Chapter 8

Imagined connectivity, poetic text-messaging and appropriation in Sudan

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Abstract

Development discourses praise the mobile phone as a globalizing tool, which has the effect of "liberat[ing] people from the constraints of their settings" (Katz and Aakhus, 2002) and bringing them into the modern world. Counter-arguments suggest that mobile phone uses are culturally embedded. Situating the text-message in a "small media" framework (Spitulnik, 2002), this study argues for local embeddedness, i.e. "appropriation", in that it is used for a long-standing practice of poetry exchange. However, the effects of transferring an older practice into the SMS context, has revitalized it in a novel way, which, arguably do connect people in new ways.

Using discourse analysis, this paper addresses the widespread sending, forwarding and receiving of a genre of poems among urban university students in Sudan. While sending poetry is a long-standing practice of keeping in touch among the working class in Sudan, earlier exchanges were dyadic, private and infrequent. The mobile phone permits immediate retrieval, a format for editing and resending the same message to any number of contacts within minutes. *Intertextuality*, the borrowing and repeating words, phrases and themes, blurs the distinction between sender/receiver, producer/consumer and private/public. More importantly, messages are recontextualized, which, when circulated in the community, can influence the feeling of belonging, an "imagined" connectivity. For the marginalized Nuba people central in this paper, this participation is guided by inequalities in Sudan. Alessandro is from the Nuba Mountains, but a prolific sender of Arabic poetry and his story is indicative of a dominant Arab-Islamic orientation among young people in Sudan, regardless of their ethno-linguistic background. Widespread poetic texting permits people to appropriate an Arab-Islamic tradition through their use of literary style and linguistic choice.

Keywords: mobile phone, media, discourse analysis, community

[1] The term "imagined connectivity" is a play on the title "imagined community" (Anderson 1991), which emphasizes the varying ideological perspectives concerning the role of communication technologies in society—that of a national community being one.

Introduction

New communication technologies have commonly been seen as modernizing tools, that their use in developing contexts would be commonly adopted in ways that would bring these countries up to “modern” standards through new connectivity.

Mobile media have been credited with facilitating the flow of information, connecting people to global circuits even from remote locales with poor communication infrastructures. They are lauded as a means for people’s empowerment and democracy building facilitating “cross-group communication and integration” (Katz, 2006:117) a more open civil society through knowledge dissemination, broader participation and even political organization. New forms of social protest are shown to be possible through “instant communities of practice” (Castells et al., 2007) such as the anti-Estrada campaign (Pertierra et al., 2002) through widespread texting or SMS “flash rioting” following the recent Iranian elections (The Guardian, 2002). New forms of electronic written media have also been linked with fears concerning youth culture. In the West, this means the loss of standard grammatical forms, literacy, while in Africa fears are related to the loss of oral tradition and a disruption of knowledge hierarchies. Alternatively, they may facilitate the possible revitalization of vernacular languages (Onguene Essono, 2004). Such predictions (positive or negative) focused on the mobile phone as an instrument of modern change, that its adoption has a consequence of “liberat[ing] people from the constraints of their settings” (Katz and Aakhus, 2002) and bringing them into the developed world.

While replacing the “state” with the “developed world” as the locus of connectivity, this development discourse is guided by the same technological determinism – ideologies about what technologies should do – as earlier theorists of media technologies, people and connectivity. Anderson’s “imagined community” (1991) was critiqued for presupposing that connections via print media produce equality and unity, the effect of common access to a technology and the homogenizing of its end-users. What’s not

questioned enough in developing contexts for marginalized people is the direction increased connectivity will take when it is not used in a rebellious uprising or improved economic and social condition.

Some recent research on ICTs has revealed that uses vary widely from setting to setting and ultimately are used to serve locally relevant functions, i.e. “appropriation” (Hahn and Kibora, 2008). This was well-demonstrated by Horst and Miller (2006) for Jamaica, where mobile phones were shown to build on pre-existing social practices as a means for staying in touch by making a high number of short calls, in effect, reinforcing local circuits of connectedness more than forging new national or global ones. Thurlow (2003), concerning language and literacy cautioned: “New linguistic practices seldom spring from nowhere, neatly quashing pre-existing forms and conventions. Just as technologies do not replace each other, nor is it really possible to imagine communicative practices breaking completely, or that dramatically, with long-standing patterns of interaction and language use”. Following the position taken in recent studies of mobile phones (Horst and Miller, 2006; Hahn and Kibora, 2008; de Bruijn et al., 2009), the case here supports the notion that technologies and people interact and mobile phone uses take on meaning in specific cultural contexts.

The appropriation of the mobile phone in Sudan is telling. Using the tools of discourse analysis, this paper addresses an innovative function of texting: the widespread exchange of poetry. Text-message interactions are very much embedded in earlier communication patterns, but that is not to say the effects of this are not innovative. They are modern in local ways: their use emerges from ongoing practices based in local ideologies of connectivity, some which reside at the level of imagined connectivity with a national entity. While sending poetry is a long-standing practice in Sudan, earlier exchanges were dyadic, private and infrequent, limited to the privileged elite. The rapid editing and resending capacity of the text message allows for the resurgence and proliferation of this earlier literary practice, in effect, a modern innovation based on a

selective aspect of the past. Poetry has been an important part of Sudanese[2] literary culture for centuries; it is now a practice which has been seized upon by people in Sudan who do not share this history nor this social position. As the case of young people from the Nuba Mountains, a marginalized Black African migrant population, will show, poetic texting has allowed them entrance into a Sudanese "tradition". The reworking and resending of these messages at a mass media level connects people in an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1991) mostly based on the intertwined elements of Sudanese and Arab culture, but more importantly based on people's understandings of Sudanese culture, the ethnic, religious, linguistic, poetic and other elements that are meant to comprise it. It is a "tradition" which even Nuba students subscribe to and render personally meaningful. For the Nuba people engaged in this practice, it's not newness, nor global connectivity, which motivates them, it is their perceived proximity to an Arabic tradition based on ideologies of prestige associated with the Arab-Islamic poetic form. Thus its novel use here is not that of giving voice to marginalized Nuba. Rather, its novelty comes from its appropriation by Nuba people as a tool of integration into the dominant paradigm. Thus "imagined community" must be qualified; people are connected via discursive participation but their appropriation of an Arab-Islamic form is guided by their inequality as marginalized people who seek to better their lives within this paradigm. Connectivity may be indeed be correlated with improved livelihoods but in the sense of contributing to one's control over his life and well-being. These notions can only be understood in a local context and with a careful understanding of people's visions for technology. Here, ideologies of a literary form and the role of communication technologies are the foci.

[2] "Sudanese", here, refers to the dominant culture of Northern Sudan. It emerged among the riverine people who lived along the Nile and first made contact with early Arabs and Muslims coming from Arabia via Egypt. While their culture exhibits indigenous aspects of Nubian and other local groups, they claim Arab genealogy and Islam, speak Sudanese Arabic and have a general Arab-Islamic orientation.

Nuba Mountains and marginalization

This paper is based on five months of fieldwork in Khartoum, Sudan. The study aimed to look at language use and communication patterns among Nuba students at the University of Khartoum since students are known to be among the most prolific users of new ICTs and mobile text-messaging in particular. This is the case in Sudan (Brinkman et al., 2009) as elsewhere.

Sudan is a country plagued by a failed national policy with respect to its highly complex internal make-up. In the fifty years since independence the Arabic-speaking Muslims in control of the state have distinguished themselves from the remainder of the population through a claim of ethnic, racial and religious superiority (Niblock, 1987). As I linguist, I first came to Sudan interested in the effects of the new communicative possibilities of the mobile phone with respect to minority languages and migrant group identity. Inspired by the development rhetoric above, of interest to me, was whether it would be possible to speak of a community via mobile phone connectivity different from community in a spatial sense. If so, what defines such a community? Based on what I had read about the uses of vernacular languages in electronic formats elsewhere: chatrooms and internet blogs, signs of ethnic and linguistic valorization, (Danet and Herring, 2003; Onguene Essono, 2004; Palfreyman et al., 2003; Warschauer et al., 2002), it was hypothesized that such a “movement” might be occurring among the migrants from the Nuba Mountains of Sudan, a region of startlingly complex ethnic, religious and linguistic diversity. The Nuba people, while increasingly Arabic mother-tongue speakers and converters to Islam, made a presence in the international media in the 1990’s for their collective “resistance” and “survival” in the last Sudanese North-South civil war in spite of the massive displacement and fragmentation of their families. The highly educated and politically aware Nuba student population was a probable context to test the claims of theorists concerning the community-forming effects of the mobile phone.

The setting

In sum, around 800 text messages were collected from 56 students between the ages of 17 and 28 at the University of Khartoum, around half of whom were from the Nuba Mountains. The text-messages were transliterated and translated from the original Sudanese Arabic, analysed using the tools of discourse analysis and then used in qualitative interviews with individuals. This research and the results of it, therefore, are a combined approach of both "anthropology of communication" (Horst and Miller, 2006; de Bruijn et al., 2009) and social/anthropological linguistics. The central role of language use is an often overlooked factor in social science approaches to communication. As this study will show, however, linguistic analysis of text-message content is central in understanding the phone's capacity to connect people discursively.

I first describe the general behavior of poetry exchange and the themes that are specific to this genre, i.e. how this pattern exists today and figures in a general pattern of "keeping in touch". I then describe how early practices of letter exchange were an important thematic inspiration for popular poetry and song lyrics in the last century. In turn, popular poetry fed into the material that became the content of letters, showing how these practices were interrelated and importantly, the cultural basis for the current practice. Then I address how text-message poetry has broader effects through intertextuality and appropriation. I conclude by discussing how ideologies of imagined connectivity motivate the practice of poetic text-messaging.

The sending and receiving of poetic messages

(1)[3]

لو البعد حرمنى من لقياك ما بقدر يحرمنى من ذاكراك غالية عندي واوعدك ثانية ما بنساك **!!!**

"If distance prevents me from meeting you it can't stop me from your precious memory to me and I promise I won't forget you!!!"[4]

[3] All examples are exact reproductions of the original text message, preserving all errors. Data will be presented in two lines: the first being an exact copy of the text-message, the second line an English translation. Translations and all errors in translation are mine.

Although Alessandro's message to me (1) above, might strike an American or European reader as emotional, romance was not the intent of the author. Rather, this poem was meant as a personalized token of friendship, with more symbolic value than originality in its content. Although it was destined for me, its thematic and linguistic style is highly formulaic, and deeply embedded in a long-standing culture of exchange, which is now re-worked into an electronic format. It is one of about three-hundred examples of poems, *shi'ar,*[5] that I found in the data, a little less than half of all the messages I recorded, making this type of message extremely important among university students. The sending of poetic messages is one aspect of the Sudanese culture of *ittiSal* "keeping in touch". Their use is not limited to special occasions, but is most often described as a way to show a person that you are thinking about them or miss them, a way to make new friends, engage in courtship, or send holiday greetings.

Because Alessandro is such an active participant in poetry exchanges, his inbox is worth a careful analysis. In fact, Alessandro's texting behavior seems to typify this genre of interaction in several ways: his cooperative turn-taking, the reworking of thematic ideas in the messages, and his use of language. Alessandro is the son of migrants from the Nuba Mountains, and as such, his tribe does not share the Arab-Islamic tradition of poetry writing and appreciation. Nonetheless, he is a prolific sender of poetry.

Exchanges and expectations

A number of messages are exchanged between Alessandro and a close friend of his, a young woman named Karima also from the Nuba Mountains; she is from a neighboring tribe. The following is an example of one of their exchanges. Alessandro wrote:

[4] Unless indicated otherwise, the poem is written in Sudanese Colloquial Arabic (SCA) which is the dominant language in Khartoum but has no formal status, and is not normally written.
[5] Transliterations from Arabic are based on Ryding (2005) with slight modifications.

(2a)

الحب الغيرك حرام والبسمة الغيرك اجرام وانا لغيرك انتغام

"Love without you is prohibited, a smile without you,
criminal, and me without you, revenge"

(2b)

كل دموعى تزل با سمك كل زهرة تفوح بعطرك كل دقه بقلبى تقول بحبك

"All my tears run down with your name; all flowers bloom
with your scent; all my heart beats say I love you"[6]

Alessandro and Karima are not in a love relation. In fact, Alessandro is getting weary of the quantity of messages he receives from Karima, yet he replies to each poem with another poem, sometimes one he writes himself. He sees this reciprocal behavior as an obligation. This message (2a) was twice sent to Karima, on separate days, with a slight change to the words. Probably this repetition was unintentional. He may have lost track of which poems were sent to whom showing that poetic exchanges may be fairly impersonal. Messages are often sent to several recipients, after the details are modified to accord for gender or for the occasion. Some poems are sent for their novelty, and whiz around like fashion statements. Poetry is often metaphorically referred to as a kind of medicine, for people in need of cheering up. Language register is correlated with degree of intimacy as one student writes in Sudanese Arabic to her close friends but is more likely to send a poem in Classical Arabic to someone she knows less well. Most simply reuse messages that are sent to them. They might take them from books of poetry, newspapers such as *gelb bi-shari'* "Heart on the street", or magazines. Other sources include TV, songs or message services. Alessandro subscribes to a message service which works in coordination with the service provider and sends generic messages about science or jokes. For those who write them, many were inspired by poems they read in secondary school.

[6] Underlining in the transliteration means that the language is Classical Arabic, the only officially recognized language in Sudan.

The theme of ittiSal "connectivity"

In their various formulations the poems revolve around a limited collection of themes including communication, friendship, love, appreciation, affection and happiness. This poem exemplifies the prototypical theme of SMS poetry, that of connecting, (here "connection" *al-wusil*), itself, an important cultural ethos in Khartoum:

(3)

لو بعدنا ولو قسينا ولو يموت الوصل فينا ,انتو أغلى الناس علينا

"If we grow distant and if we become stiff and if the connection dies between us, you remain the most precious among us"

The poems both connect literally and talk about connecting. Overwhelmingly, the poems are about a problematic of *al-bu'd* "distance", *al-shooq* "missing", *ghiaab* "absence", not "seeing you" *shaafitak* or "meeting you" *loghiaak*.

(4)

وكت يشقينى هم بعدك واحس بانى جد حزنان ومفتقدك أقيف اترقب اللحظات
رساله حروف من شهدك ...حدودها من معين ودك

"When I think of your distance I worry and feel sadness missing you, I stop, expecting the moment as a message, its letters make your honey, its edges the source of your love"

The feeling of longing is dealt with through communication or memory. Literal terms such as *ittiSal* "connection/communication", *rassal* "write", *risaala* "letter/message" and other metaphors for writing are common, *al-huruf* "letters (alphabetic)", *kalimaat* "words", *al-bariid* "package"; *dhikra* "memory" and *mokhayala* "imagination" are other means for avoiding forgetfulness. *Al-murassla* "messengers", and the metaphor *nesma* "breeze" are the means for delivery of the messages.

(5)

قد تعجز الحروف فى تجسيد اشواقنا ليكم فنحتمى بالصمت فلا تلومونا (كل عام وانتم بخير).

"Sometimes the letter transmits the missing to you and protects us with silence without reproach (that every year, you are well)"

Poetry exchange is an important type of text message among young Sudanese students, which raises questions about the cultural origins of this practice. Is this practice a new one, emerging from mobile phones or an adaptation of an earlier communicative pattern? In the next section, I will explore the earlier patterns of letter-writing and the role of popular poetry in society before returning to mobile phones, the Nuba and the current study.

Poetry and personal letters in the Sudanese context

Earlier means of poetry exchange

The exchange of personal letters has existed along the Nile at least since the 19th century (Spaulding, 1993), although literacy was extremely low, even up through British colonial times, perhaps less than 1% of the population (Sharkey, 1999). The establishment of the post office, *al-busta,* was an important point of mediation and means of transmission in colonial Sudan. Its infrastructure connected colonial officials at various outposts in Sudan through official correspondence, and was used for distribution of the first private newspaper *Al-Sudan,* which, in turn, served as a medium for letters from readers as well as publishing poems (ibid., 1999). Bus stations, too, were important places for transmitting personal letters across short or large distances, by way of a messenger, *murassla.*

In the present data, exchanging personal letters was a common practice as far back as the 60's and up to a few years ago, prior to the mobile phone. It clearly forms the cultural basis for the current practice of SMS exchange. Importantly, these earlier interactions were mostly dyadic, between two people, and slow, a letter coming every couple months. Rules governing male-female relations were strict, such that communications were difficult, but not uncommon. Before the mobile phone, these exchanges were less frequent and not everyone engaged in them. People were more likely to write in prose; the letters were longer although the themes and the strategies

were the same or similar. People wrote of their emotions, of missing a person, of keeping in touch. They also copied popular poetry and song lyrics into their letters, which brings us to the question of the origin of this artistic style, at the confrontation of interpersonal and mass media through popular culture. How does one medium feed into the other, and what cultural inspirations do people draw on in composing a message?

Popular poetry and song in the Sudan

Tracing the "social life" of an SMS poem from its original inspiration, be it an old Qur'anic text, a Sufi chant, a Nubian folktale or an Egyptian pop song, would be difficult as references are not attached, and authority is not claimed. However, the question of real origin is not so much an issue here as is how people perceive it and how this guides their behavior. The process of emphasizing cultural sources at the expense of others, be it African or Arab, comes out in the *Haqiiba* poetic movement of the last century.

Northern Sudanese poetry and song are embedded in an inquiry of what it means to be Sudanese, as this is the question that the majority of the *Haqiiba* poets and musicians struggled with in parallel with the political events of the last century. While the question of a Sudanese identity is the subject of ongoing debates, it is accepted in most academic scholarship (Abusabib, 2004) that both African and Arab elements contributed to Sudanese poetry and music albeit in complex ways.[7] Much of this tradition is oral since literacy in Arabic was limited to the Sufi teachers. *Haqiiba* is a genre of poetry and song which emerged in the 1920's and is probably the source for the majority of text message poems, as well as the source for the urban modern Sudanese music genre, which took root in the 1940's and dominates today. It is known to be passionate, dealing with emotions, with Sudan, with the Qur'an, nature and

[7] Poetry and musical styles are sometimes considered one and the same, rather than divided into the Western categories of poetry being limited to a literary rhythmic spoken or written style and song being defined as a musical genre.

especially love. It developed in rural settings and borrowed structural aspects from Sufi chants and Nubian rhythms and was sung in both Sudanese and in Classical Arabic (ibid., 2004).

One feature of *Haqiiba* is the theme that I described in detail above, the theme of "keeping in touch", also important in Classical Arabic poetry. Early *Haqiiba* poet Khalil Farah was inspired by Arabic poetry but wrote in Sudanese Arabic: "my missing you is uncountable". Popular singers of the *Haqiiba*-based music, sang of the theme of "keeping in touch", although through methods that were used in the past rather than the mobile phone; they sang of letters and even of the post office box. Mohammed Wardi sang, "The letter I sent, said to me it wouldn't go at all, I brought him a messenger who went and didn't return". Ajaabri sang, "Not even one message to reassure me a little; the promise between us is to send everyday". Hashim Siddiq's lyrics suggest that he will send the letters by the wind, rather than entrusting a messenger, "I swear to you, I won't put the address and I won't write people's names and I won't throw the letter in the postbox and I won't give it anyone in his hand".

Haqiiba poetry and music was popularized in the media: newspapers, magazines and later radio, by a movement of nationalist writers and singers. This movement called for the development of a "truly Sudanese" artform, which would capture the personality, originality and "genuine feeling" of the Sudanese. Al-Amin 'Ali Madani critiqued Classical Arabic poetry and poets as being artificial and old-fashioned, calling for a simpler, authentic, and modern poetic style. Hamza al-Malik Tambal published a collection of poems, *Diwan-al Tab'ia* in which everyday Sudanese life and depictions of scenery are central themes. Rather than relegating Sudanese traditions to the past, these authors, partly inspired by Western and Egyptian literature, redefined a modern national literature based on an ideology of Sudanism (Abusabib, 2004), hence the term *sudaani* "Sudanese" first came to be used for educated Northern elite (Sharkey, 2003). What they considered essentially *Sudanese*, reflecting the temperament, aesthetic and

mood of the people, was used as a cultural model to develop a nation on, albeit one based firmly in an Arab-Islamic orientation, and led by men who called themselves "Arabs".

In the past two sections, I have shown how the poetic SMSs are an extension and proliferation of a long-standing practice of poetry writing and exchange which has as its own inspiration, the popular genre of *Haqiiba* poetry. The use of mobile texting has clearly been absorbed into a local practice and used for "keeping in touch" in a Sudanese way. How then, might the phone be changing society? Does new connectivity change the shape and membership of such a community?

Media, connectivity, and the shape of community

There are several approaches to how media connect people. Anderson (1991) famously described how newspapers and TV can influence the national imaginary, an "imagined community" in that it provides a top-down model of a community where members may not all know one another but share an idea of belonging to a collectivity by way of shared linguistic practices. In contrast, bottom-up approaches such as that of social networking models (Wellman, 1988) focus on dyadic connections and interpersonal information flows among a population. This second approach is more obviously relevant for interpersonal media such as the internet and phone since connectivity is based in instances of interaction and immediate social networks. This latter type of connectivity blurs the traditional distinction between mass and interpersonal media, what Spitulnik (2002) calls "small media" and includes such varied examples as "political graffiti, leaflets, cartoons, underground cassettes, web pages, internet listservs" as well as technologies designed for interpersonal use (faxes, video and audio cassettes, personal computers, and telephones). Situating the phone within a small media framework, rather than an interpersonal communication tool, allows for a broader understanding of its functions in connecting people.

In an earlier study, Spitulnik (1996) illustrated how mass media discourse in Zambian Radio broadcasts filters into common use, circulates in popular discourse, and is recontextualized so that it creates a feeling of shared meaning, and shared community in Zambian society. She describes how high "frequency of interaction", "density of communication" and "shared linguistic knowledge" are effects of mass communication in a *vertical* sense, between people and the media source, people connected by talk.

These attributes are important but not sufficient criteria for the formation of a community, where a common sympathy, an "experience of belonging", or, using Anderson's notion of shared identity through imagination, are necessary attributes. However, she argues, Anderson's notion misses how community is forged through lateral communication and participation, the "repeating, recycling and recontextualizing of media discourse […] establishes an indirect connectivity […]" (Spitulnik, 1996:164). Media discourses are entangled in other utterances and dialogues which make them interpretable, "cross-linkages of language in use", or "intertextuality". As speech forms are transported from one context to another, they lose certain meanings and obtain others, are "decontextualized" and "recontextualized". Because of their public accessibility, these intertextual bits create a discourse through shared use, and shared meaning. Through the process of intertextualization, mass media discourse moves laterally in society as well, lending further support to the importance of the media in the formation of solidarity.

While this latter discussion concerns mass media, many of its features are applicable to the current study. The mobile phone was designed for interpersonal use, its flexible format allows for instant high frequency interaction, quick informal writing, easy editing, and resending capacities, as well as being portable, making it extremely accessible. In fact, even though Spitulnik emphasized the intertextual lateral functions of mass media discourse, "small media" such as the mobile phone, put these lateral interactions on center stage, a genre of communication where the frequency and density of daily

texting is greater than the outside sourcing of mass media texts such as newspapers or songs. Through the process of personalizing messages, different “voices and texts” are incorporated. When this happens, meaning is recentered or recontextualized to align participants or signal positionings in messages between two people. They create belonging through discursive exposure laterally, through circulation, through intertextuality and popular participation. For the Nuba, this recontextualization is a method of appropriation, whereby ownership is claimed over the poetic form. It occurs in subtle and different ways. In the next section, I give examples of how this happens in the text-message data.

Appropriation

Poems migrate from various sources: from spoken or musical oral genres, to newspapers and magazines, to personal letters, involving messengers, missing, silence and communication, the theme which is then sung about in new songs, the lyrics of which are then copied into personal letters, and later SMS poems, forwarded, reworked and resent. As such, the messages are decontextualized as information about the source of any of the writings is difficult, if not impossible. Very few if any of these poems were exact quotes, excepting, perhaps, some of the song lyrics and religious proverbs.[8]

In the following examples, I illustrate how the text message is recontextualized for personal use. It is a type of written media, a hybrid between mass and interpersonal media, and a context which allows for new members such as the Nuba to participate in the popular revival and widespread use of poetry writing and sending.

The following poem taken from Alessandro’s inbox is an example of an extremely common strategy, that of tailoring the message, whatever its source, with a greeting.

[8] Dr. Omer al Siddiq at the Arabic Language Institute at the University of Khartoum.

(6)

فى زحام الاعوام يمضي عام تلو عام فى كل عام حقائق واحلام وانا حلمى ان اركى بخيرفى كل عام (وكل سنه وانتى طيبه

"In the crowd the years pass one after another, every year in truth and dreams, my dream is to see you well in every year, that every year, you are well"

The poem ends with the repetition of a phrase, "see you well in every year, that every year, you are well". The poem and first greeting are written in Classical Arabic, followed by the standard holiday greeting in Sudanese Arabic, *kulu sana wa inti Tayyiba* "that every year, you are well". According to Goffman's (1981) "frame analysis", people signal their definition of a situation through framing, i.e. how it is contextualized or how meaning is constructed in interaction. Within frames, speakers (in this case, texters) adopt different performances depending on how committed they are to the text, how accountable or agentive, they want to be and what social roles they want to play. Goffman subdivided the idea of a speaker into different performance types: of relevance here are the "author" (person creating the utterance), "principal" (person assuming emotional responsibility for the utterance) and the "animator" (person relaying the utterance created by someone else). In the poem in (6), Alessandro takes on the performance of animator of the message, not taking responsibility for the creation of the Classical Arabic portion of the text. He probably did not write it because 1) it is very rare for people to make original compositions in this register 2) there is an unnatural repetition of the greeting and 3) the switch into Sudanese shows the actual function of the poem, which is to greet the recipient. This message is in a greeting frame, where the greeting portion (in Sudanese) is the work of the "author", while the poetic portion is being animated by the sender but not authored. In this way, the poem is discreetly marked as generic, and its sender exempt from being the author of the

emotional content. The greeting frame most likely contextualizes an anonymous text as being directed at a person, but not designed for the person. The switch into Sudanese is straddling the larger Arabic world on the one hand by coming from a Classical Arabic source, but the colloquial greeting grounds the discourse to the Sudanese context.

In the next example, a popular Sudanese song by Zayden Ibrahim is not only added onto but reworked:

(7)

لو احبك عمرى كلو برضو شايف ما كفايه اصلى فى حبك غرقته

وناوى اغرق للنهايه

"If I love you all my life still I see it as unsatisfactory; in fact I live in your love and I intend to go deep to the end"

Compare with the original lyrics of this song: "If I love you all my life, still, I feel it will not satisfy me". The sender of this message is taking over the responsibility of principal here, by replacing words, and adding more. The entire message is in Sudanese Arabic, which is the language of intimacy. That and the reworked lyrics suggest that the sender is assuming emotional responsibility for the poem.

The last two sets of examples illustrate "authorship". These two poems came from Alessandro's sent messages one day after the other:

(8a)

اعيش عمرى بدون الناس وابيع عمرى بدون احساس عشانك يا اعز

الناس؟؟؟

"Living my age without people and by my age without sense because of you, most precious person ???"

(8b)

لو حبوني كل الناس ووزنوني بالالماس مابتغير الاحساس انتي عندى

الاساس؟؟؟؟

"If all people loved me and measured me with diamonds my feeling doesn't change towards you, you are my base ????"

The English translations are not very revealing here but in the Arabic there is a rhyme scheme and stress pattern that both of these poems adhere to based on the word *naas* "people". The poem in (8a) is apparently based on a Sudanese poem of the same rhyme scheme. This is one of many examples of poems which closely resemble each other, if not in structure at least in words and themes. Words, phrases, rhyme schemes are taken and reused in new formulations which are meant to be heartfelt and at the same time, evoke the familiar. Here (8b) Alessandro is assuming authorship, as the person who designs the text. He draws from previous knowledge of poetic forms and styles, and produces an original poem.

Below is a final example of authorship based on thematic reworking. We saw in the above discussion how metapragmatic discourse keeping in touch by writing about "keeping in touch", figures in Sudanese poetry and song, as well as letters and later text messages. In the following example from Alessandro, the means for delivery of the message modernize from a messenger *murassla* or a breeze *nesma* (as we saw previously) to the word *mobile* itself *jawaal* (9) but still finds its way into the content of the poem. Like the older means of "keeping in touch", the text message exchange itself becomes a theme for a poem, showing how new modes of interaction are incorporated into older themes of keeping in touch:

(9)

معزتك ماكلمه بتقال ولا رساله فى جوال معزتك كلمه تهز الجبال

"Your value is the silent word and no message in a **mobile;** your value is the word that moves mountains"

The metapragmatics of "keeping in touch", therefore modernize, with the new means of electronic connection, which, in turn, feeds into the poetry of that medium. Another example of an electronic element is *rasiid* "credit":

(10)

قاسى قلبك وبتعب القلب البريده لا رسائل لا دقائق من رصيدك ما بعاتبك وما بلومك بس بريدك .

"Unkind your heart and the hearts that love it tire. No message no minute from your **credit** don't punish yourself and don't taunt, just, I love you"

As I have demonstrated above, the tailoring of poems to the Sudanese context through standardized colloquial greetings, or through personal appellations, the reworking and rewriting of messages all serve to recontextualize, to pragmatically alter the message for personally relevant use. These strategies evoke a shared identity, history, folklore, and are designed for inclusivity, a means for the creation of belonging.

Popular participation and imagined connectivity

Anderson's "imagined community", is useful in showing how belonging to a collective is possible via some degree of imagination. As I detailed earlier, producers of poetry and song in the Sudan came from the Khartoum elite, and wrote for a very small, literate audience. Later with the advent of centralized radio in Omdurman, this genre became the standard for popular *Haqiiba*-based music moving this art form out of elite circles

and into the wider public, through the popular consumption of a typically Sudanese genre of music, but a genre entirely controlled by elite producers who identify their culture as Arab and Islamic.

Small media, in contrast, are technologies that facilitate public space that is participatory and performative. Rather than passive modes of participation, such as imagination, or appreciation, such as is possible via print or radio, text message poetry illustrates *active* engagement with the art form. Receivers take their involvement even further than simply consuming them; they appropriate texts, modify them, forward them as “animators”, or mimic them, often absorbing them as “authors”, and taking emotional responsibility for them as “principals”.

Differently from traditional notions of audience or public, texters are not a concrete entity, nor an undifferentiated mass, equal receivers of a top-down media event. Rather, individuals are recipients of private messages, intertextually linked to a common storehouse of poetic language. The recycling of poetic discourse forges a collectivity by way of shared experience as receivers and senders. Private texts go public as they are sent and forwarded, so that any number of people is exposed to a particular poetic formulation. In turn, the widespread exposure to such frequently used formulations encourages repetitive engagement, through the reusing of discursive styles.

Thus changing technologies affect modes of textual production (Barber, 1997), and alter how a public is constructed. The text message, as a peculiar form of media, has a particular relationship to its users. Poetic messages draw from repeated themes, copied and forwarded messages, and reused language formulas. Such “used” material in the highly affective language of interpersonal texting is paradoxically highly impersonal. Through the decontextualization and recontextualization cycle, interpersonal sentiments become common sympathies. As Barber says, “…specific forms of address to dispersed audiences of readers can also a play a part in

constituting new forms of sociality-…developing people's awareness of their common condition" (Barber, 2007: 139). Poetic text-messaging is a practice reserved for lower and middle classes in Sudan, is embraced by Nuba students and, indeed, was described to me as a way for poor people to express their misfortunes.

In a last example of appropriation, we see a recognition of this alternative sympathy. The following poem is framed by the vocative *ya nuubaawi* "you Nuba (person)", which signals Intesar's (the sender) alignment with Joseph, both as people coming from the Nuba Mountains, a label which stands in contrast to "Arab":

(11)

صباح الخير وامانى كتيييييرة مايتعد وبوابه شوق محال تسند يانوباوى

"Good morning, I have too much hope to be measured and the doors of missing are impossible to shut—you Nuba (person)"

Interestingly, Intesar uses the word *nuubaawi* "Nuba person", referencing the entire Nuba region, instead of *katchaawi* "person from Katcha tribe" which would more accurately capture their shared tribal identity. However, such regional appellations, e.g. "Northerners", "Westerners" or "Southerners" are common ways that people in Khartoum broadly differentiate themselves into ethnic categories. Intesar's use of the term *nuubaawi*, indicates the dual identity she is claiming for herself and for Joseph, both as people from the Nuba Mountains, but also that of outsiders, by assigning their origins in an undifferentiated way to an entire region.

SMS poems are complex, residing somewhere between the oral, folkloric, personal Sudanese style and the written, formal prestige of Classical Arabic poetry. They mirror ongoing competing discourses of Sudanese identity and show how writers and senders conceptualize their receivers, how they "imagine" poetry to be written. Their use attests

to how ideologies of a literary form and *ittiSal* "connectivity" give shape to this practice. Therefore, the data presented here also problematize Anderson's "imagined community". People are participants in a practice that is guided by current inequalities in Sudan—the perceived superiority of Sudanese culture, which itself is deeply rooted in an Arab-Islamic tradition, at the expense of other cultural practices. Thus, following Bourdieu (1991) that the Nuba adopt the poetic tradition is an example, not of homogenization and unity, but rather of their ongoing marginalized status. Discursive practices must be considered with respect to the social status of the practitioners vis-à-vis others, as groups with power, or those without. Those who cannot claim rights to the tradition of the poetic form due to historical differences, absorb the practice based in ideologies, which I have termed "imagined connectivity". Many, such as Alessandro, re-write poetry based on a perceived "tradition" where the feeling of marginalization with respect to the "Arab" elite provides the ideological basis for imitating the dominant form.

Text message poetry exists in an intermediate space neither as a wholly modernizing tool, nor entirely embedded in a pre-existing practice. That Nuba people engage in it, is telling. That they belong in part to a Sudanese tradition through imagination that is redirected through participation suggests that this technology indeed influences the shape of community. Thus the mobile phone is both a reflection of society; the discourses of Sudanese identity are carried into this context, while at the same time innovative in the way that it invites greater participation to a form that was monopolized by the elite in the past. However, it would be shortsighted to posit that uni-directional and homogenous connectivity is the outcome, in the same way that positing a national "community" is problematic. While imagined connectivity indeed inspires connectedness through practice, it is the locally and socially relevant uses (feelings of inclusion and exclusion) that inspire the direction new forms of connectivity will take.

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