Ibrahim El-Salahi
Prison Notebook
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Prison Notebook

Edited by
Salah M. Hassan

The Museum of Modern Art, New York
Sharjah Art Foundation
Ibrahim El-Salahi (Sudanese, born 1930)

*Prison Notebook*, 1976

Notebook with thirty-nine ink-on-paper drawings,
page: 11 13/16 x 6 13/16 in. (28.7 x 17 cm)

The Museum of Modern Art, New York. Acquired through the generosity of Marlene Hess and James D. Zirin, Catie and Donald Marron, Alice and Tom Tisch (in honor of Christophe Cherrix), Marnie Pillsbury, and Committee on Drawings and Prints Fund, 2017

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Prison Notebook
Ibrahim El-Salahi

The Prison Notebook begins on the last page of this volume and is read from right to left, as is conventional for Arabic writings. Turn the book over to begin.
Foreword

The Sudanese artist Ibrahim El-Salahi was arrested in September 1975 and held without trial for six months in Khartoum’s notorious Kober Prison, wrongfully accused of involvement in an anti-government coup. In the weeks of house arrest that followed his release, the pioneering modernist artist, intellectual, and teacher produced his *Prison Notebook*. Modest in scale but immeasurable in impact, this sketchbook of masterful pen-and-ink drawings and virtuoso prose and poetry in Arabic served both to exorcise and document his experience behind bars. Now, more than four decades later, the volume finds itself at the forefront of cultural conversations, assuming its rightful place as a masterwork of African and Arabic modernism. It was included in the 2012–13 exhibition *Ibrahim El-Salahi: A Visionary Modernist*, organized by the Museum for African Art, New York (now the Africa Center), in association with the Tate Modern, London, which premiered at the Sharjah Art Museum in May 2012 and traveled to the Katara Cultural Village Foundation, in Doha, Qatar, in October 2012. More recently, the *Prison Notebook* was central to the groundbreaking exhibition *The Khartoum School: The Making of the Modern Art Movement in Sudan (1945–Present)*, mounted at the Sharjah Art Foundation in 2016–17. The Sharjah Art Foundation and The Museum of Modern Art are proud to be partners in this facsimile edition of El-Salahi’s *Prison Notebook*, which brings the artist’s unforgettable images and writings to a broad, English-speaking audience for the first time.

We are deeply grateful to Ibrahim and Katherine El-Salahi for their interest in this project and their devotion to its production. Salah M. Hassan, the editor of this volume, deserves our thanks for conceiving this extraordinary publication and for sharing his profound knowledge of El-Salahi’s work with our readers in his essay in these pages. Sarah Suzuki, Curator of Drawings and Prints at The Museum of Modern Art, and Judith Greer, Director of International Programmes at the Sharjah Art Foundation, were critical in shepherding the volume to completion.

The publishing teams at both institutions have been models of cooperation, working together to produce this technically complex reproduction of the *Prison Notebook* as well as the texts that illuminate it for English readers. At The Museum of Modern Art, Christopher Hudson, Publisher, spearheaded the collaboration between our two institutions; Marc Sapir, Production Director, and Matthew Pimm, Production Manager, ensured that the remarkable nuance of El-Salahi’s work was brilliantly reproduced; Amanda Washburn, Senior Designer, conceived the book’s elegant design; and Rebecca Roberts, Editor, and Maria Marchenkova, Assistant Editor, played key roles in the preparation of the texts.

At the Sharjah Art Foundation, Ahmad Makia, Managing Editor, oversaw the collaboration between our two institutions; Wasan Yousif, Publication Coordinator, and Shannon Ayers-Holden, former Publication Coordinator, performed essential transcription of the artist’s commentary and ensured that the Arabic writings in the *Prison Notebook* were translated into the most representative English. For the translation, they worked with Mustafa Adam and Adil Ibrahim Babikir, who produced a splendid version of El-Salahi’s writings, capturing their beauty and specificity. We are grateful to Karen Marta, editorial consultant, for guiding us through the publishing of this special volume. Finally, we would like to express our gratitude to Toby Clarke, director of Vigo Gallery, London, which represents the artist, for his efforts in making the reproduction of the *Prison Notebook* a possibility. It is our great pleasure to share this extraordinary work with our audiences, and we look forward to future collaborations between our institutions.

Glenn D. Lowry, Director
The Museum of Modern Art

Hoor Al Qasimi, President and Director
Sharjah Art Foundation
Ibrahim El-Salahi’s *Prison Notebook*  
A Visual Memoir  

*Salah M. Hassan*

The last three decades have witnessed the publication of numerous prison memoirs by former political prisoners in Sudan, and a number of testimonials about torture and human rights abuses have been produced in pamphlets or as open letters addressed to the authorities and the public. These publications complement reports issued by local and international human rights organizations but differ markedly from them in their emphasis on the personal legacy of political incarceration in Sudan.1 The authors, who tend to be intellectuals and activists and are mostly leftist in their political leanings, have borne the brunt of political oppression in Sudan from colonial days and through the various national regimes, including both dictatorial and democratically elected governments.

The intellectual and political contribution of these memoirs and testimonials is immense, precisely due to their expansion of the public debate around both the demons of the past and the prevalent human rights abuses of the present, which include the torture, incarceration, and illegal detention of pro-democracy activists. Most imperatively, they call for the constitution of a national truth-and-reconciliation commission to address this horrific legacy, a prerequisite to a truly democratic Sudan. Yet what is most intriguing about these writings is the picture they paint of the prison experience as lived, witnessed, and narrated by the incarcerated subject-authors. They open our eyes to the prison as a space of resistance, political education, consciousness raising, and intellectual nourishment, which, ironically, stands in stark contrast to its conception as an institutional site for punishment, repentance, or reform.2

All of these Sudanese prison memoirs are works of writing alone, with one conspicuous exception: the *Prison Notebook* of Ibrahim El-Salahi, the pioneer modernist painter and visionary Sudanese intellectual who endured an extended period of incarceration in the mid-1970s during the regime of military dictator Gaafar Nimeiri (1969–85).3 El-Salahi created a series of delicate, visually intriguing pen-and-ink drawings in a sketchbook during his house arrest in 1976, after his release from Khartoum’s infamous Kober (Cooper) Prison.4 Both aesthetically and in the context of their making, they recall the prison drawings of the early-twentieth-century Austrian painter Egon Schiele, despite the different factors that led to their respective incarcerations.5 Both artists expressed their anguish and personal trauma by recording their prison experiences: Schiele in watercolor drawings in which emaciated human figures contrast with stark prison walls, and El-Salahi in delicate and meticulous black-and-white pen-and-ink drawings that combine a visual documentation of the day-to-day prison experience with hauntingly surreal self-portraits, brief stream-of-consciousness poetry, prose, and prayers, and short Qur’anic verses.

The carceral regime in postcolonial Sudan  

There is no doubt that the carceral regime in postcolonial Sudan is very much embedded in the British colonial penal regime that preceded it, if it is not an outright continuation of it. In 1956, soon after Sudan achieved independence, the colonial penal regime was subjected to a series of reforms based on the modernist European ideal of prisons as spaces of rehabilitation rather than retribution and punishment.6 Among other changes, this involved the introduction of educational opportunities for prisoners (mostly vocational, as a way of preparing them for post-prison life); access to health care and mental health counseling and to radio, books, and newspapers; and, for less violent criminals who weren’t considered flight risks, supervised release time in which to work and earn a living, provided they returned at night to sleep in prison. The origins and fate of these reforms have been the subject of contestation within the scarce but growing body of scholarship on incarceration in postcolonial Sudan. Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim has written that these attempts at evolving away from the colonial carceral system soon failed, a result of their “artificiality” and their shallow roots in the country.7 In contrast, W. J. Berridge has argued that the post-independence reforms were at least temporarily successful: “The reform-minded carceral system that existed from the 1950s to 1960s was not a mere legacy of colonial rule; rather, the modernizing Sudanese prison professionals of this era developed the prison system far beyond the infrastructure that had existed previously and espoused educationalist and civilizational ideals with an alacrity unseen in the colonial era.”8 This Berridge has termed “defensive developmentalism”: in their efforts, the modernizing nationalists tried not only to “demonstrate their...
capacity to govern their own country" but also to adapt reformist prison ideals to their own cultural norms. Both scholars agree, however, that there was an eventual shift from reform and rehabilitation to retribution and punishment in the prisons of postcolonial Sudan. This merits further investigation, but it is embedded in the rise of the military regime and of one-party systems in Sudan, which mirrored similar shifts taking place in postcolonial Africa and the Arab world beginning in the mid-1970s.

General Nimeiri’s military regime ruled Sudan from 1969 to 1985, when the famous popular uprising ushered in democratic rule. This lasted until 1989, when a short-lived multiparty parliamentary experiment was usurped through a military coup that brought to power the current Islamist regime, one of the most repressive and murderous in Sudanese history. Prison reforms were slowly abandoned beginning in the mid-1970s, as Nimeiri prioritized political survival over serious development programs that would value human rights and basic civil liberties. In its evolution into a one-party, Nasserist-style system of governance, the regime opted for consolidation of power. It subjected the population to austerity programs imposed by the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank, which eventually led to the decline of the national economy, the further privatization of the public sector, and the rise of corruption and the looting of state and national resources. These developments were further complicated by the continuation of the North-South civil war, which would eventually lead to the partition of Sudan and the creation of the Republic of South Sudan in 2011. In this context, Berridge has argued, “the government became less concerned with governing its subjects than with demonstrating its physical power over them.” She elaborates:

The shift towards more corporeal, deterrent and retributive forms of punishment occurred in the context of racial and religious ideologies which stigmatized the inhabitants of Sudan’s peripheries and denied them the capacity for moral and social reformation. Just as the state moved from rehabilitative policies towards physical deterrence in dealing with conventional criminals, the use of extreme forms of violence against political prisoners became more acceptable. In both cases, this shift towards a more violent and deterrent form of asserting the regime’s authority underlined the frailties of the prison system and the state’s inability to exert pervasive forms of social and political control.

As the repressive state security organ grew and its authority expanded, an ultra-judicial system arose, and prisons were expanded to hold political prisoners. The housing of political and conventional prisoners together tends to facilitate the spreading of democratic and anti-military ideas and to increase communication between political prisoners and the world beyond the prison walls. Political prisoners in the Sudan at that time were mainly activists, intellectuals, and trade unionists—people generally skilled at organizing in any milieu, even in prison. In addition, as modernist prison-reform regulations dictated at the time, conventional prisoners were afforded legal rights that the ruling regime and its security organs did not wish to extend to political prisoners. This eventually led to the creation of two separate categories within the prison population, and spatial segregation was maintained (at least in principle) between the two types.

PRISON RESISTANCE CULTURE IN POSTCOLONIAL SUDAN

El-Salahi has never been a member of a leftist political party or, for that matter, of any other political party in Sudan. That said, like many intellectuals of his generation, he could not avoid leftist ideas, which have had a commanding presence in Sudan since the 1940s, or their impact on the political public sphere. Most relevant to this essay is the interesting role the Sudanese Left has played in transforming the country’s prison culture. As we learn from published prison memoirs, the security system within the prison ward in this period was in practice quite porous; the separation of the two populations was not absolute. Conventional prisoners engaged in mutually beneficial and symbiotic relationships with political prisoners and were able to move between what appeared to be separate, well-guarded spaces. For example, conventional detainees were known to smuggle messages, medicine, and food to political prisoners. It is also well-known that prison guards tended to sympathize with political prisoners, for reasons ranging from political and ethnic affiliations to familial relationships to simple human empathy with their causes. Prison professionals such as officers and soldiers engaged in similar relationships with political prisoners and, unlike security officers, avoided torturing or mistreating them, knowing that the political terrain might change: the prisoner of today might be in power tomorrow.

Conventional prisoners had more rights, although the treatment of political prisoners by Nimeiri’s regime fluctuated in severity, sometimes harsher (restriction of access to the media, the press, books, and contact with the outside world), sometimes gentler. Imprisoned Sudanese leftists and Marxist activists engaged in collective bargaining on behalf of political prisoners, and they consistently put pressure on prison authorities and security organs to improve their conditions and their access to the outside world. They organized themselves into committees around daily needs and demands, and they introduced the concept of the “commune,” a system whereby supplies such as soap, cigarettes, toothpaste, clothing, and other basic necessities were collected in order to be redistributed equally among all political prisoners. They were also known for discreetly building
small libraries; books were smuggled in via sympathetic prison guards and officers and through networks of families and sympathizers. In addition, they instituted daily sports and physical exercise routines to help break the monotony of confinement and keep up their morale and health. For example, the late Abdel Karim Mirghani, former ambassador to India, offered yoga classes to prisoners in the 1970s. They also organized classes in all fields of knowledge as well as programs of singing, theater, and other forms of entertainment, exploiting the talent and expertise of the political prisoners themselves, most of whom were highly educated. Many Sudanese political leaders wrote seminal texts during incarceration. The most formidable example is Abdel Kha liq Mahgoub, secretary of the Sudanese Communist Party, who produced several of his major books during periods of solitary confinement in Kober Prison in the late 1950s and early 1960s.\(^\text{15}\)

Because of this effective construction of community, many former political prisoners have said that they found it emotionally difficult to leave prison and, in fact, had tears in their eyes as they left. Such mixed emotions are testimony to the camaraderie that political prisoners developed in transforming the prison into a place of knowledge, community, and solidarity in the struggle for democracy. Sudanese political prisoners also helped organize contact with the outside world. They kept their causes alive and publicized their demands by engaging in hunger strikes and other acts of resistance, usually accomplished through their highly organized underground movement. This came to be known in the literature of the underground Sudanese Left as “creating cracks in the walls of the dictatorship”—prisoners used social relations and traditions as potent forms of critique, targeting the intolerable cruelties that were inflicted on them with impunity and an utter lack of remorse.\(^\text{16}\) It is crucial to point out that elements of the leftist tradition in Sudanese prisons have been borrowed by other political groups in the country and even emulated by imprisoned members of right-wing parties.

**EL-SALAHÌ’S POST-PRISON WORK**

El-Salahi is one of the most impressive figures in contemporary African art. He is an artist whose productivity has spanned more than five decades, and he is a powerful intellectual who remains morally conscientious, socially concerned, and uncompromising in his artistic integrity. His contributions to the modern African art movement can be measured in many ways: the remarkable quality of his work (primarily painting), his intellectual engagement as an artist and a writer and poet; and his record as a teacher to a generation of Sudanese and other African and Arab diasporic artists. Born in 1930 in the historic city of Omdurman, Sudan, El-Salahi attended the School of Design at Gordon Memorial College (subsequently the Khartoum School of Fine and Applied Art) between 1948 and 1954, where he majored in painting. Between 1954 and 1957 he studied at the Slade School, London. Eventually he returned to Sudan, where he taught for many years at the Khartoum School of Fine and Applied Art, one of the most active centers of creative talent in Africa and a major contributor to the growth of modern art on the continent. It was under the leadership of El-Salahi that the Khartoum School emerged as an important group of artists, known for their distinct, innovative styles. For modern African visual art, El-Salahi is on par with literary giants such as Wole Soyinka, Chinua Achebe, Ngũgĩ wa Thiong’o, Kwesi Armah, and Tayeb Salih, among others.\(^\text{17}\)

El-Salahi’s career as an artist was suddenly interrupted in September 1975, when he was arrested, beaten, and imprisoned, falsely accused of anti-government activities. Released after six months in prison without trial, El-Salahi soon left Sudan and has since lived in exile, first in Doha and currently in Oxford, England. In his written memoir *Qabdah min Tarab (A fistful of earth)*, published in 2012, El-Salahi vividly describes life in Kober Prison as he experienced it, paying special attention to the daily routines of the prisoners and their interactions with prison and security officials, and beautifully interweaving this with reflections on his spirituality and Sufi ideals, through which he coped with the experience of unjust incarceration.\(^\text{18}\) The *Prison Notebook* functions as a visual counterpart to the memoir, especially the section he dedicated to his experience in Kober Prison.

Unsurprisingly, El-Salahi’s self-imposed exile has considerably affected the aesthetic orientation of his work. His early experimentation and his search for a new visual language have given way to a more philosophical orientation. Over the years, the somber colors of his earlier period and the brighter colors of the early 1970s have retreated to make way for a more assured exploration of aesthetic visions in black and white. The period following El-Salahi’s incarceration, which he describes as a third phase in his artistic development, has been a stage of self-confidence and satisfaction, and the work reflects the accumulation of a life’s experience. In the late 1990s he wrote, “I have started to see the meaning of things with more clarity than before. My thoughts are more organized and I have more mastery of the skill of painting. I am more concerned now with the internal structure of the work, which I prefer to express in black and white.”\(^\text{19}\) El-Salahi does not subscribe to the traditional Western distinction between painting and drawing, which associates color and shape with painting, and line with drawing. He has argued, “There is no painting without drawing and there is no shape without line. . . . In the end, all images can be reduced to lines.” Hence, he prefers to describe his works in pen-and-ink on paper as “shades” in black and white.\(^\text{20}\)
El-Salahi’s *Prison Notebook* demonstrates both his mastery of drawing and his skillful painterly hand. The drawings it contains are among the finest examples of his post-prison period, in which his work has evolved into what he terms “open-ended, endless, organic growth painting.” It can take a monumental size, as in his large, nine-part drawing *The Inevitable*, of 1984–85 (now in the collection of the Herbert F. Johnson Museum of Art, at Cornell University). Like *The Inevitable*, his works are often accomplished piecemeal on paper, then framed as separate but structurally related units that, when assembled, together form one large, unified object.

As part of their overall composition, the drawings in the *Prison Notebook* contain Arabic prose and poetry composed by the artist. These writings are executed in El-Salahi’s hybrid calligraphic style, which combines classical Arabic with the vernacular styles he learned as a child in Qur’anic schools, and it is possible to trace in them his earlier fascination with the rhythm and structure of Arabic calligraphy and letters. In this volume, page-by-page translations of the text in the *Prison Notebook* are accompanied by commentary by the artist, in which he discusses the images and writings and recounts his experience in Kober Prison.

Containing some of El-Salahi’s most powerful artistic expressions, the *Prison Notebook* will no doubt consolidate the artist’s place in a broader scene, but it also serves as a sobering reminder of the agony of integrity contravened. Through the work, the prisoner’s overwhelming sufferings is transformed into courageous forms of agency and empowerment, breaking the shackles of dominance and domination in the honorable toil for social justice.

Salah M. Hassan is the Goldwin Smith Professor and Director of the Institute of Comparative Modernities and Professor of African and African Diaspora Art History and Visual Culture, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York.

Notes
2. The American activist and prison abolitionist Angela Davis has described the contemporary prison as an institution deeply entrenched in a penitentiary system designed, historically, as a place of reforming outcasts and criminals rather than punishing them—itself a modernist response to older, punitive systems. Ironically, as Davis points out in relation to the United States, a presumed democratic society, the penitentiary is a failed experiment and an institution of racial injustice, with well over two million behind bars, half of them African Americans or other minorities. See Davis, *Are Prisons Obsolete?* (New York: Seven Stories Press, 2003).
3. The title of El-Salahi’s work is meant to evoke the famous *Prison Notebooks* of the Italian Marxist Antonio Gramsci (1891–1937), which he wrote during his incarceration in Italy by the Fascist regime of Benito Mussolini between 1929 and 1935. They were smuggled out of prison and published, posthumously, in the 1950s.
4. The name Koher, by which the prison is now known, was originally derived from Cooper, the surname of the first director general of prisons in Sudan during the British colonial period. Located in Khartoum North, near the bank of the Blue Nile, Kober Prison was built in the early 1900s. Other major prisons in Sudan are Shala, in Darfur, and Port Sudan, in the country’s Red Sea Province. All three are known to have housed inmates persecuted for their presumed political activity, both those incarcerated for extended periods without trial or sentencing, in a typical use of Emergency Laws in Sudan, and those subjected to a trial and sentencing. (In this essay, the term political prisoner includes both categories.) Some of these prisons are more notorious than others for their harsh conditions and mistreatment of this population.
9. Ibid., 385–86.
12. Ibid.
13. Political incarceration has a long history in Sudan, extending back to the colonial period. In the post-colonial period, it began to intensify as a phenomenon during the first military regime of General Ibrahim Abboud (1958–64), which was overthrown by a democratic revolution on October 21, 1956, rehabilitating a vibrant but short-lived parliamentary rule (1964–69).
14. Sudan is known to have one of the oldest, best organized, and most popular Communist parties in Africa and the Arab world. The Sudanese Communist Party was established in the mid-1940s as an offshoot of the Egyptian Marxist movement. It is known for its effective role in the development of a vibrant civil society in Sudan and the rise of a strong trade union movement, organizing among workers, peasants, women, and university students.
16. In Sudan, social relationships—such as kinship or familial ties—have been, and still are, exploited by prisoners’ families to improve the conditions of prisoners’ detention or secure their release. Prisoners’ families put pressure on individuals in government to whom they have such a tie, essentially shaming them into using their power to mediate with the authorities to allow family visitations, access to medicine, or the release of the prisoner.
17. El-Salahi participated along with several other African writers and artists in the Mbari Club, an experimental arts and drama workshop in Ibadan, Nigeria, initiated by the German-British expatriate Ulli Beier and his British wife, Georgina Beier, a painter, in the late 1950s and early 1960s. Several Mbari Club members later emerged as great novelists, dramatists, and playwrights; their works have greatly impacted the growth of modern African arts and literature.
19. El-Salahi, correspondence with the author, 1998. The artist has reiterated this in several published interviews.
20. Ibid.
21. Ibid.
Translation of the *Prison Notebook* & Artist’s Commentary

Ibrahim El-Salahi’s *Prison Notebook* of 1976 is reproduced in its entirety in this volume. It begins on the last page of this book and is read from right to left, as is conventional for Arabic writings. The Notebook’s front cover serves as the back cover of this volume. A reproduction of the Notebook’s green paper jacket (likely a repurposed file folder added after the artworks were completed), it bears the printed commercial designations “Kent Super File” and *Mqablat*, an Arabic word meaning “Meetings.”

An English translation of the Notebook’s Arabic text is accompanied here by page-by-page commentary about the work by the artist, recorded in Oxford, England, in November 2011.

IBRAHIM EL-SALAHI: I was released from Cooper Prison in March 1976, and months later I was still under house arrest. I just sat there . . . I could move around but only within limits. The experience I had been through, I wanted to record it. I have always been in the habit of jotting down whatever happens to me—I make notes. It had been a very bitter and also a rather enriching experience, in a strange way. So I started jotting it down in writing and drawing— the different images and the different places and the people I had met and what happened within those very, very high sandstone walls. You couldn’t see anything except the sky and the kites flying, flying above . . . I started to record it so as not to forget. Not only for me but for anyone who is innocent and has been imprisoned under false pretenses. Just to remember what can happen.

Each window has two faces.

I was arrested on the eighth of September. This drawing is a kind of figure, and in its chest is a jail. I gave it a title, because I mix writing and drawing. It says, “Each window has two faces.” The internal face: who you were and what you were doing and your intentions and hopes and aspirations. And the outer face: It comes from beyond. You have no control over it, but it has control over you.

A moonlike face as bright as the sun
Diffusing musk, promises, and hopes,
And the bare face of truth.

This face shows how I used to understand people and how I thought about them. They appeared to me like a face, a moon face, very clear, very far away, aloof—but sympathetic. And that face can turn to give you another face to reality, and you are squeezed into nothingness. You become someone with no identity, not even a number.

Recounting the myth of the flying stone

This is a strange thing. When you are ruled by people who have nothing but the weight of their power over you, you are subjected to something and not allowed to fly about like a free bird. Your freedom has been taken away from you and becomes like a huge rock that is going to destroy your world, and you can do nothing—not a thing—about it.

It was thus foretold that in a time yet to come.
The tale of what is here and now.
A flying rock and a sultan
Have engraved, at the peripheries of Sudan.
A perfect myth.
“It won’t take more than a couple of minutes
And you’ll be back home safe and sound.”

This says that here I was being kept. You can’t go home, you can’t see your children, you can’t do anything at all. You are at their mercy, behind bars. And the very heavy metal doors shake your ears with a strong sound so that you can’t hear anything at all. It’s just like thunder. Since you haven’t done anything wrong, you can’t convince yourself that you did anything that led to this kind of treatment. It kind of keeps you in continuous shock.

Since then, six months have elapsed
locked behind bars
And darkened walls of injustice spiraling
to heaven.
Not a single soul around,
Other than those whose fortunes were
like mine.
Together with the prison guards, we were
alike.
The echo of bolting the iron gates is
defeafening.
Like thunder roaring, for no guilt of ours,
For no guilt of mine, for no guilt . . .

“People and rocks. People and rocks. People and rocks.” I kept repeating this almost like a prayer, trying to see how in certain situations you can be petrified, you can become static. At the same time, you are a human being. You have a heart, you have a mind, you have a brain. You have an apparatus within you that can show you the right way and the wrong way, so you can maneuver your destiny as you go along. But sometimes it takes you back. By the actions of others, you are made into a stone to protect yourself, to protect your innocence. You petrify yourself because of the situation.

This reminds me of the day I was taken to Cooper Prison and was faced with this gate—a huge gate. It was painted, but the color was fading away and chipped in certain spots. Above the gate there was a sign that said, “Enter unto it engulfed in peace and security. And do not despair of God’s mercy.” Whoever goes in there is already despairing of anything at all!

Enter unto it engulfed in peace and security.
And do not despair of God’s mercy.

This is about the time I went into the east-end cells and found the people who were sitting there, people whom I had missed for some time. I thought they had left the country or that they were no longer there—I found them inside. One of them was a professor of philosophy at the University of Khartoum; others were the minister of information, lawyers, and so forth. They said, “Thanks be to God you’re safe and sound.” I thought those political prisoners must have gone mad. How could they congratulate me on coming to this wretched jail? And they said, “Thousands of thanks to Allah that you’re back safe and sound.”

Thousands of thanks to Allah that you’re back safe and sound.
Thousands of thanks to Allah that you’re back safe and sound.
Our lord was merciful in what was destined.
This is our Creator’s volition.
“But it may be that you dislike something while it is good for you.”

Welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome.
Thanks be to God you’re safe and sound.
Welcome.

Welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome.
Welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome.
Welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome.
Welcome, welcome, welcome, welcome.

حرة الله علي سلامة الوطن

[Arabic text with drawings]
كلاً دقيقان تعود إلى أهل
وجففت عيناه أشعل
وانوا وراء القضاء ما
وجففت عيناه تدوار السماة.

ولا أرى أحداً
الآن كان حظهم
كانت سعاد
مثل الام دي
مزلج الأوبال الحمراء
بتيت لها الأذن صراع
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