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The October Revolution and its Causes

Hasan al-Turabi, one of the principal protagonists of the October Revolution, would celebrate it a year after its outbreak as a 'Revolution of the people' that represented a 'comprehensive movement which aimed to destroy the existing system of life and rebuild a new philosophy'.¹ Remembering it nearly five decades later on, other Sudanese are less sanguine in their judgements. Abd al-Rahim al-Qurayshi, the nephew of its most famous martyr, now laments that his uncle died for nothing because 'the democracy and freedom on behalf of which [he] was martyred were broken down because of the destructive practises of the political parties and military rule returned twice and the result ... is that the October Revolution failed to achieve any of its goals'.² Thus, it is worth asking whether the events of October 1964 still deserve to be termed a 'Revolution', given the palpable frustration that many of their participants have expressed at the political failings of the period of parliamentary democracy that they ushered in. These failings will be examined in later chapters, but for now the analysis will focus on the brief 10-day period in which Abboud's regime was brought down by mass civilian demonstrations. The debate over whether what occurred during this time constituted a revolution is a challenging one to resolve, for two main reasons. First of all, there is no consensus on the definition of the term 'revolution'. A wide range of theorists have disputed whether or not revolutions must necessarily involve violence, and whether they can be purely political in nature or must bring about fundamental social change to merit the term.³ Secondly, so many different political factions had a stake in the October Revolution that it is represented in a number of different ways in Sudan itself – as an uprising of the oppressed working classes by the communists, as a religiously inspired movement by the Muslim Brotherhood, and as a nationalist uprising by those not affiliated to either of these major ideological groupings.

It will be seen here that the events of the 'October Revolution' at least fit the narrow definition of a 'political revolution' – an episode in which a marginalized intelligentsia mobilizes itself to bring down a regime.⁴ They could also be deemed 'revolutionary' if we embrace the concept of revolution which emphasizes mass popular involvement. Kamrava – who, as was seen in the introduction, chooses to refer to the 'so-called' October Revolution – argues that revolutions involve 'millions of people for whom pursuing a cause has become more pressing than the chores of daily life'.⁵ If he were to apply this criterion to the events that surrounded the downfall of Abboud, then perhaps he might reconsider his downplaying of the term 'Revolution'. Few observers have denied the breadth of civilian participation in the uprising that overthrew Abboud,

Sudan's first military president. Moreover, by demonstrating that an unarmed public could unseat an entrenched military regime through purely civil protest, the Sudanese had confounded the expectations of Western diplomatic observers, and established a new set of protest norms that challenged existing assumptions that regimes in the Middle Eastern and African region could only be brought down by – usually military – force. In this sense, the events of October 1964 were at the very least highly remarkable, if not revolutionary. Thus it might be said that the October Revolution has been so called because of its short-term as opposed to its long-term achievements.

Nevertheless, in drawing attention to the apparently pacific nature of some of the civil protests, we should not neglect the manner in which religious and national ideals helped to define the events of October 1964. One of the most intriguing aspects of the civilian protest movement was that whilst it espoused apparently secular and universalist slogans, it counted among its foremost protagonists men who would later act as the vanguard of political Islam in Sudan. Here we will address this seeming paradox by looking at the manner in which Sudan's educated elite interpreted the October Revolution as one link in a chain of broadly defined 'national' events, thus enabling ideological differences to be temporarily overcome. At the same time, it will contend that the urban protesters' identification with a geographically and socially limited understanding of the Sudanese nation inherited from the colonial period was one of the civilian uprising's least revolutionary aspects and, ultimately, one of its greatest flaws.

Revolutions take different forms. For example, some are planned, some are spontaneous and others are negotiated.⁶ It is important to address these questions of agency and causation, since in the Sudanese context they are closely related to debates as to which particular political and social forces were responsible for the uprising. Critics and participants who claim that the Revolution was 'planned' give the greatest credit to the political parties – usually either the communists or Muslim Brotherhood – for preparing the ground for the revolution. Meanwhile, those who argue that it was 'spontaneous' attribute it largely to the professional movement that was formed during the Revolution itself, and – as was the case in the Egyptian and Tunisian uprisings of 2011 – to the urban public in general. However, it is difficult to impose a definite classification on the October Revolution, in spite of the efforts of various political groupings to do so. The form assumed by this revolution varied with the stage it had reached: planning for the overthrow of Abboud was the hallmark of the first period, but it was spontaneous events which precipitated his downfall, followed by a period of negotiation. This chapter contends that it was micro-social rather than macro-social and macro-political factors that helped facilitate the ouster of Abboud.⁷ To appreciate fully the fact that the downfall of Abboud was far from inevitable, we must examine the nature of his regime in the years leading up to his downfall.

The November Regime and the 'southern problem'

In some respects, the downfall of the 'November Regime', which ruled Sudan between 1958 and 1964, was far from surprising. Having been in power for only 6 years, it

was far less entrenched at the time of its overthrow than the governments that were ousted by the revolutions in Iran in 1979, or Egypt, Tunisia and Libya in 2011. From the beginning, it possessed only a narrow base of support and relied on coercion rather than consent. Yet it will be seen here that even in 1964, Western diplomats believed that General Abboud's position was secure, and the events that brought about his ouster, involving an opportunistic reaction by the northern educated elites to the crisis in southern Sudan, were still highly spontaneous and far from predictable in nature.

Sudanese verdicts on the 'November Regime' offer some clues to the reasons for the uprising against it. Its apologists tend to point to the fact that the Novemberists established a number of new development projects, including the Roseires and Khassal-Girba dams, the railway line from Nyala to Wau, Shambat Bridge in the capital and the Khartoum-Wad Madani road.⁸ Western scholars as well as Sudanese writers agree that whilst the November Regime may not have been able to engineer a great leap in economic development, its impact on the economy was not as destructive as that of later regimes. Bechtold, for example, observes that there had been a 'considerable rise in the standard of living' after 1958.⁹ The communists criticized the regime for relying on American aid and turning Sudan into a debtor state,¹⁰ but Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim recalls that the party was more focused on obtaining political freedoms for trade unions rather than responding to any general economic crisis.¹¹ Abboud's critics tend to implicitly acknowledge his regime's relative economic competence by focusing their criticism on its abuse of political freedom. Ahmad Ali Baggadi, for instance, states that 'because of its naiveté in listening only to supporters and drum-beaters, it believed that the people genuinely supported what it did. In reality, however, it was the first government that brought in preventative arrest (*al-i'taqaq al-tahafuzzi*), and the banning of political activity not supportive to the government'.¹²

For democratic critics, the 'original sin' of Abboud's regime was that it was brought about by a military coup. The initial justification for the military takeover, as indicated by Abboud's first radio broadcast, was that the military had no choice but to save the country from the chaos wrought by Sudan's previous rulers.¹³ The October Revolution was not original in its introduction of liberal democratic politics, for Sudan had since independence in 1956 been ruled by a Westminster-style parliamentary system, which the country's British colonizers had established a mere 3 years before their departure. The roots of parliamentary democracy in Sudan were thus already present but shallow in nature, and even the leading parliamentarians themselves were not all committed to it. Historians have tended to accept that the military takeover occurred with the connivance of the incumbent Umma Party prime minister Abdullah Khalil, who was a soldier like Abboud.¹⁴

The new government was unabashedly autocratic in nature. Abboud instantly dissolved the national parliament and forbade public gatherings.¹⁵ He also banned independent media, although privately owned newspapers would later be granted licenses to publish, albeit subject to long periods of suspension.¹⁶ Political authority was to be centred upon a thirteen-strong 'Supreme Council for the Armed Forces' (SCAF), which itself conferred 'full legislative, executive and judicial powers' upon Abboud as both president and prime minister.¹⁷ In spite of Abdullah Khalil's role in helping to organize the coup, the new government came to be dominated by

members of the Khatmiyya *Sufi* religious order who were sympathetic towards the People's Democratic Party (PDP), the party supported by the Khatmiyya at that time. The leading personalities in the regime – Ibrahim Abboud, the president, Ahmad Khair, the foreign minister, and Abu Rannat, the chief justice, were all members of the Shayqiyya ethnic group, which had close links to the Khatmiyya.¹⁸ Meanwhile, the one prominent Umma-supporting general who participated in the coup, Abd al-Wahhab, was dismissed by Abboud in March 1959.¹⁹ Moreover, unlike the more radical military regimes that had emerged in Egypt and Iraq, Abboud's government followed no grandiose ideological programme that might have been able to garner it mass support.²⁰ In short, from its earliest days the regime had an extremely narrow political base.

As a result of its limited support, the new regime depended on a degree of coercion to guarantee its survival. For example, in December 1959 a number of young officers from the Infantry School at Omdurman who attempted to overthrow the regime by force were hanged;²¹ the year 1961 witnessed both the dissolution of the Sudan Railway Workers' Union and the closure of the University of Khartoum as a result of student protest.²² Whilst arbitrary measures such as these would pale in comparison to those later employed by Nimeiri and al-Bashir, they were a political novelty at the time. As a result, in June 1961, the alleged torture of the young communist political detainee Mustafa Hassanain at the hands of the military in Kordofan led the Front of Opposition Parties (FOP), established by the Umma Party leader Siddiq al-Mahdi in 1960 and incorporating every major northern political party barring the PDP, to send a severe petition to the government.²³ This claimed that 'government terror has reached an extent that was not reached in the most destructive era of colonialism.'²⁴ The government responded by sending a number of the senior FOP members, including Isma'il al-Azhari and Abdullah Khalil, to a prison in Juba. Thus the very political classes that had failed so singularly to preserve liberal democracy were galvanized back into action as a result of the excesses of the military regime. Opposition to authoritarianism unified these elites in a manner that parliamentary democracy did not.

The frequent clashes with political opponents and constant resorts to coercion seemed to indicate that the regime was liable to be overthrown at any time. However, in the 2 years immediately preceding the Revolution the government actually appeared to have become more firmly rooted. Although the imprisoned politicians were released in January 1962, the death of Siddiq al-Mahdi in October 1961 and the secession of the Sudan Communist Party from the FOP in late 1962 seemed to have paralysed the opposition movement.²⁵ The British Ambassador Ian Scott maintained throughout 1962 and 1963 that the regime was better entrenched than it had been in its early years. In his Annual Review for 1962, he wrote:

One cannot prophesy stability for a regime which came in by a military coup ... with this proviso, however, I can see no threat to the president's personal position; and it does not seem to me that there is any possibility of any overthrow of the present regime except by a split among the top military leaders themselves ... nor are there clear signs of unrest or disloyalty among the more junior officers of the army: indeed, morale and self-confidence seem high.²⁶

Scott did not believe that the civilian political opposition posed any particular threat to the persistence of Abboud and the SCAF. He cited a 'disgruntled politician' stating that 'all the ingredients of a revolutionary pie are present', but suggested 'this pie is half-baked and will not rise'.²⁷ Moreover, the ambassador did not believe that the widespread private criticism of the regime would amount to anything. He described it as 'at once uninhibited and ineffective',²⁸ and re-iterated similar views in his 1963 Annual Review, arguing that the government had 'steadily increased in self-confidence'.²⁹ We should note in this context that Scott was highly sympathetic to the Novemberists: he frequently expressed satisfaction with the close ties between the Sudan government and the UK, decried the idea that Sudan should return to 'one man one vote' and spoke fondly of the friendship that had developed between himself and the right-wing foreign minister Ahmad Khair.³⁰ Thus his contemptuous attitude towards the Sudanese opposition reflected to some extent his conservative political outlook.

The Americans appear to have been just as sceptical about the capacities of the civilian opposition. James Mocer, the United States Information Agency representative in Khartoum at the time, claims that he told US Embassy staff of his belief that the regime would be overthrown but was simply ignored. Mocer himself predicted a 'coup d'état' rather than a civilian uprising that would restore democracy.³¹ It is hard to deny that there was something of a lull in active opposition to the regime between 1962 and 1964. The government did have to deal with a strike by the Gezira tenants in late 1963, but, as will be seen in Chapter 3, this was not supported by the Sudan Communist Party. This would seem to support the notion that the October Revolution was spontaneous in nature, rather than the result of a series of cumulative acts of organized resistance to the regime.

One of the curiosities of the events that produced the initial spark for the Revolution was that their context was provided by the debate over the political situation in southern Sudan, which did not become a major issue in northern Sudanese politics until late 1963. Historians usually speak of the 'Sudanese civil war' of 1955 to 1972.³² However, after the mutiny of the southern army units, which had refused to be transferred to northern Sudan on the eve of independence in September 1955, the conflict had been fought at a relatively low level of intensity. The mutineers remained in the bush for a number of years with little significant external support and thus failed to establish themselves as a significant military threat to the regime.³³ After Abboud came to power in 1958, his government's policies of Arabization and Islamization stoked further discontent in the predominantly non-Muslim south. The November Regime increasingly Arabized the education system in the south, established Friday as the day of rest, and harassed Christian missionaries until finally expelling them altogether in 1964.³⁴ It also stepped up the military campaign against the mutineers and forced a great number of southern Sudanese politicians and students into exile.³⁵

The 'southern problem' first became a major issue in northern politics following the raid by the southern 'Any-Nya' rebel movement on Wau, the capital of the southern province of Bahr al-Ghazal, in January 1964. The 'Any-Nya' had been established in 1963 as the military wing of the Sudan African National Union (SANU), a political movement that had been formed by exiled southern Sudanese politicians.³⁶ Although

the attack failed, it generated a great deal of publicity both inside and outside the country. Whilst the November Regime had imposed a strict media blackout regarding events in southern Sudan, the engagement at Wau was covered by Radio London and a number of other foreign news stations to which the educated urban populations of the north were able to listen.³⁷ This forced the regime to adopt a relatively accommodating attitude towards the press on the 'southern question' so as to maintain credibility. It permitted correspondents from two private newspapers, *al-Ayyam* and *al-Ra'i al-Aam*, to travel to the south to report on the fallout from the attack on Wau and visit a large number of areas in order to report on the issue in a broad context.³⁸ 'What we published', claims Ahmad Ali Baggadi, the correspondent for *al-Ra'i al-Aam*, 'caused widespread political debate'.³⁹ As a result of the extensive discussion of the southern situation among the northern educated classes and its own apparent inability to deal with the crisis in the region, in August 1964 the government appointed a commission to look into the background of the southern conflict and propose solutions.⁴⁰ This committee immediately invited public discussion of the 'southern problem' and the regime agreed to temporarily lift the restrictions it had imposed on freedom of speech in order to permit a candid debate.⁴¹ This was the first time that such measures had been taken during Abboud's 6-year tenure.

The conflict in southern Sudan had thus, on account of the widespread international attention it generated, forced the regime to liberalize itself in a manner that previous political crises in the north had not. However, it is important to recognize that the Revolution occurred not because of pressure from southerners, but because northern intellectuals exploited the opportunities granted by the lifting of restrictions on freedom of speech to shift the focus of the debate from south to north. The famous debates on the 'southern question' soon came to have little to do with the south itself. The terms under which they were to be conducted very much reflected the northern point of view – the minister of information, who inaugurated the commission established by the government to oversee debates on the issue, declared that there would never have been a problem in the south had it not been for 'the conspiracies of colonialism' and that the purpose of the conference would '[whilst] leaving ... the principle of united government untouched, [be to] study the factors that have stood in the way of cohesion in north and south Sudan and recommend solutions which bring about mutual trust and achieve internal stability and unity'.⁴² Since the overwhelming majority of southern political groups were at this time campaigning for either self-determination or regional autonomy, this statement did not bode well for serious north-south dialogue. Southerners themselves had only limited involvement in the discussion of the 'southern question'. SANU boycotted the commission as soon as it was announced.⁴³ Moreover, although Khartoum University Student Union (KUSU) played a significant role during the debates, it did so with limited southern collaboration. This was because the Student Welfare Organization – the political front representing southern students – had left KUSU the previous year in protest against its refusal to condemn a painting displayed at a cultural exhibition depicting unclothed southerners fighting over food that had been thrown to them by a group of northerners.⁴⁴ The 'southern question' was, therefore, largely a product of northern politics.

It was Hasan al-Turabi, the university lecturer and expert in constitutional law who is today famous as the *éminence grise* of political Islam in Sudan, who played the most significant role in sidelining the 'southern problem' and focusing the debates on the political situation in the north. The scene of his intervention was the examination hall at Khartoum University, where the first of the great debates on the southern question was being held on 10 September under the aegis of the Society for Social Studies (*jama'iyya al-dirasat al-ijtima'iyya*).⁴⁵ This debate was attended by senior government representatives, including the finance minister Mamoun Biheiri, as well as representatives of both the SCP and Muslim Brotherhood, and the 'southern bloc' in the person of Ambrose Rini.⁴⁶ Its official purpose was to discuss 'the southern issue and its social aspects.'⁴⁷ Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, who attended the discussion, recalls that he had prepared a paper on the history of slavery in southern Sudan that he never had the chance to read out.⁴⁸ This was because al-Turabi stole the limelight and transformed the nature of the debate with a speech insisting that the problems of the north and south could not be discussed in isolation from each other. He declared that the problem was one of political liberty and that the southern issue could be dealt with only by toppling the government in the north.⁴⁹

Although the impact of the speech was immediate, its merits have been debated. Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, although he admits that al-Turabi's speech gave inspiration to most of those present, laments that he effectively crippled any potential for serious discussion of the south as an issue in its own right by linking it directly to northern politics.⁵⁰ The future master of the Islamic Movement effectively set the pattern for the following seminars. The next symposium at the University of Cairo Khartoum Branch had a similar focus on politics in the north, as participants demanded constitutional reform as a pretext to resolve the southern conflict.⁵¹ Following this meeting, Ahmad Ali Baggadi, who had done so much to publicize the southern issue, engaged in a series of acrimonious debates in *al-Ra'i al-'Aam* with al-Turabi's fellow *Ikhwani* lecturer Muhammad Salih Umar, who had spoken at the seminar and whom he accused of exploiting the southern issue for political purposes.⁵²

The fact that the government sanctioned debates that led to such vociferous criticism of itself might suggest that it had moved in the direction of becoming a 'liberal autocracy'. However, understanding the political strategy being employed by Hasan al-Turabi and Muhammad Salih Umar, it soon moved to abort its liberalization measures. When the Khartoum University philosophical society attempted to prepare another seminar for 10 October, pressure was put on the Dean of the University Nadhir Dafa'allah to demand its cancellation.⁵³ However, KUSU went ahead with the seminar in spite of his protests and the university administration's tactic of flooding the intended meeting place with water.⁵⁴ Muhammad Salih Umar, Ahmad Ali Baggadi and Mukhtar al-Assam of the Umma Party were all preparing to speak when the police invaded the university and forced the meeting to disperse.⁵⁵ KUSU subsequently objected to the police action in a letter of protest that the executive committee carried directly to the ministry of interior, the result of which was that on 15 October the entire committee was arrested.⁵⁶ The replacement leadership, nevertheless, vowed to continue its struggle against the government and began to prepare another seminar to be held on 21 October.⁵⁷ This set the stage for the final confrontation with Abboud's regime.

Thus when the decisive seminar – at which no southern representatives were present⁵⁸ – took place, it symbolized the northern intelligentsia's struggle against an autocratic regime, and represented a fight for intellectual and political freedom *per se* more than a serious attempt to engage with the question of north-south relations. Rabie Hasan Ahmad, who became the president of KUSU following the arrest of his predecessor on 15 October, admitted in 2012 that 'All of us considered that any event ... in which people got up and talked ... would benefit the opposition movement ... even if the topic was a far off topic [i.e. the "southern problem"]'.⁵⁹ Thus, the chain of events that led up to 21 October was the product of the political opportunism of an educated elite more than a response to regional marginalization or economic misery. This is why the participants have tended to observe that the October Revolution 'had no social content', being focused largely on the restoration of democracy.⁶⁰ In this sense, it could be narrowly defined as a 'political revolution', in the sense of Huntingdon or Pareto, being led by an intellectual elite seeking greater representation for itself.⁶¹ Al-Turabi's speech had focused purely on the issue of political liberty and had not berated the regime for its social or economic failings. He would have chosen this strategy because he knew that whilst the regime had presided over a period of relative social and economic stability, it had a decidedly less impressive record when it came to preserving democracy and basic freedoms. The fact that the regime had appeared relatively stable in the years preceding its overthrow, and that the issue that prompted the series of events preceding its downfall was one that impacted little on the lives of the northern Sudanese urban dwellers who ultimately drove the uprising, lends credence to the argument that the Revolution of October 1964 was spontaneous in nature.

The martyrdom of Ahmad al-Qurayshi and the outbreak of the revolution

Ahmad Ali Baggadi, whose reporting from the south helped to provide the initial context for the fateful seminar of 21 October 1964, asserts that 'the success of the October Revolution came as a surprise to both the opposition and the government equally'.⁶² This argument stands in contradistinction to the claims of the ideological movements on the left and to a lesser extent of those on the right – for both of which Baggadi shows equal contempt – that they planned the revolution.⁶³ These claims will be investigated in more depth in Chapter 3, but here the focus will be on the credibility of the argument that the outbreak of the anti-government uprising was spontaneous and its success far from inevitable.

One senior police officer who served during 1964 argues that the crisis of 21 October could have been avoided if the police had decided to wait for the students outside the university and had dispersed their demonstration after the seminar. Apparently the police leadership was divided over whether the force should actually enter the university itself.⁶⁴ This may have been true, but the police invasion of the campus during the 21 October seminar was not a one-off incident. It occurred in the context of periodic increases in tension between police and students throughout the November

Regime, during which armed policemen had invaded the university premises on a number of occasions.⁶⁵ As noted above, 11 days before the 21 October seminar, they had broken into the university and used the threat of force to close down the debate being organized by the previous KUSU executive committee.

The clash that broke out between the students and police on 21 October was far from spontaneous: it was part of a pattern. As a result of the previous clashes, a number of the students of Khartoum University, having armed themselves with tree branches and broken bottles, came to the seminar – which was attended by around 700 students – well prepared for a showdown.⁶⁶ As the police broke into the campus in the early stages of the seminar and began to issue dispersal orders, Anwar Nur al-Hadi, one of the members of the KUSU executive committee, began to chant the words ‘if one day the people wanted freedom, then there is no doubt that fate must answer, and that the night will pass, and that the chains will break...’⁶⁷ Nevertheless, it does not seem that the students seriously anticipated the political explosion that they were about to generate. ‘He who says we went to the seminar to topple the regime is a liar’, recalls one former student, ‘but events developed until [they brought about] the end of the regime’.⁶⁸

The key event that guaranteed the 21 October seminar its place in history was the shooting of Ahmad al-Qurayshi, which nobody had predicted. It certainly does not appear that the students had intended to provoke the police into making a martyr of one of their number. Members of the KUSU executive committee claim that the students were surprised by the decision of the police to open fire.⁶⁹ Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim, who was a member of the 40-strong KUSU council at the time and had been nominated as the note-taker for the seminar, admits that by the time al-Qurayshi was shot, the student leaders had already dispersed and gone back to their hostels adjoining the university.⁷⁰ Those who carried on the fight, throwing bricks at policemen and engaging in running battles in the dormitories, were younger students who wanted ‘to have their university experience’.⁷¹ It was these clashes that led directly to the shooting of al-Qurayshi. The exact circumstances in which he was killed remain obscure. Predictably, there are many theories both about how he died and what exactly caused the police to open fire. Shamouq admits that the young students spent a long time wearing the police down and forcing them to exhaust their supply of tear gas bombs, and that this played a major role in their eventual decision to open fire.⁷² Nevertheless, although it is true that the clashes at the seminar did not happen in isolation from previous events, the KUSU leadership had clearly not planned that these young students would attack the police with such vigour, and that a death would result.

Al-Qurayshi’s martyrdom was a catalytic event, rapidly leading others in Khartoum to begin mobilizing in protest. When he succumbed to his wounds at Khartoum hospital later on in the evening of 21 October, party leaders, university lecturers, newspaper editors, schoolboys and students from the other universities in Khartoum all flocked there to find out what had happened.⁷³ However, even at this stage it was not inevitable that the bloody events at Khartoum University would lead to an uprising that would topple the regime. Al-Qurayshi’s funeral procession the next day introduced this possibility, but it was still far from inevitable that this would occur in the manner it did.

For the funeral procession to go ahead, the KUSU executive committee needed to obtain the permission of al-Qurayshi's relatives in Khartoum, and specifically of his uncle. Rabie Hasan Ahmad and the other executive committee members spent a great deal of time trying to persuade him to sanction the procession. He apparently vacillated and was at one stage adamantly against allowing his nephew's body to be taken by the students for any kind of ceremony.⁷⁴ Members of the police and one pro-government judge, Abd al-Rahman al-'Aqab, turned up at the hospital early on the morning of 22 October and nearly managed to persuade the uncle to allow them to escort the corpse back to al-Qurayshi's home village, Garrasa.⁷⁵ It seems that he finally agreed after realizing that many of the nation's political leaders had arrived at the hospital to support the procession.⁷⁶

The funeral procession itself accelerated the process of anti-regime mobilization to a considerable extent. The public funeral rites amounted in effect to a religious ceremony, which ended with Sadiq al-Mahdi, the great grandson of the famous Islamic revivalist Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi, offering prayers for the deceased. It was therefore difficult for the police to take action against those participating in the procession. This was in spite of the fact that al-Qurayshi's bier was drawing anti-regime protesters together with an almost magnetic force. Niblock estimates that 30,000 people eventually joined the procession.⁷⁷ For a while it remained a solemn religious affair, as the crowds, following negotiation between university lecturers and the police, were allowed to proceed to the Midan Abd al-Muni'im in south-west Khartoum. However, once the religious ceremony was complete and just as al-Qurayshi's body was being dispatched in a lorry to his home village, the scene was set for the crowds to rail against the government. Chanting 'the soldiers will fall', they started to attack police vehicles.⁷⁸ Al-Turabi, who had just addressed the demonstrators, argues that this was when he realized that 'this is going to be a revolution'.⁷⁹

Even at this stage, the downfall of the November Regime was far from guaranteed, for the demonstrations that followed on Friday 23 October were not substantial ones.⁸⁰ What really shook the regime was the declaration of an immediate general strike by Abdin Isma'il, the chairman of the Bar Association, on 24 October. It seems that this idea had emerged during a meeting attended by various lawyers and university lecturers at Isma'il's office soon after the 22 October demonstration. Shawgi Mallasi, the Ba'athist lawyer who many claim initially proposed the strike at this meeting, cites the spontaneity of this decision as evidence that the Revolution had not been planned by any of the main parties.⁸¹

The strike call was made public by Isma'il from the roof of the main judiciary building, using the decision of the government to ban a protest by the various professional unions as its pretext. Abdin Isma'il's full statement read:

We have presented a memorandum of protest against the demonstration being banned from proceeding to the ministry of interior, and we consider that our mission does not end yet, and it is necessary for all organizations to co-operate closely to carry out the decision to launch a general political strike, and we are to gather together all the sectors of the people throughout this period so that we are able to create a national protest front to continue the struggle against the military government and I hope after that that we will move aside peacefully.⁸²

It is widely agreed that the general strike was an overwhelming success. It paralysed economic life in the capital, disrupted all the major communications networks and cut off routes of supply to the army in the south.⁸³

It did not take long after the declaration of the general strike for Abboud to concede to the protesters' demands. On 26 October, he made a radio broadcast announcing the immediate dissolution of the SCAF and cabinet, declaring that he would remain as head of state only so that a transitional government could be formed.⁸⁴ The departing president and a number of senior members of the military leadership then began to negotiate with a series of delegates from the United National Front, which had been jointly established by representatives of the political parties and professional movement.

Commentators on the October Revolution have offered a number of different explanations for Abboud's rapid capitulation. One theory credits the sheer effectiveness of the general strike; another popular interpretation is that it was pressure from the radical 'Free Officer' movement within the army; and another contends that the ageing general himself sympathized with the popular movement and was far less keen to maintain power than some of his more hard-line lieutenants in the SCAF. 'Abboud himself made the decision to resign, he never thought that he was so hated', recalls Ahmad Ali Baggadi.⁸⁵ Al-Turabi, who participated in the negotiations with Abboud that followed the 26 October broadcast, states: 'honestly, we were surprised by his modesty ... he said "I didn't make the November revolution.... I am an engineer and not a soldier, I don't want to kill another student, go to the authorities and negotiate with them"'⁸⁶

It is difficult to deny that Abboud was more malleable than SCAF members such as his temporary minister of interior Ahmad Rida Farid, who had threatened on 24 October to 'strike any more demonstrations with an iron fist'.⁸⁷ The admission of a former member of the Free Officer movement that Abboud had already made his decision to concede to the popular will on 25 October *before* the Free Officers surrounded the Republican Palace also suggests that the president himself played a significant role in bringing about the downfall of his regime.⁸⁸ However, it is worth noting that he did not concede immediately – the first decision he made on 25 October was to arrest two of the judges who had participated in the demonstration that led up to the declaration of civil disobedience, a decision he reversed 5 days later.⁸⁹ It seems likely, therefore, that the broad impact of the general strike played some part in forcing his hand. In spite of this, his subsequent flexible attitude played a major role in enabling the Revolution to take the relatively peaceful course that it did (and is probably why he was granted far more lenient treatment than the other members of the SCAF during the interim period).⁹⁰ This does not mean that October was a 'negotiated revolution' in the Kamrava sense. Kamrava defines a 'negotiated revolution' as one in which the 'state has become weak and vulnerable to pressure from society but is not weak enough to be overthrown, and the only solution is for representatives of state and society to negotiate a largely peaceful transfer of power'.⁹¹ Abboud's decision to dissolve the SCAF does not exactly fit this model: given the comprehensive nature of the opposition to his regime, it would probably have been overthrown in a less ceremonious manner had he not capitulated so early on.

Violent and non-violent aspects of crowd behaviour

For a number of the thinkers who influenced the Sudanese intellectual elite in the 1960s – most notably, Franz Fanon – violence was a necessary and integral aspect of revolutionary social and political change.⁹² Yet the events of October 1964 challenge the notion that revolutions must be violent by definition. The fact that the anti-regime movement forced Abboud to start making concessions within a mere 5 days contributed to October 1964's reputation as a peaceful uprising. Nevertheless, it is not universally remembered as such. Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim laments that years of adaptation to authoritarianism under Umar al-Bashir have led people to adopt a cynical attitude towards the Revolution, associating it with 'vandalism' (*al-takhrīb*) rather than change (*al-taghyir*).⁹³ It is true that Revolution was marked by violence at key stages; however, it is not fair to say that it was this violence that played the decisive role in forcing the regime to abandon power.

What can be said is that the spark of the Revolution was provided by a genuinely violent confrontation between the students of Khartoum University and the police on 21 October. Even sources sympathetic to the students concede that their use of force – albeit adopted only to protect their right to freedom of assembly and discussion within the university – contributed to the decision of the police to open fire. As seen above, in preparation for the seminar, a number of the male students had armed themselves with bricks, tree branches and broken bottles. Using their weapons, they managed to isolate and beat up some policemen before the fatal shootings occurred.⁹⁴

After the conflict that provided the initial catalyst for the Revolution, the civilian opposition to the regime adopted both violent and non-violent strategies. Whilst al-Qurayshi's funeral procession was conducted in a reverent and pacific silence, the crowds that gathered in Abd al-Muni'im square in its immediate aftermath chanted slogans such as 'death to the traitors' and 'revenge ... revenge',⁹⁵ and then proceeded to smash up and set fire to nearby police cars.⁹⁶ This does not appear to have been simply the work of a violent fringe or a marginalized urban underclass; Ahmad al-Amin Abd al-Rahman, a civil servant in the ministry of agriculture who would soon become a major player in the Professional Front, admits with a degree of contrition that he participated in this vandalism.⁹⁷ At the same time, this violence appears to have been fairly spontaneous in nature. Mallasi cites it as evidence of the fact that the Revolution was initially 'lacking in leadership'.⁹⁸

Those who eventually provided the Revolution with its leadership, in both the parties and the unions, never actively encouraged the use of violence against the regime and its agents. They pleaded with the public to stay committed to peaceful means of protest, particularly after the outbreak of the general strike on 24 October. On this day, the SCP's 'Central Bureau for Trade Unions' issued a statement calling on the people to focus on the general strike and avoid perpetrating acts of vandalism.⁹⁹ This was followed by another SCP statement on 28 October condemning vandalism and sabotage, and arguing that if these continued they would be exploited by reactionaries to justify a counter-revolutionary coup.¹⁰⁰ This policy was an effective one. The success of the general strike in bringing about the downfall of the regime via peaceful means even forced the British Ambassador to retract his previous cynical statements

regarding the revolution. Originally, he had characterized the events of 22 October as 'widespread but unorganized hooliganism',¹⁰¹ and shortly afterwards stated that 'The only purposeful direction, apart from actions embarrassing to the function of government, seems to be attacks on liquor shops'.¹⁰² However, after the general strike had succeeded in forcing Abboud to dissolve the SCAF and cabinet, he admitted:

This whole affair has contained remarkable features. A military government has allowed itself to be overthrown by purely civilian opposition.... Civil disobedience on the Gandhian model has been deployed, perhaps for the first time in the Arab or African world, with devastating effect.¹⁰³

Whilst the British Ambassador may have identified these events with the methods adopted by the Indian nationalist movement against British rule, the Sudanese demonstrators found their own specific ways to express pacific protest. A number of those who took to the streets carried branches of the *neem* tree as a symbol of peace.¹⁰⁴

Nevertheless, it is difficult to deny that acts of vandalism and arson did occur, even if they were exaggerated by Western embassies and the Western media. Windows were smashed at the American embassy and there was an attempt to break into the United States Information Service library.¹⁰⁵ These acts prompted the *Herald Tribune*, in an extraordinary act of national self-referentialism, to produce on 26 October the headline 'Khartoum Situation "serious" in 4 days of anti-U.S. riots'.¹⁰⁶ There were also a variety of other acts of vandalism. They included an assault on a pharmacy whose Syrian owner was believed to have murdered a Sudanese in the period leading up to the Revolution, and another on the premises of the newspaper *al-Ra'i al-Aam*, which was held by a number of opposition groups to have been sympathetic to the regime.¹⁰⁷

It is difficult to state objectively whether this violence was sponsored by representatives of the various political parties. Ahmad Ali Baggadi, as a journalist at *al-Ra'i al-Aam*, insists that the assault on its premises was orchestrated by the SCP to settle grudges with him as a party member who had left the fold.¹⁰⁸ Not surprisingly, this is denied by former communists, who argue that it was simply a spontaneous outbreak of popular anger against a newspaper thought to be supportive of the regime.¹⁰⁹ Such memories are echoes of the position of the SCP at the time, which, although trying to deter acts of vandalism during the revolution itself, in November 1964 sought to excuse them by pointing to the strength of the people's feelings of 'class injustice'.¹¹⁰ The SCP attitude to revolutionary violence was, therefore, somewhat ambivalent.

The extent to which Sudan's Islamists adopted a pacific stance during the civil protests is also unclear. A good deal of the most destructive rioting exhibited a highly moralistic character. Bars, night clubs and off-licenses were all set on fire.¹¹¹ The British Ambassador concluded that attacks on 'liquor shops ... would point to the influence of the Muslim Brotherhood'.¹¹² Whilst there is no direct evidence that any of the Sudanese political parties associated with the Muslim Brotherhood organized these attacks, it is true that they had campaigned against the opening of new bars and clubs during this period¹¹³ and would have them banned when they had political dominance from the late 1970s onwards. If the individuals who conducted these attacks were not active members of the Brotherhood, they would certainly have sympathized with them. One particular incident demonstrated the manner in which some elements of crowd

behaviour during the Revolution jarred with the more secular slogans adopted by other protesters. Fadil Awadallah, lamenting the role of 'the rabble' in the revolution, recalls:

After the victory of the Revolution a group of rabble (*gauga*) assaulted a statue embodying the renaissance of the Sudanese woman that had been established by Abboud's government in front of the Omdurman post office, and they brought it to the ground and smashed it, and their only justification for this act was that the woman who was represented life size in the statue was wearing a Sudanese *thob* and that her lower back was revealing indecent features!¹¹⁴

This incident was hugely ironic, given that educated women played a significant role in the October Revolution,¹¹⁵ which would come to be regarded as a high point for women's rights in Sudan following the granting of female suffrage for the first time in the country's history. The acts of this group are a reminder that crowd behaviour is rarely collective, and urban demonstrators during the revolution had a variety of separate agendas. These specific actions recall to some extent the kind of religiously sanctioned mob violence that was practised in the immediate aftermath of the Iranian Revolution.¹¹⁶ The attacks on bars could be interpreted as a kind of 'revolutionary violence' enacted for the sake of radically restructuring the moral and social order in Sudan – but if this was this case then it was unsuccessful. It would take nearly two more decades for Sudan's Islamists to succeed in their goal of outlawing alcohol consumption in the country.

Incidents of vandalism during the revolution do not seem to have provoked a particularly strong response from either the police or the army. However, there were two further occasions on which the army deployed force to control specific crowd actions which it perceived as more fundamental threats to the existing political and social order. The first occurred at Kober, Khartoum's central prison, in which both political detainees and long-term criminal offenders were incarcerated. In the immediate aftermath of Ibrahim Abboud's dissolution of the cabinet and SCAF on 26 October, a large crowd headed from the palace towards the prison with the intention of releasing all the regime's political prisoners.¹¹⁷ As they entered it, they were not opposed by either the police or the warder staff, who presumably could have done little to obstruct them given the sheer size of the crowd.¹¹⁸ Although their avowed intention was only to release political prisoners, a number of their would-be liberators seized water pipes and instead managed to bash down the gates of the section containing the long-term criminal detainees.¹¹⁹ Upon being set free, these men ran riot, setting fire to the central prison offices and attempting to kill one of the warders.¹²⁰ Eventually, an army detachment arrived to back up the Kober governor, who managed to clear the demonstrators out of his prison by directing the soldiers to fire in the air while threatening to kill anyone who approached the prison walls.¹²¹ The significance of this was that the incident revealed the nervousness about any form of anarchic popular anti-regime action not only among the army but also among the intellectuals, students and politicians – despite the fact that it was opposition to the regime that had brought the latter to the prison in the first place. A number of the political prisoners held a meeting in their cells and decided to issue a statement saying they would wait to leave

the prison in a peaceful and legal manner.¹²² They were eventually allowed to leave on 28 October, the prison arranging for them to be released surreptitiously so as to avoid attracting the attention of the recidivists.¹²³ Again, this demonstrates the gulf separating the planning and strategies of Khartoum's political classes from the spontaneous acts of the urban crowds, which many of the Revolution's supporters as well as its opponents saw as potentially anarchic.

In a similar vein, the same officers who were unwilling to use force to keep the November Regime in the palace were prepared to do so to protect the building itself and what it represented. This became clear during the famous 'palace massacre' of 28 October, when the army opened fire on crowds surging towards the building and chanting 'to the palace until victory' (*ila al-qasr hata al-Nasr*). On one level, this demonstration testified to the civilian and largely pacific character of the protests. It was led from the front by Abd al-Majid Imam, who was holding hands with Dr Khalida Zahir, the first Sudanese woman to study at Khartoum University when it was originally Gordon College.¹²⁴ However, it also embodied the potential for revolutionary violence, as the chants of the crowds began to demand the trial and execution of members of the SCAF.¹²⁵ At one stage, the crowds surrounded the car of Hasan Bashir Nasr's son and would have killed him had one of the senior professionals, Abd al-Halim Muhammad, not intervened.¹²⁶ The military, including the Free Officers, appear to have been unsympathetic to these demonstrators. Mahjub Bireir, the Free Officer who had commanded one of the detachments surrounding the palace on 25 October, complains that 'the demonstrators themselves did not know what victory they wanted'.¹²⁷ In justification for the subsequent use of firepower against them, retired army officer and military historian al-Shaikh Mustafa insists that they repeatedly ignored warnings not to come any closer to the palace and that if they had been allowed to enter it, there could have been 'a massacre' because of the presence of SCAF officers.¹²⁸

There has been a considerable amount of controversy surrounding the chain of events that actually caused the shooting. Some sources assert that the army opened fire because the crowds had started to wrestle rifles from the soldiers' hands, others that the soldiers mistook the sound of a car exhaust for a weapon being fired, whilst yet others attribute the decision to open fire to the nerviness and inexperience of Zein al-Abdin Abd al-Qadir, the commanding officer.¹²⁹ Other accounts claim that the shooting was planned in advance, specifically by Abboud's former strongman Hasan Bashir Nasr – although Thompson disputes this, observing that he was not in the palace but at the military headquarters at the time.¹³⁰ Evidence from British embassy sources is telling here. Ian Scott informed the Foreign Office that before the shooting a Sudanese foreign ministry official had instructed him to close the British embassy, which was in close proximity to the palace, because the army was about to open fire on the waves of demonstrators.¹³¹ This would seem to support the notion that members of the November Regime, possibly fearing the kind of gruesome fate suffered by Nuri al-Sa'id and Faisal II after the downfall of the Hashemite regime in Iraq in 1958, ordered the shooting for fear of what might happen if the crowds should enter the palace.

The burst of fire during the 'palace massacre' killed around twenty people and caused the demonstrators to abandon their march towards the palace and focus instead

on ferrying their wounded to hospital. The Sudanese generally treat this incident as being exceptional in a Revolution that otherwise witnessed hardly any loss of life. 'The burst of fire was strange', recalls Ahmad al-Amin Abd al-Rahman, who in spite of his opposition to military rule viewed the generation of army officers from that period as 'very mature, very responsible'.¹³² Such use of force by the military would have been shocking to the urban northern Sudanese of the time. This generation had seen the independence struggle being won by largely peaceful means, and the vast majority of urban northerners had witnessed nothing of the fighting with the southern rebels, which had not at this stage spread to the north. Ahmad al-Amin Abd al-Rahman admits that when he saw the corpse of Mutawalli Atabani, who had been transported to Khartoum hospital after the shootings, he vomited at the sight of the latter's brains spread out behind his head.¹³³

Thus, although the October Revolution is rightly remembered for the successful adoption of non-violent strategies, it is impossible to characterize it as either a purely 'peaceful' or a purely 'violent' revolution. The very spontaneity with which the revolution occurred and the broad social and political background of its participants makes it particularly difficult to generalize on these grounds – different protagonists had different agendas. Pacific civil protest was mixed with chants to 'hang the generals' and moralistic attacks on drinking establishments. It is also worth remembering that the politicians, professionals and army officers who came to lead the Revolution were reacting to events just as much as they were directing them. They never publicly advocated violence and it is also worth recalling that these professionals, politicians and soldiers, even those who were communists, shared the same privileged social backgrounds as their predecessors in the November Regime and had little interest in encouraging forms of violence that might provoke urban anarchy.

Religion and nation in the revolution

The moralistic element in the violence that broke out during the October Revolution serves to remind us that it was far from a purely secular event. However, the role of religion in the revolution was incidental rather than planned. As demonstrated above, the sanctity of al-Qurayshi's funeral procession was one of the reasons the police were forced to allow it to proceed. The political parties chose to convene during the Revolution in the tomb of Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi because, as one of the holiest sites in Sudanese Islam, it effectively represented a 'building outside of Sudan'¹³⁴ into which the military could not intrude. Thus, religious scruples helped to determine the manner in which the insurrection unfolded. However, they did not define the Revolution itself. It is revealing that the least eventful day of Sudan's 'revolutionary week' between 21 and 28 October was Friday, the Islamic holy day. During the Islamic Revolution in Iran, the Friday sermons, or *khutba*, delivered at mosques across the country acted as a vital tool of mobilization.¹³⁵ On Friday 23 October 1964, Sadiq al-Mahdi made an 'emotional anti-government speech', but it does not seem that this had the same impact as that made by the lawyers' call for a general strike on the following day.¹³⁶ This reminds us that those who participated in the uprising did so as members of the modern, urban

economy – no purpose would have been served by announcing a strike on a religious holiday or day of rest.

Thus it is difficult to characterize the events of October 1964 as a religious revolution, the purpose of which was to change the beliefs and moral norms of society. This at first seems difficult to explain in light of the prominent role of Hasan al-Turabi, who as the political mastermind of the 'Salvation Revolution' a generation later in 1989 would endeavour to do exactly that. Indeed, some of his statements concerning the overthrow of Abboud are surprising in that they reveal an identification with Western history and a fascination with secular Western revolutions. At the time he delivered his famous examination hall speech of 10 September, al-Turabi had recently finished completing a three-year doctorate, heavily imbued with Cartesian positivism and logic, at the Sorbonne in Paris.¹³⁷ Although he admits to being involved in pro-Algerian Muslim groups in the French capital, he claims to have developed at this stage a passion for reading about French history, especially the 1789 revolution, which bemused his fellow activists.¹³⁸ 'I was probably influenced by the revolution, *fraternité, égalité*', he told the author, even admitting that the interest he took in politics when he returned to Sudan was 'probably the influence of France'.¹³⁹

It is worth noting here that al-Turabi has a long track record of professing his occidentophilia for the sake of flattering Western audiences; indeed, the ideological gulf between his English-language and Arabic-language statements and writing has been much commented upon.¹⁴⁰ Since his split with al-Bashir in 1999, he has been keen to distance himself from the extreme religious ideology of the 1989–99 period and to portray himself as acceptable to the West. Nevertheless, members of KUSU recall that al-Turabi turned up on 10 September dressed as a 'real Parisian', complete with three-piece suit.¹⁴¹ Moreover, it is fair to say that in October 1964 he waged his campaign against Abboud's regime in the name of political liberty rather than religious revival. Even after the examination hall speech of 10 September, a number of the students who witnessed it were not aware that he was a member of the Muslim Brotherhood.¹⁴² In this seminar, he famously argued that the difficulties Sudan faced were not caused by the 'southern problem' but by an absence of political freedoms that plagued south and north equally, and thus insisted that democracy and elections were the best solution.¹⁴³

Whilst al-Turabi's actions in 1964 might appear incongruous within the context of his broader political career, a number of Muslim intellectuals throughout history have followed the same practice of citing religion and (political) philosophy in different contexts. The tenth-century philosopher al-Farabi, for instance, maintained that the Prophet Muhammad was essentially a philosopher who had chosen religion as a means to communicate to the masses.¹⁴⁴ Nikkie Keddie argues that the nineteenth-century political activist Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, who was regarded as a pioneer by many Islamists of the twentieth century, followed al-Farabi in preaching a rational and philosophical message to the educated elite and a religious and moralistic one to the masses.¹⁴⁵ Al-Turabi's political and intellectual career is remarkably similar to that of al-Afghani. Just as al-Afghani travelled to Paris and championed the merits of philosophy over those of religion in his debate with the French philosopher Ernest Renan, al-Turabi produced a PhD thesis at the Sorbonne that embraced Cartesian logic

and Cartesian positivism.¹⁴⁶ Just as al-Afghani would later use religion as a rallying call as he attempted to rouse the Indian masses against British colonialism, al-Turabi began to invoke religion when he moved from addressing a student seminar to a broader public audience.

By the time he came to write about the October Revolution on its first anniversary in 1965, al-Turabi had already rediscovered himself as an Islamist politician, having been appointed secretary general of the Muslim Brotherhood's executive bureau and having established the Islamic Charter Front during the previous year. In the article he wrote on the Revolution for the party's newspaper, *al-Mithaq al-Islami*, he subtly re-interpreted it and added a moral and religious agenda. Whilst he acknowledged that the overthrow of Abboud was in the first place 'a popular revolution against a military dictatorship', he also stated that the revolutionaries of October were motivated by a desire to 'cleanse the moral corruption that had spread through the administration in terms of neglect and bribery and [acquisition of] forbidden wealth and which was reflected in public life in the drinking holes and brothels'.¹⁴⁷ It is worth noting in this context that throughout the period of the November Regime, members of the Brotherhood had sought to publicize the sexual depravity of senior members of the junta.¹⁴⁸ Al-Turabi was, as usual, tailoring his message to suit his audience. To an exam hall full of students he talked about political liberty, whereas to a more socially conservative electorate he spoke about public morals.

Jafa'ar Shaikh Idris, a senior member of the Muslim Brotherhood who followed up al-Turabi's article 4 days later, was more explicit. Idris argued that the 'set of values that ignited the Revolution was an Islamic set of values', and that 'the pioneers of that revolution were those who had the strongest faith in the philosophy which that set of values brought'.¹⁴⁹ However, this language was noticeably abstract, which is hardly surprising, for in reality religion played little of a practical role in the revolution. Admittedly there were, as seen above, attacks on bars and brothels, but these appear to have been fairly spontaneous and peripheral incidents. The various students, professionals and political activists who led the revolution did not make *shari'a* a rallying cry – *shari'a* itself was not as central or as emotive an issue in the politics of the Middle Eastern and Islamic world in the 1960s as it was to become in the 1980s.¹⁵⁰ Al-Turabi, even though he would campaign for an Islamic constitution after the 1965 elections, does not appear to have raised the issue when he was a member of the five-man delegation that negotiated the transition to civilian rule with the military following Abboud's dissolution of the SCAF on 26 October.¹⁵¹ Perhaps he was guided by some kind of Islamist equivalent of Kwame Nkrumah's dictum, 'seek ye first the political kingdom'. Or, to create public awareness of his more specific ideological programme, he found it necessary to address first the more secular concerns of his target audience.¹⁵²

Nevertheless, the events of October 1964 provided the opportunity for the growth among the intelligentsia of an alternative set of beliefs to those associated with both Marxism and Islamism, a set of beliefs that Gallab identifies as akin to a 'civil religion'.¹⁵³ According to Gallab, 'this Sudanese civil religion has its own shrines, such as the University of Khartoum, the birthplace of the October Revolution'.¹⁵⁴ It is worth noting that when the lecturers wrote to the government in protest against police intrusion

into the university, they spoke in terms of the violation of the *haram* of the university. The word *haram*, best translated here as 'shrine' or 'sanctuary', has deep Islamic connotations, also suggesting something that is forbidden – in this case, forbidden to enter. The lecturers' protest petition described the university as 'a sanctuary worthy of reverence' (*haram jadid b'il taqdis*), whereas that of the lawyers described it as a '*mihrab muqaddas*' (holy sanctum).¹⁵⁵ This illustrates an interesting concatenation of the secular with the religious by the defiant professionals. Whilst Khartoum University was the home of the 'modern forces', and had been established during a period of British colonial rule, the lawmen defended it using Arabic terms that were highly evocative of the respect for both privacy and knowledge within Islamic ethics.

Gallab further observes that a generation of poets and entertainers has appeared that has become responsible for expressing the values associated with this 'civil religion'. It includes Muhammad al-Makki Ibrahim, Fadl Allah Muhammad, Hashim Sidiq, Mahjub Sharif, Muhammad Wardi, 'Abd al-Karim al-Kabli and Muhammad al-Amin.¹⁵⁶ Again, it is important to understand that Gallab terms this a *Sudanese* civil religion and a 'national discourse'.¹⁵⁷ Mahjub Sharif, for instance, articulated his poems about the October Revolution in the northern riverain dialect of Sudanese Arabic spoken by the populations, which formed the base of the nationalist movement.¹⁵⁸

Participants often saw the 1964 Revolution as a kind of continuation of the independence struggle. One student activist recalls that the public saw in their military rulers 'another image of the colonizer', observing that the generals wore exactly the same uniforms and even the same caps as their colonial predecessors!¹⁵⁹ In this context, it is important to remember that the Sudanese independence movement had achieved its initial goal of formal territorial independence in 1956 with relative ease, due largely to the willingness of the British to surrender Sudan as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Egypt over the Suez Canal.¹⁶⁰ The nationalist movement, such as it was, had not been forced to fight for its goals in the same way as the nationalists in countries like India, Algeria or Vietnam. In a way the events of October 1964 offered Sudan the opportunity for a 'real' independence struggle, if not against the British, then against the soldiers they had trained in the colonial army. The October Revolution succeeded, albeit briefly, in unifying disparate political forces just as national independence struggles did in other non-Western nations during this period.

Nationalist ideals were at the core of the Revolution. Although both the Muslim Brotherhood and the Communist Party influenced events during October 1964, the vast majority of the urban population was still more attached to the ideal of national independence than it was to Islamist or Marxist philosophies. In Port Sudan, the one demonstrator who was killed was wrapped in the national flag by his fellow protesters.¹⁶¹ According to Mahgub, the reason that the crowds burnt the flag at the Egyptian embassy was their fury at the assertion made by the Egyptian press that the uprising in Khartoum was an attempt to emulate Nasser's revolution.¹⁶² Even leftist or rightist ideologues are remembered for their role as prominent Sudanese rather than prominent Islamists or communists. For instance, Muhammad Shaikh al-Arab, in commemorating these events, bundles together Babikir Karrar and Abd al-Khalig Mahgub – a Muslim Brother and a Marxist, respectively – as 'national' figures for their roles during the uprising.¹⁶³

Sudanese accounts of the October Revolution – including those provided by the SCP – often define it as link in a chain of ‘great national events,’ beginning with the battles waged by the Ja’ali ruler Makk Nimr against the Turco-Egyptian colonizers of the 1820s, from Muhammad Ahmad al-Mahdi’s successful revolt against the Turco-Egyptian state in 1885, to Ali Abd al-Latif’s attempted revolt against British colonialism in 1924, to the various campaigns for independence waged by the political parties of the 1940s and 1950s.¹⁶⁴ Whilst many of the leaders of the civilian insurrection represented a younger generation of politicians, they were often related to past nationalists. For instance, Shawgi Mallasi, the man who some claim proposed the general strike on 22 October, was the nephew of one of the leading members of Ali Abd al-Latif’s White Flag League, Ali Mallasi.¹⁶⁵ The political parties participating in the October Revolution were largely the same as those that had been politically active during the independence campaigns – the NUP, the Umma Party, the Muslim Brotherhood and the SCP.

There is perhaps a clue here as to the reason why civilian pro-democracy protests were able to succeed in Sudan while they failed elsewhere in the Middle East. In countries such as Iraq, Syria and Egypt, the principle of parliamentary democracy had been discredited in the period between the 1920s and 1950s, when the European imperial powers had manipulated local politics to ensure that parties linked to the major rural landholding classes won the elections or that more populist parties were sidelined in favour of pro-Western monarchs.¹⁶⁶ In Sudan, the British colonizers had permitted full parliamentary democracy only in 1953, 3 years before independence. Whilst in the wider Middle Eastern region, populist military autocrats such as Nasser and Qasim were seen as the men who had liberated their countries from the grasp of European imperialism with coups that led to significant wealth redistribution, in Sudan it was a parliamentary politician, Isma’il al-Azhari, who was ‘the father of independence’ (*Abu’l Istiqlal*). Al-Azhari, who was at the forefront of the funeral procession on 22 October, was an important symbolic figure. Nationalism and liberal democracy were thus more firmly bound together in the mind of Sudan’s protesters.

Of course, the fact that its protagonists represented the October Revolution as the latest link in a chain of ‘national’ events leads one to question how ‘revolutionary’ it actually was – since genuine revolutions are understood to represent a radical break with the past and the introduction of a new set of norms.¹⁶⁷ Moreover, it illustrates the fact that the October Revolution shared the same inherent limitations as Sudanese nationalism itself – with the arguable exception of the Mahdist revolt, the majority of these events had their epicentre within the riverain north of the country.

Social composition of the popular movement

Although the October Revolution began as a student movement, it spread rapidly to all major sectors of the urban population. Commentators on the event are fond of stating that it was not any given political party but ‘the people’ who brought it about.¹⁶⁸ If we define ‘the people’ as what was at this time the relatively socially and culturally homogenous population of Khartoum, this is in many regards true. As soon

as al-Qurayshi was shot, news of what had happened was spread throughout the capital by taxi drivers, by people returning from the centre informing their neighbours in the suburbs and by gossip in bars, so that citizens from all over Khartoum came to witness the scene at the hospital that evening.¹⁶⁹ It seems that the news travelled very quickly and without particular assistance from any of the political parties. The poet Muhammad Abd al-Hayy recalls that he first found out about the shooting at 2 o'clock on the morning of 22 October when he saw a drunk who was chanting 'there is no government!' (*hukuma ma fi*).¹⁷⁰

The number of those who attended al-Qurayshi's funeral ceremony has been estimated at 30,000. Among these, the most prominent groups were the students and secondary school pupils, who had been in close contact with their seniors at the university before the seminar of 21 October.¹⁷¹ However, Khartoum's professional classes and large groups of urban workers also attended this procession.¹⁷² The urban labourers and government employees also made the most significant contribution towards the general strike. The British Ambassador acknowledged this on 25 October, reporting that 'the strike call seems to be largely successful today and includes government offices and banks', with hospital staff keeping only emergency services running.¹⁷³ The next day he added that although some banks and businesses had re-opened, factories in Khartoum North remained closed and electricity was being provided only because of the efforts of expatriate workers.¹⁷⁴

Casualty lists can provide a useful index for the social composition of urban demonstrations. On the day after the army opened fire on the crowd at the palace on 28 October, *al-Sudan al-Jadid* provided a breakdown of the names and occupational backgrounds of the fifteen individuals who had perished by that point (the number would later increase). These were all male and comprised university students, secondary school pupils, employees of Sudan Airways and locally engaged workers at the Japanese textile factory.¹⁷⁵ Labourers and students had provided the uprising with its principal foot soldiers. Thus, whilst 'the people' made the October Revolution, it was specifically those among them – for the most part male – who were integrated within the central urban economy. Almost all of those who died had northern, Arabic names – with one exception, Mabior Shol, a labourer at Khartoum University, who, like other southerners on campus that night, got involved in the fighting with the police.¹⁷⁶

Although the vast majority of casualties were male, women also contributed to the Revolution from the start. Before the seminar on 21 October, posters in the name of the female students declaring that they would be prepared to 'sacrifice their lives' were attached to walls in Khartoum.¹⁷⁷ During the clashes between students and police at the university on 21 October, the female students supported the men by singing *zagharids*, the shrill ululations that women in northern Sudan usually released to celebrate weddings or other notable occasions.¹⁷⁸ One male student participant later argued that the students would not have continued their fight against the police had it not been for the particularly moving *zagharid* chanted by one female student.¹⁷⁹ Secondary school girls also participated in large numbers in Khartoum and elsewhere.¹⁸⁰ The Revolution also had one female martyr, Sayyid Bakhita Mubarak, who was shot whilst demonstrating alongside her children and grandchildren.¹⁸¹

Recent scholarship has observed that women's participation in Middle Eastern protest had a radicalizing effect due to the willingness of female protesters to use mockery and insult as tactics and the unwillingness of the authorities to break up women's protests due to social mores that militate against physically dispersing them.¹⁸² This was most visible during the demonstration of 24 October, in which female lecturers, doctors and lawyers joined their professional counterparts in presenting a memorandum to the palace.¹⁸³ Led by Fatima Ahmad Ibrahim, an SCP member who would later become Sudan's first female MP, they helped to deter the military from taking action against the demonstrators by standing at the forefront of the crowds and humiliating the soldiers with chants of 'go back to the barracks, you girls.'¹⁸⁴ Female participation in the protests thus enabled women to perform in a wide range of gender roles. On one level, their agency was determined by a narrowly defined and socially conservative understanding of femininity – exhorting the male students to acts of bravery, and shaming the soldiers by employing a rigid understanding of gender to stigmatize them (calling them cowards by comparing them to girls). On another level, women participated as economically empowered, politically savvy professionals and identified themselves as equal with men by declaring their willingness to share in their sacrifice.

Whilst there was broad urban participation in the revolution, its leadership was socially narrow, being limited to the urban professionals and leaders of Khartoum's mainstream political parties. As mentioned above, the most significant protest petitions handed to the government were those presented by the lawyers, judges, lecturers and doctors; the call for the general strike was initiated by a lawyer, Abdin Isma'il. The fact that the alliance of professional, trade and labour unions was termed the 'Professional Front', further underlined the dominance within the anti-regime movement of a professional class socially distinct from regular labourers (see Chapter 4). The civilian team delegated to negotiate the establishment of the transitional government comprised two professional representatives and three representatives of the mainstream political parties. These included Abdin Isma'il, as chairman of the Bar Association; Hasan al-Turabi, who although a university lecturer was seen by some as representing the Muslim Brotherhood; Mubarak Zarroug and Ahmad Sayyid Hamid for the Unionists; and al-Sadiq al-Mahdi for the Umma Party.¹⁸⁵

The revolution outside Khartoum

Hasan al-Turabi is fond of claiming that the October Revolution was 'a capital affair'.¹⁸⁶ This is perhaps a convenient argument, since his own organization, the Muslim Brotherhood, still had a very narrow political base at this time, built mainly on the support of intellectuals and students located within Khartoum; it perhaps also demonstrates the fact that he himself featured most prominently in the capital. The SCP, which had a much wider presence in Khartoum's immediate periphery, took a different view, maintaining at party meetings that the regions made a significant contribution to the Revolution in the capital.¹⁸⁷ It is undeniable that the civil protests *did* spread outside Khartoum and across the whole northern part of the country. However, it is also true

that wherever the demonstrations began outside Khartoum, they were a reaction to news from the capital, rather than a response to regional events.

It seems that although news spread to the regions relatively quickly – the communications network linking the various provincial secondary schools to those in the capital helped here¹⁸⁸ – this did not occur speedily enough for the provincial insurrections to feedback significantly into those of the capital. In Shendi, Sinnar and al-Fashir, secondary school students began demonstrating on 22 and 23 October, whereas both Dueim and Shendi were able to respond to the call for the general strike on the day it occurred, 24 October.¹⁸⁹ The uprising took longer to travel to the major provincial towns of the east and west. In Nyala, a major city in the western province of Darfur, the demonstrations did not begin until 25 October.¹⁹⁰ In Port Sudan, the principal town of the east, secondary school pupils began demonstrating on 24 October, but it was not until 3 days later that its population responded to the call for a general strike.¹⁹¹

Bechtold, echoing the communist narrative to some extent, claims that as the Revolution unfolded in Khartoum, ‘trucks and trainloads of sympathizers began to arrive from provincial towns.’¹⁹² However, the importance of this provincial support should not be exaggerated. As noted above, it took the protesters in Khartoum a mere 5 days to force the regime to begin making concessions and by the time the provincial towns had started to organize their own support for the capital, events had already taken their course. Whilst the NUP politician Muhammad Jabara Awad was able to bring a trainload of Beja volunteers from the eastern city of Kassala, by the time they arrived Abboud had already dissolved the government. Accordingly, members of the United National Front thanked the new arrivals but informed them they would not be needed.¹⁹³ Similarly, in Wad Madani and Sinnar, the local revolutionary fronts made plans to send truckloads of citizens to the capital but abandoned them after the UNF informed them that such assistance was not necessary.¹⁹⁴ In towns that were very close to Khartoum, such as Hassaheissa, citizens began to travel to the capital in their own private cars.¹⁹⁵ But, again, it seems that their practical input was limited.

The uprisings in the provinces were not marked by any particularly significant regional agenda. For the most part, the demonstrators in the provincial towns adopted the same slogans as those in Khartoum – in Hassaheissa, they cried ‘hang the generals’; in al-Fashir, ‘soldiers go back to the barracks’; and in Nyala, the chant was ‘we will not forget you o Qurayshi’.¹⁹⁶ In Hassaheissa, crowds carried photographs of al-Qurayshi, presumably obtained from nearby Khartoum, whilst in al-Ubayyid, prayers were offered for him in the central mosque at the Friday congregation on 23 October, and in Shendi, demonstrators carried a mock funeral bier made up to look the same as the one that had borne the martyr.¹⁹⁷ In Nyala, a student called Mahgub Sha’rani composed a *qasida* (a poem written in classical style) to commemorate al-Qurayshi, which he read out in the town’s main square.¹⁹⁸ Even in the relatively remote western province of Darfur, then, the protests reproduced the Arabophone nationalism of the riverain centre.

Although they did not determine the ultimate course of the Revolution, the protesters in the provincial towns did fight their own battles and obtain their own martyrs. After the general strike spread to al-Fashir, the provincial capital of Darfur,

tensions between the military and the urban population peaked on 29 October as the local army regiment opened fire on a mass demonstration. This provided the town with two martyrs, Salih Abdallah and Ahmad al-Amin.¹⁹⁹ Al-Ubayyid also had its own martyr, Abbas al-Tijani, who was killed in clashes with the police, as did Port Sudan with Muhammad Khalifa. In each of these towns, there were elaborate funeral processions for the martyrs, akin to those held to mark the death of al-Qurayshi in Khartoum.²⁰⁰

The social composition of the provincial demonstrations was broadly similar to that of those that took place in Khartoum. Again, casualty lists offer a useful index. In al-Fashir, the two people killed following the 29 October demonstration were a cobbler and a student at the local scientific institute (*ma'ahad ilmi*). The twenty-three people who were injured included a number of market traders and urban labourers, in addition to a painter, a fishmonger, a barber, a carpenter, a forestry worker, a supervisor in the Public Works Department, a hospital driver, an employee of Bank Egypt, two council workers, a primary and a secondary school pupil, as well as a young child.²⁰¹ In other words, it was those who were most integrated into the central urban economy that provided the provincial uprisings with their leaders.

It was rare that provincial support for the Revolution was expressed on an ethnic basis. On 29 October, a demonstration was conducted in the name of the Halawiyyin in Hassaheissa, but this is the only such example discovered so far by the author in media coverage of the provincial protests.²⁰² After the end of civil disobedience was announced in Nyala, there was a large public meeting in the main square at which it was reported that 'the tribes participated ... through their tribal games.'²⁰³ However, this appears to have been very much a ceremonial affair and in any case took place after the event. The rural population of Darfur seems to have been little touched by the urban insurrection. Dr Musa Jalil, who witnessed it as a school pupil in Kutum, recalls that the demonstrations were confined to the town.²⁰⁴ There seems to have been more social participation at the village level near riverain urban centres such as Dueim and Wad Madani, where the social gulf between town and countryside was less significant.²⁰⁵ In Garrasa, al-Qurayshi's home village, the inhabitants of Dueim and nearby villages such as Ni'ama, Geteina and Wadi Sheila came to witness his burial, and then participated in an anti-government procession.²⁰⁶ This probably reflected the fact that the rural areas of riverain Sudan provided more of a catchment area for the central secondary schools and universities than the more peripheral rural regions of the country.

The leaders of the provincial uprisings also had social backgrounds similar to those of the Revolution in Khartoum. Bodies termed either the 'national front' or the 'professional front' were established in the provinces and in most cases appear to have been led by urban professionals. In Rufa'a, the local body was led by the doctor and future leader of the 1985 National Alliance and subsequent prime minister Jizouli Dafa'allah; in Shendi, by Dr Abdallah Sulayman; in Nyala, by Shakir Siraj, later a member of the Central Committee of the Doctors' Union; and in Sinnar, by the judge Abd al-Aziz Shiddu.²⁰⁷ In Port Sudan, it was Dr Harith, the chief doctor at Port Sudan Hospital, who delivered the most memorable speeches.²⁰⁸ At the same time, in the riverain town of Wad Madani, the local protest movement was driven by the Gezira

Tenants' Union, whose pro-communist president al-Amin Muhammad al-Amin was instrumental in the establishment of a 'Conference of Popular Organizations' (*mu'atamar al-munazzamat al-jamahiriyya*).²⁰⁹

However, in general the provincial uprisings were driven by the same elite social forces that guided the insurrection in Khartoum. They did not express regional agendas and were not led by regional political parties. These parties – such as the Darfur Renaissance Front of Ahmad Diraige – would appear in the aftermath of the Revolution, not during it. Nevertheless, what can be said is that the Revolution directly helped to inspire regionalist movements to challenge central authority. As the Darfuri historian Mahgub Abd al-Rahman al-Zein writes, 'the participation of the people of Darfur in the October Revolution and their giving of two martyrs had a far-reaching effect on the political development of the people of Darfur, and this was in addition to the appearance of a new language in political evenings organized by various associations, especially the Darfur Renaissance Front.'²¹⁰ One of the earliest acts of the Darfur Renaissance Front's branch in Nyala was the presentation in *al-Kurdufan* of a protest memorandum demanding that action be taken against both the *Miralai* who ordered the 29 October shootings in al-Fashir and the military governor of Darfur.²¹¹ Many of the other regionalist organizations empowered by the October Revolution identified with its goals. These included the Beja Congress, which had grown frustrated with the Abboud Regime's decision to allow the Nubian settlement of Khash al-Girba. The General Union of the Nuba Mountains also published manifestos that concluded with the declaration 'Long Live the October Revolution'.²¹²

What the provincial uprisings illustrated was that the events of October 1964 did represent a genuinely national revolution, albeit within a nation that did not encompass the full geographic extent of the state with which it was identified.

Conclusion

The centrality of Hasan al-Turabi's speech to the set of events that ignited the October Revolution poses a challenge to analysts seeking to compare Sudan in 1964 to Egypt and Tunisia in 2011. How could a man who would later become the architect of the attempt to create an Islamic state in Sudan also be the engineer of an uprising that espoused universalist and non-religious ideals? To resolve this apparent paradox, we must accept that there is no rigid dichotomy between 'Islamist' and 'secularist' forms of mobilization. It is important to recognize that the forms of civil protest witnessed in Sudan were driven by secular civilian movements and organized in secular spaces, and that, as in 2011, the regime was overthrown by purely pacific civil disobedience. The notion of a purely peaceful revolution is, of course, somewhat utopian. There was a considerable amount of vandalism, and the 21 October seminar would not have been as significant as it turned out to be, had students not been willing to confront the police with improvised weapons. Nevertheless, such acts of violence as did occur did not play a decisive role in bringing about the downfall of the regime.

In a sense, the fact that the October Revolution was at least outwardly secular rather than religious in character is nothing surprising, since it occurred in the era before secular Arab nationalism had been discredited by Nasser's defeat in the six-day war of 1967. Even though there was no one 'nationalist' party in Sudan, nationalism proved to be particularly cohesive for the majority of the protagonists in October 1964, who interpreted the fight against Abboud as a kind of revivification of the independence struggle. The October Revolution can be seen as a kind of microcosm of the wider Sudanese nationalist project – it was the brainchild of an urban elite inhabiting the riverain centres of Sudanese society, and excluded large sections of the population in spite of its pretensions to possess universal appeal. The uprising in the capital may have exported itself to the provinces, but this was very much a one-way process, dominated by the same elite social groups that had spearheaded the anti-regime campaign in the capital.

The Revolution did not occur in a political vacuum. As will be seen in Chapter 3, the communists in the long run and the Muslim Brotherhood in the short term had to some extent laid the ground for what would eventually transpire. Nevertheless, the events of 21–26 October were still highly spontaneous in nature and relied upon a series of crucial turning points without the occurrence of which the anti-regime movement might never have generated a significant impetus. They included the decision of the Khartoum University students to stay on and fight the police after the KUSU executive committee had retired, and the decision of al-Qurayshi's uncle to give his eventual sanction to the funeral procession. The civilian uprising was not, as al-Turabi argued, a 'comprehensive movement ... which aimed to break down the existing system of life.' It hinged upon a series of unpredictable yet interrelated contingent events and rational choices made by key players at crucial junctures. There was, thus, no air of inevitability surrounding the October Revolution of 1964 – and this marked it as distinct from the next great civilian insurrection, the April *Intifada* of 1985.