.

The Audience

After I returned from Sudan I conducted a group interview with four Sudanese women as audiences living in Iowa City in March 2002. Iowa City is chosen for the group interviews because it represents a growing community of Sudanese immigrants.

“Making meaning is a social process arising out of interaction with others” (Van Zoonen, 1994, p. 138). For feminist research, group interviews enable women to exchange experiences and build on each other’s ideas. My attempt in including the Sudanese women audience living in the U.S. in the research discussion is aimed at unveiling some of the diasporic voices and experiences with *aghani al-banat* and it is an attempt to join my voice as an immigrant and an audience with these diasporic voices.

The Interviewing Process

Before I went to Sudan I conducted a preliminary group discussion in Iowa City in the Summer of 1999. The group included a famous Sudanese male singer called Yousif al-Mousili, a Sudanese lady, called Khalida, who studied music in Sudan and had a limited experience in singing, and her husband who also had a musical background. The group discussion was about the label “*aghani al-banat*” and about the perceptions of the interviewees to the lyrics of *aghani al-banat*. The group discussion at Iowa City was brainstorming and I quite benefited from al_Mousili’s suggestions about the Sudanese intellectuals I could contact in Sudan who have rich information about *aghani al-banat*.

The fieldwork in Sudan began in mid of May (2001) and ended in mid August (2001). When I reached Sudan, I had in my mind al-Mousili’s suggestion to meet a Sudanese male poet called El-Tigani El-Haj Musa who has, I am quoting Al-Mousili, “rich information and knowledge about the history of *aghani al-banat*”. When I reached Sudan I started my interviews with Musa who is also the Assistant Secretary General of the Council for Classifying Literary and Artistic Texts in Sudan an office that was established in the late 1970s. The Council gained momentum recently because of the Islamist cultural orientation that necessitates the application of more censorship to all artistic texts in Sudan.

My interview with Musa centered on historical information about *aghani al-banat* and focused on the role of the Council in publicizing or controlling the publicity of *aghani al-banat* and their performers. Because there is no written information about the

history of *aghani al-banat*, as I mentioned earlier, I have relied heavily on the information from Musa.

Musa suggested meeting Dr. Afaf al-Sadiq a Sudanese woman intellectual who wrote her Ph.D. thesis in the 1970s on the *lolay* (lullaby) songs which is a form of women's singing in Sudan. I met Al-Sadiq in her office at Al-Ashiqqa for Publication and Printing where she is the Executive Director of the corporation. My interview with al-Sadiq was rich and she brought up many examples of *aghani al-banat* sung in the past and in contemporary times. Al-Sadiq and I exchanged our views as researchers who are interested in exploring women's songs in Sudan.

Through al-Sadiq I had the opportunity to contact another Sudanese researcher (Arwa al-Rabi) who is doing her Master degree on *aghani al-banat* from a purely musical perspective. Arwa was working on her graduate studies at the Institute of Music and Drama in Khartoum when we met for an individual interview. With Arwa I discussed many issues regarding her perception of the lyrics of *aghani al-banat* as an audience, as a musician, and as a researcher.

Important to this research is the fact that Al-Sadiq, Al-Rabi, and another intellectual Sudanese woman living in the U.S. (Asma Halim) are defined as back ground data for the history and development of the *aghani al-banat* and they are defined in this research as audiences who listen to the songs.

I contacted the first performer Hawa through my mother's neighbor and friend who knows Hawa. Hawa came to see me with our neighbor in my family home in Khartoum for the interview (chatting). The in-depth interview with Hawa was an extended interview that took more than three hours where she talked about her personal

life and her singing experience in both the past and the present. Hawa herself is a living symbol for the history of *aghani al-banat* as she is singing for more than six decades.

My access to the second *ghanayya* (Hanan) was also made through a chain of women. Arwa gave me a phone number of a lady that knows the cellular phone number of Hana whom I called and scheduled a meeting with her in her home in Al-A'wdaa neighborhood in Omdurman area. The interview with Hanan took an hour and a half. Because she had been ill I could not extend the interview. I tried to contact Hanan later but she was unavailable. I continued trying to contact Hanan from the U.S. through the phone because I felt that I needed to speak more to her about her experience as a show dancer but that was unsuccessful.

The last interview with Amal was done through my brother-in-law who has a good relationship with Amal and her family in Khartoum. I got to know Amal through him and we met together at my family's home in Khartoum. To have two of the three interviews in my family's home was the choice of the two singers Hawa and Amal. The site of the interviews (my family home) should not be understood as implying the power of the researcher over the interviewees. The two singers (Hawa and Amal) chose the site of the interview because they thought it is more convenient or more accessible than the other choice of meeting them in their homes or other "neutral" places of their choice.

The Postcolonial Politics of Location:

Postcolonial researchers launched a debate on the “native” insider/outsider in anthropology and fieldwork. For instance, Narayan (1993) argued that the *native* anthropologist is assumed to be an insider who will forward an “authentic” point of view to the anthropological community. Native anthropologists, then, are perceived as insiders regardless of their complex backgrounds. “The fact that we are often distanced-by factors as varied as education, class, or emigration-from the societies we are supposed to represent tends to be underplayed” (Narayan, 1993, p.677). To deconstruct the generic term of “insider anthropologist” Narayan (1993) and Abu-Lughod (1992) call for the *enactment of hybridity*. Hybridity, as mentioned earlier, does not only mean the identity formation of a person (the researcher) but also means that every anthropologist carries both a personal and an ethnographic self. In this scheme, “we are all incipiently bi-(or multi-) cultural in that we belong to worlds both personal and professional, whether in the field or at home” (Narayan, 1993, p. 681).

Therefore, I had my own locations as a feminist, an audience, and a middle-class western-educated Sudanese woman. Moreover, through *enactment of hybridity* I have chosen to join in this research my hybrid identities of being a feminist researcher and being an audience of *aghani al-banat*. My first location is my professional from which I do not relate to the singers as an “authentic insider”. In fact, the experiences and lives of the *ghanayaat* in Sudan always appeared to me as remote. To the singers I might also not be defined as an “insider” and could be defined as belonging to the community of Sudanese women who relate to the singers as mere entertainers who come to perform in their occasions.

Moreover my second location is a personal one. During all the interviews I conducted and during the writing process of the research I made visible my location as an audience. I could not/would not escape my location as an audience because I grew up with these songs that are part of many cultural rituals in the Sudanese society. Accordingly, from these hybrid locations I insisted in making myself visible in the discussion and the dialogue with the performers and the audience. Through my professional (researcher) and personal locations (audience) I shared my views with the *ghanayaat* as a feminist and an audience who is living in the U.S. and returned home to reflect on a women's culture that I am a part of as a "consumer".

I faced many difficulties in placing myself in relation to specifically one *ghanayah* (Hanan), and I faced some difficulties in writing about the songs and the interviews. However, this is a concern of many postcolonial researchers who discussed the politics of location in living the text in the field. By approaching the singers through people I know I thought that I took the most important step in resolving the "trust" issue between the "researcher" and the "researched". Yet my experience in interviewing Hanan showed that the "trust" issue and the gap between the "researcher" and the "researched" sometimes is difficult to be narrowed in two hours discussion. When I met Hanan in her home I introduced myself by the full name and I approached her as a researcher and an audience who is interested in discussing the experiences of some Sudanese women singers and she is among the singers I am interested in talking with.

Despite my attempt to become visible and clear about the purpose of meeting her, Hanan was suspicious of me. She interviewed me at the beginning and asked me about my family name "Malik" and if it is the same family name of a famous rich family in

Khartoum. She also asked me why I am interested in studying *aghani al-banat*? When I will be returning back to America? What did I study in America? In interviewing me Hanan acquired the power of controlling the discussion and by questioning me at the beginning of the interview, Hanan indicated that the “trust” issue was not quite resolved from her side. All the responses of Hanan to the themes of the interview were very brief and she was hesitant in responding to the issues concerning her dancing experience, her personal life, marriage, and family relations and how these relations impacted on her professional life.

I shared my experience of interviewing Hanan with my friend Al-Rabi’(with whom I developed a very strong relationship after our interview/discussion) who said to me: “everybody knows Hanan is not a flexible person and she is very arrogant”. Al-Rabi’ added that: “the *ghanayaat* are being bothered continuously by some Sudanese women who are affiliated with the Islamist government that is trying to control the *ghanayaat* and to control singing. Thus recently the *ghanayaat* become more and more untrusting to the ‘strangers’” (A. Al-Rabi’, personal communication, June 20, 2001). I took Arawa’s justification about the pressure the *ghanayaat* are experiencing now from the government as a possibility about Hanan not being cooperative with me in the interview as I wished she would be.

My experience in interviewing Hanan and the “trust” issue supported the postcolonial and feminist discussion about the “nativity” of the insider. The point is not only about the “authentic insider”/ “outsider” the interviewing process is largely about how the broad ideological and political processes that govern the context in which the

interviews took place impact the internal relationship between the “researcher” and the “researched”.

Analyzing the Songs

Because *aghani al-banat* as a style of singing is complex and varied and includes hundreds of songs, it is very difficult to choose those most important to understanding *aghani al-banat*. As I mentioned in the previous chapter the *tom-tom* songs marked the individual performance of Sudanese women in the 1930s and appeared as working-class songs. This style of *aghani al-banat* is concerned with romantic, social, economic, political, and fashion experiences. Accordingly, it was determined these would be most appropriate in interpreting the role of *aghani al-banat* in women’s lives. However, the number of *tom-tom* songs exceeds hundreds of songs. Accordingly, the research provides some example of *aghani al-banat* that have been sung in the 1950s, 1960s, 1970s, 1980s, 1990s, and the current songs of 2000-2001. These decades represent the generations of three performers included in the research and also encompass the wide range of years of their singing experiences. Moreover, my choice of historical analysis is generated by the realization that almost all the lyrics of *aghani al-banat* talk about events and incidents in specific historical periods in Sudan.

Most of the Sudanese musicians believe that the 1930s crystallize the appearance of *tom-tom* as a popular culture of performance. Thus the research includes some examples of that era from the memory of the people and the singers I interviewed. The songs that are included in the analysis of the research are the songs sung by the performers I interviewed and songs performed by other singers. The examples of the

songs in this research are basically from recorded songs on audiocassette tapes, songs that are composed by and sung by Hawa during the interview, and songs from the memories of the people I interviewed while they revealed the historical development of *aghani al-banat*. The Sudanese people largely depend on memory and oral history in documenting the historical and social processes they experience.

Textual Analysis

The research applied historical textual analysis to *aghani al-banat* as a method to facilitate the understanding of what meaning is produced in the lyrics of *aghani al-banat* performed by the *ghanayaat*.

Textual analysis is an approach that allows for the interpretation of texts in relation to their cultural contexts in which they operate. The aim of textual analysis, as J. Fair (1996) argued, is not to find truth in a pristine or unadulterated form hiding in the text, but to understand how a particular system of words and meaning define and shape ways of knowing. “Texts, of course, are open. They can take on many different meanings, though one meaning may dominate; and interpretations themselves are subject to interpretation. Hence, textual analysis does not provide ‘the meaning’ of texts but strive to render texts meaningful by placing them with relevant interpretive framework” (J. Fair, 1996, P.8).

Through historical textual analysis I divided the songs/lyrics included in this research into nine themes. Each theme is defined as a theme depending on the repeated messages, topics, and the relations (power, class, gender) the lyrics address. However, it is worth mentioning that the process of thematizing the songs is a difficult one due to the

interrelations and intertextuality that characterize *aghani al-banat*. For instance a song might begin as a love/romantic song then it shifts to talk about politicians and politics. Accordingly, thematizing the lyrics is done for analytical purposes and it does not mean that the songs in “reality” are separated according to the topics they address. Historical textual analysis allowed for relating the changes of the texts of the songs to broad ideological, political, economic, gender, and cultural processes taking place in the Sudanese society.

The Postcolonial Politics of Representation: Analyzing the Interviews

Each of the audio taped interviews and songs were transcribed and translated. As Nelson (1989) stated “it is during the labor of transcribing that the researcher performs the actual transformation from listening to speech to the writing of speech, of making visible the invisible” (Nelson, 1989, p. 229).

The individual interviews and the group discussions are then summarized and distributed in the text (the research) as quotations to support and inform the different chapters of the research. The group discussion and individual interviews with the audiences are also summarized showing the variety of the audiences’ views regarding *aghani al-banat*, the *ghanayaat*, empowerment, and pleasure.

In relation to the in-depth interviews with the three performers I made a choice to write the text of the interviews as it took place during the interview process. In this respect, I chose not to interrupt the flow of the voices of the singers and present them as topics. The voices of singers are represented as narratives or as stories told by them to me during our interviews.

Narrative transforms “informants” whose role to provide cultural data for the anthropologist into subjects with complex lives and a range of opinions. Narrative and analysis, as Narayan (1993) argued, are categories we tend to set up as opposites, yet a second look reveals that they are contiguous, with a broader open even the most full-scale crossovers. Thus, the analysis of the voices and the stories of the three singers have been made in relation to the research questions and in relation to the postcolonial discourses of “modernity”/ “tradition”, and also the issues of class and education that classify women performers in Sudan. As well as analyzed in relation to the discourses about women performers in the Sudan and in relation to the relationship between the “researcher” and the “researched”. Accordingly, analysis itself is most effective when it builds directly from events and cases evoked by the narrative, so providing a chance to step away, reflect on, and reframe or weave the particulars of the storie(s) with the broad and general. Again “calling for a greater integration of narrative into written texts does not mean that analysis to be abandoned, but rather that it moves over, giving vivid experience an honored place beside it” (Narayan, 1993, p. 682).

Finally I should mention that part of the transcribing went simultaneously with the interviews. I found myself in an agreement with Ram (2002) that such simultaneity allows the researcher constantly to reevaluate the topics of the interviews and the interviewing style. Glesne and Peshkin (1992) argued that data analysis that was done simultaneously with interviews enables qualitative researcher to focus and shape the study as it proceeds. Kane (1995) notices that the research process is a dynamic system involving repetitive loops. Researchers when proceed in sorting out material and seeking

patterns, themes, and categories may find that they need to collect more information to support their ideas (Kane, 1995).

I have to mention that I developed strong relations with some of the informants of this research and I contacted them from the U.S. through phone seeking further information about areas in their interviews that I felt needed more elaboration.

Conclusion

By applying in-depth interviews with individuals and in group discussion I tried to understand one social/cultural practice (*aghani al-banat*) and to understand the musical and personal experiences of the three performers. Moreover, in these interviews I attempted to include different perceptions about *aghani al-banat* from the point of views of Sudanese women and men who hold intellectual as well as ordinary life styles and experiences. I wanted to hear more voices and views about *aghani al-banat* and I wanted to weave these gendered experiences in one fabric.

The debate on the politics of location launched by postcolonial research and adopted in this research revealed that knowledge is a social practice emerged from the interaction of the “researcher” with the “researched”. Knowledge is also partial depending on the location of the researcher and from where the researcher speaks. The methodology showed that the politics of location worked as a path through which I worked the hyphens of insider/outsider and also reflected in my multiple locations as an audience as a researcher. The politics of representation, on the other hand, showed that the meanings emerging from the interviews and the songs are not ‘out there’ ready for the researcher to explore them. Rather that the researcher’s representation of the texts by

contextualizing them within the contexts on which they emerge at a specific moment of time is what renders the texts meaningful.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE NARRATIVES OF THREE WOMEN PERFORMERS

Reality itself is negotiated in a back and forth process that modifies each party's (the researcher and the narrators) understanding...the negotiated reality is a social emergent. It comes into being because of the relationship and 'belongs' to the relationship rather than to either of the parties. This intersubjective reality is also the ground in which the text develops (Long, 1999, p. 68).

This chapter provides a discursive space for the voices of three Sudanese women singers who have different life experiences and have different agencies regarding their subject positions as *ghanayaat/fananaat* and as women. The chapter explores how the *fananaat* negotiate their position as female singers through highlighting their perceptions to and relationships among each other as *ghanayaat/fananaat*, their perception to *aghani al-banat* (the "other"), and through highlighting their artistic experiences as *fananaat*. In addition, the chapter discusses the relationship of the three *fananaat* with institutions (such as the media and the record production companies).

The views of the three *ghanayaat/fananaat* were conveyed to me in a specific setting and in a specific historical moment of time. Accordingly, these narratives and views should be understood as a representation of specific subject positions chosen by each of the three women in response to my concerns and questions. In these interviews I also had my own locations as a feminist, an audience, and a middle class western educated Sudanese woman. Moreover, the narrative analysis of this chapter attempts to break down the divisions between the researcher and researched by locating the narratives of the *fananaat* within the internal politics of the research (researcher/researched). Issues of class, education, and age that worked to integrate/disintegrate the researcher and the research subjects, discussed in the methodology, are particularly

reflected in this analysis. I also attempt to locate the narratives of the *fananaat* within the external broad political, ideological, gender, and economic processes (discussed in Chapter Three) that shape the Sudanese society and its subjects.

The Narrative of Hawa al-Tagtagah: The Multi-Faceted Life of Struggle

As mentioned earlier in Chapter Three, I met Hawa in my family house in Khartoum. My mother's neighbor and friend who escorted Hawa to our home had informed me about the importance of providing Hawa, when she comes to chat, with cigarettes because she will be expecting that as part of our hospitality. Thus, my mother and sister helped in preparing tea, coffee, and we prepared a whole packet of cigarettes to welcome Hawa.

Hawa is an old but energetic woman of a clear sense of humor. She is a simple woman who owns a simple house in Omdurman despite being a performer for more than six decades. Due to the age gap between Hawa and myself, I called her through out the interview *haja*³ Hawa as she wished to be called. Hawa had mastered at least two different genres of performance. She had participated in performing songs during World War II praising the Sudanese soldiers who fought. Second, she has been composing and performing songs sung by other *ghanayaat* to the bride, guests, the groom's/bride's families. In addition, Hawa's songs describe a metaphoric body as a common theme. Accordingly, historically Hawa played an important role at both the political level, through her participation in political events prior to Sudan's independence, and at the

³ *Haja* is a title that is given to old women in Sudanese society. The term *haja* in Arabic means the pilgrim. However, the title is usually given to an old woman or old man (*haj*) regardless of whether one has taken an actual religious trip.

level of producing and reproducing images about the identity formation of the Sudanese woman through her role as a composer of songs for the bridal dance.

Smoking her first cigarette and drinking the first cup of coffee Hawa began her narrative by introducing herself as: “My name is Hawa Jah Ar-Rasoul Mohamed al-Tayeb. My family is from Ab Haraz area, and we lived in many cities in Central and Western Sudan, such as Rufaa, Al-Rahad, and al-Obied. I finished my school education at the fourth grade elementary level. I was married to my cousin for a brief period of time, but I divorced him because of I wanted to be a singer and he would not allow me to do that. After my divorce, I came alone to Khartoum in the 1930s because the male members of my family rejected or deserted me as a *ghanaya* and as part of the family and I was dismissed from home.” In this respect, Hawa mentioned a striking story about her uncle who once tried to kill her (she showed me the scar from that attempt) when he learned from Hawa’s mother that Hawa wanted to become a *ghanaya*. Hawa encapsulated her experience as follows: “Can’t you see how much did I suffer in my life? I have been dismissed from home and I have chosen to live as a single woman with no children of my own since the 1930s because I wanted to become a singer. I took a very difficult path in my life full of sacrifices. In fact, I paved the way for other singers who found the way towards singing easy.”

In the 1930s and 1940s in Khartoum, Hawa appeared as a *ghanaya* performing in wedding occasions. At the beginning of Hawa’s career in Khartoum, gender segregation in the Sudanese society, especially in Northern and Central Sudan, was very acute. As Boddy (1988) has argued, in the Muslim societies of Northern Sudan, females were largely associated with enclosure, with the maintenance of the household; males are

associated with the precarious outside world, with political and economic life. The gender- segregated, but complementary, spaces of men and women were also reflected in the architecture of the houses in the villages and the cities. For instance, as Costantinides, (1985) explained, old houses had a *hosh rigal* (a men's salon or quarter) and a *hosh harem* (a women's quarter), and the house itself had two separate entries for men and women. Thus, the gender defined space of women created a distinct women's culture that is celebrated on occasions such as weddings, circumcisions, births, and *zar* where women gather to sing, chat, and gossip.

Accordingly, the performances of Hawa and other *ghanayat* of her generation were also limited to these occasions and these spaces. Moreover, within this limited space of performance, Hawa has experienced many difficulties in pursuing her career as a performer of wedding celebrations. Hawa said: "in the 1930s the bride's father would not allow the loud sound of the *daloka* to be heard in his home. Some men consider singing with a *daloka* as *ieb* (unacceptable act). In many times instead of playing the *daloka* in these rehearsals I used to play on a candy's container." I suffered a lot at that time because I used to sing for the bride during the rehearsals while I was afraid that the bride's father would dismiss me from his home if he heard the loud voice of the *daloka* and my singing.

It is very important at this juncture to emphasize the role of the *ghanaya* in the 1930s in wedding celebrations and rituals in Central Sudan. As Hawa mentioned, the *ghanaya* did not come to the wedding only to perform, but she was also a central part of the rituals of the wedding. Subsequently, Hawa said: "I used to stay in the bride's family home for fifteen days to entertain the guests and the family of the bride and I used to

exchange my performance for gifts I received from the bride's mother, such as gold rings, perfume, gold necklaces, sugar, tea, butter, coffee, and clothes. Beside these gifts, I also received *nogtah*⁴ from the women participating in the wedding celebration while I performed." The clear visibility of *nogtah* in the festive context, as Kapchan (1996) has argued for the Moroccan *shaikhat*, demarcates the *ghanaya* as a commodity, set apart from the audience.

Hawa continued describing her role in wedding rituals by saying: "I was not only a performer at the wedding party, but I was also responsible for the beautification of the bride's body. I used to be responsible for giving the bride her first *dukhan* [steam bath] and massaging the bride's body with *dilka* [homemade scented dough]." One the audiences added that: "the *ghanaya* was also responsible for introducing the bride to sexuality by providing information as to what would happen the first day of marriage (*dukhla*) between the bride and her husband" (A. Halim, personal communication, May 20, 2002). Moreover, Hawa as a *ghanaya* plays a vital role in teaching the bride how to dance for her husband at her wedding party. Hawa orchestrates the bride's body and its movement to the rhythm and lyrics of the songs she performs. One of the female audience members I interviewed said: "in the past, the bride that was not introduced to her dance by Hawa was not considered a complete bride" (I. Haseeb, personal communication, March 16, 2002). Hawa said to me that for many Sudanese families, she is not only a performer, but she is also considered a blessing "*bit bakhatu bay*."

⁴ *nogtah* is money (varying in amount from one woman to another) given to the *ghanaya* while she performs. The gift of the *nogtah* expresses the happiness by the giver and is a necessary encouragement for the *ghanaya* to continue singing. Moreover, the appearance of *nogtah* in women's gatherings distinguishes the *ghanaya* from other women in the gathering (i.e. the audiences) as it worked for commodifying the *ghanaya*.

Hawa: A Political Activist and a Legend of Resistance

Hawa's life hi(story) or narrative as female performer is distinctive because her experiences encompass the colonial and post-colonial eras in Sudan. Accordingly, she witnessed structural changes in the history of Sudan as well as contributed to making that history. Yet Hawa's history of political struggle has never been written or documented because of her marginal subject position in the Sudanese society as a "*ghanaya*" of "low status". Thus, Hawa tried to exploit every space in the interview to talk about her role in fighting against colonialism and her role in supporting the first national government in Sudan in 1956. Hawa's insistence on her political participation in Sudan suggests the way that she desired to be represented.

Many historians argue that the political struggle for Sudan's independence in 1956 began in 1947 through the formation of a political body called The Graduate Conference that was established by a famous political figure in Sudan called Ali Abdel-Latif. Hawa said: "the meetings of the Graduate Conference were held in *fananeen* (male singers' homes); I, however, was the only *ghanaya* to attend these meetings and I was the first Sudanese woman to participate in a demonstration led by politicians and laborers against colonialism in the late 1940s." In fact, for a Sudanese woman to appear in the front lines of the demonstrations in the 1950s was unique and "extraordinary" at that time and was reflected in a famous national song that says: "even women went out to the street equally with men...the soldiers of the country."

Hawa described her experience in the demonstration leading for Sudan's independence as follow: "I was attacked by a British officer and sent to jail in the Barbar

area of Northern Sudan for six months. Immediately after I completed the six months in jail, I joined a series of demonstrations against colonialism in many areas in Greater Khartoum, and I was sent to jail several more times. In fact I was sent to jail even before the British sent Ismail Al-Azhari, the first Sudanese president, to jail in the period prior to Sudan's independence in 1956."

Hawa is among the strong supporters of the first president of Sudan Ismail Al-Azhari. When al-Azhari died in 1960, Hawa got onto Radio Omdurman after a long period of time and sang a *manaha* mourning song for al-Azhari:

Ya Zaiem al-watan...harga al-qoloub narak

Aliela Al-Sudan faqad aham insan

Babki ya farris al-nidaal..kan al-mote shaorni kunt-a- afdak

Lakin al-kariem nadak wa li jinan al-naiem wadak.

"O"...the leader of the nation, your fire has burned our hearts.

Today the Sudan has lost his most important person.

I am weeping for the knight of struggle.

If death had consulted me, I would have sacrificed myself for you.

But God (the generous) has called you to be on his side...has taken you to

Paradise.

After singing that song, the military government of Aboud at that time sent Hawa immediately to jail. "My history is full of struggle and I formed history," Hawa said to me. The discussion with Hawa went on to include stories and scattered events that shaped Hawa's life as a Sudanese woman who revolted against the structure of gender

segregation and gender inequalities in the Sudanese society. Mohanty (1991) suggested that critical knowledge and political consciousness do not follow automatically from living in a marginalized social location; they develop only within the struggle against oppression when this struggle includes the work of remembering and re-narrating obscured experiences of resistance to, or tension with, social, political, and cultural norms. The narration of such experience, Mohanty argued, is no mere reporting of spontaneous consciousness. On the contrary, it involves rethinking and rearticulating painful memories and forging connections between these memories and collective struggle.

Hawa not only contributed to political and cultural events inside Sudan during the period 1930s-1950s, but she has also contributed and performed in cultural events in Egypt. Hawa said she snatched the opportunity to perform in the wedding of King Farouq of Egypt and Sudan in the 1940s, when Sudan was colonized by Britain and Egypt, despite the opposition she faced from a number of Sudanese politicians who were invited to attend that significant event. Hawa mentioned that the Sudanese politicians said to her: “we do not want any woman to accompany us to attend the King’s wedding. Besides, the King has Um Kolthoum and other well-known performers to entertain him. Your *daloka* singing, Hawa, will not compete with those singers and is not good enough to entertain the King.” Moreover, Hawa also joined a group of politicians who went to Cairo in 1952 to congratulate the first Egyptian president, Jama Abdel Nasir. She sang for him: “*Ahlan beik ya Jamal...Ahlan ya ramz al-nidaal*. [Welcome to you Jamal... Welcome to you the symbol of struggle].”

Hawa also had the opportunity to meet the most popular singer in the Arab world, Um Kolthoum, when she visited Sudan in the 1960s. Hawa said: “I showed Um Kolthoum some aspects of our Sudanese culture, and I took her to a wedding occasion on which I sang, and she also witnessed the bridal dance.”

Hawa as a *Ghanaya* and as the Mother of *Ghanayaat*

Hawa mentioned that she composed the most popular song in *aghani al-banat* (bridal dance songs) that is known in most parts of the country: “Al-mihaira [The Pony]”. Many brides danced to its *tom-tom* rhythm. Furthermore, Hawa composed “al-magdallah,” “al-mashtallah,” “alloul alloul,” and “gamar as-Sibou’ ad-dair [The Rotating Moon of Seven Days].” Her other love songs in a *tom-tom* rhythm include “ya al-hajarouk allia [Those Who Make You Leave Me]”, “al bi radio ibtalani [The One Who Cursed Me with His Love],” and “ya ballal allia [My Lover]”. Hawa performs her songs with the *daloka* only.

Identity is a continuous process of negotiating the self and the other(s); thus, Hawa’s perception of current *ghanayaat* has been made through a comparison between the relationship of the *ghanayaat* to her generation and the relationship of the *ghanayaat* to the present time. She said that in her generation the *ghanayaat* were close friends. “We not only shared the composition of the songs, but also shared our *tobs* and our jewelry with each other. Now, there is more competition because the *ghanayaat* sing for money. Moreover, the current *ghanayaat* are only repeaters of what I and my generation have composed and sung.” She also said, “the *ghanayaat* now also sing the old songs sung by famous male and female singers such as al-Kashif and Aisha al-Falatiyya and

make some changes or modifications to lyrics of these songs. Thus, there is nothing new in the songs that are performed by the *banat* [girls] now.”

Hawa has been described by many *ghanayaat*, specifically by Hanan Bolo Bolo, as the mother of their careers. Hawa mentioned that some *ghanayaat* such as Gisma and Samira Duniya occasionally come to her home and consult her about the words and the language of the lyrics they want to perform. Hawa provides her advice and asks these performers to change the messages that she thinks will not be accepted by a female audience. Hawa mentioned the lyrics of the following two songs:

Ya Ab Shara inshalla rajil mara

You, Ab Shara (a religious Sufi leader), I want a man even if he is
married to another woman.

and also:

Darien umor sabien...al-indo amartien

Ye-moot ba'ad shaharien...wa isajil li al-'amartien

Wa ana araj'li habeebi al-wasiem.

We want a man aged seventy,

Who has two towers and will die after two months,

And leave a will of the two towers to me...and I will go back to my handsome
lover.

Hawa communicated to the *ghanayaat* who perform these songs the anger and the complaints of female audiences about these songs because the first one encourages husbands to remarry and the second encourages young girls to marry older men to inherit

their wealth. “Some of the *ghanayaat* listen and respect my suggestions and others refer to me as “*marra kharfana* [a woman with a hazy mind].”

By telling these stories, Hawa gave depth to the role she plays between the performers (*ghanayaat*) and the audience (the Sudanese women that Hawa knows and chat with about *aghani al-banat*). The Sudanese female and male audiences listen to the messages of *aghani al-banat* that have the power to tell men directly what women want and expect from them. Women listening receive the messages and communicate their opinions about the lyrics to the *ghanayaat* through Hawa. Thus, Hawa plays the role of a gatekeeper who tries to filter the messages sent by *aghani al-banat* to the audience.

The “Modern” Media Institutions of Khartoum and the Performance of Hawa

The media (particularly radio) was established by colonial rule as a “modern” institution in 1945, initially through broadcasting news and then through its domination by male performers. The few women performers to enter Radio Omdurman at that time faced strong opposition from their male counterparts even though they literally followed the style of singing propagated by those male performers. Hawa appeared in the 1930s and 1940s as a *ghanaya* performing *aghani al-banat* with the *daloka*. However, this type of singing was not recognized and respected by the media institutions as a “modern type of singing” that could be given space in the media. It was only in the 1970s on a television program called “*souar sha’biya*” [folk images] that Hawa and other *ghanayaat* were given space in the media as performers of folk songs and introduced to larger audiences.

Hawa said: “while my songs were only broadcasted by the television once and I never recorded my songs on the radio, my songs are popular because they are distributed all over the country through the bridal dance and wedding occasions. I am very pleased that my songs are now sung in the U.S. by the immigrant male singer Sami al-Maghribi.”

The Narrative of Hanan Bolo Bolo

Hanan Bolo Bolo is a *ghanaya* who gained wide popularity in Sudan during the 1980s mainly because she was the first show-dancer in Sudan. In my interview with the famous Sudanese male singer Yousif Al-Mousili, he said that Hanan Bolo Bolo was the first *fanana* who publicized the bridal dance in the Sudan. In this respect, Al-Mousili argued, Hanan took the bridal dance that is usually performed in a private or limited space and applied it to a broad public space for the audience (men, women, and children).

Hanan lives in the Al-Awda neighborhood in the Omdurman area. Her three-story home, fancy new-model car, gardener, and housekeeper might initially suggest that her narrative would be about a self-made *ghanaya* who struggled enough to reach this position. When I arrived at Hanan’s home I was first welcomed by the housekeeper who told me I should wait for moments for Hanan to come and talk with me.

Hanan, whose full name is Hanan Abdela Abdel-Karim, told me the following: “ I started my artistic journey with singing songs in a children’s program broadcasted by the television of Omdurman at the mid 1970s. Because I sang a song about a bird called Bolo in that program, the audience gave me the nickname of Hanan Bolo Bolo. Later, I began my career as a *ghanaya* performing for private occasions and wedding celebrations, playing the *daloka* instrument only. Then I moved from playing *daloka* to performing

with a full musical band on private and public occasions. As soon as I began my career as a *ghanaya* performing for wedding occasions with the *daloka*, my relationship with Television and Radio Omdurman stopped.” As mentioned earlier, the television and the radio wouldn’t allow any *ghanaya* to perform the songs she performs in wedding celebrations as they considered by these two mediums as *habita* and sexually expressive.

Unlike Amal’s narrative, which will be discussed later, Hanan from the beginning of our dialogue took a position and adopted the language of a person who does not seek a common ground of experiences between the “researcher” and the “researched”. Hanan was very suspicious of me and I felt that in the way she first looked at me and in the way she welcomed me at her home. She asked me several times about my identity as a researcher living in the U.S. Hanan said: “Are you really writing your research on *aghani al-banat*? Are the people in the U.S. interested in *aghani al-banat*? She also asked me if my family name “Malik” is the same name of a famous rich family in Khartoum? I could argue that Hanan categorized and labeled me as an “outsider”: a researcher who belongs to the community of educated women and who usually judges *aghani al-banat* as “loose lyrics” and the *ghanayaat* who perform them as “loose women.” Subsequently, I argue, Hanan took the interview as a discursive space to voice her defensive opinion about *aghani al-banat* to the community of educated Sudanese women.

Thus, our dialogue was a process of shifting the identities of “researcher” and “*ghanaya*” and of negotiating the positions of “insider”/”outsider”. As a result, I switched from my professional location as an “ethnographic researcher,” an “outsider,” to my other personal location as a woman and as an audience (“insider”) in order to narrow

the gap between Hanan and me. Hanan's responses and her narrative, however, continued to be about defending *aghani al-banat* and defending her identity as a *ghanaya*.

While Hawa's main genre of performance in *aghni al-banat* centered in performing songs for the bridal dance, Hanan is known for performing and composing songs for the migrant Sudanese men in the Gulf States and the rich merchants in Sudan. Hanan appeared as a well-known *fanana* in Greater Khartoum in the early 1980s, specifically during the dictatorial regime of Nimeiri. The late 1970s and 1980s are very crucial decades in the development of the economic, social, and cultural fabrics of the Sudanese society. Sudan's national debt worsened, and the tragic famine of the 1983-84 occurred. Accordingly, Greater Khartoum witnessed an influx of displaced people who escaped from their famine-hit areas and from civil war in the South (Malik, 1995). Moreover, the two decades are characterized by the largest Sudanese migration in history to the countries of the Gulf, an event that changed the social and economic structure of Sudan. All these factors resulted in widening the gap between the rich and the poor in the Sudanese society. Women—specifically poor women—entered the singing business in large numbers in order to make a living. Consequently, the structure of *aghani al-banat* reveals drastic changes in the ethnicity of the *ghanayat* and in the lyrics during this time period. The *ghanayaat* were no longer exclusively ex-slave descendent women, and the lyrics of *aghani al-banat* became more and more sexually explicit. Accordingly, the media institutions in Sudan launched more criticism against *aghani al-banat*. Hanan as a performer is a product of these circumstances, and her story's defensive discourse should be read within that context.

Hanan claims that: “there is nothing wrong with *aghani al-banat*. The songs tell about what is going on in our world. For instance, Hanan explains: “I sang, ‘Wad al-gharib [The Son of the West]’ for the people of Western Sudan, and I sang ‘Farah Farah yal-azabah [Joy, joy, the Bachelors]’ for the immigrant Sudanese in the Gulf.” For her, there is no *ghuna habit*, “nonsense” or “bad/loose” singing. She continued by saying, “When we (the *ghanayaat*) sang *aghani al-banat*, the Sudanese people sang with us. If the people did not experience the realities of these songs, they would not have sung them. All the Sudanese people repeated ‘*Hamadah dah.*’ Even the Arabs in the Gulf States requested me to sing ‘*Hamadah dah.*’” Hanan also said: “*aghani al-banat* is a type of singing that is desirable and requested by the audience. As a performer I should please the audiences and not the media. I should sing the songs, *habita* or not, that audience ask me to perform. Thus, I would not call *aghani al-banat* ‘loose’ and ‘bad’”. In fact, here Hanan is responding to the opinions of some the Sudanese women audiences when they talked about the naivete of some of *aghani al-banat*. One of those audiences (Buthayna) said: “the *ghanayaat* are not *banat naas* (decent women) because they perform at weddings and because they perform naïve songs (B. Satti, personal communication, March, 16, 2002).

The Discourses of “Modernity” and “Tradition”

When Hanan represents herself as a performer of *aghani al-banat*, she repeatedly uses the words “heritage”, “grandmothers”, “mothers”, and “folklore” to describe the lyrics of the songs and to describe her relationship with the previous generation of *ghanayaat*. In this respect, Hanan said: “although the media says *aghani al-banat* is

habita (loose), *aghani al-banat* is a type of singing that has existed from the time of our grandmothers. The government not only criticizes *aghani al-banat*, but also it established the Council for Classifying Literary and Artistic Texts that controls the *fananaat* and dictates certain qualifications for the lyrics. Now we as *fananaat* are not allowed to perform *aghani al-banat* with its original old nature that passed to us by our grandmothers.”

When I asked Hanan about her relationship with other *ghanayaat*, she said she considered the *ghanayaat* (such as *haja* Hawa al-Tagtagah, Nasrah, *hajah* Aisha, and Gismah) as her mothers because they preceded her in performing *aghani al-banat*. “In the 1980s when I first appeared as a public performer of *aghani al-banat*, I used to meet with those *ghanayaat* regularly in each one’s house. In those gatherings, we used to hear each other’s singing and tried to help each other in composing the lyrics we sang.” Therefore, as Hawa mentioned earlier, composing the lyrics of *aghani al-banat* used to be a collective group experience of women.

To distinguish herself from the first generations of performers (her grandmothers and mothers), however, Hanan turned to the discourse of “modernity.” She said: “I am the first *fanana* to modernize *aghani al-banat* by introducing modern musical instruments in my performance of *aghani al-banat*.” By applying music in *aghani al-banat*, Hanan shifted this style of singing from lyrics to tunes. She introduced long musical intervals between the lyrics to allow herself to dance. Moreover, Hanan added: “In 1987, I appeared as the first *fanana istiradiya Sudaniya* (Sudanese show dancer). However, I stopped dancing now because the current government banned the dancing shows of the *ghanayaat*.”

The common terms used in Sudanese literature to refer to dancing and the woman who dances are *raqies* and *ragassa* respectively. Yet Hanan used the term '*fanana istiradiya*, which has an artistic connotation; it is not just *raqies* (dance), but it is a show that requires an artistic talent and training. Moreover, by using the term *fanana istiradiya*, Hanan distinguished herself from the other *ghanayaat* who dance in monosexual private gatherings and dance when they teach the bride how to dance on her wedding day. Hanan, in fact, used show dancing to present to the public the various ways that women may "use their bodies." Thus, Kapachan's argument (1996) that the Moroccan *shaikhat* codifies a possible repertoire of feminine movements into the social canon also applies here. The group of women audience members I interviewed held that people, especially men, attended Hanan's dancing shows because she was a pretty woman and a good dancer, not because she was a *mutriba* with a good voice. To me, Hanan as a show dancer always appeared as a courageous woman who stepped out of the norms of a Muslim society like Khartoum and performed a sexually expressive dance that many brides feel shy to perform even at a very close private setting.

To represent herself as a "modern" performer of *aghani al-banat*, Hanan said: "at the beginning I used to sing in wedding occasions and still do, but I moved into another stage of performing in theatres and abroad. Actually I took many singing trips abroad to Nigeria, Chad, Cameron, London, Germany, Holland, Oman, Cairo, Abu Dhabi, and Kuwait. I traveled to these countries with invitations to perform for private wedding celebrations and also for public occasions." With that move, Hanan introduced *aghani al-banat* to an international setting.

Hanan performs with her own musical band, a chorus (backup female singers), and organ accompaniment. She said her performance with the full musical band or the organ primarily depends on the preference of the people who ask her to perform for their occasions. To make her performance “modern” enough, Hanan said: “in these occasions, however, I sing *aghani al-banat*, and I also sing songs from other famous *fananeen*, such as Hassan Attiyah and Ahmad al-Mustafa.” Thus, Hanan presented herself as a *fanana* distinguished by her ability to perform the songs of the well-recognized male singers. In fact, from the beginning of our discussion, Hanan repeatedly said: “When I was a child saw the *fananeen* (male singers) such as Zeidan Ibrahim on television, I wanted to be a *fanana* like him.”

I could argue that Hanan made an intelligent political use of her position and location as a *fanana* in the generation of singers in the late 1970s and 1980s. This middle position between the first generations of *ghanayaat/fananaat* (1930-1960s) and the current *ghanayaat* allowed Hanan to sometimes adopt the language of the first generation while distinguishing herself from it by relating herself to “modernity.” In addition, this position allowed her to criticize the current *ghanayaat*. In this respect, Hanan said, “in our time in the 1980s we did not give much weight to money. What we were aiming at was to have a strong public base and popularity. *Alhamd lill Alah* I succeeded in proving myself as a *fanana*, and I have a very wide public base now.” In referring to the 1980s (her time) as the golden era of her career, Hanan uses the same discourse as Hawa, the career mother of Hanan, when she referred to the 1930s-1960s. Moreover, this position of being closely related to the old generation of *fananaat* allowed Hanan to describe her perception of the current *fananaat/ghanayaat*: “now the number of the singers far

exceeds the number of the cars in Khartoum. I see now large numbers of *fananaat* and many of them could not be able continue. I do not know if this is a wave that will fade soon or what?” Hanan also insisted in making clear her image as a role model for other *fananaat* who succeeded Hanan in show dancing, such as Awadia Izzeldin, Baha Abel-Karim, and Joahir.

The use of the gendered idioms “mother” and “grandmother,” the concepts of “folklore” and “heritage,” and the words *fanana*, modern musical instruments, and international music indicate Hanan’s attempts to actively employ the contrast between “modernity” and “tradition.” “The ‘non-western woman’ as a trope of feminist discourse [and post-colonial state discourses] is either non-modern or modern, she is seldom perceived as living a situation where there is a deeply felt tension between tradition and modernity” (Ong, 1988, p. 86, brackets added). Hanan’s narrative appeared to work the hyphen of this tension when she presented her singing as part of the “authentic” “traditional” women’s popular music in Sudan passed to Hanan’s generation from grandmothers and at the same time Hanan presented her singing as “modern” through highlighting her attempts to modernize *aghani al-banat* by including music and public dancing shows.

Hanan’s Relationship with the Media and the Record Production Companies

I wanted to move my discussion with Hanan to another aspect of her career to understand how she relates herself as a *fanana* with the media and the role of the record production companies in Sudan in her popularity. Hanan said she sings songs that she has composed and songs from unknown composers *aghani shabi’ya* [folk songs]. She

said she composed the following songs: “*Wadal-Gharib* [The Son of the West]”, “*Hamadah Dah* [This Hamadah]”, “*Ana mali al-khadar marag lie wadari* [My Lover Appeared for My Loss]”, “*Hannanah*”, “*Yuomah ana zooli ma gaah* [Mother, My Man Did Not Come]”. For other folk songs, Hanan usually adds new words to the old lyrics, such as “*bakait bi domoie* [I Cried with Tears]” and “*ya willaid al-naas* [“O”, the Son of Good People].”

The record production companies played an important role in Hanan’s appearance as a *fanana*. The first audiocassette tape she recorded was for Sarah Art’s Company in 1986. The tape was named for the song “Hamadah Dah [This Hamadah]” which was a huge success in the 1980s as the song “Hamada Dah” was among the first songs in *aghani al-banat* that talked and praised the Sudanese male migrants to the Gulf. The tape received wide popularity at that time inside Sudan and in the Gulf States, and as a result, she became better known by the audience. Hanan said she is not monopolized by any of the record production companies. In fact, she imposes her own terms on these companies. However, Hanan mentioned: “recently, like other *ghanayaat* in Sudan, I entered into a new stage of my career in which I largely depends on male poets to compose lyrics for me to perform because we as *fananaat* have to obey the terms of the Council for Classifying Literary and Poetic Texts.”

Because I heard a story from one of the audiences I interviewed saying that the president of Radio Omdurman prohibited one of Hanan’s songs in the early 1980s from being broadcast on the radio, I asked Hanan if the government prohibited any of her songs from being played in the media. Hanan did not answer my question, but she mentioned that the media (television and radio) has no role in her popularity as a *fanana*.

Like other *fananaat* who perform *aghani al-banat*, Hanan received little or no attention from the media.

At the end of our dialogue, after I thought that I had become less of an “outsider,” specifically after Hanan have talked a little about the government’s policy of censorship implemented by the Council for Classifying Literary and Poetic Texts, I asked Hanan about her personal life as a wife and a mother. I was hoping that Hanan would talk about her two divorce experiences and how her career has affected her two marriages. However, Hanan talked very briefly about her identity as a wife and a mother because I was not less of an “outsider” as I thought I might be. She said: “My personal life witnessed many changes after she had her three children. Now I devote much of my time to the children, and I cannot find as much time to perform as I used to have.”

I also tried three times to telephone Hanan from the U.S. asking her about her personal experience as a dancer and how empowering or disempowering her experience was as a Sudanese woman exposing her body to the public. However, I was not welcome by Hanan. In fact in my telephone attempts Hanan’s manger would ask me to wait until she asks Hanan about the possibility of talking to her. Hanan never responded to my request of asking her further questions instead I always faced with excuses from Hanan’s side conveyed to me through her manger. Thus, my experience with Hanan, compared to the other in-depth interviews I conducted with Hawa and Amal, told me that in some instances becoming an “insider” is impossible. Moreover, the power and authority experienced by the research informants in controlling what will be said and what will be silenced is always evident to every researcher. Yet it is the postcolonial ethnographic research that highlighted the role of the researcher in making visible how she/he is faced

by the resistance of the informants. “Not all fieldwork is a celebration of *communitas*. Given the multiplex nature of identity, there will inevitably be certain facets of self that join us up with people we study, other facets that emphasize our difference” (Narayan, 1993, p. 680).

The Narrative of Amal Al-Nour:

The Politics of Negotiating the Label “*Fanana*” “the Other” within the Sudanese Society

Amal al-Noor comes from a middle class family living in an upscale neighborhood in Khartoum called Al-Amaraat (the towers). Ethnically, she belongs to the dominant Arab/Riverain group in Sudan. Amal is an educated female singer who completed her education at the Institute of Music and Theatre in Khartoum in 1985. Despite being blind, she is also currently studying economics at the University of Khartoum.

As I mentioned earlier in Chapter Three, Amal as a performer sings songs that are not necessarily classified as *aghani al-banat*. In this sense, lyrically, her singing belongs to the recognized dominant mode of singing referred to as *ghuna hadieth* or “modern” singing. However, she also performed *aghani al-banat* on several occasions, and she presented *aghani al-banat* in conferences inside Sudan and abroad.

Amal told me that she started singing before she entered elementary school. During medical treatment for her vision, she felt very strong about music. “My love of music started at an early stage in my life because I participated in Girl Scouts in the city of Medani, singing children’s national songs. Then my family and I left Medani for

Khartoum, where I attended Al-Nour Institute for the Blind. After finishing high school in 1982, I entered the Institute of Music and Theatre in Khartoum and studied singing. Since then, I have chosen singing as a career. Of course I faced a strong opposition from my family because the Sudanese community rarely accepts a woman as a *ghanaya* or a *fanana*. However, the opposition I faced from my family was not bad because of my situation. I think being disabled is one of the reasons that made my father sympathetic with me.”

Since the beginning of our conversation in my family’s home in Khartoum, I felt a common ground with Amal. We both share the position of being middle-class educated women and from the same Riverain politically dominant ethnic group in Sudan. Yet, Amal mentioned an important statement that set the boundaries between Amal as a *fanana* and me as other than a *fanana*. Thus Amal said: “the Sudanese society always has a tough opinion about the *fananaat* in general and about *aghani al-banat* and the *fananaat* who perform them in particular: for the Sudanese society, the term *ghanaya/fanana* is a stereotypical term; the *fanana* is as ‘bad’ as a woman who smokes cigarettes or a prostitute. I can now have some girlfriends from well-known respectful families like yours, but the *fananaat* who preceded me did not have this chance. However, none of these families can allow one of their sons to marry me.” Then Amal said: “despite knowing that we (the *fananaat*) fight very strongly in building our reputation, the society still holds on to the generic term *fanana* as a woman of ‘bad reputation’.” Amal believes that if any one of the *fananaat* wants to become a *fanana* with a respectful and good reputation as a woman, she should pay an expensive price for that aim. Every act by the *fanana* is calculated by the society in the struggle for

respectfulness and good reputation. After Amal made these clear the differences in the Sudanese society's perception to a woman who is a *fanana* and a woman who is not a *fanana* I felt that the difference that separates me from all the subjects of this chapter is always present. I was always viewed by *ghanayaat/fananaat* as "an outsider", a part of the dominant discourse and vision that perceive the *ghanayaat/fananaat* as the "other" (as free, bold, not conforming to many of the characteristics of the "*muhtaramaat*," or respectful women.

Amal believes, however, that with the increasing enrollment of female students at the Institute of Music and Theatre in Khartoum, a slight change started to take place in the social views about the *fanana*. Thus, society began to perceive the *fananaat* who study music at the Institute of Music and Theater as respectful and educated women. This new perception has placed the *fananaat* who studied music and singing in a better position than the *ghanayaat* who did not have the chance to pursue their education such as Hawa and Hanan. In fact, the group of women I interviewed in Iowa City as audiences of *aghani al-banat* all agreed that the Institute of Music and Theater caused a clear shift in their perception of the *fananaat*. They mentioned that they appreciate and respect more the *fanana* who graduated from the institute, like Amal, than the *fanana* or *ghanaya* who have not had the chance to study at the institute such as Hawa and Hanan. One of the audience in that group said: "the *ghanayaat* who sing at wedding occasions are not *banat naas* (from good families). A *fanana* who is *muhtarama* performs at theaters and does not sing in wedding celebrations with a *daloka* like the *ghanaya* does".

Amal mentioned that she is a pioneering *fanana* who began the dual study of music at the Institute of Music and Theater and Economics at the University of

Khartoum. Amal's strategy is to avoid society's criticism and blame for the *fanana*.

By carrying her college degree, Amal is trying to convince society that she is not only a *fanana*, but also a college student specializing in economics. According to Amal's experience, this dual study technique provides her some sort of protection from the society and its opinion about the *fananaat*.

Most interestingly, there are many *fananaat* who have started to follow Amal's steps in carrying out two specializations, music and economics. Amal described this trend by other *fananaat* as an imitation of her. She mentioned that: "typically this imitation is done by a frightened woman who thinks that if she specializes in Fine Arts, for instance, she will not be respected as much as a *fanana* who specializes in economics like me."

Negotiating the Binary Positions of Educated *Fanana* /Non-educated *Ghanaya*

After making visible the differences in the society's perception to the *fanana* like Amal and other Sudanese women who are not *fananaat* like me, Amal tried throughout our dialogue to make clear the common ground between her and me visible. Thus Amal's narrative moved back and forth between the binary oppositions of "us" (the educated women) and "them" (the *ghanayaat* with a limited or no education). Within this context of binary oppositions, Amal gave her perception of *aghani al-banaat* and her representation of herself as a *fanana* who consciously worked her own way or negotiated the performance of these songs.

In Amal's opinion, which I share, there is a kind of hypocrisy when the critics in the print and mass media criticize *aghani al-banat* and the *ghanayaat* who perform them

while at the same time listening to these songs at their wedding celebrations and enjoying dancing to these songs. Amal said she believes that *aghani al-banat* is the real mirror that reflects what is going on in the whole world. *Aghani al-banat* is the thermometer that measures and indicates every event in the society.

For Amal, *aghani al-banat* is characterized by simple melodies because the women who compose the melodies, unlike men, had no access to the study of music and had no opportunities to listen to music on the radio. Because of these circumstances, the women had no alternative but to compose simple musical ideas usually interwoven with the voices of *lolay* (lullabies) to produce *aghani al-banat*. Thus, to Amal, *aghani al-banat* appeared as a “natural,” simple product of those women. “The women sing these songs without reworking them. Unlike the type of singing that I have, and other *fananaat*, studied at the Institute are trained to perform. We have to rehearse and rework the songs several times. In *aghani al-banat*, singing is from the heart of the woman to the hearts of the people. It is more authentic than other types of singing.”

Departing from that perception of *aghani al-banat*, Amal presented *aghani al-banat* in academic and cultural conferences in Sudan and abroad. “At the Festival of Women and Creativity in Cairo in 1992, I sang some songs of *aghani al-banat*. In this respect, I aimed at destroying the barrier between the *fananeen* of the “mainstream” singing by men and women and *aghani al-banat*. I believe that *aghani al-banat* is *our* [distinctly women’s] singing.” Amal told me that there were a number of *fananaat* like her who graduated from the Institute of Music and Theater and used to secretly perform *aghani al-banat* because they were afraid of being criticized by the media and society. Amal said: “in the late 1980s, Arawa al-Rabi, Dr. Afaf al-Sadiq, and myself opened the

door for a scientific dialogue and a discussion about *aghani al-banat* in which we asked the question why are the *fananeen* (males and females) and the critics ashamed of *aghani al-banat*? Only then did those *fananaat* who used to privately perform *aghani al-banat* turn to perform publicly.”

In her narrative, Amal used the phrase “*aghani al-banat* is *our* singing” to refer to all Sudanese women, educated and non-educated. For her, *aghani al-banat* cross the boundaries between Sudanese women. Yet at the same time, the educated *fananaat* should be careful in singing these songs because the language of some of the songs does not conform to the language of an educated woman. Adopting a discourse of an educated middle class *fanana*, Amal argued that: “some *aghani al-banat* is *habita* [loose and of low value in terms of language]. However, each *fanana* has the freedom to choose among the variety of the lyrics of *aghani al-banat* (decent and indecent) to perform and the audience has the freedom to choose the type of lyrics they want to listen to.” It is very important to dwell on the difference in the views of Hawa and Amal about *aghani al-banat* and the concepts they used to state their opinions. In the previous narrative, Hawa mentioned specifically some songs that she perceives as sending messages that are not acceptable by some women audiences (*ma munasiba*). On the other hand, Amal used the same concept *habita* (loose) that has always dominated the media and critics’ writing about *aghani al-banat*.

Presenting herself as an educated *fanana*, Amal talked about her strategy in performing *aghani al-banat*. She said: “I choose among *aghani al-banat* the songs that suit my thinking and suit my own values as a person—not just as an entertainer. I choose the songs that are not *saiya*’ [so bad] and sings the part of the lyrics that I feel is

suited my language. When I sang some of the songs of *aghani al-banat* I found myself sometimes unable to perform them because the language is originally not mine. I feel shy of some of the lyrics of *aghani al-banat* because of the language issue that in many times reveals sexuality.” Accordingly, one way that Amal accesses honor and respect is by distancing herself from the lyrics of *aghani al-banat* that are sexually expressive. Codes of propriety are an extremely important aspect of Sudanese culture and other Muslim societies (see Abu-Lughod, 1986 and Kapchan, 1996). “The enactment of these codes is context-dependent, relying on notions of social position, status, and discursive role negotiation”(Kapchan, 1996, p. 191). In this respect, Hanan Bolo Bolo never raised as an issue the language of *aghani al-banat* and the sexual messages of some of these songs.

Amal argued that: “we, as educated Sudanese women, sing *aghani al-banat* not as an aim. *Aghani al-banat* have their *ghanayaat* who could not be able to compose other than this type of singing. Those *ghanayaat* have no means other than singing to express their emotions and opinions. The woman who composes these songs is a simple woman who was deprived of all of her rights.” Accordingly, and alternatively, Amal believes that *aghani al-banat* could be used as a channel through which educated women could send messages to the uneducated about how to defend their rights. She believes that *aghani al-banat* could be directed to bring change to women using the same simple melodies and simple lyrics to achieve this aim.

I was not pleased with Amal’s opinion about the top-down change to *aghani al-banat* that should be carried out by educated Sudanese women to produce a change or empower the lives of other Sudanese women, especially the uneducated. I said to Amal

that I think you and I agree that *aghani al-banat* is an honest expression by women about the social, political, religious, and economic problems the women and the society face. I asked her if she thought, therefore, that if *we* brought a word from here or there and changed the original songs to new ones with “refined” words and meaning, *we* would lose the particularity of these songs as being direct and bold. Amal responded by saying that the new trend of composing new lyrics of *aghani al-banat* could produce a loss to some of the particularities of these songs, but *we* would preserve the material itself.

Amal’s Perception of the Current Performers and The Current Songs

Amal believes that the current high number of performers of *aghani al-banat* is related to economic reasons because the *ghanayaat* need money to support themselves and their families. Amal mentioned: “many of the *ghanayaat* of *aghani al-banat* believe that singing is better than prostitution, and for other *ghanayaat* singing could facilitate prostitution.” Furthermore, Amal mentioned that the numbers of *ghanayaat* and of *aghani al-banat*, especially the *habita* (the loose), increase during totalitarian regimes. In her opinion, during totalitarian regimes there is always deterioration in the economic situation of the poor as well as overwhelming oppression. “Everybody wants to ease his/her burden. Singing is a means to ease that oppression. Secondly, in these totalitarian regimes the gap between the rich and the poor becomes wider. Rich people have the money, and they are able to make parties everyday and bring the *ghanayaat* in these parties. The *ghanayaat*, the poor, need the money to make a living. Moreover, what the *ghanaya* sings in that circumstance is the material of an angry person. Thus, the outcome is the ongoing *habit* deteriorating and lyrically poor type of *aghani al-banat*.”

I asked Amal about her perception of the *ghanayaat* who publicly dance while they perform *aghani al-banat*. Amal argues that dance always accompanies *aghani al-banat*; however, there are two types of dance. The first type is the show dance performed by the *ghanayaat*. For instance, Amal said: “because her voice would not bring her any popularity, the *ghanaya* Hanan Bolo Bolo depended on dancing. Thus, she became the first female show dancer in Sudan.” Second, there is the audience’s dance to the rhythms of *aghani al-banat*. This type of dancing, according to Amal, is a means of relieving the oppression the people suffer from everyday.

When our dialogue turned to discuss the current songs under the Islamic political regime in Sudan, my concern was about the changes that took place to *aghani al-banat*. Amal said “at this moment of history we find the performers of *aghani al-banat* have started to deal with male professional composers of lyrics who add new words to the already available songs”. Amal said to me: “if you heard the new audio cassettes of Hajir Kabashi and Nada al-Gala you would find that the words, the verbs, and lyrics are not composed by women. These songs cannot be named *aghani al banat*. However, I can see that this trend can help *our* cause as women.”

It is important to perceive Amal’s opinion about the necessity for imposing a change in the lyrics of *aghani al-banat* by educated Sudanese women as part of a broad ongoing discourse and dialogue launched by some Sudanese women researchers and academics regarding their perception of the “state” of *aghani al-banat*. For instance, two of the women audiences I interviewed in Sudan (Arwa and Afaf) insisted on the vital role that should be played by educated Sudanese women to empower other Sudanese women

by sending messages that use proper language to discuss the “real” current problems facing the Sudanese woman.

Conclusion

This chapter attempted to show how the *fananaat* in the Sudanese society are actively negotiating their subject positions as *fananaat/ghanayaat*. Moreover, this chapter reflected on how the performers (the subject of this research) asserted their agency and shaped their own representation. In this respect, the three performers shaped their own re/presentation as Sudanese women and as female performers. Hawa re/presented her narrative as a *ghanaya* and a political activist, Hanan’s re/presentation centered on modernity and artistic talents, and Amal’s re/presented her narrative as struggle of negotiating her academic self and her artistic self. Accordingly, the stories of the Hawa, Hanan, and Amal provided a new representation, different from the western and post-colonial representations of the third world woman, the Sudanese woman, as either “modern” or “traditional”. Contrary to these dichotomous images, the narratives of the *ghanayaat* showed the Sudanese woman as living a situation where there is a deep tension between “tradition” and “modernity”. Reference here particularly to Hanan’s narrative in which she showed how she is trying to work the hyphen of modern *fanana istradiya* and traditional performer at wedding celebrations.

In relation to how the performers view and perceive each other I mentioned that Hawa is perceived by Hanan as her mother and Hawa’s performance is well respected by Hanan. On the other hand, Amal perceives Hanan as a mere dancer with no vocal qualities and talent. Hawa perceive herself as the mother of all female performers and

she showed how she always tried to provide those performers with advises that can make their performance better.

I have also shown that due to the tension between the mass media and the performers of *aghani al-bana*, wedding occasions and cultural rituals such as the bridal dance remained the sole effective medium of communication among the Sudanese women in sending and performing the messages of *aghani al-banat*. In this chapter I have tried to rework the divisions of “researcher”/ “researched” in the interviewing process with the three women performers through negotiating my professional location as a postcolonial feminist ethnographic researcher and my personal subject position as a Sudanese woman and part of the audience for *aghani al-banat*. Moreover, by applying intersubjectivity and narrative analysis to the stories of these performers, I have attempted to rework the divisions of “data collection”, reading, and writing the text. In this respect, I adopted the epistemology of Naraya (1993) and Lal (1999) based on an engagement with the researcher’s politics of location in articulating partial perspective based on “situated knowledge”. The politics of location and shifting identities allowed me, to a large extent, to look for venues of closeness rather than distance from the research subjects.

CHAPTER SIX

AGHANAI AL-BANAT: LYRICS OF EXPOSURE AND NEGOTIATING SOCIAL/GENDER RELATIONS, FEMININITY, AND BODY IMAGES

This chapter focuses on the textual analysis of some lyrics of *aghani al-banat*, mostly *tom-tom* songs. Part of the songs included in this chapter are composed and sung by the *fananaat* Hawa and Hanan. Accordingly, their songs should be viewed as a continuation to their narratives told in the previous chapter as well as part of *aghani al-banat* as a genre. By applying textual analysis, the songs are classified into nine themes and analyzed in relation to the metaphors used in these lyrics and their cultural implications and also in relation to class, power, and gender relations the songs revealed. As well, the themes of *aghani al-banat* are analyzed in relation to the context in which these songs are usually sung in Central Sudan. More specifically, the textual analysis of the songs aims at answering the research questions: How are the Sudanese woman and gender relations in Central Sudan represented in these songs? How are issues of femininity, sexuality, and body images express in these songs? How are issues of migration, westernization, culture, and internalization being addressed in the lyrics and in the performance context of *aghani al-banat*?

Due to the close connection of *aghani al-banat* with certain rituals in the Sudanese society, many of the audiences I interviewed in this research argued that *aghani al-banat* became one of the most powerful components of their own culture as Sudanese. Thus the chapter also reflects the impact of *aghani al-banat* on the Sudanese women living in the Sudan and in the Diaspora.

It is very important to mention that the songs in their original Arabic poetic text are sensitive to issues of symmetry and balance in each rhyme of the lyrics. Moreover, the choice of the words and expressions in these rhymes are predominantly cultural specific; they are symbolic, and sometimes include words that have no clear meaning but are chosen to keep on the rhythm and to balance the rhyme of the song. However, when I translated these lyrics from Arabic to English they lost many of their characteristics because the English words used in the translation could never bring the same depth and influential meaning existed in the original Arabic text of the lyrics.

Songs of the Train and the Travelling Lover

It is important to repeat that the 1930s witnessed the appearance of *tom-tom* songs in the urban slums (*Radiefs*) and the *anadi* (social clubs and local bars) by ex-slave women expressing their freedom in love relations. Thus, in my opinion *aghani al-banat* share some traits with the 1930s blues songs in the U.S. Hazel Carby (1988) argued that to understand women blues' performance and their songs as part of a discourse of sexual relations within the black community, it is necessary to consider how the social relations of black women were dramatically affected by migration. Migration had distinctively different meanings for black men and women. The music and song of women blues singers embodied the social relations and contradictions of black displacement: of rural migration and to the urban area.

The 1920s and 1930s witnessed the emergence of a theme of *aghani al-banat* that expressed the trading/commercial movement and the transportation (specifically the train) in the Sudan and its emotional impact on women. The train took the beloved ones

away from their loving women and the women were left behind to cope with the experience of being a part from the lover. In the following songs the woman personalizes the train and blames it for taking away her lover. She even wished for the complete destruction of the train (the train here is a metaphor for the process of travelling and change in mode of life) in order to find an end to her lover's travel.

The train that took you I wish it broke into pieces

And you remain safe.

Al-Qatar al-shalak inta

It-kassar hita hita wa taslam li-a- intta.

The train which took my green

I will catch it by lorry.

Al-Qatar al-shal khadari

Bahasilu bil-lawari.

From your breath, you the train

And from your wizeing chest, my mid went of

Where is my lover?

The same way you took him, you bring him back

Min baf nafasak, yal-gitar

Wa azziz sadrak agli tar, whyne-o al-habeeb?

Zay ma shillto jeibo yal-gitar.

Oh, I didn't forget him...I said goodbye to my lover and I cried,

When the train whistled and took him away...my tears fallen from my eyes,

How did he sleep there and how is he doing?

God! Did he still remember me? Am I still in his mind,

I didn't forget about him.

Ah ana ma nisaito...wada'ta al-habeeb wa bakaito,

Lama al-qatar saffar shalo...dimoe min eini salo,

Amsa wa baat kaif halo?...Ya rabi tarini fi balo, ana ma nisaito.

His train has arrived, oh people his train has arrived

Have mercy on me, the one who traveled and has forgotten about me

My lover has gone ...May God take good care of him.

Qitaro halla, ya naas qitaro halla

Hin ali-a- safar nissani

Az-zol da safar wada-tu Allah.

Migration for black women, like Sudanese women and specially ex-slave women who propagated *tom-tom* songs in the 1930s, often meant being left behind. In women's blues and *aghani al-banat* the response is complex: regret and pain expressed as "My sweet man done gone and left me dead" or "The sound of the train fills my heart with misery" (Carby, 1988, P. 234). In *aghani al-banat* the same complexity of pain is reflected, "He traveled and forgotten about me", "From your breath, the train, and from your wizening chest my mind went of" (*min buf nafasak yal-qitar wa azziz sadrak agli tar*), or "Return back my lover, the train".

I would agree with Carby (1988) that the black women's blues and *aghani al-banat* share the language that carries the conflict of interests between men and women and is the cultural terrain in which these differences were fought over and redefined.

“Women’s blues were the popular cultural embodiment of the ways in which differing interests of black men and women were a struggle of power relations” (P. 235). Similarly, the train songs of *aghani al-banat* in the 1930s historicized a crucial change in the gender structure of the Sudanese society as a result of the establishment of capitalist project that only incorporated men. Economically, the incorporation of the Sudanese men in these capitalist schemes widened the gender gap between men and women. Men become more associated with “modernity” while women were left to deal with the “traditional” and the household: “the train which took my green I will catch it by lorry”. This song clearly reflects the issue of power relations and unequal access to the privileges between men and women in the 1930s Sudan. The *ghanaya*, or the Sudanese woman, could catch a lorry to run after her lover but she could not access the train: the symbol of commercialization, industrialization, and “modernity”.

Songs of Professions

Through *aghani al-banat* the *ghanayaat* and the Sudanese women in general have been able to speak about different classes in the Sudanese society. For instance, they sung for school teachers in the 1940s and 1950s, for the army officers, for the rich merchants, for the men who migrated to the Gulf and Saudi Arabia, for the medical doctors, and for every profession held by Sudanese men through out the history of Sudan.

“O”, who is going to Paris...bring me a groom

But make sure he is fashionable,

And he belongs to the teaching institution.

Yal-Mashi li Paris jeep li maak aries

Shartan ie-koon- libies wa min haiy'at al-tadries.

Oh Fire... Oh fire,

Oh fire... I regret I had never been a teacher,

I sit on the chair... and grade the textbook.

Nari Alliyalh wa nari,

Wa nari alma bigeet ustaz,

Aguod fil-korsi wa assahih al-karrass.

These two songs are centered on the teacher because at post-colonial and post-independent Sudan of the 1950s teachers were the most recognizable and most distinguished elite in the Sudanese society.

Education in Sudan like many other third world countries favored boys over girls. According to the limited access to education by women, especially the *ghanayaat* who have less access to education compared with other Sudanese women due to ethnicity and economic factors discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis, they were not able to enter the work force equally with men. Thus in their songs the *ghanayaat* and other Sudanese women reflected their unfulfilled dreams of having education and entering a career (teaching).

The use of the phrase: “Oh, fire on me I haven’t become a teacher” speaks volumes because it is an honest emotional expression by the Sudanese woman of her longing to become a woman with a career (teaching in the song) as well as a regret of not becoming.

Songs of the Rich people: The Class Issue in the Sudanese Society

Peep ...peep... Toyota... peep ...peep... Toyota

If you saw Salah in the Toyota. He looks like apples.

Teet ...Teet...Toyota...teet...Toyota

Law shofto Salah fil-Tayota shabah al-tufah fil-Toyota.

The sons of the people living in comfort...

Driving cars...Allah Rabaza...

The sons of the well off people...Allah Rabaza

Driving Benzes...Allah Rabza

Living in the heights...Allah Rabaza

Awlad rahaat...Allah ya Rabaza

Sayiqeen arabat...Allah ya Rabaza

Awlad al-izz...Allah ya Rabaza

Sayiqeen al-benz...Allah ya Rabaza

Saknieen amarat...Allh ya Rabaza

Register to me your towers...

Register to me your cars..You are honey itself

Register me love

Sajil li amaratak

Sajil li arabatak..ma inta al-asal zatak

Sajil li al-raidah

Jaded al-Thora, al-Arab neighborhood,

I love the moustache of the son of the Arab

Jaddeed al-Thora hay al-Arab

Braeed al-shanab fi wadal-Arab.

Al-Tahir (1993) believed that *aghani al-banat*, especially the *tom-tom* songs, could not exist without the context of class and ethnic discrimination in the Sudanese society. As such, this theme of *aghani al-banat* is produced as well as maintained by the class and ethnic conflicts in the society. The songs stated above appeared to document the time on which famous car marks owned by the upper and middle classes were present in the Sudan, Greater Khartoum. Yet the choice of the words *awlad al-izz* “sons of wealthy or well-off people”, driving their cars, living in big towers (heights), Benz, and Toyota indicate power relations and class discrimination between the rich (those who own) and the poor (the women who entertain and praise the rich people).

Moreover, the use of the phrase *jana al-Arab* (son of the Arab) also reflects the ethnicity issue in the Sudanese society and the superiority of the Reverains (Arabs) over other ethnic groups. Most importantly, the *ghanayaat* who sing these lyrics questioned these relations by the very act of publicizing these class, ethnic, and gender distinctions and inequalities within the society.

Lyrics of Gossips and Scandals about the “Powerful” in the Society

Thursday is full of fun... from shari (street) al-ghaba to shari al-Neil

The boat and the automobile

Let's go to the Embassies... Let's wear long dresses.

Youm al-Khamies da hajeej kateir min al-ghaba li shari al-Neil

Al-Aoama maa' al-automobile

Ya- lla namshi lill safaraat ya-lla nalbas al-ibaiyat.

“O” the governor of the provinces,

How longing you are to girls,

“O” the governor and the minister... there is a lot of money in the government.

Ya muhafiz al-mudieriyat ya helailak min al-banat,

Ya al-Muhafiz wal wazier fil-Hakoma groosh kateer.

We went to Amaraat [a nieghborhhod area in which many of international embassies are located], and the important men gathered

They took their *ibaiyaat* [long covering cloth usually wore above the national dress of the Sudanese men *jallabiya*], and forgot their responsibilities.

Mashaina al-Amaraat, wa itlamo al-kubaraat

Wa qallau' al-ibaiyaat...wa nisso al-Maso'oliyaat.

We wear the channel for the fun of tonight

I depend on you, you Kamal Shanter the attorney

The sweet.. Lollipop.

Nalbas al-chanel li hajeej al-liel

Ba'tamid aliek ya inta, ya Kamal Shanter ya mohami,

Ya halawa harba.

The songs (1), (2), (3), and (4) historicize or document a stage in the early 1980s in which some of the *ghanayaat* had performed *aghani al-banat* in small private gatherings called *qa'daat*. These *qa'daat* usually include rich merchants, politicians, governors, famous attorneys, staff of international embassies, and women, specifically

the *ghanayaat* who can trade sex with money. Unlike the majority of the Sudanese women, the *ghanayaat* in those *qa'daat* smoke cigarettes and drink alcohol (Rajab, 1989). As I mentioned in the previous chapter *aghani al-banat* witnessed drastic change in the 1980s and the lyrics became more explicit about sexuality. The songs were scandals about well-known public officials who were involved in sexual relationships with some of the *ghanayaat* and prostitute women. The very act of talking about others, the very practice of sorting out epistemologies that shock and scandalize creates and catalogues ideas about deviance and virtue which are enforced with each telling (Fair, 2000). The *ghanayaat* as part of these *qa'daat* evoked the tradition of gossip, rumor, and song by divulging the secrets of the powerful through the catchy rhythm of *tom- tom* which people could not help but repeat.

Songs of the Sudanese Men in the Diaspora

Migration of Sudanese men to the Gulf States took place in the 1970s as a result of Sudan's accumulated economic crisis and debt problems. Most of the migrants were officials, academicians, technicians, and laborers from middle and lower classes of the society. Those migrants to the Gulf States emerged as a competitive class to the existed economically powerful class of merchants and businessmen in Greater Khartoum. Thus, the Gulf migrant men exercised and expressed their economic power in wedding rituals by paying high dowries and buying expensive dresses and big amounts of gold to their brides (Abu Isa, 1992). The *ghanayaat* admired and sung for this emergent group of migrants and some of them had the chance to be paid in foreign currency.

My sweetheart...my sweetheart, the light of my eyes,

He brought the wedding presents from Oman,

He paid the dowry in dollars,

He brought enough presents for all,

He paid his dowry in thousands,

Korsi Jabir and not only *kirdan*.

Al-ballal sabah inei,

Jab al-shaila min Oman...Sadda malo bil-dollar,

Jab al-shaila mitkafi...Sadda malo-bil alfi,

Jab al-shiala min Oman...Kursi Jabir ma kirdan.

He left the neighborhood, he was taken from me...and he landed in Jeddah,

Tonight in the airport they drew him from me,

He flew to Abu Dhabi...Tonight in the airport they drew him from me,

He who wears the “ugal”...He who is the owner of dollar.

Ghadar al-hilla sahabo mini, fi Jeddah idalla,

Alli-la fil-matar, sahabo mini, le Abu Dhabi tar

Allabis al-Ugal sahabo mini da sied al-dollar.

The lyrics of *aghani al-banat* mentioned above showed the cultural influence of the Gulf on the Sudanese literature and culture in the 1980s. In the late 1970s and the 1980s the Sudanese culture, especially of Greater Khartoum, witnessed an importation of cultural terms from the Gulf and Arab countries by the back and forth movement of migrants to Sudan. Terms such as: *ugal* [a cloth worn by Arab men over their heads], *korsi Jabir* [a twenty- four krauts gold necklace named after one of the princes of the Gulf States “Jabir”], and *kirdan* [another type of gold necklaces] were repeatedly

mentioned in *aghani al-banat* at that time. Thus *aghani al-banat*, as mentioned by one of the audiences in the U.S. is a mirror that reflects every change experienced by the Sudanese society. Subsequently, the role of the *ghanayaat* in performing these songs could be understood as not limited to entertainment but also a means of circulating the news of updated fashion to the Sudanese women.

My lover is fantastic...He is a painter, who paint Bomastic.

Habibi fantastic...wa bitrab bohia Bomastic.

My lover come on...come to me to be together,

Let's be together as long as our love was blended with our blood,

My lover, come to me to soak our longing...And inhibits the big heights of
London

Habeebi ta'al ta'al nitlum madam al-raid ikhtalat bil-dam

Habeebi ta'al nabil al-shouq wa naskun London amarat foq.

The songs (3) and (4) talk about the migration of Sudanese men to Europe that became a phenomenon in the 1990s. In the song (3) the *ghanaya* described her lover as a painter because many of the Sudanese migrants in Europe were faced by unequal access to professional careers in these European countries. In fact a large number of the immigrant Sudanese in European countries and in the U.S. though highly qualified, with long professional experiences in Sudan, are working in the service sectors of these countries. Accordingly, the *ghanaya* reflects a conflicting image of the migrant Sudanese man to the west that is different from the praised image of the migrant Sudanese man to the Gulf. In one instance, the *ghanaya* is making fun of her lover as a painter and in

other instance the *ghanaya* expresses her eagerness to travel to her lover and live in the high towers of London.

The terms: “high towers” and “heights” are metaphors for wealth and big cities (such as London), however its repetitive use by the *ghanaya* in many lyrics of *aghani al-banat* reflects the social construction of the *ghanaya* as the epitome of all that is low and base in society. As one of the audiences I interviewed in Iowa City stated: “the *ghanayaat* are not *banat naas* [are not women from families of good reputation and high culture)]. If they are *banat naas* they wouldn’t perform in wedding celebrations and they wouldn’t perform with *daloka*” (B. Satti, personal communication, March 16, 2002).

Love Songs

In describing *tom-tom* love songs El-Tahir (1995) argued that by their simple words, simple melodies, and simple rhythm, *tom-tom* love songs entered directly into the hearts of the people who are happy with love relations or suffering from their love relations. These songs emphasize and reassure the particular and the personal of every person who thinks about his/her personal life in isolation of the ethnic group or the family. According to El-Tahir, in the 1920s and 1930s in Sudan the relationship between the personal and the communal got weaker and what has become important at that moment was the personal destiny.

The moment my love came to us..He pleased all the sad people

Oh the seedling of the pine tree...the pine that is well irrigated

Our hearts are in love...why are people worried?

Saat al-Habeeb jana...farrah kull al-hazana

Ya shattlat al-banah wal-banah raoiyana

Goloobna mutahaabah wal-naas mala tabaana.

“O” mother..”O” father..Why are people worried?

I did not invent love,

It existed since the time of the prophet companions

“O”, the hooked pieces of gold

People accused me of coming close to you.

Ya youmma..ya yaba ...al-naas mala tabaana

Al-hub ana ma badaitoh...min zaman al-sahaba

Ya dahab al-shibaika al-naass itahamoni baika.

“O” the one with honey-color eyes

Keep the love between us a secret.

Ana ya abu ioon assliyyah

Khalli al-mahabbah bainatna takoon sirriyyah.

Those who make you leave,

Haram (religiously unacceptable) this desertion.

Yal-hajarook ali-a,

Haram al-hajer dia.

Oh crying could never help in bringing back my lover

I cry and I call for Al-Hadi Al-Hadi my life partner

OOP ali-a- OOP ali-a- al-bika ma bijibu lia

Ana babki wa banadi OOP alli-a- ashan khatir al-Hadi

Al-Hadi shariiek hayati OOP ali-a-

Your family has known about us...and they sued me

I don't care about the suing...I am satisfied with your love.

Ahalak sh'aaro baiyya...wa fataho ali qatiyya

Qatiyya ma hammiyya...kifaya hobak liyya.

I agree with Rajab (1979) that the songs stated above constitute love songs' literature that is about the affection, sufferings, and about reflecting the complex social processes that women negotiate in expressing their emotions. Moreover and according to Al-Rabi' the love songs of *aghani al-banat* are the product of an instinctive consciousness and simple expression to a woman's suffering either from a love experience or a suffering from the banning of her own dreams by the society (A. Al-Rabi', personal communication, June 20, 2001). Accordingly, there is a common theme in the love songs of *aghani al-banat* that reflects the tension between romance (man-woman love relations) and the social pressure on women. For instance, the composer of the first song in this theme said: "the moment my lover came to us" instead of saying "the moment my lover came to me". Thus she used "us" instead of "me" in order to avoid being questioned and blamed by the society as a "bad" woman who dates men. The use of the plurals "we" and "us" is common in old love songs sung by women and men in the Muslim Sudanese society. Moreover, the composer of the song said: "I did not invent love! It existed since the time of the prophet Mohamed's companions. The composer in expressing her love engaged herself into a dialogue with the society to prove that love is a normal and an instinct feeling. In fact, she situated love within the sacred era of the prophet Mohamed because she knows that the Sudanese society respects the prophet and

his companions and she wished that the society would accept her love as a feeling that has been permitted since the era of prophet Mohamed's companions.

The love songs of *aghani al-banat* are expressions to a woman's happiness with love (the moment my lover has come, he pleased all the sad people), expression to her effort to change her life, and also expression to the difficulties she encounters in her destiny (crying could never help in bringing back my lover). As such, the average woman finds some sort of personal sympathy and comfort in these songs. Also because of its influential rhythm and simple content, the songs reach out to everybody's heart. In my group discussion with the Sudanese women audiences living in the diaspora many of them mentioned that they are moved by *aghni al-banat* more than other types of Sudanese singing. In this respect, Iqbal mentioned the following song:

My mother, I am not insane I have not rejected our home

I love my man...I grew up with him since I was a child.

Ya youma ana ma janait...wa ma abait al-bait

Ana bried zooli wa ma'aho min tabait.

Iqbal said whenever her sister hears this song she cries because the song speaks for her. She said her family rejected the lover of her sister and her sister kept her emotions hidden, thus she feels relief in this song. Accordingly *aghani al-banat* indicate how the audience heard "we" if the *ghanaya* said "I". In this respect, *aghani al-banat* like the blues, "of course the singers were entertainers but the blues was not an entertainment escape or fantasy and sometimes directly represent historical events (Carby, 1988, p. 232). Another voice from the diaspora said: "*aghani al-banat* unlike other lyrics, written by a male poet talking about his own personal problems and

aspirations to which a few audience could relate, it is the voice of collective women's experiences that expresses the group and then expresses the society. Thus, *ughniyat al-banat* is a sophisticated song because it tells the audience about a direct collective problem" (K. Al-Jinaid, personal communication, March 16, 2002).

In the romantic atmosphere there is an exposure and openness to the discontent with the personal and the surrounding worlds. Thus the content of the songs appears as a mixture of a world filled with sufferings, poverty, and social injustice and a utopian world that is difficult to be achieved in terms of love, equality, freedom of choice, and freedom of expressing romantic feelings. The lamentations (*bakait, oop ali-a-, al-nar, al-hajer*) of the *ghanayaat* on themes of lost love and abandonment define feminine cries as they are experienced in the everyday world. The thematic sadness of the love songs, however, is countered by a joyousness delivery as the words are vigorously drummed and intoned. Kapchan's (1996) description to the festive voicing of the words and rhythm of the lyrics of the Moroccan *shikhat* is undoubtedly applicable to the atmosphere of *aghani al-banat* in the Sudan:

The juxtaposition of mournful words, festive voicing, and sexualized dancing acts both to define and, at least momentarily, to resolve crisis...Lamentation sung as celebration may be said to have therapeutic effect, the benefits of intersemiotic dialogue finding resonance with evidence from other Islamic rituals and cries. Contradiction is thus celebrated, embodied, and made into strength" (Kapchan, 1996, p. 197).

Sakina and Najwa of our group discussion in Iowa City said when they are at home, in Iowa City, and heard any song performed by Sudanese male singer they could be moved by the song. However, when they hear a song of *aghani al-banat* they would immediately stop any activity and become completely absorbed in the process of listening to the songs and start dancing and crying at the same time. "I dance on the voice of the

ghanaya and on the rhythm of the words and the *daloka*”, said Sakina. Iqbal added:

“When I hear a song from *aghani al-banat* sung by a male singer I wouldn’t be moved by his singing, however if a *ghanaya* sang I will find myself in a different *hal* “state”. The *daloka* has something magical and indescribable; it enters into the bottom of the heart directly”. Khalida and myself agreed that in the diaspora when we hear *aghani al-banat* in the audiocassette we recall all our memories in Sudan and we do not only listen to the lyrics but we could almost smell the incense and the whole atmosphere of a typical Sudanese festival.

The wedding celebrations in general are crucial to the discussion of *aghani al-banat* because they represent an important context on which *aghani al-banat* are performed and because they highlight the centrality of the *ghanaya* in these rituals. The *ghanaya* continues to be an indispensable part of wedding festivity. The *ghanaya* sings for women in the parties preceding the bridal dance. She sings for their families, praising their ethnic groups, and performs songs about professions (analyzed earlier in this chapter) that might match each woman’s husband’s or lover’s career.

Lyrics of Sexuality: Discourses of Openness

As I mentioned earlier the social-economic, cultural, and political context that helped in producing the Blues of the 1920s America resembled the context that produced *aghani al-banat*, the *tom-tom* rhythm in the 1930s Sudan. The *tom-tom* songs appeared as a working class songs that express the complex interweaving of the “general” and the “specific” and of individual and group experience of ex-slavery in Sudan. Large number

of the *ghanayaat* who were ex-slaves, incorporated their autonomy and freedom in composing explicit and open discourses about sexuality.

Sex appeal is sweat,
 appeal like sweet,
 My heart is picked with needles,
 My right heart is stabbed with a knife,
 Sex appeal is sweat as sweat.

Al-sex billi halawa billi,

Qalbi al-shamal matoun ibar,

Qalbi al-yamine matoun sikein

Al-sex billi halawa billi.

Tonight, hundred percent we will apply the theory,
 Tonight hundred percent the drama will happen to me.

All-liela miea al-miea han-tabiq al-nazariya,

All-liela miea al-miea...al-drama hasla allia.

“To express sexuality ...is an act of defiance” (Abu-Lughod, 1986, p. 157).

Moreover, it is an assertion of power that has no place in the social hierarchy, especially in the Muslim societies (Kapchan, 1996). Yet, because these lyrics of sexual desires are enacted in a festive mode (in many times referred to as lyrics with no composer as in many of the lyrics of *aghani al-banat*) it is tolerated and enjoyed. “A defiance but also a source of social renewal, permitting the social ideation of alternate wells of power within the individual”(Kapchan, 1996, p.193).

In this festive context “as the ordinary and quotidian gives way to the extraordinary and exceptional...Events such as weddings inevitably provide counter-performances to the everyday norms and conventions by putting them into differential and experiential relief” (Kapchan, 1996, p. 190 and 191). The *ghanaya* provides this “relief”; she calls the women to dance and to show their bodies, their fashioned dresses, their gold accessories, and the beautiful patterns of their *henna* in celebrating this state of “relief”. The *ghanaya* comes to these gathering as a singer and with the expectation to be called to dance as one of the Sudanese women in Iowa City has argued. In her dance performance the *ghanaya* is engaged in an intense demonstration of physical and artistic prowess. The audience expects it and the *ghanaya* is responsible for communicating it. In her dancing performance the *ghanaya*, as Kapchan argued for the Moroccan *shikha*, “successfully lures her audience and captures the attention centered on her, a state of ‘communitates’ may be achieved, facilitated at times by musical (*daloka*) climax or by loss of self-centeredness that transpires in shared dance” (Kapchan, 1996, p.197 and p.198, *daloka* is added).

In these contexts it is important to highlight women’s “gaze”. Gazing of women to other women is an important activity in the Sudanese culture. Women’s gatherings is a space for active gazing and space for married women to perform the bridal dance, thus reproduce the “state” of being a bride (the focus of all people’s attention) another time. Moreover, in these gatherings the Sudanese women, especially the married ones, take the opportunity to show other women their beauty and their ability to possess gold and their access to other fashionable clothes. For the unmarried young women this festive context offers a unique opportunity to show their beauty and their artistic talent in moving their

bodies (a body that resembles the *ghanaya* 's sexual body) to other women who are looking for brides to their sons. The Sudanese woman in these gatherings celebrates her femininity and her sexuality.

In the two wedding occasions I attended in Khartoum as a participant observer I recognized that when the young Sudanese women attend those occasions they took off their imposed or freely chosen *hijab* and join the *ghanaya* and other women in the dancing circle or theater. They revealed fashionable clothing making a more individual and personal statement than the collective Islamist statement. Thus their private bodies, as Abu Odeh (1993) argued for Iranian women, are almost unrelated to their public ones.

Songs of the Metaphoric Body (Songs of the Bridal Dance)

In the past the bride used to dance to her husband and his family half-naked because the purpose of her dance was to show and publicize her virgin body to her husband and his family. Undoubtedly, the bridal dance witnessed many changes and the bride now does not appear half- naked but she must show much skin as possible. I would argue that there is a shift in the bride's performance from the virgin body to the sexual body. However, this shift does not mean virginity is no longer an important element in the cultural construction of the ideal *mo'adaba/mohafisa* (conservative) woman in the Sudanese society. Yet more than ever, the contemporary bridal dance turned to be a space for the bride to show her sexual body, through emphasizing body language and movement, to her husband, his family, and other women. Moreover, the bride's body is sexual because the songs performed during her dance are predominantly descriptive to every part of her body.

The role of the *ghanaya* in the bridal dance is extremely important. During the bridal dance usually the *ghanaya* classifies the songs and their corresponding dances into couplets. Part of these couplets sung in a slow rhythm and some of them sung and danced on a fast energetic rhythm. Musa mentioned that at the slow rhythm the bride usually dances the pigeon dance in which she moves her neck and her head. At the energetic rhythm the bride moves her whole body, especially the hips area. Moreover, in the bridal dance, the *ghanaya* also praises the bride, the groom, and their families. Those who have been praised by the songs give some money *nogtah* to the *ghanaya*.

Oh the pony, the continuous series of perfume,
Fire, the bride...your groom couldn't stay intact.

Al-Mihira iged al-jalad

Al-nar ya arosa...arasik ghalabu al-thabat.

The swimming gazelle, you people

They said the gazelle went to fetch water in Hamad neighborhood,

Al-sied al-awam ya nas,

Galo al-sied warad wa fi hillat Hamad...wa garad an-nass garad.

Our groom do not be fooled

The uneasy to be caught wild gazelle has come to you,

The unopened glassed room has come to you.

Ya ariesna ma titghaffal

Jaak sied al-khala al-bitgafal

Jaak salon gazazo maqafal.

The groom is awake...he couldn't sleep

He is awake for you...you who like the moon

The bride is with him...he couldn't be patient

She is shining like a pine tree for you (the groom).

The bride is with him...like a candle lightening for him.

Al-aries ma binoom...ghalbo al-sabur

Sahi wa ghalbu al-noom ...lake ya badour,

Al-arousa ma'-h- ghalabu al-sabur...bana lama-h- li, ah ya badur

Al-arousa ma'-h-shama' tadoie lie...ah ya badur.

The song (1) and (2) used many metaphors that are culturally specific to describe the bride and her beauty. For instance, in the Arabic literature *al-kheil* [horses] are animals of prestige and their owners take great pride in them (Kapchan, 1996). Moreover, in the Arabic literature the *kheil* and specifically the *mohera* [the female pony] is among the dearest and lovable animals that symbolize *asala* “authenticity” and beauty. To mention that the bride resembles the bony means the bride is from an “authentic” family *ma'salla*; meaning she is a virgin and a good woman. Moreover, *al-sied* [gazelle] in the Sudanese literature symbolizes beauty, specifically the beauty of the eyes, and most importantly *al-sied* is uneasy to be caught; it is characterized by *jafal* [not easy to be reached]. A woman who is *jafla* [uneasy to be reached and uneasy to sexually surrender to her man] is always praised by the Sudanese culture.

Moreover, in the song (3) the metaphor of “*salon gazazo maqafal*” [unopened glassed room] means that the bride is virgin “*maqfola*” [closed]. Boddy (1989) argued that the metaphors of virginity and fertility in the Sudanese society are associated with closure that is mainly reflected in the cultural practice of female circumcision in which

the external genitals of the girl are removed, thus the womb appears to be more internal and closed. While on the other hand the circumcision of a boy is directed towards openness expressed by the act of removing the foreskin of his sexual organ.

The use of the words *gamar* [moon] in the song (4) and the pine tree also have cultural connotations for the Sudanese society. To describe a woman face as a moon means that it is round and lightening. As well the pine tree is known for its elasticity and good smell. In the Sudanese culture a woman who has *jisim laien* [elastic body] meaning that she is feminine in contrary to a woman whose body is strong and shows muscles. Moreover, the candle in song (4) is metaphorically symbolizes sacrifice. The candle burns itself in order to bring light to others. The metaphor of the candle is reflecting the role of the bride as a wife and a mother- to- be who could scarify herself for her husband and her kids.

The dove had come down, my people,
 The dove had come down and made us mad,
 The pigeons had come down in the courtyard,
 The pigeons had come down slowly.

Al-baloum nazal ya ahalna

Al-baloum nazal jannana,

Al-hamam nazal fil-saha,

Al-hmam nazal bar-raha

The metaphors *baloum* dove and *hamam* pigeons have specific cultural meanings for the Sudanese society. Among domestic birds in the Sudan *hamam* pigeons are considered to be *tahir* [pure] (Boddy, 1989). Thus there is a great link between women,

fertility, and purity that all linked to constitute the concept of *sharaf* [honor] that is highly valued in the societies of Muslim Sudan.

In this study I am also concerned about the influences of other international musical and cultural practices on *aghani al-banat* and I am interested in how culture is being addressed in the performance of *aghani al-banat*. Thus I asked some of the women audiences in Sudan for their opinions about the global influences on *aghani al-banat*. Dr. Afaf believes that international music has no influence on *aghani al-banat*. She said: “this is due to the fact the *ghanayaat* who sing and compose *aghani al-banat* have very limited education and limited knowledge about international music. In other words, the *ghanayaat* have local culture and local knowledge. Moreover, *aghani al-banat* are produced by local soul and heart/local consciousness”. (A. Al-Sadiq, personal communication, June 10, 2001). Afaf and Arwa believe that *aghani al-banat* have the “authentic” Sudanese flavor that makes the Sudanese man dance on its rhythm and the songs are also part of the living reality of the Sudanese woman. Accordingly, they added that if *aghani al-banat* witnessed an international influence they should be called any thing other than *aghani al-banat*.

While I agreed with Afaf and Arwa that *aghani al-banat* lyrically and musically have not witnessed any international influences, the bridal dance however, as a theatre and drama (i.e. as a message that is delivered by a body act, accessories, and attires) is experiencing a clear international influence. Due to the proliferation of advanced communication devices such as satellite dishes in many parts of the Sudan, the bride’s dresses for her dance recently showed Indian, Egyptian, Western, and Gulf influences. These influences are reflected in Indian embroidery of the bride’s dresses, applying

Indian design of *henna* on the belly area, and also reflected in the performance of the bride to some dances borrowed from the Gulf area. Besides, the Sudanese bride also wears the western white dress in her wedding party. Moreover, in my interview with Al-Mosili he mentioned that recently *al-zaffa* becomes an inevitable part of the Sudanese wedding rituals. *Al-zaffa* is an Egyptian tradition performed by a band or a group of people that sing songs welcoming the groom and the bride when they arrive at the wedding ceremony.

This self-conscious appropriation of foreign fashion and rituals made the bride an icon of internationalism. The Sudanese bride is employing symbols of the “authentically” Sudanese, when she dances on metaphorical lyrics about fertility; virginity; and femininity, and of the “authentically” Other; the western as well as the Indian; the Egyptian; and the Arabian.

The Contemporary Changes in the Lyrics of *Aghani al-banat*

As I said earlier *aghani al-banat* usually update the new events in the society. As such there are new vocabularies that entered these songs. Some of these vocabularies are part of the literature produced by the street children in Greater Khartoum who invented their own literature and own language in their thirst to develop their autonomous distinct community. Examples are *fardah* (friend) and *shamar* (gossips). Accordingly, *aghani al-banat* copes with any changes in the society even at the language level:

To this neighborhood I will never come again

Al-shamar (gossips) is too much,

Even to my father and mother’s home...I will not come back again,

Al-shamar (gossips) is too much,
Fog al-hillah de tani ma baji,
Al-shamar kateek tani ma baji,
Bait omni wa aboi...tani ma baji,
Al-shamar kateer tani ma baji.

Moreover, Suliman said “the girls now sing: I want to marry a man even if he is my sister’s husband. This song in fact, is an indicator to a real problem that young women face in the Sudan” (A. Suliman, personal communication, July 22, 2001). Many Sudanese women I interviewed believe that young women living in Sudan are facing a problem of rarity of young Sudanese men due to the increasing influxes of migration by the youth to outside Sudan. Suliman said the women in their songs exceeded the *sharia* limits by asking to marry their brothers- in- law because the Islamic *sharia* law forbids that. Accordingly, in his opinion, this song should drive the attention of the Sudanese society to find a solution to the marriage problem of those women:

I’m coming to you Ab Shara (a religious Sufi leader),
 I’m coming to reveal all my secrets to you,
 You, Ab Shara I want a man to marry even if he is my sister’s husband,
 Secretly, Ab Shara even if he is another woman’s man,
Jay-ak, jay-ak ya Ab Shara,
Jay-a affitto maak ya Ab Shara,
Ya Ab Shara inshalla rajil aukhti, ya Ab Shara,
Bil-tara bil-tara, ya Ab Shara...inshalla rajil mara ya Ab Shara

In the song above the woman is revealing her secrets to a famous Sufi leader (Ab Shara) who died decades ago in Central Sudan. She is calling for his supernatural power to solve her problem of finding a man to marry even if his another woman's husband.

Aghani al-Banat: The Exiled Words

Recently *aghani al-banat* witnessed some ideologically imposed changes, especially at the level of the poetic text. As mentioned in Chapter Four due to the regulations of the government represented by the Council for Classifying Literary and Artistic Texts the *ghanayaat* are obliged to depend on male poets to compose songs for them to perform. As a result, the recent audiocassette tapes largely contain songs written by male poets, songs recorded at the Radio of Omdurman in the 1940s by well recognized *fananaat* (female singers) and *fananeen* (male singers) such as Aisha al-Falatiya and *Al-Hageeba* male singers in the Radio, and folk songs (*aghani sha'biyya*). The irony about the songs composed by male poets and performed by the *fananaat* is that the *fanana* now speaks for a man and describes a situation of a man who is in love with a woman or describing his loving woman. Accordingly I used the phrase "exiled words" to refer to the state in which *aghani al-banat* are voicing men's words and become objectified by the media and its related institutions.

My lover has been missing...I meet him wherever I see beauty

In the light, wherever I see it...I meet my lover

In the roses, wherever I see them...I meet my lover

At the river- bank I meet my lover,

My beautiful lover, her soft check

Habeebi ghab fi maoti al-jamal balagi,

Fe al-nor lo zahar balagi,

Fi abaq al-zahar balagi,

Fi shati al-nahar balagi

Habeebi al-jamiel balagi,

Khado al-asiel balagi.

Tonight Oh my eyes...I am awake the whole night and couldn't sleep,

The greenery is flourishing ...and to your seeing (my woman),

my soul is longing

Aleila whyne ya einy-a ...musahir alleil wa al-nom aba li-a,

Al-khudra nadya jorofa...wa le shoftik roeihiti lahofa

There is a clear objectification of *aghani al-banat* by the media in the Sudan. In a television show recorded by the Television of Omdurman in the Summer of 2001 about *aghani al-banat*, the *fananaat* are presented as folk songs' performers without mentioning that many of *aghani al-banat* are composed by some of the *ghanayaat*. In that show the *fananaat* were wearing long sleeves dresses under their *tobs* (Sudanese national dress for women that resembles the Indian sari) and they covered their heads with scarves under the *tobs*. They performed songs mostly referred to as *aghani turath* (songs of heritage); songs of praise (*aghani shukur*), songs of *siera* (*aghani siera*), and love songs referred to as "refined" *tom-tom* sung by Aisha Al-Falatiya in the 1940s. In that show the *ghanayaat* were not allowed to move their bodies or dance while they sing and they were not allowed to also loose control over their *tobs*. Accordingly, the media

presented the *fananaat* who perform *aghani al-bant* within the image that conform with what the government perceives as “ideal” image for the Sudanese woman performer in the media.

Thus, it is interesting and significant that the *ghanayaat*'s use of the media is the media's use of them. I would like to make an analogy to the question raised by Kapchan (1996) when she analyzed the use of the Moroccan media of the *shikhat*: How can a cultural symbol of shamelessness be transformed into a symbol of national diversity in Morocco? I would ask the question: How can a symbol of “low culture” (the *ghanaya* of a culture of *daloka*)- an image portrayed by many Sudanese women in this research and by the government- be transformed into a symbol of “*turath*” (national heritage) and “authenticity”?

The appropriation of the *ghanayaat* by national television obviously pays tribute to their extant popularity with the majority of the Sudanese audiences. It is an official acknowledgement of an unofficial art form one with the power to name injustice and with the power to intense sentiment and interest in viewers. The *ghanaya*'s appearance on the television is controlled and “purified” to become a symbol for heritage and “authentic” Sudanese singing.

The Issue of Audience Pleasure and Feminist “Empowerment”

According to a survey done by *Usrati* magazine in 2000 on the shops that sell the audiocassette of *aghani al-banat*, the survey found that these songs constitute 85% of the total sales of cassettes. The majority of the audiences who buy these tapes are Sudanese

migrant men and women who live in the Gulf States and other countries abroad. My question is: Why *aghani al-banat* are still powerful and continuing to be sung by women?

Arwa said she believes that these songs are still important because no change has happened to the Sudanese cultural structure. Women's problems and suffering still exist and the customs and laws that govern the relationship of women and men are the same. Moreover, Arwa and Khalida believe that the totalitarian political systems in the Sudan played an important role in keeping a lower position of women, especially poor women in the society because it did not give women another, other than singing, means of expressions and freedom. Because of that, Arwa argued, there were many phenomena that took place in *aghani al-banat* such as the *fananat* Hanan Bolo Bolo and Awadiyya Izzeldin who appeared as bold show dancers expressing sexuality in their dance and their lyrics.

Dr. Afaf on the other hand, argued that: "we basically love these songs because they are part of our identity as Sudanese women. The songs are part of our blood. Besides, the hot African rhythm and the metaphors used in *aghani al-banat* are part of who we are as Sudanese women" (A. Al-Sadiq, personal communication, June 10, 2001). Afaf said *aghani al-banat* and particularly the songs of bridal dance emphasize concepts and body metaphors that we (the Sudanese women) were raised up to acquire in order to become Sudanese women. However, she believed that *aghani al-banat* are standstill in relation to the topics they discuss. For Afaf the songs talk about the same issues and the same relations since the 1930s.

Al-Dao perceived *aghani al-banat*, as a type of singing that is needed at this moment of Sudan's history to express and speak about the stages of economic and

cultural deterioration of the Sudanese society. He mentioned that he evaluates a successful song as the one that has the ability to read the society soundly. *Aghani al-banat* they are accessible to everyone because of their simple words and simple expressions that could be understood by anyone without exhausting the mind of the receiver. Accordingly, and by attaining this valuable information the receiver could understand the map of the Sudanese society and how the society lives.

I asked the Sudanese women I interviewed as audience in Sudan and in Iowa City if they think that *aghani al-banat* are empowering to them as women? In this respect, Khalida said: “I really move by *aghani al-banat*. When I hear these songs I feel that I am happy and I want to dance. I feel happy because the songs are very direct and bold. I also believe that if an educated woman has no power to defend her rights she can find a relief in these songs. The songs are simply a way of disguised struggle. The songs express the reality, revolt this reality, and situate the reality in a historical context” (K. El-Jinaid, personal communication, March 16, 2002). On the other hand, Afaf and Arwa believe that empowerment could not be achieved by singing. They added that in order to be empowered, a woman should be aware of her rights, her situation, and gender position in the society. For them these types of awareness give real empowerment to women.

Other Sudanese women I interviewed argue that singing is a means of expression for the disempowered women (the *ghanayaat*). The women who produce and sing *aghani al-banat* have no chance to enter Parliaments or political parties in order to express their views and fight for their causes. Yet with her simple awareness, the *ghanaya* succeeded, with what is available to her, to boldly revolt against the hegemonic control of the society and its ideologies over women and their dreams. Two of the

women of Iowa City discussion group said *aghani al-banat* are empowering because the songs have the power to recall and document their memories of love and their memories about Sudan.

On the other hand, Al-Dao believes that *aghani al-banat*, specifically the *tom-tom* songs, since the 1930s appeared as empowering because it changed the way women express themselves in singing. Before the appearance of the *tom-tom*, by the *ghanayaat* of lower ethnic and class positions, the Sudanese woman used to sing facing the wall in public occasions because she was not allowed to face the audience, the men, and sing for them. Moreover, Asma believed that the *ghanayaat* in fact empowered the other Sudanese women by taking the lead in publicizing *aghani al-banat*.

Conclusion

Although some of the Sudanese women and the *ghanayaat*, who compose and perform *aghani al-Banta*, have been excluded from formal participation in the political institutions of post-colonial Sudan, they are actively involved in formulating the debates that constitute the civil society. The *ghanayaat* often summarize popular opinion while simultaneously spurring public debate of the religious, cultural, political, and social principles that contribute to the constitution of the Sudanese community.

Aghani al-banat as a text expressing and representing lived realities and imagined lives by the Sudanese women appeared as contradictory and contingent. Thus, some of the lyrics of *aghani al-banat* appeared as reinforcing the dominant Islamic and cultural discourses of the Sudanese society about femininity, honor, and fertility (in the songs about the metaphoric body). On the contrary, some of the lyrics are open enough and

latently rebelling against poverty, inequalities, domination of the powerful, and simply calling for freedom to express love and sexuality. Similarly, the readings of the Sudanese women audiences to the lyrics of *aghani al-banat* are also contradictory and emphasized the conflict between “pleasure” and “empowerment”. As audiences all the women and men I interviewed argue that *aghani al-banat* is favorable and make the audience happy and relieved. When the audiences are faced with the issue of “empowerment” they tried to distance themselves from the pleasure they experience as audiences and to detach themselves from the *ghanayaat*, the Sudanese women who create and deliver that pleasure, and they enter into arguments about educated/non-educated women, low-culture/high culture.

Moreover, the way the Sudanese women audiences feel about *aghani al-banat* is determined to a large extent by distance. Sudanese women living in Sudan feel that they gain representation in these songs because the songs express women’s point of view regarding gender, femininity, and power relations in the Sudanese society. However, they feel that *aghani al-banat* are not empowering since they did not work within the framework of formal political institutions. In other words, the audiences living in Sudan believe that *aghani al-banat* is a serious entertainment but not empowering. On the other hand, for Sudanese women living in the diaspora *aghani al-banat* work more as a cultural resort; as a symbol for their happy moments and memories in Sudan; and as an imagined and remote atmosphere they missed and yearn for. The Sudanese women living in the diaspora feel that *aghani al-banat* is an empowering force to them because it provides them with a sense of belonging to a Sudanese women’s culture they miss in the U.S.

CHAPTER SEVEN

REFLECTING ON *AGHANI AL-BANAT*: THE DISCURSIVE NARRATIVE AND
THE “HOMEWORK”

The Sudanese woman in the discourses of the post-colonial state (Communist and Islamist) has been at the serve of political discourses by and for men. The identification of the Sudanese woman as bearer of an “authentic” identity, especially authentic Islamist identity, has affected her emergence as a full-fledged citizen of post-colonial Sudan. Moreover, I could argue that the identity politics (discourses organized around questions of religion, ethnic, and national identity) of the different regimes in the Sudan aim at stabilizing, controlling and reshaping of gender relations, thereby attempting to control women's lives. One way to control women's lives (material and cultural) is by controlling or eradicating women's participation in Culture. The labeling processes of *aghani al-banat* and the censorship policy launched by the state, the media, and the Council for Classifying Literary and Poetic Texts against *aghani al-banat* are practical acts of controlling women culturally. I argue that categorizing the lyrics of the *ghanayaat*, and *aghani al-banat* in general, as *habita* (of low-value and nonsense) by these forces is a way of masking the issues of class, poverty, and female autonomy, perpetuating their social “misrecognition” in the larger community.

Despite being labeled as “loose” singing, *aghani al-banat* provided a discursive space by which the Sudanese women foreground individual/group stories of injustice and transformed these stories into a frame of a larger picture of systemic class and gender inequalities. *Aghani al-banat* provided a public space in which alternative narratives of social and gender relations could be voiced; nearly every song offered both a framework

of critiquing the existing relations in a fun simple way as well as a dream of improvement.

Reflecting on *Aghani al-banat* as a Popular Music and a Cultural Medium

Aghani al-banat as a popular culture reflected the class, ethnic, and gender inequalities within the society and reflected the power of the Sudanese woman to name those inequalities and her aspirations to change her realities. Moreover, *aghani al-banat* is an embodiment of the collective awareness that reflects the histori(es), realiti(es), and the expectations of the Sudanese women. In other words, the Sudanese women, especially the pioneering performers of ex-slave descendent origin, created their own culture and popular literature in which they contextualized the past, present and the future of their varied realities and fantasies. Thus, *aghani al-banat* appeared as a powerful cultural communication practice that connects the Sudanese women with the history of the lived experiences in the 1930s when the Sudanese women sang their “train blues” and the present fantasies of joining their lovers in the “heights of London”. As a communication practice and as a popular culture *aghani al-banat* is the presence of what the Sudanese woman feels and thinks at that very moment and it is a powerful indicator of that feeling. Moreover, most of *aghani al-banat* analyzed in this research are composed in the first person making the experiences of the Sudanese women both personal and immediate.

In this research the *tom-tom* songs that constitute a huge part of *aghani al-banat* in the urban centers of the Sudan, and the focus of the research, have been classified as working- class songs produced and reproduced by social-economic and ethnic relations

that characterize and shape the Sudanese society. The *ghanayaat* who took the lead of composing and performing their own songs and performing [*aghani sh'abiya*] folk *tom-tom* songs with no specific composer are part of the people of the periphery, slave-descendants, that return to rewrite the history and fiction of the metropolis. As L. Fair (2001) and Carby (1988) argued in the 1920s-1930s, working-class women of African descent on the American and the African continents proclaimed their freedom to choose their partners and choose their lovers. In 1930's Sudan, the ex-slave Sudanese women who emerged as free women sung about their lovers, their unequal access to education, migration, work, and unequal access to decent living that caused pain and disappointment and became frequent topics addressed in *tom-tom* songs.

With the appearance of *tom-tom* as a popular culture of performance, the participation of the Sudanese women in music and dance rituals has changed. Subsequently, women's performance has changed from ethnic-group singing to individual performance and as a result the 1930s and 1940s witnessed the appearance of a wave of female singers in different cities in the Sudan. Thus, the Sudanese women who in the 1920s sung facing the walls and not the audiences, started to perform individually facing their audience. On the other hand, the participation of women as audiences in music and dance has changed. The *tom-tom* rhythm helped in liberating the body movement of the Sudanese woman by moving every part of their body rather than just moving their heads and necks as the Sudanese woman used to do in the past. In fact the performers of *tom-tom*, *aghani al-banat*, appeared as singers and as teachers of dance. In the previous discussion I showed the role of the *ghanaya* since the 1930s as a teacher who teaches the bride how to dance in her wedding party. The body movements of bridal

dance, mastered by the *ghanaya*, usually transfer from home to home and that's what made the real shift in the dance experience of the Sudanese woman.

Aghani al-banat and the *ghanayaat* are very central to the formation of discourses about gender and the taboo issues of sexuality and women's love stories. Moreover, I argued that the role of the *ghanayaat* in performing *aghani al-banat* should be understood as not limited to entertainment but also a means of circulating the news of updated fashion to the Sudanese women all over the country.

The research showed that the context in which *aghani al-banat* is performed is very crucial to the understanding of *aghani al-banat* because it provides the discursive space for women to freely express love, sexuality, and fantasies. In these women's gatherings, the *ghanaya* dominates and dictates the emotional tenor of celebration. Through the loud singing of the *ghanaya*, the loud voice of the *daloka*, and the mastering of body movements by the *ghanaya*, the audience is drawn up into a collective state of celebration of their sexuality, femininity, and celebrating the power of deviance.

In my attempt to understand the Sudanese women's bodies, during my participation in wedding parties in Khartoum, I found it multilayered and highly complex. In a way the body of the bride and the bodies of other Sudanese women who took off the *hijab* in private women's gatherings, seemed to be a battlefield where the cultural struggle of post-colonial societies were waged. Due to the proliferation of western body images through the satellite dishes that sit on nearly every roof of the houses of Greater Khartoum, the Sudanese woman started to buy into the western sexually exposing attires. In this sense her body become more and more capitalized and commoditized. However, the capitalized westernized body of the Sudanese woman is also simultaneously

constructed “traditionally”: propertized and carries family sexual honor. The songs about the metaphoric body showed this battlefield of cultural struggle between westernization and “tradition” or Sudanese cultural body images. The songs of the bridal dance show that the bride usually wears western or international designs in her attires while dancing on songs that emphasize honor and purity as understood by the Sudanese culture. In this sense the bride’s body is praised as virgin, asexual, and conservative.

I also argued in my analysis that the internationalization of the bride in Sudan contested the geographically bounded notions of national culture.

Critical Ethnography: Some Self-reflexive Moments From “Home” to the Academy

I prepared myself with reading materials about the experiences of postcolonial feminists who returned home to study their own communities and the problems they faced in placing themselves within these communities. Yet, I gave my imagination more than one chance to dream of a smooth interviewing processes with the research subjects as I dreamed of a unity as Sudanese women. However, when I interacted with the singers I was surprised how issues of class, access to education, ethnicity, and age could generate distance as well as closeness with the subjects of this research. These divisions made the westernized notion of a monolithic third world woman an imaginary image.

For the Sudanese society it is true that the female singer is socially situated as different from other women who do not take singing as a career. I remember how some of my friends and relatives in Sudan laughed at me and criticized my research because it is mainly concerned with the performers of *aghani al-banat*. I was even criticized more when some of my relatives knew that I went to Hanan Bolo’s house in Omdurman to

conduct my interview. I have been blamed for chatting with and visiting women of “bad” reputation and entering a house that has rarely been seen by a *muhtarama* (decent) woman other than those who go to Hanan to book for wedding parties and other celebrations and even booking for these occasions usually done via phone. Thus these culturally constructed images of a *ghanaya* and non-*ghanaya* by the Sudanese society made the divisions of native/non-native deeper.

Like Lal (1999) within the postcolonial idiom I found some useful pathways (not solutions) to the relationship between the researcher and the research. By adopting Haraway’s (1992) politics and epistemologies of location I found my way to work my multiple locations as a researcher, an audience, middle class Sudanese woman, western educated, living in the U.S. in relation to the research subjects. I found that only through where and how I locate my self within the interviews with the singers and how I can make shifts within these multiple locations and identities that I could be able to rework the dualisms of native/non-native and insider/outsider. Most importantly, by contextualizing the narratives of the three singers within the social-political and ideological context of the Sudanese society and within the internal politics of the research (insider/outsider or researcher/researched) I tried to picture the participants as agents and actors not a screen or a resource. Accordingly, by discussing how the singers responded to my concerns: the concepts and images they used to express themselves and their relationships with each other, as well as their silences, I tried to state how the singers asserted their own agencies and own representations in this research.

Mohanty (1991) argued that ethnographic feminist researchers should not only represent third world women as active subjects, but also acknowledge the subtle ways in

which women resist their subordination and create social space for themselves.

Accordingly, telling the stories and narratives of the three Sudanese women performers with special emphasis on the context, conditions, and political/social struggle became an objective to this research. Subsequently, by applying ethnographic methods and group discussions, the research was not trying to give voice to the Sudanese women performers and audiences of *aghani al-banat*. I aimed at weaving their voices with my own voice as a researcher and an audience and to bring these voices into the center of a scholarship in women, music, culture, and communication. The participants of this research and myself together worked for documenting the voice(s), historie(s) and the experiences of three women singers with music.

In this research listening to the stori(es) of the three performers opened the door to many reflective questions about my own identity as a Sudanese and to my position as a feminist and an academic. The three performers are part of a community of women singers who are, in an inspiring way, negotiating their worlds and resisting norms of patriarchy, tradition, and an Islamizing gender discourse that all work for controlling Sudanese women's positions and agencies. My interaction with the singer Hawa urged me to listen very closely to her story during the interview and many times after. Hawa's story emphasizing her role in resisting colonialism and fighting against patriarchal norms governing the Sudanese society in the 1920s and 1930s made me think about my own position as a feminist. Clearly Hawa has been a fighter for decades and has participated in the history-formation of Sudan since before I was born. However it is myself and other educated Sudanese women, due to our access to higher education and publication, who are the ones who could receive recognition as feminists not Hawa. Neither the

media nor the women's movement in Sudan gave Hawa and other Sudanese women, who fought behind the scenes, any recognition to their roles in Sudan's culture and politics. Instead, Hawa is continuously being referred to as just a *ghanya shabiyya* [folk songster]. My realization of this inequality of opportunities and injustice made me question my own position as a feminist and made me really believe in the biases in history writing. How many histories in the world are male-biased and partially written?

On the other hand, when Amal talked about her experience as a singer and the perception of the Sudanese society to her as a singer, Amal mentioned that she knows no one of her close girl friends that would allow her brother to marry her because she is a singer. When Amal said that, I stopped and asked myself if I for instance would allow my brother to marry Amal? What Amal's story tells me as a woman labeling another woman, and as a human being? What injustice does the Sudanese society generate in judging the singers as loose/bad women? How are *we* (the Sudanese women) not only divided by class, ethnicity, education, age, but also sadly divided by professions. Amal and I share many things in common of being middle class women, acquiring higher education, and from the dominant ethnic group in Sudan, yet Amal made it clear that she and I are different or perceived differently by the society because she is a singer and I am not.

My interview with Hanan also showed moments of distance and divisions between me as a researcher coming from the U.S. and Hanan as a *ghanaya* of limited education. I mentioned in Chapter Five how Hanan chose to represent herself and her narrative within the idioms of "modernity". I would argue that the internal politics of the research has made Hanan to represent me as an outsider, an elite, and a carrier of

“modernity”: belonging to the dominant Other as a researcher coming from the west.

Thus living in the U.S. for five years away from Sudan constituted another factor that worked to an extent to create a distance between the Self and the Other. In fact, I found the following question raised by Mohanty (1991) a legitimate unresolved question during and after my journey to “home”: What are the politics of being a majority and an elite in Sudan, while being a minority and a racialized other in the U.S.?

Writing about the thoughts and reflexive moments I lived while doing this research should not be read as romanticizing the resistance of three performers. However, I would like their stories to be read as stories about resilience and negotiation of power and domination. The two singers Hawa and Hanan chose paths and images that did not conform to the “ideal” image of a Sudanese woman. Hawa is a divorced woman smoking cigarettes, having male friends politicians and singers (i.e. more associated with male-world), and perform at wedding celebrations. Hanan on the other hand was divorced twice, she sings in wedding occasions and dances publicly for men. Amal tried all her life to conform to the image of an ideal Sudanese woman but has never been recognized by the Sudanese society as fully ideal as she told me. With all the rejection they face in the society, the three singers continue to participate in Culture. As performers, they negotiate power and gender relations in the Sudanese society on a daily basis as if they took that negotiation as a lifetime job. In the songs they perform, they question gender and class relations as well as praise men and the rich people. It is their narratives and the lyrics they compose and perform which both resist and conform to domination and power that brought the agencies of the singers and their power to negotiate their space within the Sudanese society.

Reflecting on the views of the women audiences in the diaspora and in Sudan, the research showed some differences as well as agreements in these views regarding the lyrics of *aghani al-banat* and how empowering they are to the Sudanese women. All the women I interviewed as audiences stated clearly their love for the lyrics, melodies, and rhythms of *aghani al-banat*. For the audience living in Sudan and their heads are continuously bombarded by the overwhelming critique launched by the print and mass media against *aghani al-banat* I found that they are caught up with the dualism of pleasure/empowerment. They said they enjoy listening and dancing to the songs, however, they feel singing is a means for the powerless uneducated Sudanese women who have no other means than singing to voice their grievances and problems. Accordingly, they think of empowerment as a process that could only be achieved through formal political institutions and not by singing.

On the contrary *aghani al-banat* have different meaning to the Sudanese women living in the diaspora. Largely, the group I interviewed in Iowa City agreed that *aghani al-banat* is a cultural practice that shapes what *we* are as Sudanese women. Moreover, they agreed that listening to *aghani al-banat* in the U.S. provides them with a sense of cultural pride and I agreed that the songs constitute a shelter under which I could cry, laugh, and simply enjoy myself. Some of the audiences mentioned that *aghani al-banat* are empowering because they assert the power to recall their memories of celebrating their femininity, womanhood, celebrating Sudan, and love.

At the end of this part I would like to reflect on my experience in listening to and analyzing the lyrics included in this research. As I mentioned in the Methodology Chapter listening to *aghani al-banat* as a researcher was a challenging experience to me

as an audience. Listening to songs of the 1930s, 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s from Hawa and other Sudanese people concerned with the oral history of *aghani al-banat* and thematizing these songs was a tedious and overwhelmingly difficult job to pursue. However, I enjoyed grouping the songs together and I was always motivated by the aim that the whole process of researching on *aghani al-banat* is meant to document this history which otherwise will disappear with the death of any of those who still memorize these songs. Whenever I go back to every group of songs thematized by the social and political relations they reveal and the metaphors they express I feel that I am reading the history of Sudan for the very first time. Researching on *aghani al-banat* and reading the only two books, I ever found, about the history of music in Sudan I felt empowered in ways I never thought about. The research widened my horizons about the everyday politics of the Sudanese society. Researching on *aghani al-banat* exposed areas of silence and taboos in the Sudanese society as well as made me celebrate my belonging to *aghani al-banat* as a women's culture as an audience and deeply ever as a researcher.

Finally, I hope that highlighting my experience with the Sudanese women at "home" and in the diaspora will help in transforming those in the first world, as it has transformed me, who have yet to move beyond the notion of the imagined oppressed, illiterate, subservient, traditional, and exotic third world Other.

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APPENDICES

APPENDIX ONE

LIST OF INTERVIEWEES AND NARRATORS

Narrator	Title/Position	Date
1. Yousif al-Mosili	Singer, composer, living in the U.S.	May, 25, 1999
		March,15,2002
2. Khalida al-Junaid	Former student of music, living in the U.S.	May, 25, 1999
		March, 16,2002
3. Abdelalla A. Abdelalla	Musician, living in the U.S.	May, 25, 1999
4. El-Tigani Haj Musa	A Poet and Assistant Secretary General of the Council for Classifying Literary and Poetic Texts, Television of Omdurman	May 17, 2001
5. Hawa al-Tagtaga	Singer, living in Greater Khartoum	May, 20, 2001
6. Hanan Bolo Bolo	Singer, living in Greater Khartoum	May 28, 2001
7. Amal al-Nour	Singer, graduated from Higher Institute of Music and Theater, Khartoum	June, 5, 2001
8. Afaf al-Sadiq	Executive Director of Al-Ashiqa for Publication and Printing, a Ph.D., a researcher on Sudanese women's lullaby songs	June,10,2001
9. Arwa al-Rabi'	Master student at the School of Music and Drama, University of Sudan.	June, 20, 2001

10. Ahmed Suliman Professor of music, the School of Music
and Drama, University of Sudan July, 22, 2001
11. Ali al-Daw Researcher, Department of Folklore Studies,
The Institute of African and Asian Studies,
University of Khartoum. August, 11,2001
12. Iqbal Haseeb a housewife living in Iowa City. March, 16, 2002
13. Najowa Rajab Working at a Day Care Center, Iowa City. March,16,2002
14. Sakiena Mohamed A student at Kirkwood Community
College, Iowa. March,16, 2002
15. Buthayna Satti A student at Kirkwood Community College, Iowa
Iowa City. March,16,2002
16. Asma Halim A Ph.D. candidate at Ohio University and an
activist specializing at issues of Female Genital
Mutilation in Sudan and Africa. May, 5, 2002