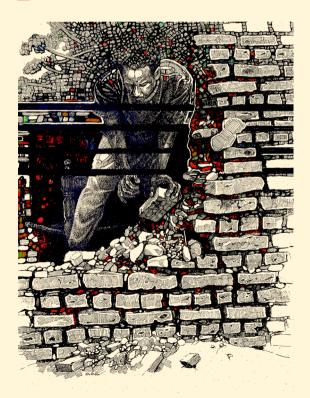


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Betrayals and Missteps:

The tale of Sudan's Resistance Committees and other revolutionary forces (1-2)

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"We are like sailors who on the open sea must reconstruct their ship but are never able to start afresh from the bottom. Where a beam is taken away, a new one must at once be put, and for this the rest of the ship is used as support. In this way, by using the old beams and driftwood, the ship can be shaped entirely anew, but only by gradual reconstruction," Otto Neurath.

Just like Neurath's sailors, the Sudanese revolutionaries have been trying to reconstruct the ship of a habitable country for everyone amid the vast ocean of political turmoil. As the current bleak moment quickly erodes the memories of the generational breakthrough in Sudanese politics that the Resistance Committees (RCs) have offered, a critical and nuanced reflection on this experience remains our sharpest weapon against its erasure.

The RCs, with their local, horizontal, decentralized, organic, flexible, and heroic nature, were effective in achieving two monumental tasks: First, the ousting of the thirty-year-reign dictator Al Bashir; and second, rendering the old tricks of military, civilian, and imperial elites obsolete and ineffective. This is what can partially explain the junta's resort to the current generalized state of exception, under which they can keep their plundering machine operating.

Although we may be losing this round of the struggle for democratic transition due to sheer The Flevels of violence and bare necessity, it might serve us well down the road to salvage the organizational legacy of the RCs, including their lessons, skills, UME

networks, and confidence in the power of collective will.

In this two-part article, I critically reflect on the experience of Resistance Committees during the nearly five years of pre-war mobilisation. The focus is on Khartoum state's RCs, primarily due to concerns of not doing justice to experiences beyond this personally familiar and relatively better-documented The first part examines how other revolutionary forces from historical civil society abandoned the RCs and delegated their revolutionary tasks to these nascent and ideologically polarized organizations. The second part explores the major issues that hindered the effective materialization of the political change expected from the RCs. This includes a focus on the following questions: RCs' legitimacy and representation, issues of intersectionality, ethics of engaging in the public sphere, and the nature of the revolutionary task.

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Betrayals

Other than RCs, political parties and professional organisations were the other influential actors in the Sudanese revolution. When it comes to professional bodies, both military and civilian parties of the transitional government have systematically obstructed the rebuilding of trade unions and the syndicalist movement at large. This was evident in the delays in approving the trade union law by the Sovereignty Council and the attempts by the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) to keep emerging trade unions under their sphere of control.

Following the military coup of October 25, 2021, the fissure between the grassroots-led RCs and the older forms of civil society organizations only widened. With the junta's crackdown on the transitional government and FFC leaders, the RCs found themselves at the forefront of the battle for democracy. The spontaneous and massive mobilization that followed the coup, along with the disproportionate response from the security forces, brought the bureaucratic machine to a halt, sparing the professional class from the organizational task of disobeying the coup leaders. However, only about a week later, the generals' attempts to bring life back to normal meant that professionals had to confront the reality of their weak

Except for a few defiant actions from the Bank of Khartoum, the Assembly of Petroleum

or non-existent unions.

Sector Employees, and the Information and Communication Technology Union, the daily operations of public and private institutions resumed normally once the coup authorities officially declared so.

The limited scope of change sought by civil society was clear in professional bodies' unclear stance on post-coup events. Demonstrations and barricades prevented the coup from targeting professional organizations, allowing unions and syndicates to demand better wages through massive strikes. However, their demands were strictly sectoral, and their response to unrelated events was lukewarm. For example, when electricity sector workers announced a strike in September 2022, cutting off power to large parts of the capital, barricades by resistance committees brought the city to a standstill, forcing authorities to address the strikers demands. In contrast, workers in various sectors ignored calls by the RCs to take part in anti-coup mobilisations, even when demonstrations faced severe violations, such as the use of live ammunition that resulted in numerous deaths, like in the Omdurman massacre on December 30, 2021, and the Al Qasr St massacre on January 17, 2022.

Another significant revolutionary void

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was that of political parties. With party membership becoming synonymous with the old political elite club, all progressive forces withdrew from proactively engaging in the creation of new parties that could echo the spirit of the transitional moment. The streets, the sit-ins, the RC meetings, the charter drafting; all these were opportune moments for individuals across the political spectrum to meet and recognise political affinities from which to build something new. Instead, the RCs were seen as the end of the inherently antagonistic nature of politics, heralding the oxymoron of an age of depoliticized politics where everyone could agree on everything. In reality, RCs became the Trojan horse through which different and competing political visions were advanced. This led to a situation where existing political parties competed for control of the RCs, resulting in their eventual fragmentation in various ways. While what was really needed were new progressive organisations with clearly defined ideological visions to effect consistent and cumulative change, and this has no other name at this point other than political parties.

The following points outline some of the key ways in which the RCs' ability to carry their gains to the desired end was undermined.

Legitimacy and representation

While the RCs, with a few exceptions, lacked democratically elected governing structures, they nonetheless enjoyed wide

support, as evidenced by consistent turnout to their announced protest actions
throughout the pre-war period. This performed legitimisation, infused with the
lasting romanticisation of the RCs, kept
pushing the representation question under the rug. However, the disregard for
this foundational task for any democratic
transformation is haunting us at this critical moment, with recent debates around
the role of RCs in the management of
emergency response, the Kampala conference and the legitimacy of the representing members.

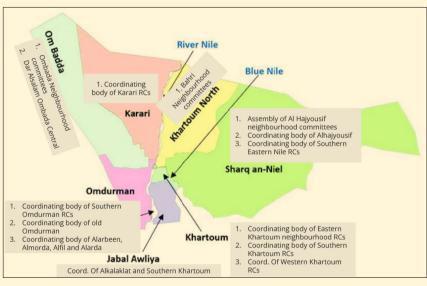
To better understand the question of representation within the RCs, it might be useful to share the most common structures that were followed within Khartoum State. The Coordinating Body for Khartoum State is the largest umbrella under which there was around 15 locality-based coordinating bodies; three in Eastern Nile, three in Omdurman, two in Ombada, one in Karari, three in Khartoum, two In Jebel Awlia and one in Bahri Locality. Under each of these bodies, a number of independent resistance committees fall, whose active membership can range anywhere between ten and twenty.

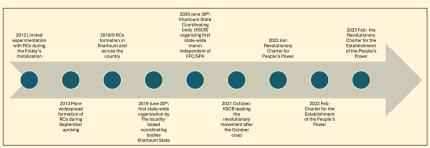
The envisioned process for structuring RCs, which dominated debates at that time, focused on what was referred to as grassroots organizing (Al Binaa Algaadi) through "foundational programs." This meant, with slight variations, that there would be open calls for all residents to register in their neighbourhood commit-

tees. The next stage involved drafting a code of conduct and a general structure. These codes would then be approved through democratic mechanisms, and members would be elected for different offices and for representation at higher coordinating levels.

Structurally, RCs, coordinating bodies, and the state umbrella had governance structures comprising various offices, in-

cluding protest and mobilization (Almaktab almidani), media, external communication, finance, social and medical, legal, training and events, and organizational affairs. Different phases of the mobilization led to varying levels of competition and controversy among these offices. For instance, in the bloody days following the October coup, the protest and mobilization office was critical, as it decided





on protest routes and assembly points. During the drafting of the political charters, the "external communication" office representatives' control over the top-down-top process had a significant impact on the outcome of the final charters, Communication representatives will share drafts of the charters from the

Drafting committee to the Coordinating body to RC that will review and send their feedback in the same order, as its representatives will share drafts of the charters from the Drafting committee to the Coordinating body to RC that will review and send their feedback in the same order.

Within such a three-level structure, issues of representation could arise at any of these levels, and their impact could easily undermine efforts at the other levels. This was not difficult to occur given the extensive and fluid nature of these organisations. Several cases illustrate how this loophole was deliberately abused to block efforts to democratise the RCs and coordinating bodies.

Many of these structuring steps were only followed by very few RCs, perhaps only a handful launched these open calls for registration. While many had codes of conduct, organizational structures, and representatives at higher levels, the democratic nature of these processes is questionable. Initially, the security situation was the justification, but during the transitional and post-coup periods, we saw

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RCs enjoying a decent level of freedom in gathering and organising. Despite this, the evasion of democratic processes occurred for various reasons, such as co-opting by a few members, such as the early founders, the more politically experienced, or those affiliated with political parties. This was particularly evident in areas associated with specific political parties, such as old Omdurman RCs sympathising with the Umma or Communist party, and Bahry and the Assembly of Alhajosuif RCs leaning towards the FFC agenda.

These issues were transposed into the charter drafting process. For instance, the revolutionary charter was pushed by the "radical change" position spearheaded by the Communist party, while the charter for the establishment of people power was preferred by the "soft landing" allies associated with the FFC. This made the RCs and the charter drafting platforms for settling ideological ridges and historical animosities.





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