

Remembering Revolutionaries

Gender, Activism, and Collective Memory in Sudan

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Introduction

When the December Revolution unfolded in Sudan in 2018 and 2019, the eyes were on the women, with more than 50% of the protesters being female. This number was a remarkable because of several reasons. In the thirty years before this revolution, Sudan was governed by an Islamist-military regime. This led to a reinforcement and institutionalization of the already patriarchal structures that were in place. More concretely, when in public, women had to adhere to a certain dress code, they could be picked up and imprisoned if they were found faulty of that and. In short, in participating, women were acting against social norms, patriarchal structures and family restrictions (Abdalla et al. 2023). The remarkable presence of women during the 2018/2019 revolution may have seemed extraordinary, but it did have historical precedents. A closer look at Sudan's past reveals a long tradition of women's political participation and resistance. In all three successful uprisings in Sudan since its independence, 1964, 1985 and 2019, women have played defining roles (Abbas 2020; Damir 2020; Elamin and Ismail 2019; Engeler et al. 2020; Kabalo 2012; Tønnessen 2023). Again, these earlier revolutions took place under social conditions that were not necessarily supportive of women's political engagement. Yet despite structural and normative constraints, women consistently participated and mobilized themselves.

This recurring pattern raises broader theoretical questions about mobilization under conditions of marginalisation. Social movement research emphasizes that movements are more likely to succeed when they are grounded in a shared collective identity that participants can identify with, increasing their willingness to engage and mobilize (Bashri 2021; Eyerman 2015; Tilly 2003). Such a collective identities is not given but socially produced. This happens through shared narratives, symbols, and a collective remembrance of the past. Collective memory therefore plays a central role in social movements, as it shapes collective identities (Olick 1999) and therefore the effectiveness of any social movement (Rigney 2018).

In the case of the Sudanese revolutions, mainstream historical accounts have largely excluded women's contributions to the revolutionary movements and have rarely incorporated their political agency into dominant narratives of Sudanese history (SIHA 2021). This absence raises an important puzzle: if women's revolutionary roles are marginalized in official histories, to what extent has the memory of women's past activism nonetheless persisted and informed

contemporary mobilization? More specifically, did the memory of women's revolutionary ancestry play a role in shaping women's participation in these three revolutions?

This question is particularly significant given women's structurally marginalized position within Sudanese society. Deep-rooted patriarchy, reflected among other things in Islamic family law, disadvantages women in both public and political life. Participating in protests therefore means not only confronting the state, but also gender-specific social hierarchies. Nevertheless, women have repeatedly emerged as central actors in Sudan's revolutionary moments.

Within this context, this thesis explores the women's involvement in Sudanese revolutions, with a particular focus on the role of memory and knowledge transmission. It examines how awareness of earlier instances of women's activism may have shaped political engagement across generations. The guiding research question of this study is therefore:

Why did women participate in the Sudanese Revolutions of 1964, 1985 and 2018/19 even though this defies their prevalent social roles?

This thesis hypothesizes that women's participation was influenced by the knowledge and the memory of previous movements and earlier female political engagement in Sudan. By examining this hypothesis, this study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of the role of gender and memory in activism, specifically in the context of the three successful Sudanese revolutions.

Literature Review & Theoretical framework

This section lays out the core concepts that will be used in engaging with in this paper and define the theoretical framework that are utilized.

Collective memory

As this thesis seeks to understand the influence of memory on activism, it will begin in exploring the different shapes memory can take on. Maurice Halbwachs, who has significantly shaped the concept of collective memory, has defined memory through four subcategories, which are autobiographic memory, collective memory, historical memory and history (Olick 1999; Halbwachs 1992). Within this paradigm, autobiographical memory refers to a recollection of events we have personally lived through, whereas historical memory is transmitted to us via written or recorded accounts. History represents a past that is no longer directly connected to us, while collective memory is “the active past that forms our identities” (Olick 1999; Halbwachs 1992). While this categorization can be helpful in detangling different strands of memory, more recent scholarship has rejected these categories to be rigid and separated from each other. Instead, they should be seen as points for what the spectrum of memory can all entail, and which different ideas are feeding from and into each other (Verovšek 2016). While remembering is carried out by individuals, group membership provides the frameworks and incentives that shape what is remembered and what is forgotten. Naturally, the different subgroups overlap and feed into one another (Halbwachs 1992; Olick 1999; Verovšek 2016). Nevertheless this concludes that collective memory is not a passive recollection of the past but a dynamic reconstruction shaped by social frameworks (Halbwachs 1992).

Within these frameworks groups shape their identities, solidify their bonds, and interpret their present realities. Collective memory would therefore be the result of collective actions and a specific groups memory work (Daphi 2024), that shapes social practices. This means that collective memory exists through and because of memory work, through the process of being discussed, formed and contested (Rigney 2025a).

Consequentially, memory work is the process through which people actively reinterpret and symbolically rework the meanings of past events, using their cultural resources (Rigney 2025b; Jelin 2003). Memory is not something created once by a single actor, rather it unfolds across

networks and multiple locations; it is created and distributed collectively (Rigney 2025c). Under circumstances of conflict and places where only a specific story is remembered, memory work is resistance (Hale 2012). This is especially true in places where the memory that is being preserved runs counter to the story of the entity in power. Evidently power relations are inherent within these constructions of the past. Dominant groups often strive to impose their interpretations of reality, interpretations that bolster their own interests, as the universally accepted truth, thus establishing a memory hegemony (Olick 2023). One way in which this is done is in choosing whose stories are archived and are made part of an official history and which are not. Hegemonic control over collective memory is a potent tool for maintaining existing power structures, since according to Foucault by controlling people's memory, you control their dynamism, their experience, and their knowledge.

Collective memory and activism

The assumption that memory has a significant influence on activism, which underlies the hypothesis, is not new. Especially in recent years the complex and dynamic relationship between memory and activism has received more attention. For collective action to take place and to ignite movement, the participants must recognize themselves in the collective identity on which the movement is based (Bashri 2021; Eyerman 2015; Tilly 2003). Such identities are not given, they are socially produced and maintained through shared narratives, symbols, and interpretations of the past. This is why collective memory plays a central role in social movements, as memory processes contribute directly to the formation of collective identities (Olick 1999), and thus to the effectiveness of activism (Rigney 2018).

With the Memory-Activism Nexus, Ann Rigney presents a framework to examine this relationship. She designates three subcategories: *memory activism*, regarding activism with the goal of producing a hegemonic narrative and influence future remembrance; *the memory of activism*, talking about how activism is remembered; and *memory in activism*, talking about how the memory of earlier activism engage in current movements (Rigney 2018; 2021; Merrill and Rigney 2024). Of course, these categories are overlapping and impossible to fully separate. While this thesis primarily focuses on memory in activism, it necessarily engages with the other two dimensions as well. By examining how Sudanese women draw on memories of earlier activism to guide and justify their participation in contemporary movements, the analysis highlights memory as a mobilizing resource. At the same time, the very act of remembering

women's political roles, largely absent from official historical narratives, constitutes memory activism, as it challenges masculinized and exclusionary accounts of Sudanese political history (Berridge 2015; Salih 1998). Further, the ways in which these memories are articulated and circulated shape future remembrances and situate the analysis also within the realm of memory of activism.

At the individual level, identifying with past struggles can be empowering, as it allows participants to see themselves as part of a larger historical project. Since individuals are the basic units of collective action, communication and interaction among them play a crucial role in transforming personal experiences into collective mobilization (Tilly 2003; Bashri 2021). Through the sharing of memories, personal grievances are reframed as political injustices, enabling the development of critical consciousness and opening up possibilities for change (Haug 1999; Onyx and Small 2001). Memory also provides movements with practical resources. Recollections of earlier activism can inform strategic choices, offer lessons from past successes and failures, and supply tools of resistance that can be adapted to new contexts (Rigney 2025c). Cultural forms such as storytelling, oral histories, poetry, and ritual practices serve as key vehicles through which such memories are transmitted and mobilized, particularly in contexts where formal archives are inaccessible or exclusionary (Rigney 2025c).

Understanding memory as a source of knowledge also highlights its complex nature. Social memory includes not only narratives of past events but also values, worldviews, and embodied practices transmitted across generations. Traditional knowledge, meaning historically accumulated practices and know-how of local communities, constitutes a crucial dimension of social memory and contributes to social resilience (Felci and Altom 2022). In this sense, memory links past experiences to present action while also orienting movements toward imagined futures.

Social movements can thus be understood as specific communities of memory, since they influence which, past events are remembered and how (Daphi 2024). Her findings indicate that activists with strong identification tend to engage in positive rejection, framing current mobilization as an improvement over the past, while those with weaker affiliation more often adopt earlier movements positively (Daphi 2024). This demonstrates that memory is not static but selectively reinterpreted considering present political needs.

Taken together, this literature highlights that memory is not merely a background condition for activism but a constitutive element of political mobilization. By situating Sudanese women's activism within the memory–activism nexus, this thesis conceptualizes memory as a resource through which women construct collective identity, transmit political knowledge, and challenge dominant narratives of resistance. The analysis thus assumes memory as a central mechanism through which women's political participation becomes meaningful, legitimate, and enduring.

Oral history and traditional history making

Traditional knowledge and practices constitute key components of social memory and are therefore central to social resilience (Felci and Altom 2022). In Sudanese history, oral poetry has played a central role as a tool of political resistance and historical documentation, and has traditionally been a women's tool to guard their heritage (Dyop 2025). Historical narratives are preserved through oral forms, specifically folklore and poetry, which are used to record impactful events and shape collective memory. Sudanese women, as primary creators and transmitters of this oral tradition, have already historically been a powerful force in mobilizing social and political action. Through oral poetry, women invoke national sentiment, encourage resistance against colonial and local rulers, and in some cases directly instigated collective action. Oral poetry, like written sources, can function as a trustworthy historical medium, capable not only of reflecting events but actively shaping historical processes and political movements (Muhammad 1996).

Conceptual Frameworks

Feminist Theory

In order to investigate female movements in Sudan, a thorough understanding of feminist theory is crucial. Feminist theory suggests that experiences and interpretations of reality are situated, meaning they are shaped by position, embodiment, and power (Harding 1991). Feminist scholarship rejects the notion of value-free or universal knowledge and instead emphasizes that all knowledge production is embedded within gendered, colonial, and classed structures of power. From this perspective, meaning making is never neutral but always deeply influenced by relations of domination and exclusion (Butler 2009; Nnaemeka 2004).

Feminist theory contributes to this thesis primarily through its emphasis on positionality and intersectionality. Rather than assuming a universal political subject, it directs attention to how gender intersects with other axes of power, such as class, race, and colonial history, to shape political participation and visibility.

Feminist theory also informs us that different people theorized differently depending on their lived realities. Obioma Nnaemeka for example shows that feminism in the African context can look different than in the Western outlet. African feminist theorizing emphasizes negotiation, collaboration, and non-confrontational strategies of resistance grounded in local contexts. Unlike Western feminist approaches that often prioritize rupture and deconstruction, African feminism foregrounds pragmatism, relationality, and embeddedness in indigenous social structures (Nnaemeka 2004). This framework is relevant for understanding Sudanese women's activism as an ongoing, negotiated form of political engagement that operates within, rather than outside of, existing social and cultural realities. This is pertinent to the study of Sudanese women's activism, as it allows an analysis of how women's political roles are enabled, constrained, or rendered invisible within male-dominated revolutionary narratives and historiography. By challenging claims to full objectivity and universality often implicit in International Relations scholarship, a feminist approach also requires the researcher to acknowledge their own positionality and the partiality of all knowledge claims (Harding 2016; 1991).

Through feminist epistemology memory can further be conceptualized as a form of knowledge production. Frigga Haug, who made memory work famous in academic circles, defines memory work as a collective feminist practice that connects personal recollection to broader social and structural conditions (Haug 1992; 1999). Building on this definition, Sondra Hale applies memory work to African and conflict contexts, defining it as the ways women insist on remembering their roles in resistance in defiance of dominant power structures that seek to marginalize or erase them. This thesis adopts Hale's understanding of memory work to analyse how Sudanese women actively produce counter-memories that challenge official or masculinized accounts of revolution. A feminist perspective thus enables an analysis of memory as both gendered and political. It makes it possible to interrogate whose memories are preserved, whose are silenced, and how acts of remembering themselves can function as forms of resistance (Mohanty 1984). Memory work is understood not only as retrospective narration

but as an ongoing political practice through which women assert agency, legitimacy, and historical continuity.

Social constructivism

This thesis is grounded in a social constructivist framework, which provides both the ontological and epistemological foundation for analysing women's political participation and memory work in Sudan. Social constructivism assumes that (social) reality is not fixed or objective but produced through shared meanings, discourses, and interactions. Knowledge, identities, and political realities are understood as historically and socially constructed rather than given (Wendt 1992).

Social constructivism, therefore, supports the assumption that memory is not a neutral recollection of historical facts, but an active process through which meanings are negotiated, and identities are formed. These identities are constituted through social interaction (Wendt 1992). Therefore, political memory work happens when these interpretations of the past are collectively produced, transmitted and mobilized with the purpose of uniting people around a cause. Political mobilization is therefore intensely shaped by how actors interpret their experiences and situate themselves within broader narratives of resistance, injustice, and possibility (Wendt 1992). Constructivism also allows this thesis to focus on agency of the actors rather than determinism. It highlights how marginalized actors actively produce knowledge, identity, and political imagination (Ajah 2024).

Social constructivism therefore enables an analysis of how Sudanese women's political identities and forms of agency were constructed through memory work, in the years of 1964, 1985 and 2018/2019, specifically through the interpretation, and circulation of memories of past resistance and injustice. These practices are understood not as passive reflections of history but as ongoing processes of meaning-making. Women's participation in protest is part of an ongoing process of collective remembrance, identity construction, and political imagination. Constructivism thus provides a coherent framework for analysing how memory functions as a political resource through which people articulate agency, continuity, and claims to visibility.

Integrating Constructivism and Feminism

Together, social constructivism and feminist theory provide a multi-layered interpretive framework for this study. The constructivist approach allows us to see meanings and identities

as socially constructed through collective memory and discourse; with feminism asking who constructs them, whose voices are included or excluded, and how that influences lived realities. Through this combination this paper highlights the memories and the memory work that are engaged in the mobilization of women as political actors during this revolution. This thesis is also valuable, as it situates Sudanese women's activism within the broader global conversation on feminist agency in postcolonial contexts, emphasizing the transformative potential of memory as both a political and epistemic resource.

Context

This section outlines the political and legal background, as well organizational structures necessary to understand women's participation in Sudanese uprisings and the conditions under which women's political memory and memory work have developed. Therefore, this section does not offer a comprehensive national history, but highlights important political ruptures, authoritarian structures, legal frameworks and overview of key organizations that shaped both patterns of resistance and the remembrance of women's political roles.

Political regimes

Pre-Independence

Sudan's modern political history is marked by cycles of authoritarian rule, popular uprisings, and interrupted democratic transitions. Prior to independence, Sudan experienced a brief period of indigenous rule under the Mahdist State, founded in 1881 by Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi, a religious and political leader who mobilized widespread support against Turco-Egyptian domination. The Mahdist forces captured Khartoum in 1885 and established a state. This period ended in 1898–1899, when Anglo-Egyptian forces defeated the Mahdist regime and imposed joint colonial rule over Sudanese territories. This colonial governance shaped Sudan's political institutions and social hierarchies deeply, reinforced regional inequalities and lay the groundwork for future conflicts. In 1955, the First Sudanese Civil War broke out between northern and southern regions over the demand of the latter for representation and regional autonomy (Hasan 1967). Sudan formally gained independence on 1 January 1956, following a declaration by the Sudanese Parliament.

Post-Independence

The post-independence period was characterized by political instability and multiple military interventions. In 1958, General Ibrahim Abboud seized power in a military coup, suspending civilian rule. His authoritarian government triggered growing opposition, culminating in the October Revolution of 1964. Initially sparked by clashes between students and police at the University of Khartoum, the uprising quickly expanded into nationwide protests that demanded the resignation of Abboud (Hasan 1967). The revolution succeeded in toppling the military regime and marked the beginning of a brief period of civilian governance. During this

governance women achieved the right to vote and run for political positions. In 1965 Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim was elected to serve as the first woman the Sudanese Parliament. In 1969, another military coup brought Jaafar Numeiri to power. His regime alternated between socialist and Islamist orientations, ultimately introducing Sharia law nationwide in 1983. This decision intensified political repression and contributed to the outbreak of the Second Sudanese Civil War. Mounting economic hardship and political discontent led to the Revolution of 1985, which forced Numeiri from power following mass protests triggered by rising prices of basic goods. Again, a civilian government was established, though democratic rule remained short-lived.

In 1989, Omar al-Bashir seized power in a military coup, inaugurating an Islamist-military regime that would last for three decades. During this period, the state systematically restricted political freedoms and implemented legal frameworks that disproportionately targeted women, particularly through public order laws and the enforcement of Islamic family law. These measures regulated women's behaviour in public spaces and reinforced gendered divisions between the public and private spheres. The 2018/2019 Revolution emerged against the backdrop of prolonged economic crisis, political repression, and accumulated resistance to al-Bashir's rule. What began as localized protests in cities around Sudan such as Atbara over bread prices quickly evolved into a nationwide movement demanding regime change. In April 2019, the military in accordance with al-Bashir's own paramilitary removed al-Bashir from power, replacing him with a Transitional Military Council. Protesters continued to mobilize, culminating in a large sit-in outside the military headquarters in Khartoum. On the 3rd of June 2019 the sit-in was dispersed violently by the military, which marked a pivotal and traumatic moment in the revolutionary period.

Following a fragile power-sharing arrangement between civilian and military actors, Sudan experienced renewed instability, leading to the outbreak of armed conflict between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) in April 2023.

Legal Framework Affecting Women

Throughout Sudan's history, women's personal status and civil rights have been regulated through Islamic legal frameworks (Tønnessen and Kjølsvædt 2010a). Following the 1989 Islamist military coup, the government introduced a legal framework that formally upheld gender equality in constitutional terms while simultaneously institutionalizing women's

subordination through family and criminal law. It creates a clear framework to female exclusion in public, structuralized in the state (Elhassan 2025).

The codification of the Muslim Family Law in 1991 established gendered hierarchies the legal frame. Women required a male guardian to validate marriage, faced severe constraints in initiating divorce, risked losing custody upon remarriage, and inherited only half the share of male relatives. The law further positioned men as legal breadwinners, granting husbands the authority to restrict wives' employment and mobility. These provisions rendered women legally dependent on male relatives and confined their political agency to the private sphere (Damir 2020; Tønnessen and Kjølsvædt 2010a).

Complementing family law, the Criminal Law (1991) and the Public Order Act (1996) regulated women's presence in public space. The vaguely defined morality provisions, in particular Article 152, made indecent clothing and indecent behaviour punishable offences, which allowed for arbitrary enforcement by the police.

In practice, these laws disproportionately targeted women, exposing them to arrest, physical punishment, and public humiliation for clothing choices, social interaction, or participation in demonstrations. Restrictions on movement, public gathering, and mixed-gender interaction directly impacted women's ability to organize, protest, and engage visibly in public and political life. Together, these legal frameworks produced a gendered system of governance in which women's bodies, mobility, and reputation were subject to state control. This legal marginalization, rather than cultural norms alone, structured both the risks women faced in public political participation and the necessity of informal, collective, and memory-based forms of resistance (Tønnessen and Kjølsvædt 2010a).

Women's Organizations and Infrastructure of Resistance

Despite the restrictions women face within Sudanese society, they were always involved in Sudan's long history of resistance movements and social mobilization including on the union front and in anticolonial movements (Abbas 2020; Kabalo 2012; Makawi 2025). The first official women's organization in Sudan was the Sudanese Women's Union (SWU), founded in 1951 as part of the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP). Led by Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim, the first woman to serve in Sudan's Parliament, the SWU played a central role in mobilizing women

during the October Revolution of 1964 and was instrumental in securing several political rights for women, including suffrage (Al Amin and Magied 2001; Damir 2020; Tønnessen and Kjølsvædt 2010b). Following the 1969 coup, President Jaafar Numeiri established a single-party system and dissolved the independent SWU, replacing it with a state-controlled women's organization aligned with his regime. During this period, the Muslim Brotherhood expanded its political influence and promoted women's participation within an Islamist framework, framing women's political engagement as a means of balancing what it conceptualized as "soft" forms (healthcare, maternity) and "hard" forms (warfare and security) of politics (Damir 2020). This highlights the coexistence of measurable gains resulting from the Sudanese Women movements efforts and the continued persistence of structural discrimination against women.

While different organizations were established in secret during Numeiri's regime, after its fall, women's organizing diversified significantly. The political landscape came to include secular leftist organizations (including the rebranded SWU), cultural nationalist and religious groups (such as those affiliated with the Muslim Brotherhood), as well as national and international NGOs and grassroots initiatives, including neighbourhood committees and youth movements like Girifna (Hale 2016). Under Omar al-Bashir's Islamist-military regime, however, the state once again sought to control women's political participation through the establishment of regime-affiliated women's organizations, giving rise to a form of "state feminism". While officially sanctioned organizations encouraged women's participation within narrowly defined parameters, independent women's groups and political parties were once again systematically suppressed. This strategy allowed the regime to mobilize women in support of the state while simultaneously preventing the formation of autonomous women-led political movements, thereby severely restricting the political space available to women operating outside an Islamist framework (Abdalla et al. 2023; Tønnessen and Kjølsvædt 2010b; Tønnessen 2019).

Women's groups and activists pursue diverse goals and do not constitute a coherent or unified group but rather reflect broader societal divisions and contradictions (Badri 2008; Hale 2016).

Workers Unions

Workers' unions have played a crucial and enduring role in Sudanese politics since well before independence, forming a backbone of collective mobilization across all major uprisings (Wessels 2024). From the late 1940s onward, Sudanese trade unionism developed as a broad-

based and politically conscious movement, encompassing teachers, railway workers, nurses, port workers, tea vendors, and other organized labour groups. Within this context, the Sudanese Women's Teachers' Union, one of the earliest women's organizations in Sudan, emerged, which shows the closeness between women's political organizing and labour activism (Al Amin and Magied 2001). This union tradition established repertoires of protest, such as strikes, coordinated work stoppages, and collective bargaining, that repeatedly resurfaced during moments of political crisis. In the 2018/19 uprising, these historical structures re-emerged most prominently through the Sudanese Professionals Association (SPA), a coalition of professional bodies. Although the SPA was officially established before the revolution, it came into existence in clear anticipation of large-scale mobilization (El Khazen 2019). Drawing on the legacy of earlier unions, the SPA unified diverse professional groups and transformed spontaneous street protests into an organized mass movement with articulated political demands (Wessels 2024). A similar pattern can be observed in the 1985 Revolution, where, among others, the National Alliance for National Salvation, a joint platform of trade unions and professional associations played a substantial role in facilitating the transition process (El Khazen 2019). This tradition of strong unions and professional organizations helps to keep strategies alive, through which their reoccurring role can be understood as inherited practices within the political culture. Each revolution could count on the groundwork laid over years of organizational continuity and union-based modes of resistance that never fully disappeared.

Women's Grassroots Organizing and Neighbourhood Committees

For many Sudanese women, grassroots organizations constituted the primary and often most accessible avenue for political engagement. The concept is quite old and not unique to Sudan. The organization happens along geographical location, rather than the workplace (as unions do). Through this way of horizontal organizing, small political hubs can be created all around the country (Elnaiem 2024). While women's participation in formal political institutions remained limited, such local forms of organizing enabled broader involvement across regions and socio-economic backgrounds (Makawi 2025). After the Islamist regime banned parties, women moved their political engagement to civil society organizations, where they didn't have to deal with the strong presence of men (Hale 2016).

Despite Sudan's strong tradition of grassroots mobilization, this participation has rarely translated into meaningful political representation. This gap reflects a broader postcolonial

crisis common across the Global South, in which vibrant civic engagement coexists with elite-dominated political systems that absorb, neutralize, or marginalize popular demands (Makawi 2025). Research on women's political organizing in Sudan further highlights a persistent disconnect between elite women's organizations and grassroots women's priorities (Tønnessen and Kjøstvedt 2010b). While elite-level discourse often revolves around ideological debates, particularly concerning religion and gender norms, grassroots women's concerns are shaped by everyday material conditions such as economic precarity, family maintenance, and access to basic services.

Within this context, neighbourhood-based organizing emerged as a crucial form of political practice. Neighbourhood committees and informal women's networks allowed for localized mobilization grounded in shared experiences and mutual support. These structures became especially significant during periods of political repression, when formal political participation was limited. Women's groups operating outside the ruling Islamist party faced systematic disadvantages, including surveillance, restricted access to resources, and exclusion from official political channels (Abbas 2020; Hale 2016; Tønnessen and Kjøstvedt 2010a). Nevertheless, grassroots and neighbourhood organizations proved resilient, enabling women to organize on their own terms and sustain political engagement beyond elite-controlled arenas.

Neighbourhood committees also functioned as central mechanisms through which new civic formations were negotiated, particularly during moments of heightened mobilization (Makawi 2025). Through everyday interaction, collective problem-solving, and storytelling, these spaces facilitated informal memory work, allowing women to transmit experiences of past resistance and articulate collective grievances. As such, grassroots organizations and neighbourhood committees not only sustained women's political participation under authoritarian conditions but also preserved the memories and organizational repertoires that would later underpin mass mobilization during the 2018/2019 Revolution (Adeela 2023; 04:35).

Memory and Historical Erasure

As this historiography shows, throughout these cycles of authoritarianism and resistance, women have consistently played significant roles in Sudanese political mobilization (Kabalo 2012). However, their contributions have often been marginalized or erased in official historical narratives, their roles not reflected in archives or museums. Official records and media largely

ignored women's contributions, and quotas in representation, when acknowledged, remained mostly symbolic. Often, women and their roles only appear as folkloric symbols, as passive victims or as moral enforcers aligned with Islamist ideals (Dyop 2025; Elhassan 2025; Tønnessen 2011). Understanding this political context is therefore essential for analysing how women's participation was shaped, constrained, and remembered, and how women themselves engaged in memory work to preserve narratives of resistance across generations.

Methodology

Research Design and Approach

In this thesis, I seek to answer the question why women participated in the Revolutions of 1964, 1985 and 2018/19 even though this defies their prevalent social roles?

I do that through examining my hypothesis that political memory work was an important factor in mobilizing women to participation in Sudan's revolutions of 1964, 1985, and 2018/2019. My aim is to, first, address the significant gap in existing scholarship in researching Sudanese women's roles in resistance movements, especially across these three revolutionary moments. Second, I aim to contribute to the research done on the memory-activism nexus, in examining the relation between collective memories of resistance and the continued political mobilization of the same social group over time.

Because this research focuses on meaning making, narratives, and memory, it adopts an interpretive qualitative design, combining discourse analysis and historical comparative analysis. Taking an interpretive approach allows this study to focus on the narrative dimensions of experience and to examine how experiences are articulated within broader societal contexts (Lim 2025). A qualitative research design allows this thesis to examine meaning, discourse, symbols and memory practices in-depth and sensitive to the context. Rather than seeking causal explanations or statistical generalization, this paper aims to understand how women's participation in revolutionary movements is narrated, remembered, and mobilized over time and can focus on individual accounts. Qualitative methods are therefore employed to analyse texts, narratives, and symbolic representations associated with Sudan's revolutions of 1964, 1985, and 2018/2019.

The research design reflects the social constructivist view that political identities and mobilization are shaped by socially constructed meanings, and a feminist understanding that political history and memory are structured by power. Discourse analysis enables this thesis to focus on how activists narrated their own roles and how these roles were narrated by others and how symbols, slogans, and images produced shared understandings. The historical comparative

analysis allows to examine how women's participation and its remembrance changed over time and to highlight how earlier experiences and memories shaped later mobilization.

Case Selection and Scope

First and foremost, the case selection is based on my personal interest. As a feminist and scholar, women's activism and the condition that it functions in are of great interest to me. Upon my initial research I began reading many novels by Sudanese authors and started wondering about the power that those stories held. While from there my topic sway over to the memory department, my interest does lie in the power stories hold to inspire action.

After delving into the topic of women's revolutionary activities in Sudan, I selected the three revolutions of 1964, 1985, and 2018/2019 because they share several key characteristics that make them suitable for comparative analysis when following the most-similar design. All three uprisings were non-violent and resulted in the overthrow of military dictatorships, marking significant moments of political rupture in Sudan's history. In each of these revolutions, women played an active role, although the forms, visibility, and remembrance of their participation differed across cases. The recurrence of these revolutionary moments allows me to research the continuity and change in women's participation and in memory over time.

Data and Sources

The sources that are used are available interview data, blogposts, news articles and secondary literature. Across the three revolutions, the availability of sources differs greatly. The revolution of 2018/2019 has the most publicly available sources since it has had the internet to distribute and archive knowledge. The 1964 revolution is quite well documented and there are different sources available. To find material on the 1985 revolution on the other hand, was quite a challenge. It is important to note that this paper mostly considers sources that are available in English, either original or translated. This will influence the results greatly, since many sources only exist in Arabic.

The analysis will be compiled in two sections: A with-in case discourse analysis and a across case comparative analysis.

First Section: With-in case discourse analysis

The with-in case discourse analysis allows me to examine each revolution individually and in depth, enabling the identification of how memory was produced and mobilized in each case. Discourse includes written and spoken texts, symbols, slogans, and narrative practices, in this case through which memory is being produced. The analysis examines women's roles and visibility during each revolution, how their participation was remembered in its aftermath, and the ways in which women actively preserved and transmitted memories of resistance. The within-case analysis combines deductive and inductive elements. While the analytical categories are informed by the theoretical framework, the analysis remains open to themes emerging from the material. Applying the same framework to all three cases provides the basis for the following comparative analysis.

The following categories and guiding questions are used for the analysis:

1. *Women's participation*

- a. *How did women participate in the revolution? What were their roles?*
- b. *How visible was the women's participation?*

This first section informs the analysis of events on the ground, focusing on the roles women assumed during each revolution and the extent to which these roles were gender specific. It also examines the public visibility of women's participation at the time of the revolution, which means assessing how apparent their political involvement was at the time of each uprising. This is assessed through the degree to which women occupied public and visible roles. Visibility, however, must be approached with caution. Because this analysis relies on mediated sources, the information reconstructed has already passed through multiple filters of selection and representation. Recognizing these filters is essential for analysing how women's participation was later remembered and represented. At the same time, this section itself reflects how the events have been presented through available sources.

2. *Memory of women's participation*

- a. *(How) was the women's involvement remembered after?*
- b. *Which memories persisted in the public/private discourse?*

The second section examines the remembrance of women's participation. While the first question focuses on how women's participation was remembered and framed in the aftermath

of each revolution, the second examines which of these representations became dominant and enduring within public discourse over time or reappeared in later periods, including in the lead-up and during subsequent revolutions. I examine this remembrance through sources that reference women's participation and trace how these representations persist, shift, or disappear over time.

3. *Memory work*

- a. *How did women actively preserve or create memory?*
- b. *Through which medium did women actively preserve and create memory?*

The third section focuses on the creation, preservation and utilization of memory. This allows this thesis to examine how women view their own role in resistance, how they want to be remembered and which tools they used.

Second Section: Comparative analysis

Further, in a comparative analysis, this study will compare the three case studies in identifying similarities and differences, especially focusing on the remembrance of the women's participation and the reappearance of symbols, stories and memories over time. This second part of the analysis will allow for insight about women's participation, roles and visibility overtime and about a potential change of narrative and reactivation of memory for mobilization. It will also help us to examine the different mediums used.

The comparative analysis is guided by the following questions:

1. *Women's participation*
 - a. *How did women's participation change across revolutions?*
 - b. *How did the women's visibility change across the revolutions?*
2. *Memory of women's participation*
 - a. *How was the memory of earlier revolutions reused?*
 - i. *Did activists reference earlier female resistance?*
 - ii. *Did 1964/1985 serve as symbolic frameworks for 2018/19?*
 - iii. *How did "being remembered" influence "mobilization"?*
 - b. *What role did woman's organizations play in preserving memory?*
3. *Memory work*

- a. *What patterns can be found in the way women actively preserve or create memory over timeframe from 1964 - 2019?*
- b. *Did the medium in which women preserved and created memory change over time?*
- c. *How are the medium and pattern related?*

Researcher Positionality and Reflexivity

I am a Swiss woman studying the political memory of Sudanese women from the Netherlands. I do not speak Sudan's native languages and have not lived in or visited Sudan, therefore this study is necessarily undertaken from an outsider position. The social, political, and historical realities shaping Sudanese women's experiences differ from my own lived realities. This positional distance affects my access to sources, my interpretation of narratives, and the understanding of local meanings.

Recognizing this, I adopt a reflexive approach to acknowledge the limits of my perspective. I pay special attention to base my research in Sudanese women's voices as well as my academic reasoning in scholarship from Global South researchers. Rather than claiming to represent Sudanese women's experiences, the study aims to analyse the articulation, remembrance, and utilization of Sudanese women's experiences in mobilization that is found in the sources present. I am attentive to issues of representation, power, and exclusion and acknowledge that women from higher socio-economic backgrounds are overrepresented in the available material, as they are more likely to speak English, reside in urban areas such as Khartoum, and be included in existing research. I recognize this limitation explicitly, and the findings are, therefore, interpreted within this scope, without claims to comprehensive representation of all Sudanese women's experiences.

Methodological Limitations

This study faces multiple methodological limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the visibility of women's participation in Sudan's revolutions is uneven across cases and sources. Public and archival materials tend to privilege highly visible forms of activism, and women in urban and higher socio-economical positions. Less visible forms of women's political

engagement such as at the grassroots level, and in areas outside of the capital region are not represented accordingly.

Second, the analysis is shaped by source bias and gaps in the available material. Sources related to earlier revolutions are more limited and filtered through official and dominant narratives, while material from the 2018/2019 revolution is more easily available and digitally documented. Additionally, English-language sources and urban perspectives are overrepresented, which affects whose experiences are included.

Third, political memory is selective and contested. Memories of resistance are shaped by power relations and political interests, meaning that some narratives are emphasized while others are marginalized or forgotten. The study therefore does not treat memory as a neutral reflection of past events, but as a dynamic and constructed.

Fourth, the context of the two civil wars between the north and the south of Sudan is not incorporated in the analysis of the political dynamics. With the cessation of South Sudan in 2011, the country and its political dynamics looked different in 2018/2019 than during the two uprisings before that.

Finally, discourse analysis has inherent limits. While it allows for a deeper examination of meaning-making, representation, and memory, it cannot fully capture lived experience or establish causal relationships between memory and mobilization. The findings should therefore be understood as interpretive rather than explanatory or predictive.

This methodology chapter has outlined the interpretive qualitative research design used in this study, which combines a within-case discourse analysis with a historical comparative analysis. Grounded in social constructivist and feminist approaches, the methodology is designed to examine how women's participation in Sudan's revolutions was articulated, remembered, and mobilized over time.

By analysing three revolutionary moments as different yet comparable cases, the methodological framework allows for an in-depth contextual analysis and for the identification of patterns of continuity and change. This approach is well suited to addressing the research question, since it captures the role of political memory in shaping women's participation and visibility across different historical contexts. Through its focus on discourse, narrative, and

memory work, the methodology enables an understanding of the memory–activism nexus and its gendered dynamics.

Analysis

First section: With-in case analysis

October Revolution 1964

The best way to address this revolution is through the eyes of Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim, who was part of the founding the SWU and was the first woman elected to serve in the Sudanese parliament. In the analysis of the October revolution will be based, if not indicated otherwise, on two articles written by her. These two articles are “Women in the Sudan” published in the magazine Labour Monthly in 1969, right around the time when the democratic period after the October Revolution ended due to Numeiri’s coup, as well as “Sudanese Women's Union: Strategies for Emancipation and the Counter Movement” which appeared in Ufahamu, a journal of African Studies published by the UCLA in 1996. These two accounts were chosen as the main references as they represent the view of a Sudanese woman who was deeply involved in this Revolution and its making and are some of the only more detailed descriptions of the participation of women.

Women’s participation

Women’s participation began before the revolution, when they became members of unions and women organizations. Since the women’s organizations were banned under Abboud’s military regime, the organization of the revolution were held in private, often under the umbrella of housewife societies.

The roles that women took on during the October revolution can be categorized into two blocks. Women, alongside the men, were protesting, and exposed to harassment and gunfire by the security forces. Women spoke about being ready to being martyred and some were indeed killed (Berridge 2015; Al Amin and Magied 2001). More gender specific roles included the support of the male protesters, who still were larger in number. Women sang the zagharids, the ululations, that women usually sing at celebrations. Further, the women shamed and mocked the soldiers, calling them cowards (Berridge 2015).

At the time, women's involvement in the revolution was quite visible (Ibrahim 1969; Berridge 2015). They were present in the demonstrations, and their images were featured in newspapers (Figure 1). Fatima Ibrahim as an icon and the SWU with its big influence made sure that after the revolution, women gained the right to vote and launched a big campaign to support women's equality to men. By 1969, many laws were changed that enhanced women's stance in the workforce as well as in family law. Women were very involved in the protests, giving them visibility.



Figure 1: Women demonstrating in 1964 in against the military government (Ibrahim 1969, p. 312).

Memory of women's participation

In the four years following the October Revolution, women's involvement remained relatively visible and institutionally anchored. The SWU was highly active during this period, women gained the right to vote, and Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim continued to play a prominent role, both as a leader of the protests and as the first woman elected to parliament. Women's resistance and political participation during the revolution became closely associated with the SWU, which shaped how their involvement was remembered in the immediate post-revolutionary period (Kabalo 2012; Al Amin and Magied 2001; Berridge 2015).

Multiple news outlets and academic publications from this period discussed women's participation, although these accounts were more common in left leaning rather than mainstream publications. Where women's involvement was addressed, it was often remembered in positive and celebratory terms, described as "heroic" and "legendary" (Al Amin and Magied 2001). Many sources emphasize the unprecedented number of women participating in the revolution and highlight that women assumed roles comparable to those of men, while simultaneously advancing women's political demands (Al Amin and Magied 2001).

At the same time, this recognition was not universal. Many outlets did not explicitly mention women's participation or the role of the SWU at all, indicating that women's contributions, while visible in certain political and ideological circles, were not consistently acknowledged across the broader public discourse (El-Affendi 2012; Hasan 1967; Howell and Hamid 1969).

Memory work

The SWU created the magazine "Sawot al Mara'a" (The Women's Voice) in 1955 and printed it for around 20 years until sometime during Numeiri's regime. This magazine played a decisive role in mobilizing against the military. and continued to be an important tool to distribute ideas and stories after the revolution (Ibrahim 1969). Since traditional news outlets would not discuss women's topics in depth, through the magazine, broader range of women were introduced to topics such as the main causes for women's discrimination, Islamic perspectives on women's involvement in politics and their equality, and equal working and political rights for women (Ibrahim 1996).



Figure 2: Cover of the magazine Sawot al-Mara'a Issue No. 109, August 1968 (*Sawt al-mara'a Magazine* 1968)

Conclusion

Taken together, the October Revolution 1964 demonstrates that women's participation was both extensive and effective, in that their participation was translated into institutional and political recognition in the immediate aftermath. Women engaged in organizing, protest, and resistance, assuming the same as well as more gendered roles as men.

At the same time, the remembrance of women's participation was selective and uneven. While narratives associated with the SWU and left-leaning publications highlighted women's revolutionary presence, mainstream and conservative discourse often marginalized their contributions. Women's political agency thus became publicly visible primarily through organisational leadership positions and iconic personalities, such as Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim, rather than through recognition of women's collective participation. This case highlights that visibility alone is insufficient to secure lasting remembrance. Instead, the women's revolutionary participation only entered the collective memory of specific groups. Institutional

and discursive channels of organizations that valued this participation, such as the SWU or the communist party, kept the memory alive. This shows that memory is gendered and that representation is contested and shaped by power.

Revolution of 1985

Among the three revolutions, sources on women's participation are most difficult to find for the 1985 uprising. This absence can be explained by two interrelated factors. First, during Numeiri's regime, Islamist forces gained increasing influence, including Islamist women's organizations, who participated in the debates around women's rights (Hale 2001). As a result, the political priorities during the four-year democratic period following the 1985 revolution differed markedly from those of the October Revolution in 1964, with less emphasis on women's public political participation. Second, the Islamist-military regime that came to power with al-Bashir in 1989 actively promoted a gender ideology that promoted the view of the women's place to be domestic sphere. This regime had little interest in documenting women's revolutionary achievements and instead implemented censorship and discursive practices that contributed to the erasure of women's participation from the historical record (Elhassan 2025). Therefore, this section is mostly based on one of the only English sources that go into the women's role of this revolution: Zeinab Bashir el Bakri's article "the crisis in Sudanese Women's movement" from 1995.

Women's participation

Women's participation took on three main roles. First, women engaged through professional unions, where they participated in meetings and preparations for the general strike; several female trade unionists were arrested as a result. Second, women took part directly in demonstrations, some of which were led by housewives, an important yet under-documented form of mobilization. Third, within the framework of the traditional family structure, women helped organize political activity by hosting secret meetings in their homes and helping to protect those in attendance (El Bakri 1995). Women's participation must have been quite visible during the protests, especially to other revolutionaries. Yet their presence is not reflected in any sources such as news outlets or academic writing. Women's participation is not mentioned, and protesters or union members are sometimes referred to as "men", creating the assumption that women were not present (Berridge 2015).

Memory of women's participation

Women's participation in the revolution does not appear to have been actively remembered in the post-revolutionary period. The SWU lost a significant degree of influence, stopped taking on new members and became restricted to women affiliated with the Communist Party (El Bakri 1995). This also meant that the memory of women's participation stayed within those small circles and were not transmitted. At the same time, more conservative and Islamist parties and women's organizations moved to the forefront of the political landscape. Although women's issues featured prominently on their agendas, they were framed differently, emphasizing women's roles within the private and familial sphere rather than advocating gender equality in the public sphere (Hale 2001). Within this ideological context, commemorating women's participation in a revolution in which they had assumed roles comparable to those of men held little political value and was therefore not actively promoted. From these protests, mainly personnel stories survived and most only reappeared after the December Revolution. Even in this realm, they did and do not form part of the public discourse. This is demonstrated by a South Sudanese activist, who recounted the day she participated in a protest against the imposition of Arabic and Islamic Studies as a prerequisite to obtaining a high school certificate. She was a secondary school student at the time and recalls leading an all-girls' march in front of her school to demand an end to this discriminatory policy (Elamin and Ismail 2019; SORD 2020).

Memory work

Memory was primarily created through the telling and retelling of their experiences within private and semi-private spheres, particularly in conversations with family members and friends (Adeela 2023; Elamin and Ismail 2019; SORD 2020). Almost no other forms of recollection of women's participation in 1985 has survived.

Conclusion

Overall, the 1985 Revolution shows a clear disjuncture between women's active participation and its public remembrance. While women were quite involved in organizing, demonstrating, and facilitating political action, their contributions were not accounted for in the dominant narratives neither right after nor in historical remembrance. This erasure was not accidental but shaped by shifting political and ideological settings. The decline of the SWU and the rise of conservative and Islamist actors led to a setting where women's political agency was not a

desirable focal point. As a result, women's participation in roles comparable to those of men was excluded from public commemoration. Memory of women's involvement therefore persisted primarily in fragmented, personal, and oral forms.

December Revolution 2018/2019

This most recent revolution differs to how the memory and remembrance are produced and preserved. The revolution took place in the digital age which alters the processes of memory-making significantly. Digital platforms, particularly social media, have made personal experiences widely accessible, allowing individuals to publicly document and share their perspectives. Another crucial factor for the abundance of material is the close temporal proximity to the revolution, roughly seven years have passed since. Memories remain therefore relatively immediate and vivid. For a researcher working from afar, this has profoundly expanded both the availability and diversity of sources.

Women's participation

Women participated in the December Revolution in a wide range of ways. They were actively involved in neighbourhood committees and women's organizations, which played a central role in organizing street actions and protests (Makawi 2025; El Khazen 2019; Elnaiem 2024; Adeela 2022). Some of the roles women took were more gender specific, such as cooking food and while others challenged traditional gender roles, such as burning tires and leading protests (Abdalla et al. 2023). The sit-in further challenged prevailing gender norms, as responsibilities were distributed without regard to gender and women stayed overnight at the site, thereby directly contesting social expectations (Abdalla et al. 2023). Through their engagement, women created space to represent themselves politically and articulate their own demands during the revolution (Makawi 2025). One of the central slogans, "the public is private," reflected women's rejection of the prioritization of so-called public political demands over issues often framed as private. Through this framing, women asserted that democracy begins with the right to exist without violence and emphasized that these private concerns are inherently public and political (Abbas 2020; Makawi 2025).

Women's participation was highly prominent, with more than half of those protesting being women, visibly present through both their physical presence and their voices. Once again, the zagharid played a central role, marking the start of each protest (Adeela 2023).

Memory of women's participation

Within the roughly seven years that passed since the revolution, women's involvement has been remembered as central and constitutive of the uprising itself. The uprising was and still is frequently referred to as a women's revolution, and it is difficult to discuss the events of 2018–2019 without acknowledging the large number of women who participated and took over leading roles (Abdalla et al. 2023). Women are remembered not only as participants but as leaders across multiple arenas of protest and organization (Al-Nagar and Tønnessen 2021; Elamin and Ismail 2019; Elnaiem 2024). Public discourse surrounding the December Revolution has consistently emphasized images of strong women and narratives of women's leadership. One reemerging symbol is the one of the *Kandake*, the term used for queens of an ancient kingdom in Nubia, part of modern day Sudan (Engeler et al. 2020). The term is used to describe strong women (Zunes 2021), but is also disputed within the movement (Makawi 2025). But more importantly, this symbolic reference links contemporary women protesters to historical traditions of female resistance in Sudan (Engeler et al. 2020).

Memory work

Memory work was and still is being done in great variety of different ways. Women actively engage in memory work by being highly vocal about their experiences through the production of films, books, and newspaper articles, as well as through various forms of digital storytelling, such as blogposts, YouTube videos or social media posts.

The memory is being created and preserved through digital platforms and the deliberate construction of archives documenting women's participation. Documentation and archiving constituted a significant share of activist labour, with such practices being around 12.5 percent of women's activities, meaning that storytelling and record-keeping were integral rather than peripheral to women's activism (Elhassan 2025). In addition, street art played an important role in inscribing women's revolutionary presence into public space (Sudan Memory 2022). Throughout the city and especially in the area of the sit-in, many murals were painted referring to people killed by the authorities and leaders of the revolution, but also to the important role of women and imagined futures of an equal future between genders (Hashim 2019; Sudan Memory 2022; Dyop 2025).

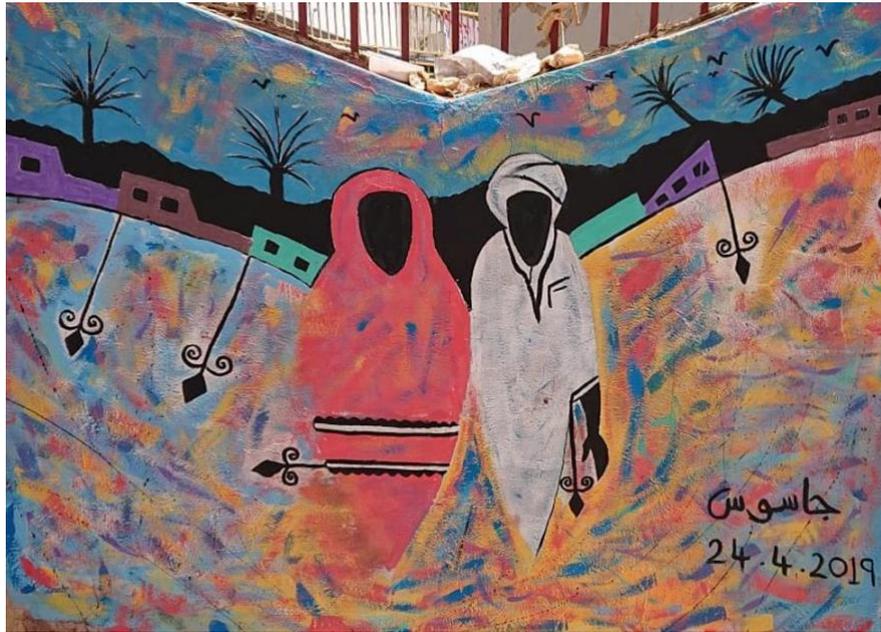


Figure 3: Mural in the area of the sit-in, painted during the Revolution of 2018/2019 depicting a female and a male person and their equal standing (Hashim 2019).

One particularly interesting example is the documentary “Sudan, remember us” by Hind Beddeb (2025). In the film, she documented the revolution and its participants. She specifically highlights all of the various ways revolutionaries created memory, therefore conducted memory work.



Figure 4: Scene from "Sudan, remember us" of a girl reciting a poem (Beddeb 2025, 08m12s).

Beddeb shows the creation of murals, the chants of the protests and many poems being recited. She talks to activists about their experiences and about the way they organize themselves. Through her work, the documentary not only captures different forms of memory work being conducted but is memory work in itself through documenting people's stories and their memory work. This is only amplified by the goal of the documentary highlighted by its name "Sudan, remember us".

Conclusion

The December Revolution of 2018/2019 represents a shift in the relationship between women's participation, visibility, and memory in comparison to the two earlier revolutions. Women's political agency was not only highly visible during the revolution, but also actively articulated, documented, and preserved by women themselves. Memory work was an integral dimension of the political action, with social media, art, and archiving practices shaping the narratives through which the revolution would be remembered. The creation of memory has not ended, documentation is ongoing.

Comparative Analysis of the Revolutions of 1964, 1985 and 2018/2019

Women's participation

Across the three revolutions, the forms of women's participation remained quite consistent. In 1964, 1985, and 2018/2019, women were involved in organizing, protesting, and supporting revolutionary action, including through gender-specific practices such as ululation. What changed was not if or how women participated, but the political and social conditions under which this participation took place. In the October as well as the December Revolution women articulated their participation not only as support for broader political demands but also as a means of advancing claims related to gender and equality, while this did not figure prominently in 1985.

Women's visibility on the contrary was not as consistent. In 1964, women's participation was highly visible and publicly acknowledged, though often framed through organizations and prominent figures. In 1985, despite continued and substantial participation, women's visibility

declined sharply in public narratives, with their presence largely absent from media and historical accounts. In contrast, the 2018/2019 revolution marked an unprecedented level of visibility, with women not only highly present but also acting as central protagonists in the discourse of the revolution, to the extent that the uprising was described as the women's revolution.

Memory of women's participation

References to earlier forms of female resistance appeared only sporadically in interviews conducted with protesters of the 2018/2019 revolution (SORD 2020). These references were limited and largely individualized rather than forming part of a broader, shared historical narrative. Earlier women's activism does not constitute an explicit frame through which contemporary participation was understood. This means that neither the 1964 nor the 1985 revolution served as a central symbolic framework for the December Revolution. Earlier revolutions were not widely mobilized as explicit reference points in public discourse or collective memory during any of the revolutions. The limited public remembrance and the suppression of this memory of women's activism restricted the extent to which women's past participation could function as a mobilizing resource.

But symbols and narratives did refer to the historically strong presence and involvement of women in Sudan through the figure of the Kandake, which emerged as a point of identification. Further historical continuities did exist in practice, such as the grassroots organizations while were engaged in every revolution. Also, the women's organizations, especially the SWU, played a crucial role in preserving and shaping memory, though their influence varied over time. In 1964, organizations were central in institutionalizing memory through publications, such as *Sawot al Mara'a*, and political wins, such as the election of Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim. In 1985, the decline of influence of the SWU and fragmentation of women's organizations in general limited their capacity to preserve memory publicly, contributing to the privatization and fragmentation of remembrance. In 2018/2019, both formal and informal women's organizations, alongside decentralised activist networks, became important sites of memory production, facilitating the documentation, archiving and distribution of narratives.

Memory work

Across the period from 1964 to 2019, a clear shift can be observed from institutionalized and centralized forms of memory preservation toward more decentralized, participatory, and self-directed practices. In earlier periods, memory was preserved primarily through organizations and media narratives. During the military remiges, which suppressed official memory production, memory work became fragmented and embedded in personal, oral, and informal spaces. Then in 2018/2019 memory work became an explicit and intentional component of activism, carried out collectively and publicly.

The mediums of memory preservation changed significantly over time. In 1964, print media and organizational publications played a central role. Following 1985, memory was largely maintained through oral storytelling, interviews, and private transmission. During the December Revolution, social media, visual art, archives, and film documentation became dominant. Because of the internet, broader circulation is possible, and multiple narratives can be present. The changing medium of memory preservation is closely linked to broader patterns of political participation and power. Periods characterized by organizational strength and political openness facilitated institutional memory work, while repression and marginalization pushed memory into private and informal domains. The prevalence of digital media during the December Revolution allowed for a convergence of participation, visibility, and memory production, allowing women to actively shape the narratives in real time. In this way, the medium through which memory is created both reflects and structures the political possibilities available to women at different points in history.

Discussion

This thesis started out to explore the research question of why women participated in the Sudanese Revolutions of 1964, 1985 and 2018/19 even though this defies their prevalent social roles. The initial hypothesis argued that women's participation was influenced by the knowledge and the memory of previous movements and earlier female political engagement in Sudan.

The analysis supports this hypothesis, although in a more nuanced way than originally anticipated. Women were not consistently mobilized through explicit references to their participation in earlier revolutions. Nevertheless, collective memory operated as a mobilizing

resource in more implicit and structural forms. Women's participation was shaped less by conscious remembrance than by organizational infrastructures that were inherited, a more general knowledge of a history of strong women and gendered practices of resistance that persisted across generations. In this sense, political memory functioned not primarily as narrative remembrance, but as lived and transmitted political knowledge.

The findings complement the existing literature on collective memory in activism. They show that also implicit remembrance, in addition to the explicit one, serves a resource through which women construct collective identity, transmit political knowledge, and challenge dominant narratives of resistance. Additionally, even though other revolutions very seldomly mentioned, symbolic references to strong Sudanese women of the past were dominant, especially in 2018/2019. The analysis further demonstrates how deeply collective memory is shaped by gendered power relations. Women's participation in Sudanese revolutions was not erased due to a lack of political significance, but because it challenged dominant gender norms and patriarchal political orders. In that, remembering women's resistance emerges as a political act, one that directly confronts memory hegemonies.

The analysis also shows the close relationship between political context and the forms that memory work takes. In periods of political openness more institutionalized forms of memory preservation are active, while repression and ideological singularity pushed memory into more private and informal domains. The December Revolution marked a new mode of remembrance through the use of the internet. While this form of memory making appears more collective and inclusive than earlier variants, it nevertheless should be observed with caution. Not all stories become equally visible, as the algorithm shape which narratives circulate widely and which remain marginal. These dynamics are not neutral but also reflect existing power relations, as decisions over visibility continue to be made by those in power. At the same time, digital spaces do enable memory production by more diverse groups of people to become more accessible in general.

Beyond the Sudanese case, this thesis contributes to the broader debates in feminist and postcolonial scholarship by demonstrating how marginalized actors sustain political agency even in the absence of formal recognition. Sudanese women's activism illustrates a case of political continuity being maintained through formal and informal networks and intergenerational transmission of knowledge. Memory emerges not only as a tool for

commemorating the past, but as an infrastructure that enables marginalized groups to imagine themselves as political subjects in the present and future.

This thesis has shown that Sudanese women's participation in the revolutions is embedded traditions of resistance that are sustained through collective memory, even when that memory is fragmented, erased or contested. Women did not just join revolutions, they passed on political knowledge and resistance strategies and actively negotiated the terms of remembrance. By focusing on memory as a gendered and political resource, this thesis underlines the central role of women in sustaining Sudan's revolutionary tradition and challenges dominant narratives that continue to marginalize their contributions.

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