



The Revolution Continues: Sudanese Women's Activism

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INTRODUCTION

The months following December 2018 were a defining moment in Sudan's history characterized by what seemed to be unthinkable—the fall of Omar Al-Bashir's 30-year rule. The wave of anti-government demonstrations in Sudan began over the rising cost of living and escalated into nationwide calls for Bashir's removal. Beginning as random and disjointed protests in various parts of the country, the uprising quickly became coordinated with millions taking the streets. The main organizing body of the movement was the Coalition of Freedom and Change, a collective of professional organizations operating as unofficial unions forming neighbourhood resistance committees, organizing mass strikes and drafting protest schedules that were disseminated through social media, galvanizing the masses under the hashtag *#TasgotBas* translating to *#FallThatIsAll* (Elhassan 2019).

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Central to the documentation of the #FallThatIsAll uprisings has been the celebration of women through international media, the Sudanese diaspora and within the movement. The once vilified, ridiculed and de-legitimized roles of women activists were being crowned the title ‘*Kandaka*’, a name given to Nubian queens of ancient Sudan (Abdulbari 2019). Though the resurfacing of the term was well received in the movement, closer engagement with its usage poses reservations. By capturing a single romanticized period in which women were exalted in Sudanese history, irresponsibly neglects to engage with the subsequent violent realities that constitute the history of Sudan today. That is, between the usage of the title *Kandaka* in the 2018/19 uprisings and that of ancient Sudan, there exists a history of violent lived realities of women, namely of women activists that are conveniently overlooked in the present moment. Moreover, the sentiments attached to the claiming of the movement’s many *Kandaka*’s are deeply entrenched with an overwhelming sense of pride, patriotism and glorification for ‘our women’. The underlying ownership in the language amplifies the already grounded ownership of women within society that exists beyond Al-Bashir’s regime and cannot be simply undone by his removal.

It is important to note that although the harsh treatment of women activists was undoubtedly crafted by the Islamist regime’s practice, it was very much cradled ‘by a society steeped in misogyny’ (Malik 2019a). Interrogation of the drastic change in narratives and discourses surrounding women’s roles as activists as mirrored in the language reveals how their activism and subsequent fame is legitimized to a patriarchal end. This chapter historicizes the evolution of Sudanese women’s activism in the last two decades, beginning with the facets of the regime’s Islamization project. This provides the foundation to analyse the laws that engineered the policing of women in the public sphere followed by an examination of women’s activism through key mobilization points of the Sudanese women’s movement. I highlight the ways in which the political context in Sudan has influenced space for activism and uncover the overlooked nuances emerging from the #FallThatIsAll movement that successfully led to the demise of the Islamist regime.

THE ISLAMIZATION EXPERIMENT

A characteristic shared by many religious fundamentalists is the need for a construction of an imagined Islamic society unblemished by modern

ideas (Moghissi 2004, p. 60). In the Sudanese context, this took place through the re-implementation of Islamic Law as part of a larger civilization project (*Al-Mashru Al-Hadari*) that set out to ‘civilize’ the population under the umbrella of Islamism in 1989 headed by former president Omar Al-Bashir (Badri and Tripp 2017, p. 143). In Sudan, the civilizing project entailed the imposition of cultural homogeneity, demonstrated through the heavy pan-Arab and pan-Islamic rhetoric classifiable by the forcing of ‘Arab’ identity on indigenous groups across the state (Osman 2014, p. 44). The Islamization of public conduct was institutionalized in a separate set of public order laws in 1996. The implementation of the public order regime embodied a particular set of values designed to control gender relations within society and signify state engagement in regulation of the personal. Additionally, an independent committee was formed to monitor and uphold the public appearance—or what Nageeb refers to as the ‘Islamic outlook’ of the city (2004, p. 21). The morality sentiments attached to the laws serve to distinguish between the good (moral) and bad (deviant) citizen, with their application anchored in hierarchies of gender, class and ethnicity. This tailored notion of morality permeated through institutions such as mosques, the media and education system. In addition, the established courts, committees, police and security services designed to cater to the regulation of public moral conduct (Nageeb 2004, p. 20). In this narrative, all men take on the role of social and religious protectors and thus, are awarded the entitlement to ‘correct’ women’s sense as per state regulations. This could be described as a manifestation of ‘biopower’, evident through all aspects of society, biopower is ‘an explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugations of bodies and the control of populations’ (Foucault 1978, p. 140). As a concept, biopower reveals how women’s bodies are faced with becoming subjects of collective concern and interest evident through tireless regulation (Miller 2007, p. 351). This highlights how these gendered notions are not limited to the public sphere and in fact carry weight in *all* spaces.

The public order laws purport to be applied to all equally, however, the reality of the public order regime is that while the nature of the legal prohibitions leads to their frequent violation, they are not consistently enforced (SIHA 2017, p. 5). A gendered analysis of the laws exposes how socio-political discourses harvest the avenues through which women’s bodies are able to exist in certain spaces. Although all women are exposed to the law, particular groups such as alcohol brewers, and sellers,

tea sellers, students and activists are rendered the most affected (SIHA 2017, p. 5). This is arguably attributed to the nature of their lifestyles that requires their presence in the public sphere, leaving them more susceptible to the violence perpetuated by the laws. Engagement with Article 152 that speaks to the vague notion of ‘indecent/immoral dress’ which may ‘cause annoyance to public’s feelings’ discloses how the desired woman citizen is achieved through projecting Islamic norms of morality on women’s bodies (Sudan Criminal Act 1991). Behind the guise of morality the female body is forcibly concealed, making women’s dress a symbol of ‘cultural authenticity expressed in Islamic terms’ (Kandiyoti 1991, p. 3). What this seeks to unravel is how modes of dress and its inscriptions over women’s bodies lead us to the interwoven nature of morality and modesty. More specifically, how the state allocates policies that mould women’s social and moral judgement if not adhered to. Similarly, Article 151 speaks to the prohibition of ‘gross indecency’ revealing the perpetrator as ‘whoever commits any act contrary to another persons modesty’ (Sudan Criminal Act 1991). The impact of this vague provision is that fails to delineate the acts that could be ‘contrary to another persons modesty’ making it prone to subjective interpretation by public order police, who routinely arrest individuals on the above basis for acts that should not be criminalized (SIHA 2017). The penalties for breaking the laws are limited to imprisonment, physical punishment by means of lashing and/or flogging or a monetary fine. Unpacking this closely exposes the inherent unequal design and application of the law that is rooted in classed structures. Nageeb (2004) notes that upper-class women are able to avoid engaging with the law as they manoeuvre the city in private transportation and are employed in private institutions. This effectively highlights how working class women are the most vulnerable to the violence perpetuated by the laws. Accordingly, for these groups of women, paying a monetary fine is not a viable option, resulting in forced imprisonment or subjection to physical abuse. An examination of these dynamics indicates the inextricable link between state violence, formal law and material realities.

Furthermore, the prevalence of a non-Muslim Sudanese population cannot be understated when assessing the Islamization project and the policy packages that accompanied it. A presidential decree in 1991 obliged women to an Islamic dress code, through the wearing of a *hijab* or headscarf. Effectively forcing the heterogeneous cultures prevalent in Khartoum to adhere to Islamic modes of dress, regardless of religious background. The Public Order Act provided a disguise for the detaining

and humiliation of women, namely those visibly identifiable as non-Arab (Osman 2014, p. 53). This crucial factor proves especially necessary to an understanding of which groups were disproportionately affected by the Islamic hegemony and how experiences of groups varied. This includes the Christian population from South Sudan, Nuba Mountains and the small but, prominent Coptic population. The already marginalized roles of non-Muslim and non-‘Arab’-speaking Sudanese groups were further aggravated by the regime change. The Islamic rhetoric mobilized in post-1989 Sudan was heavily infused with the Arabization of identities, resulting in the erasure and silencing of groups who did not ethnically or religiously ‘fit the part’. The abovementioned laws sought to force adherence to what is deemed Islamic, and in theory ‘Arab’, on the vibrant population (Osman 2014). Resisting adherence to these policies became punishable by law, therefore fortifying their marginalization.

The public order regime underlines how gendered moral bodies are disciplined by the state in a fashion that normalizes and naturalizes particular ways of being. Hence, resulting in the repression of those who do not subscribe to state-definitions of the norm through various methods of control, marginalization, silencing and abuse. A deeper engagement reveals how classism and regional hierarchies further aggravate the laws governing the gendered composition of Sudanese citizenship. The exclusionary formation of Sudanese citizenship, established through gendered and classist provisions, fiercely regulated by the state and other actors, served as fuel for Sudanese women’s organizing.

SUDANESE WOMEN’S ACTIVISM

In masking the systems that disenfranchise women citizens, the state produces a shared experience across women. Recognizing womanhood as a site from which alliances are possibly built the following section explores women’s complex responses to exclusion by honing in on particular moments of women’s organizing. It is important to reiterate that the women’s movement in Sudan has proven to be more issue-driven as opposed to ideologically grounded (N. Khidir, personal communication, July 31, 2018).¹ Therefore indicative of the fact that acceptance of a single ideology is not a prerequisite for solidarity to resist women’s issues in

¹This chapter draws on research conducted for my MA in Gender Studies with Sudanese women activists based in London.

the Sudanese context. During the early years of the Islamization project, the regime placed a ban on the activities of political parties and dissolved all existing NGO's, forcing a re-registration with the Humanitarian Affairs Commission (HAC) and the completion of a strict security screening process in order to resume activities. The new constraints on political parties had serious implications on women's initiatives, as it severed the channels of women's activism that traditionally existed within party margins. However, even after the ban was lifted, parties faced regulation and were immobilized by the regime, further dimming women's activism within them. A combination of factors, namely resentment with the oligarchic nature of male-dominated parties resulted in the rise of youth and women's groups 'characterized by a dismissal of organized politics and a distrust of international organizations' (Kadoda and Hale 2015, p. 219). Establishing of new grounds for women's activism witnessed the formation of mutual solidarity and self-help organizations that seemed relatively safe from government retaliation. Badri (2008, p. 11) documents that—despite the registration restrictions imposed by the state—the number of registered NGOs dealing exclusively with women's rights issues rose to 37 by 2003. Women-oriented NGOs therefore constituted the bulk of civil society, proving to be the most active (Hale 2015). Women expelled from their jobs in 1991 by the government managed to move their talents to women-oriented NGOs, efficiently injecting knowledge from their experiences in the male-dominated civil service sector and the previous achievements of the women's movement within these spaces (Badri 2005). The transition of spaces occupied by women activists was accompanied by a notable change in the nature of activism. With substantial changes made in the political structure of the state post-1989, issues such as rape, sexual assault and the policing of women in public took precedence. Therefore, replacing previous focus on women's education and rights to hold public office. It can be argued that the altering of foci and new space for activism opened doors for Sudanese women's mobilizing across difference as the formerly exclusive nature of the women's movement took a turn for the better. These changes were reflected in the language used by actors, transitioning from identifying as part of a particular party ideology to more neutral titles as evident in the adopting of the term *nashitaat* (activists) (Hale and Kadoda 2013, p. 1).

ENGAGING THE STATE

Rape Reform: Article 149

Previous research on the Sudanese women's movement attributes the failure to introduce legal changes to the fragmented nature of the movement along political lines. However, this was challenged in the later years of the regime. Driven by NGO and non-party affiliated actors, organizations strategized agendas aimed at law reform. This is evinced in the organizing around Article 149 of the Criminal Act of 1991 that defines rape as a crime, but characterizes it as *zina* (adultery) in which the woman has not consented. The punishment for *zina* amounts to one hundred lashes for unmarried women and death by stoning for married women (Salah 2015). Under this law, a woman who was raped could be tried for *zina* if her lack of consent was not proven. Proof of rape under Islamic penal codes in Sudan necessitates a confession from the rapist, or four witnesses to the rape. This condition places women who bring a charge of rape to courts in a precarious position as they can easily be subjected to the harsh punishments of *zina* (Peraira and Ibrahim 2010, p. 930). Evidently, the law that conflated rape with adultery was high on the agendas of a number of organizations for years. One may argue that the increased levels of rape and gender-based sexual violence in Sudan's conflict-ridden region of Darfur served to catalyse women's organizations in Khartoum to prioritize the reform of Article 149 (N. Elkhalfifa, August 6, 2018). The urgency of the matter eventually led to the crafting of an alliance, spearheaded by Salmmah Women's Resource Centre, constituting a number of advocacy workers that operated as 'Alliance of 149' (Gayoum 2011). The law pertaining to adultery and rape in Sudan was confronted with the galvanization of efforts led by Salmmah in coordination with international partners such as Women Living Under Muslim Laws and Refugee International. The alliance comprised of roughly sixty Sudanese activists along with women activists from the continent including Senegal, Nigeria, Mauritania and Morocco who were facing similar challenges under Islamic laws (Tønnessen and al-Nagar 2015, p. 14).

The demand for legislative changes was articulated in the alliance's launching of the 2010 campaign, which created a platform for discourse between governmental representatives and women's organizations. Women activists shed light on legal amendments in other Islamic countries such as Pakistan, where the synonymous interpretations of rape and *zina* within law was amended in 2006, to urge similar reforms in Sudan.

Salmmah's role in coordinating consultations between Pakistan and Sudan facilitated the exchange of strategies between activists and lawyers. Such processes were rooted in the recognition of correlations between the Sudanese Criminal Act of 1991 and the Pakistani Hudud Ordinance of 1979 (Tønnessen and al-Nagar 2015, p. 13). Ultimately, the correspondence between women's rights groups from Sudan and other countries strengthened the launching of the Sudanese campaign in 2010 (Gayoum 2011), and increased awareness regarding the negative impacts of harmonizing rape and adultery. In 2015, the alliance celebrated the long-awaited amendments to the law that reflected the differentiation between *zina* and rape. The amendments additionally expanded the range of social acts deemed to constitute rape and replaced the vague reference of 'sexual intercourse' to a more extensive definition of rape as a sexual contact by way of penetration to the body, including the use of an object (ACPJS 2016). However, it is important to note that although the scope of what constitutes rape was broadened the restrictiveness of evidence standards still applies. Therefore although the law was reformed, with proof of some gains, it did not completely dismantle the premise from which the law emanates.

ARTICLE 151 (3)

Accompanying the amendments to the law on rape in 2015 was the addition of a clause to Article 151 (listed above) concerning sexual assault, the new clause reads:

(3) A person who commits sexual harassment is anyone who carries out an act, a speech or behavior that is a temptation or an invitation for someone else to practice illegitimate sex, or conducts horrendous or inappropriate behavior of sexual nature that harms a person psychologically, or makes them feel unsafe. This person will be sentenced to a period of no more than three years and lashing. (Sudan Criminal Act 1991)

The clause was informed by the coordinated advocacy of Sudanese women activists, who tirelessly worked towards transformative reforms that served to better prevent and respond to sexual violence, but more importantly, to hold perpetrators of abuse accountable by law (ACJPS 2016, p. 1). As of date, three cases of sexual assault on women in public transportation in

Khartoum have been taken to court under the new law, activists have celebrated this achievement however; remain concerned with the language of the law (E. B., personal communication, August 4, 2018). Following the tropes of ambiguity in the examined laws above. The clause reads in a confusing manner, as it speaks to the behaviour of the committer of sexual harassment as causing temptation and/or invitation for someone *else* to take part in assault. Making it difficult to delineate between the victim and the perpetrator. Other critiques of the law view the use of the word ‘temptation’ as implying that sexual assault can be prompted, allowing perpetrators to defend their actions by claiming they were lured or ‘tempted’ by the victim’s dress or mere presence (Salah 2015). Therefore arguing that the language of the law accommodates misogynistic arguments thus broadening policing of women’s clothing and behaviour, cushioned by the claim for women’s protection.

‘LUBNA’S TROUSERS’

In 2010, Lubna Hussein, Sudanese journalist, was arrested at a restaurant in Khartoum under the aforementioned Article 152 for ‘indecently’ wearing trousers in public. Evidently, Lubna’s arrest is not unusual to women in Khartoum where the policing of women’s dress is rife, however, Hussein’s choice to be imprisoned despite her diplomatic immunity (provided by her position as UN staff) is what makes this case of heightened interest (Hawkesworth 2012, p. 120). Hussein’s decision was strategic as it acted to expose the gendered and classist nature of the law. This was achieved by the launching of an international media campaign, anchored in publicizing the consistent disenfranchising of *particular* groups of women under the regime’s interpretation of *Sharia* law. The case popularly referred to as ‘Lubna’s Trousers’ garnered international responses and is perhaps one of the most well-documented cases regarding women’s interactions with the public order laws in Sudan. However, what this analysis seeks to pinpoint is how individual acts can have a ripple effect in women’s organizing. Hussein’s individual efforts set alight conversations on wider issues related to women’s bodily agency and law enforcement’s targeting of women in the public for what is vaguely defined as immoral. In seizing this energy, local feminists mobilized outside of court hearings and continued to address the case after her release through informal and formal channels. Among the initiatives born in solidarity with Lubna was Khartoum based women’s organization *Mubadarat la li-Qabr al-Nisaa*

(No to Women’s Oppression Initiative), which flourished in the following years as demonstrated in its organizing of sit-ins, press conferences, and demonstrations on a number of issues including against the conflict in Darfur, the Nuba Mountains and South Kordofan (Ali 2015, p. 172) The initiative stands as one of the most active in civil society spaces, existing as a safe zone for women activists—throughout Sudan’s regions—in need of protection and advice on how to advance resistance (T. A., personal communication, August 2018).

Fadlalla (2011), drawing on Lubna’s case, outlines the complex position of Sudanese women as being caught between misogynistic regimes that challenge their mobility and Western rescue narratives. France’s memorable intervention with Lubna’s case was demonstrated by an invitation of residence. In addressing Hussein’s case former French president Nicolas Sarkozy publicly spoke to France’s identity as a ‘liberated woman ready to rescue her sisters, who have been forced to wear the *burqa* by their misogynist Muslim leaders’ (Fadlalla 2011, p. 167). This seemingly heroic claim cannot be divorced from the larger political atmosphere in which Islam is deliberately measured by the practice of Islamic regimes. The complex positioning of Muslim women in the international landscape emerges as a constraint to women’s activism at the local level. In organizing towards revealing the injustices endured by women living under Islamic laws, activists are met with narratives that condemn Islam. It becomes apparent that efforts within activist spaces are impeded upon by perceptions held regarding Islam’s entanglement with the law. It can be argued that at the local level, the processes of intricate engagement and separation of theology from the oppression of women occurs (N. Elkhalfa, personal communication, August 6, 2018). However, from a Western ‘saving’ narrative, as evinced in Lubna’s case, the process of liberating women is achieved through the removal of the subject from the oppressive Islamic regime under the guise of protection. It is worth noting that efforts have been focused on forming spaces that mediate the challenges faced by women activists working in Islamic contexts. One such effort is the aforementioned transnational solidarity network, Women Living Under Muslim Laws that has acted as a collective space for women ‘whose lives are shaped, conditioned or governed by laws and customs said to derive from Islam’ (WLUML, n.d.).

The legislative strands of the above discussion draw attention to how moral preoccupations with women’s bodies and movement find home in the law. By codifying these particular notions of gender and sexuality,

the state mobilizes heteronormativity in a fashion that nurtures its patriarchal goals and desires. Finally, we are able to tease out two key features of state-building used in the Islamization project in Sudan, the use of women's bodies as an instrument to map the terrain and define the boundaries of the project; and the codifying of laws that serve to regulate women's behaviour and sexuality to guarantee women's adherence to the tasks involved (Peraira and Ibrahim 2010, p. 929). With an understanding of this, the following section will explore the impediments to women's activism and their experiences of the erasure of civic space.

GENDER AND 'CLOSING CIVIC SPACE'

In the case of Sudan, the ways in which these organizations and movements utilize public space was notably dangerous in the face of Islamist authorities. The challenging yet seemingly safe operation of women's activism outlined in the previous section came to a halt when the government administered a clampdown on a number of NGOs in 2009, ceasing their activity and liquidating assets (Hale 2015). The draconian government crackdowns espoused the sudden closure of a number of organizations, mass surveillance of activities, raids and the criminalization of activists. Authorities additionally placed greater restrictions on the media, limiting freedom of expression by suspending newspapers and warning editors against the publishing of subjects that 'cross red lines' (HRW 2016, p. 12). Effectively creating a dangerous and precarious environment for occupiers of civic space. By recognizing the intensity of government crackdowns on civil society, it becomes evident that there exist shades of shrinking space. That is to say that although the closing of space is experienced by all of civil society, the application of these processes is gendered. Women activists report their experience of government surveillance of activities as notably different than their male counterparts.

I was working on a case with a total of nine lawyers, three women and six men. The first day on the job one of the women lawyers faced verbal abuse from Security Council. The third day another woman was arrested and questioned by authorities. By the fifth day a fabricated case against me appeared. We were all working together but the three women activists involved only faced the challenges. Nothing happened to the men, even when dealing with us as a group the police would refer to the men as "*asatza*" (teachers) as a form of respect, and to us women as "*banat*"

(girls) to degrade us. Do you see? There even exists a lack of acceptance of our roles as activists. (E. B., personal communication, August 4, 2018)

The stifling of women's voices is undoubtedly linked to the moral fashioning of women in Sudanese society, as authorities use social conventions to harass women, threatening to tarnish their reputation by labelling them as deviant. The distinctive treatment of women in activists' circles is mirrored in the language used when identifying them. The referral to women activists as '*banat*', a term used to identify young girls and when used to describe older women carries a demeaning connotation, is a deliberate act underpinning the idea that they have strayed away from their roles and are in need of discipline. This is to demean their presence in activist spaces and re-inscribe their social positioning as 'less'. This underlines state construction of women's citizens that trickles down into society's expectations; these expectations are extended to other social actors, making the threat of ruining reputations a source of trauma for many women activists. As a result of the growing stigmatization on activism there exists greater anxieties around activists challenging narratives about gender said to be rooted in the Islamic faith, effectively 'crossing a red line'. Moreover, they often face the criticism of being labelled traitors of their culture and by extension, religion (HRW 2016). In extreme cases, this takes the form of branding women activists enemies of the state, importing foreign beliefs that are aimed at disturbing the peace. An interview with Darfur based lawyer and feminist activist revealed the drastic measures undertaken by the government to impede her work:

During my involvement in the documentation of testimonies by rape victims in Darfur, I was called to testify that the cases were fictive and that the chief lawyer played a vital role in their fabrication. My law license was revoked and I was taken from El-Fasher (West Darfur) to Khartoum as a witness, if I refused to testify then I would be convicted with reason. I was held in solitary confinement for seventy-nine days. I faced abuse during this time a lot of which was racialized "*You people from Darfur are the killers of the killer!*" "*You whores from Darfur*". In refusing to testify I was later convicted with crimes against the state and forced to flee. (T. H., personal communication, August 1, 2018)

The racial slurs used against categories of women activists finds its roots in the aforementioned homogenizing efforts by the state that cemented

regional hierarchies on the basis of ethnicity and race. This process produced stereotypes that facilitated the exclusion of women outside of the Northern—‘Arab’—Muslim category, regarding them as ill-fitting to the constructed moral Muslim woman citizen. This underlines the multidimensional experiences of oppression directed at women activists from marginalized regions of Sudan. The clampdown on civil society in part succeeded in impeding the efforts of activists and resulted in grave implications for the women’s movement at large. Firstly, the closure of organizations hindered the movement’s activity and space for organizing and strategizing. Secondly, the threat of exile and imprisonment resulted in the loss of many key activists, who through years of engagement acquired knowledge and formed important alliances. As a result of the threat permeating activist spaces, there existed serious insecurities around the leaders who remained, lawyer and feminist activist Najlaa Elkhalfifa stated:

The government has created an environment of lack of trust within activist spaces. You see the same faces at every workshop, owning the knowledge and not willing to transfer it in fear of getting tangled up with the authorities. (personal communication, August 6, 2018)

This was crippling for the future of the women’s movement as the dissemination of information, knowledge transfer and evaluation are critical to feminist movement building. Due to the the lack of trust, the process of collective reflection and access to past projects- that often act as ‘building blocks’ for future organizing- are lost. Thirdly, and perhaps the most difficult implication to overcome, the substantial cutback of funds that previously supported the agendas of various organizations. In a deliberate strategy aimed at deterring the efficacy of women’s rights activism, the Humanitarian Affairs Act (HAC) law prohibited organizations from receiving funding from foreign donors unless authorities approve it. Activists described foreign funders as ‘fatigued’ with Sudan, seeing as many have pulled out over recent years (E. B., personal communication, August 4, 2018).

Moreover, the shrinking of civic space, specifically the attack on women activists cannot be understood in a vacuum. There exists a link between the erasure of civic space and alternative state agendas. This link reveals that the framing of women activists as foreign agents polluted with Western ideals is part of establishing the fiction of a threat from an external force. In founding this illusion of threat, the state mobilizes

‘authenticity’ discourse as a response. The formation of national consciousness grounded in authenticity is a mechanism used to re-establish hierarchies on the basis of gender, class and sexuality. This results in the celebration of some roles while establishing grounds for regulating others (Hawkesworth 2012). This is seen in the dismissal of women’s resistance as foreign, which undermines home-grown initiatives and rationalizes the labelling of women activists as deviant and immoral women with imperialist goals that are not welcome in an authentic Islamic society. An understanding of this exposes the weakness of the state and views the curtailing of freedoms as a desperate measure undertaken to re-assert patriarchal order (Okech 2017, p. 17). Therefore, the crackdowns underscore the regimes growing fragility and defensiveness towards voices of dissent and justify its actions behind the curtain of protecting nation. The mere existence of an active women’s movement causes anxiety to the patriarchal state in profound ways (Moghadam 1998, p. 216); this anxiety is then expressed through a frantic attack on civic space. Nevertheless, for many women activists, the growing phenomenon of closing space for civil society represents an extension of the difficulties they have faced for years. The experiences of silencing, erasure and harassment have revealed their resilience demonstrated by their ‘resourcefulness and determination’ in the light of impediments placed on their activism (Mama Cash and UAF 2017, p. 33).

CONFRONTING ERASURE

Despite determined efforts to shrink civic space in the later years of Al-Bashir’s regime, activists in Sudan sidestepped government pressures aimed at immobilizing them and transitioned into new modes of resistance. While many moved into undocumented underground activism others used varying tactics to ensure their work continues. At the height of government surveillance on civil society, new organizations surfaced by resorting to the altering of mission statements to disguise their feminist agendas when registering with the Humanitarian Affairs Commission (HAC). Existing organizations used the same method by tweaking the descriptions of events to bypass government raids (N. Elkhalfa, personal communication, August 6, 2018). Former Salmamah Women’s Center staff, Zeinab Elswawi spoke to this tactic stating:

At times we would change the titles of our conferences in order to ensure that the government would issue visas to our participants. We achieved a lot by operating in this way. If the question is whether the government threatening our work is stopping it, the answer is no. The work is being done and it will continue to be done. We will get our rights, whether they like it or not. (personal communication, August 4, 2018)

This method of concealing feminist agendas, albeit to keep the movement alive, questions the consequences of reducing the visibility of feminist agendas for the future of the movement. In order to sustain much-needed resistance, actors in the movement are forced into depoliticizing language by distancing themselves from naming their agendas as feminist, resulting in the movement's limited action, reach and thus impact. This is to argue that the new modes of resistance were accompanied by a new set of constraints. Although the essence of resistance prevails, the commitment to claiming feminist agendas is hindered at the hands of the state, begging the question of how sustainable these methods are to achieving political guarantees for women. The dilemma remains on whether these tactics of bypassing government surveillance are successful in realizing the feminist project of *radical* transformation.

Although many of the alliances formed as an outcome of shrinking space are centred on the protection of women activists, other organizations made use of local resources and established creative alliances to continue their activities (E. B., personal communication, August 4, 2018). Many organizations made use of local resources and established creative alliances to continue their activities. In 2013, Salmmah Women's Resource Center organized the 'One Billion Rising' event in collaboration with other civil society and youth groups (Hale 2015). The coordinators orchestrated a 'dance for freedom' performed by hundreds of women from diverse backgrounds and age groups. In mediating shrinking space, the event was held at Al-Ahfad University for Women, an institution with a historical commitment to raising feminist consciousness (as evinced in its compulsory gender studies course for all of its students) demonstrating a far-reaching yet low-costing event. Founded in 1997, Salmmah's mission was anchored in organizing on gender-related issues and grounded its work in feminist theory. In fulfilling its promise, Salmmah's organization housed a library for gender studies. Open to all, the library was complete with archives of Sudanese women's histories that facilitated research on

gender, with Ahfad students being noted as frequent visitors (Z. Elswawi, personal communication, August 4, 2018)

At face value, these collaborations may seem coincidental or even logistical; however, the relationship between Salmmah and Ahfad University speaks to the marriage of activism and the academy. The existence of the library on Salmmah's grounds allows us to complicate the perceived domain of theory and re-imagine what it means to theorize. African feminists in particular have spoken to the binary of activism and the academy, attributing the division to Western, patriarchal systems of knowledge production that are rooted in particular forms of knowledge building. Gqola (2001) renounces this binary, highlighting its limitations that are fixated in the exclusion of other sites of knowledge, particularly knowledge that exists in activism. Rejecting this binary fosters the growth of theorizing and mobilizing that together are the key to uprooting oppressive structures. The penetration of activism and academia in this example draws us to the need of knowledge production to permeate public discussion and is born from an understanding that a movement grounded in theory is undeniably more impactful. Although the sudden closure of Salmmah in 2014 meant the existence of the library is no longer, Ahfad University continues to take part in the One Billion Rising event annually (Z. Elswawi, personal communication, August 4, 2018). Therefore, acknowledging how shrinking space has resulted in alternative methods of keeping feminist knowledge's alive. It is this persistence of activists organizing despite the regimes silencing methods that brings us to the mobilizing efforts of the uprisings beginning December 2018. With an understanding of this, the following section will circle back to the uprisings that led to the removal of the military Islamist regime.

THE 'REVOLUTION OF CONSCIOUSNESS'

Similar to recent and historical popular uprisings on the continent the masses emerging in the #FallThatIsAll movement reflect the vigour and commitment by the youth to reclaiming spaces, narratives, histories and re-imagining of their futures (Kadoda and Hale 2015, p. 215). The youth primarily characterized as 'rotten' and 'degenerate' over several decades in Sudan have undone this discourse through their labour that primarily built the remarkable movement and its insistence on peaceful protest action. In rising to their generational challenge, the Sudanese youth led and realized what many believed was impossible. The chants and slogans

of the uprisings used on the ground and on social media reflected the youthfulness of the movement in the use of slang and wit to express their claim to power. It is this invigorating action that revived older generations who had in essence thrown in the towel on Sudan and accepted the eternal reign of the Islamists. Grounded by the digital space, the movement relied heavily on technological advancements in awareness-raising namely through artistic content. Arguably the most powerful mode of resistance in the movement, the art revolution spoke to the suppression of creativity under Al-Bashir's rule.

At the main protest site, the General Military Headquarters, protestors exemplified a reclaiming of space through the establishment of art galleries, makeshift clinics, classrooms, libraries, food stalls, awareness-raising sessions, discussion corners as well as musical and theatre performances, sparking a renaming of the movement to the 'Revolution of Consciousness'. Moreover, the rejuvenating energy was not limited to protestors on the ground as the solidarity of the Sudanese diaspora channelled the ongoings in Khartoum through the organizing of protests and fundraising to sustain the movement from afar. The contributions of the diaspora speak to a sincere sense of connectedness and exemplify resistance that occurs beyond geographical location. Though there is much to be said on the solidarity existing in the movement and its accomplishments beyond the removal of Al-Bashir, no political uprising comes without its difficulties, ones that despite the joys must be underlined. The following section attempts to untangle overlooked experiences that have been subsumed under the larger achievements by reflecting on issues that emerged within the movement, asserting that gender struggles exist at the centre of every space.

MAYDANIK

At the beginning of protest action in December 2018, women constituted more than half of the bodies at the frontline. In an effort to break their spirits, the regime's forces systematically targeted women activists as a way to destabilize the movement as it evidently was grounded on their presence (Abdalaziz et al. 2019). This took form in the detaining, beating and rape of women protesters, representing a heightened version of the experiences of women activists over the years. Despite its efforts, the forces of the government tired as the revolution proved relentless. However, the abuse faced by women protesters was not exclusive to state power and

was strongly experienced from within the movement. This draws us to think about the layers and complicated ways in which movement building is experienced by different bodies. Despite the power in numbers congregating to achieve a single goal, women's occupancy in protest spaces is met with harassment and assault of their bodies. Bringing the issues of women's harassment by their comrades who are men to the forefront, at a time where action is contingent on collective unity, complicates the narrative. As a result, the issue of the gendered bodily experience of mobilizing is swept under the rug, as it does not affect the collective. Women's issues and experiences of bodily violence within movement building are relegated by the insistence that state violence constitutes something more important and therefore takes precedence. Central to this process is the use of nationalist sentiments to silence women's experiences of harassment in order to focus on the goal of the collective. The documentation of these experiences is limited as the power of mainstream history insists on a sense of patriotism that sidelines gendered and classed experiences for the movement. Within this framework, the power to bring alight issues is afforded to certain bodies, reminding us that power is pervasive even when there seems to be a single goal.

In speaking back to the sidelined issues of sexual harassment on protest grounds, women activists began a movement within the movement, calling for an inward reflection on protest action and gendered oppression. Resulting in the formation of *Maydanik* (gendered word translating to 'her space') a safe zone for women located at the main protest site, providing victims of sexual harassment with legal and psychological support. The space intended to allow for discussion on the gendered experiences of the movement, particularly the pervasiveness of sexual harassment. The introspection on the gendered experiences in protests spaces speaks to the added layers of labour and exhausting of energies devoted to humanizing women's experiences in spaces that are intended to be about freedom. The issues that necessitate the formation of *Maydanik* within a movement complicate the notion of 'freeing spaces' as it calls into question which bodies are able to exist 'freely' within those sites.

SUDAN WOMEN FOR CHANGE

The unprecedented commemoration of women as the drivers of the revolution proved conditional after the toppling of the regime and negotiations for a civilian transitional government began. As the boundaries

of women's involvement were drawn, the bubble of women's fame quickly deflated. Nevertheless, the sidelining of women in the transitional process did not go unchecked as a collective of organizations under the name Sudan Women for Change led a press conference reiterating their list of demands in a declaration sent to internal and external entities. Additionally, a live recording of the press release was shared on Twitter along with a copy of the declaration open for signatures. It is important to note that the message was not targeting the military council leading the transition period, but was directed to all forces of change *within* the movement. Drafted in collaboration with a diverse number of youth organizations, civil and political groups from across the country—the declaration touched on varying issues relating to women in the ongoing movement and their experiences of harassment, the transitional period, as well as women's roles in the structures to come. Operating on three levels the declaration addressed the securing of rights to women within the Sudanese constitution in accordance with regional and international standards, women's active and impactful participation in the political sphere and in everyday life, as well as, women's social and economic revolution (Noon Movement 2019). Discussion around these three levels took seriously the position of marginalized women, the question of access and recognition of the varying needs of women as a result of their diverse lived experiences.

In responding to questions of the purpose of a women's declaration (independent of the larger declaration by the Coalition of Freedom and Change) at the press conference, organizers juxtaposed women's roles as the backbone of the revolution with their invisibility in the negotiation process as the flame that ignited a woman's revolution within the revolution (Noon Movement 2019). The timeliness of the press conference spoke to women's firm rejection of being famed for labouring in the movement with no political guarantees, causing them to call for the concretization of the slogans and chants that elevated women in the uprisings. In speaking to their unyielding dedication to securing women's rights, a representative of Sudan Women for Change, Nahed Jabrallah stated, 'We will not get involved in any compromises, and we will not tolerate any attempt of manipulation in this regard' (Sudan Female Activists Seek Half of Transitional Authority 2019). The drafting of the demands by women's groups across Sudan's diverse regions represents yet another instance in which women's movements are required to labour in reminding the collective of their hard-won rights. The need to devote their efforts to

mobilizing independently symbolizes the resilience that exists at the heart of feminist mobilizing,

ALAA SALAH—THE ‘ICON’

A turning point in the documentation of women protesters in Sudan was the capturing and mass spread of an image of Alaa Salah, a young protester photographed by Lana Haroun. Initially receiving little media attention, the anti-regime protests that were ongoing for months took centre stage as the masses had been awakened by the captivating image of the woman dawning white, standing on a car leading the crowd in chants. The spread of the image at an overwhelming speed corroborated false beliefs of women’s political activity as somehow new and exceptional. The image was met with notable admiration by Western(ized) media as it disrupted the over-exhausted and repetitive narrative of the voiceless-oppressed-Muslim-woman. Nevertheless, what is of interest here is the overlooked nuances served by the image at the local level. Salah’s photograph garnered substantial attention by fellow Sudanese within protest spaces and in the diaspora as her image became the centre of WhatsApp group discussions, Twitter threads and Instagram reposts—carrying the common theme of how the woman in the image represents the ‘future’ of Sudanese women. Although not dismissing the powerful message delivered by the image, the iconization of Salah as embodying the ‘future’ on Sudanese platforms accentuated the erasure of the faceless and nameless women who historically laboured in building the foundations for women protesters like Alaa Salah to proudly occupy. The discourse surrounding the image effectively played into the widespread participation of muting Sudanese feminist histories of knowledge and movement building in academia and mobilizing spaces.

As previously stated, among the chief missions of the Islamization project under Al-Bashir was the forced Arabization of Sudan’s diverse population and the violent suppression of those who were ethnically or religiously ill-fitting to the narrative. In acknowledging Sudan’s violent history of ethnic and tribal hierarchies, deeper engagement with the image exposes how it has served to simplify a complex narrative of the historical erasure of marginalized communities in Sudan. The Northern and ethnically ‘dominant’ culture in the image illustrates the iconization of a particular *kind* of Sudanese woman as the face of the movement. Malik (2019b) uncovers this irony by underlining that the white garment worn

in the image traditionally represents the uniform dress of Sudan's professional women, pinpointing how the image is deeply entangled with the ethnic and classed structures of Sudanese society and thus far from representative of women in the movement or Sudan at large. This understanding calls attentiveness to the ways in which the exception and fame of an individual are often awarded to certain pockets of society 'the bourgeoisie, the educated and the photogenic' (Malik 2019b). As Sudan is on the brink of social change, with women from marginalized communities labouring in its transformation the image robs their labour from inclusivity and celebration in the immediate narrative. The irony rests in the fact that the image assuming to represent a revolution of change is continuing with the upholding of the very divisions that drove it.

THE REVOLUTION CONTINUES

The goal of overthrowing Al-Bashir and the ferocious oppression accompanying his administration has begun to be realized. However, ideas of women's position in society cannot be reversed with the removal of the regime as the dominant structures that underpin women's oppression remain. What the analysis of Sudan's #FallThatIsAll uprising has aimed to underline is that the sustenance of feminist movements and resistance is constant, the labour is constant, be it under repressive regimes or popular uprisings. Therefore, dismantling patriarchy in its various forms is an exhausting and ever-changing journey as the mechanisms available to it evolve. In understanding the various factors that play into the difficulties that exist within movement building, the powerful tools of resistance utilized by women activists in the Sudanese example remind us of the uncompromising labour of feminist movements in making their transformative agendas visible so not to be watered down by the collective.

In recognizing how the state mobilizes gender to construct its citizens, this chapter set out to provide an interrogation of women's relationship to the state by exploring the policies that—by design—cement-gendered divisions. This understanding facilitated discussion on how women's bodies and ideas of respectability, good-moral-'Arab'-Muslim woman, are employed by the state as sites of control. Therefore, revealing the mobilizing foci of the Sudanese women's movement in the years following 1989. By looking at important moments of women's mobilizing, the analysis revealed how even through the successes, the patriarchal foundation of the state remains intact. Moreover, an examination of the government's efforts at impeding women's mobilizing demanded an understanding

of state fragility and how this materializes into the branding of women activists as enemies of the nation. A deeper look at the difficulties facing women activists within the #FallThatIsAll movement served to underline the stubbornness of patriarchy irrespective of women's central roles, the labour and resistance continues in all spaces. Finally, what the Sudanese example has illustrated is the use of global feminist imaginings to advocate for reform and enact change at the national level. Additionally, that the spirit of resistance prevails despite continued erasure, silencing and harassment. However, reliance on this spirit alone cannot achieve the ultimate goal of dismantling patriarchy.

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