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Decolonising Security, Epistemic Disobedience, and Revolutionary Change in Sudan

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Abstract

This article interrogates the late colonial and postcolonial evolution of Sudan's security sector, trade unions, and professional associations. Specifically, this article is concerned with how Sudan's police and army responded to trade professional associations during the Joda Strike of 1956 and the October Revolution of 1964. Through these historical junctures, this article analyses the evolution and actions of the security forces through the lens of Anibal Qujano's study on the coloniality of power. In doing so, it interrogates the "modernist" development of power structures that emerged during the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium and in the post-independence period. In addition, this article draws on Sylvia Wynter and Walter Mignolo's discussions on epistemic decolonial practices. As such, this article argues that trade and professional organisations naturally responded to the coloniality of Sudan's security forces through epistemic decolonial practices. In doing so, they challenged the structures of domination embodied by the security forces, while simultaneously articulating their own narrative for Sudan's political, social, and economic future. Using archival sources and an extensive literature review, this article makes a significant contribution to African studies, decolonial studies, and postcolonial history by theoretically conceptualising the development of Sudan's coloniality of security and the epistemic responses of unions and associations. In doing so, it advances decolonial thought and advocates for a history from below approach in the fields of postcolonial literature, cultural studies, history, and political analysis.

Keywords: decolonisation; postcolonial; professional associations; revolution; security sector; Sudan; trade unions

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Introduction

This article interrogates the late colonial and postcolonial evolution of Sudan's security sector, trade unions, and professional associations, with a focus on how these institutions interacted with the colonial and postcolonial state. The article analyses the responses of Sudan's police and army to trade unions and professional associations during two key historical events: the Joda Strike of 1956 and the October Revolution of 1964. Through these historical junctures, the article argues that while the security forces were primarily instruments of the colonial state, they also became sites where colonial power relations were contested and reproduced. By exploring these moments of resistance, the article situates the actions of Sudan's security forces within the framework of Aníbal Quijano's coloniality of power,[1] which highlights how colonial power structures continue to shape post-independence societies. Drawing on Frantz Fanon's seminal work, *The Wretched of the Earth*, this article defines decolonisation as a complex and multifaceted process that recognises that colonialism is inherently violent, and that colonised people, in their struggle for liberation, must confront the internalised psychological and cultural impact of colonialism, which stretches beyond the formal removal of colonial-era power structures.[2]

Furthermore, this article builds on the work of Sylvia Wynter and Walter Mignolo, whose theories on epistemic disobedience provide a framework for understanding how the unions and associations articulated their own visions of Sudan's political, social, and economic future. As such, this article is concerned with the following research questions: What impact did the British administration in Sudan have on the development of Sudan's security sector and on the consciousness of workers and professionals? How were popular imaginings articulated in Sudan's late colonial and post-independence periods? How did Sudan's security sector respond to acts of civil disobedience and dissent?

Historical Antecedents in Sudan's Revolutionary Change

The history of late colonial rule and post-independence in Sudan is characterised by revolutionary change and political transition. As a country ruled by the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium from 1899 until 1956, Sudan often found itself at the political and economic cross-roads between the condominium partners. However, as the late colonial period (1940–1956) demonstrated, the Sudanese actors engaged in high politics were eager to participate in the post-independence period. Simultaneously, Sudanese workers were in the midst of developing a revolutionary political consciousness that asserted their agency and demanded equal and fair treatment for workers across the country in the late colonial period and beyond. After gaining independence from the Condominium

1 Aníbal Quijano, "Coloniality of Power and Eurocentrism in Latin America," *International Sociology* 15, no. 2 (2000): 536–540.

2 Frantz Fanon and Richard Philcox, *The Wretched of the Earth*, trans. Richard Philcox; introductions by Jean-Paul Sartre and Homi K. Bhabha (Grove Press, 2004).

on 1 January 1956, Sudan entered a period of political transition and parliamentary government, which came to a halt following a military coup on 17 November 1958. Characterised by economic turmoil, authoritarian rule, and violent conflict with southern Sudan, the November Regime's six-year rule was brought down by a popular uprising in October 1964.

Alongside political turbulence, questions of positionality and identity have further complicated postcolonialisms in Sudan. Situated ambiguously between the Arab and African worlds, Sudan's identity struggles are emblematic of its colonial demarcations and the absurdities that arise from them.[3] Scholars argue that the conflicts surrounding identity often stem from marginalised groups rebelling against oppressive structures that deny them recognition and inclusion.[4] This marginalisation is deeply intertwined with issues of ethnicity, religion, and socio-political power, where those residing in the north disproportionately benefit from political and economic privileges, leading to a push for an Arab-Islamic identity that alienates other groups.[5] However, as Ali contends, there is a need to examine Sudan's postcolonial legacies beyond the binaries of Africanism versus Arabism and Islamism versus secularism, to reveal the extended patterns of dominance that have characterised various regimes since independence. Instead of viewing Sudan through these lenses, a focus on unequal power relationships that privilege predominately northern and male individuals provides a clearer understanding of the dynamics at play.[6] In addition, the role of colonialism in Sudan's conflicts is also significant. Scholars like Warburg assert that from the outset of independence, Sudan was plagued by issues that have only intensified over time, fundamentally linked to its colonial past.[7] Resistance to oppressive structures has often been propelled by various popular imaginings that reflect a form of decoloniality. Trade unions and professional associations emerged as critical players in resisting the postcolonial order; therefore, engaging with decoloniality and ongoing revolutionary changes in Sudan is essential for understanding the resistant legacies of colonialism.

Importantly, the exploration of decoloniality and its implications in Sudan is vital for several reasons. Decolonial themes, particularly those related to the security forces, reveal how colonial legacies continue to shape contemporary political dynamics, complicating Sudan's postcolonial reality. Ramon Grosfoguel's concept of an epistemic decolonial turn reveals these ongoing entrenchments. Grosfoguel argues that knowledge is always produced within specific power structures of the world-system, critiquing the

3 P. M. Holt and M. W. Daly, *A History of the Sudan: From the Coming of Islam to the Present Day* (Taylor & Francis Group, 2016).

4 Peter Woodward, *Sudan, 1898–1989: The Unstable State* (L. Rienner Publishers, 1990).

5 Alex de Waal, *Sudan: What Kind of State? What Kind of Crisis?* (Social Science Research Council, 2007).

6 Nada Mustafa Ali, *Gender, Race and Sudan's Exile Politics: Do We All Belong to This Country?* (Lexington Books, 2016).

7 Gabriel Warburg, *Islam, Sectarianism and Politics in Sudan since the Mahdiyya* (Hurst & Company, 2013).

"point-zero" perspective of Eurocentric knowledge, which falsely claims neutrality while concealing its rootedness in a colonial power matrix. This has been used to legitimise colonial domination by constructing hierarchies of superior and inferior knowledge.[8] In Sudan, the persistence of epistemic hierarchies is deeply embedded in the security forces, whose foundations are rooted in colonial power dynamics. These forces, initially created to uphold colonial authority, have continued to function as instruments of control, shaping the social, political, and cultural fabric of Sudan even after independence. As Grosfoguel highlights, epistemic hierarchies are not merely academic but are embedded in the very structures of power, shaping how knowledge, authority, and legitimacy are constructed and maintained.[9] In the case of Sudan, the colonial legacy of the security forces—particularly their role in suppressing dissent and maintaining order—continues to inform their actions and their relationship with civil society. The recent conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which erupted in April 2023, illustrates how these colonial power structures have persisted into the present. Despite the formal end of colonial rule, the actions of both factions in this conflict demonstrate a deep entrenchment of the hierarchies and forms of violence that were originally instituted by the colonial regimes.

Scholarship, Sources, and Methods

Historical analysis relies heavily on archival methodology to fulfil its research aims. Archives serve as vital sources of historical insight, shaping our understanding of events and their actors by informing historians about the context and perspectives of their creators. Alongside oral histories, these resources form the backbone of how historians interpret significant historical junctures. However, the origins of archives as imperialist projects necessitate a critical deconstruction of the knowledge they provide. By analysing a range of sources, this article highlights how these materials have shaped arguments or constrained our understanding of key issues, thus illuminating the complexities of Sudan's revolutionary landscape. The methodology employed in navigating this subject matter not only involves a critical engagement with archival materials but also seeks to position the research within a broader decolonising agenda. This approach emphasises the need for scholars to reflect on the implications of their sources and methods in understanding Sudan's historical narratives, ultimately advocating for a more nuanced and equitable representation of its past.

While the existing literature on Sudanese colonial and postcolonial history notes the role of popular revolutions and armed forces in transforming the social, political, and economic landscape of the country, there remains a notable absence of studies that apply political concepts like the coloniality of security and epistemic disobedience specifically within the contexts of Sudan's revolutions and strikes. W. J. Berridge examines the

8 Ramon Grosfoguel, "The Epistemic Decolonial Turn," *Cultural Studies* 21, no. 2–3 (2007): 215–216.

9 Grosfoguel, 215–216.

dynamics of civil uprisings and the crucial role of grassroots activism in challenging authoritarian military regimes.[10] Holt and Daly provide a comprehensive history that emphasises the influence of diverse groups on the nation's development and the evolution of security forces from colonial times to the present day.[11] Elena Vezzadini investigates the historical memory of anti-colonial resistance, illustrating how collective memories inform current struggles against oppression and colonial legacies.[12] This article complements these works by specifically addressing the enduring colonial power structures and defining epistemic disobedience as a form of resistance. While the existing scholarship provides important insights into the origins and development of Sudanese colonial and postcolonial popular imaginings and the development of Sudan's security forces, this article aims to expand these analyses by underscoring the need to apply decolonial theories to better understand the roots of colonial and postcolonial national tensions.

Building on existing literature, this article employs decolonial approaches as its methodological framework to explore Sudan's colonial and postcolonial history, with a particular focus on the role of the security sector and trade unions in shaping that history. These theories are applied when analysing archival sources to provide valuable insight into the contexts and perspectives of their creators, shedding light on the social, political, and economic processes that shaped Sudan's colonial and postcolonial history. Several decolonial approaches towards archival research have been taken into consideration throughout this article. Edward Said's work on orientalism points to information collection as an important component of the imperialist project. Through controlling the information that was collected and recorded during imperialist rule, the imperial powers successfully created a gap in knowledge, whereby the ideas of conquered peoples were omitted.[13] Said argues that the West constructed the "Orient" not as a real place, but as an ideological space through which to define itself against an "other," justifying colonial domination.[14] Dipesh Chakrabarty's *Provincializing Europe* complements this by challenging the universality of Western narratives, advocating for a historical approach that centres non-Western perspectives and acknowledges the agency of colonised peoples.[15] Together, these theorists critique the imperial knowledge production that shaped colonial history and emphasise the need for a more inclusive, decolonised understanding of the past.

10 W. J. Berridge, *Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan: The "Khartoum Springs" of 1964 and 1985* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2015).

11 Holt and Daly, *A History of the Sudan*.

12 Elena Vezzadini, *Lost Nationalism: Revolution, Memory, and Anti-colonial Resistance in Sudan* (De Gruyter, 2023).

13 Edward W. Said, *Orientalism* (Vintage Books, 1979).

14 Said, 27.

15 Dipesh Chakrabarty, "Postcoloniality and the Artifice of History," in *The Postcolonial Studies Reader*, ed. Bill Ashcroft, Gareth Griffiths, and Helen Tiffin (Routledge, 2000), 4.

The imperialist knowledge structures identified by Said and Chakrabarty are evident in Sudan's historical context. Like other African nations, Sudan's National Records Office (NRO) reflects the legacy of colonial power, where information was systematically collected, controlled, and often excluded the voices of colonised peoples. Its primary function was to serve the British administration, which gathered information about individuals and groups from urban and rural areas to classify them as either potential colonial allies or political agitators.[16] Under the guise of knowledge and intelligence collection, the British administration was able to utilise this early archival institution to shape colonial narratives. In doing so, a historical bias emerged, whereby those in power controlled how the colonised peoples would be perceived and engaged with. As Achille Mbembe points out, this hegemonic tradition is responsible for repressing indigenous epistemic traditions while simultaneously cementing itself as the primary historical truth.[17]

A similar, but contextually varying, hegemonic tradition emerged in Sudan at various historical junctures. During the authoritarian rules of Ja'afar al-Nimeiry (1969–1985) and Omar al-Bashir (1989–2019), access to the NRO was restricted to the information that the government wished to publicise. In addition, after the fall of both regimes, protestors attacked government buildings and burned archives.[18] These historical junctures present two critical points. Firstly, for the governments of al-Nimeiry and al-Bashir, establishing authoritarian rule was intrinsically linked to controlling the knowledge of the state and its people. This is similar to the British administrators, who used the archives to consolidate knowledge on colonised people in the hopes of exerting control over the territory. Secondly, record destruction by protesters during the 1985 and 2019 popular uprisings can be considered a clear articulation of the protestors' discontent with the regime. More critically, the destruction of archives controlled by authoritarian regimes can be regarded as a rejection of the values and hegemony of the regime, and the knowledge they choose to uphold and perpetuate onto populations.

Decolonising the archive is an essential aspect of challenging dominant power structures and rethinking historical narratives. Archives have long been sites of power, where decisions about what is preserved, remembered, or erased have been made by those in control. This selective process often marginalises the voices and experiences of subaltern groups, limiting their representation in the historical record. To decolonise the archive, it is crucial to recognise and address these biases, especially in the ways archival descriptions are created and the authority behind them.[19] Furthermore, the control of archival resources can suppress alternative narratives, whether through direct

16 Mahassin Abdul Jalil, "Chapter 3: From the Terraces of Celebrated Narratives to the Cellars of Tarnished History: Obliterating Knowledge in Sudanese and Arab Historiography," in *Ordinary Sudan, 1504–2019*, ed. Elena Vezzadini et al. (De Gruyter, 2023), 96.

17 Achille Mbembe, "Decolonizing Knowledge and the Question of the Archive," 10–24.

18 Abdul Jalil, "From the Terraces," 96.

19 Abdul Jalil, 95.

appropriation or indirect pressure to conform to a dominant discourse.[20] A key part of the decolonisation process involves shifting how archives are described and who defines their contents. Participatory frameworks, where communities are involved in describing their own records, are central to this transformation. Such efforts empower communities to reclaim their narratives and challenge dominant histories. This can be further supported by methodologies like annotations in archival finding aids which provide a more inclusive, flexible approach to archival access.[21] By embracing these decolonising methodologies, archives can become tools of resistance and empowerment, allowing marginalised groups to recover and assert control over their own histories. This shift not only changes the content of the archive but transforms how knowledge is produced, represented, and accessed, contributing to a more equitable and just historical record.

The Coloniality of Sudan's Security Sector

To understand the coloniality of Sudan's security sector, and the role it has played in suppressing articulations of people's popular imaginings at various historical junctures, it is critical to introduce Anibal Quijano's study on the coloniality of power. Quijano's seminal work discusses the enduring impact of colonialism and Eurocentrism in Latin America through his conceptualisation of the coloniality of power. This concept has driven decolonial understandings on how power structures, social hierarchies, and cultural norms have shaped legacies of colonialism. He defines coloniality of power as a hierarchical social order that was developed through colonialism and continues to function in the post-independence era.[22] In tandem, Quijano deconstructs the phenomenon of modernity, equating modernity with newness, and argues that colonialists were able to create a global model of power based on a self-justificatory narrative and their own self-perceptions.[23] This analysis is further reinforced by thinkers such as Nelson Maldonado-Torres and Ramon Grosfoguel, who build on Quijano's ideas, emphasising that modernity, far from being a neutral and universal concept, is a product of colonialism and continues to shape social realities, including the operation of security forces.[24] Torres's concept of the coloniality of being expands on this critique by highlighting how colonialism not only affects political structures, but people's lived experiences.[25] Grosfoguel too extends Quijano's coloniality of power discussion by describing how colonialism persists through the colonial power matrix, affecting all

20 Abdul Jalil, 95–96.
21 Lauren Haberstock, "Participatory Description: Decolonizing Descriptive Methodologies in Archives," *Archival Science* 20, no. 2 (2020): 125–138.
22 Quijano, "Coloniality of Power."
23 Quijano, "Coloniality of Power."
24 Nelson Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being," *Cultural Studies* 21, nos. 2–3 (2007), 244; Grosfoguel, "The Epistemic," 215.
25 Grosfoguel, 242.

dimensions of social existence, including security forces that maintain the hierarchical order established through colonial rule.[26]

Quijano's work is noteworthy in Sudan's context in many respects. Firstly, his discussion on modernism is useful in understanding how the colonial advocation of the "modern" drove the development of Sudan's security forces. Drawing on this concept, the coloniality of the security sector is understood as the manifestation of the power structures and norms instilled in the security sector during the colonial period. To effectively apply this theoretical approach, it is important to briefly contextualise the development of Sudan's police and army during colonial rule. An understanding of the development of the security forces during this period, through examples from two archival sources, demonstrates how power structures were developed to respond to dissent and political turmoil.

Sudan's police force was founded in 1899 with the creation of the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium. Controlled by the central government, the police force's primary role was to suppress internal disorder in the country and support the Governor-General[27] in maintaining peace at local levels.[28] By 1925, under the jurisdiction of the Sudan government, the police transformed into a civil law enforcement institution, as opposed to a "semi-military force for maintaining order"[29] in the Condominium. However, regardless of this transformation, the police still possessed a negative reputation among the public—the Sudanese people viewed them as a body that primarily supported British interests in Sudan.[30] The British administration was wholly aware of this perception and was making efforts to counter falling police school enrolment rates as a result. In a report by the Cadets School of Administration and Police, published in 1944, during a time when nationalist and anti-imperialist sentiment in Sudan was resonating strongly with the educated classes, the British Civil Secretary noted that "the Commissioner of the Police and Prisons and I are concerned about the unpopularity of the police profession given this current period of political unrest."[31] The report goes on to suggest the use of propaganda to encourage more recruits into the police force and fulfil British aims in maintaining peace and order during this nationalist wave: "If educated Sudanese won't enter the police service, we shall have to proclaim that Sudanese nationalism has failed,

26 Grosfoguel, 221.

27 The Governor-General was the head of the British administration in Sudan and oversaw the execution of all colonial policies.

28 Ammar Mohamed Elbagir Ibrahim, "Chapter 9: Police Models in Sudan: General Features and Historical Development," in *Ordinary Sudan, 1504–2019*, ed. Elena Vezzadini et al. (De Gruyter, 2023), 265–286.

29 Ibrahim, 269.

30 Ibrahim, 269.

31 "Notes on the Development of Sudan's Police Force," Civil Secretary's Comments on Mr. Henderson's Report on the 1944 Cadets School of Administration and Police, SAD.659/2/27, 1944. Sudan Archive, Durham University.

in that the Sudanese are not virile enough to look after their own security and must look forever to a British foreign service."[32]

The British administration was concerned with the lack of police school enrolment during the nationalist wave because the police had historically been used by the administration to quell internal disorder.[33] In addition, the British administration were prepared to use anti-nationalist propaganda to encourage police recruitment. Both points demonstrate the extent to which the British administration was willing and able to use the police force to uphold their structures of power. During a time when British colonial rule was being questioned by Sudan's educated classes, the police force was being drawn into the orbit of British political and security interests. This colonial document shows that within the context of potential political transformation and anti-colonial sentiments, the British administration regarded the police force as a group that could support them in maintaining what Quijano refers to as a hierarchical social order.[34] Following independence in 1956, postcolonial governments continued to uphold this hierarchy[35] by using the police as a way to protect the security of the regime in the face of unrest.

The development and maintenance of Sudan's late-colonial state apparatus was highly dependent on possessing a functioning, "modern," and loyal army. An understanding of the origins of Sudan's army makes evident that exerting control over the army and developing it along "modern" lines allowed the British administration to suppress political tensions. In doing so, the British administration upheld a hegemonic power dynamic, which, following independence, would come to serve the ambitions of the army by placing them at the centre of political power and control. The origins of the Sudanese army can be traced to 1925, with the founding of the Sudan Defence Force (SDF). The SDF was primarily made up of and run by British and Egyptian officers, but after 1937, about 51 Sudanese officers were promoted, as a result of their professionalism and loyalty to the administration.[36] In 1948, the British opened the Military College to provide educated Sudanese who had completed secondary school with a two-year education.[37] Armed with British training and on-the-ground experience, the SDF became the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) after undergoing a rapid

32 "Notes on the Development of Sudan's Police Force."

33 Ibrahim, "Chapter 9: Police Models in Sudan," 269.

34 Quijano, "Coloniality of Power."

35 W. J. Berridge, "'Nests of Criminals': Policing in the Peri-Urban Regions of Northern Sudan, 1964–1989," *The Journal of North African Studies* 17, no. 2 (2012): 239–255.

36 Atta El-Battahani, "Civil-Military Relations in Sudan: Negotiating Political Transition in a Turbulent Economy," in *Businessmen in Arms: How the Military and Other Armed Groups Profit in the MENA Region*, ed. Elke Grawert and Zeinab Abul-Magid (Rowman & Littlefield Education, 2016), 138–139.

37 Ahmad M. al-Awad, *Sudan Defence Force: Origin & Role 1925–1955* (Occasional Paper No. 18, Institute of African and Asian Studies, 1996), 106–107.

Sudanisation[38] process which formalised them as the country's national army. To the British administration, the successful and complete Sudanisation of the armed forces meant that Sudan was "the one African country south of the Sahara … with a modern military establishment possessing the attributes of an independent national army."[39]

The British administration contributed a plethora of resources to grow and "modernise" the Sudanese army. For instance, the establishment of the Military College contributed to the ideological development of the officer corps. In addition, the Sudanisation of the army, as with other Sudanisation processes, was completed under the discretion of the colonial power who directed the training of the army and selected who they wanted to assume which posts. The modernisation of the Sudanese army under the discretion of the British administration had important political benefits for the colonial power. For example, within the context of Sudanisation and the onset of independence, the British administration was growing more concerned with the potential for political interference from their condominium partner. In the run up to Sudanese independence, the Egyptians had been advocating for a union between the two countries and their expression of this political future resonated with some members of Sudan's educated elite. In 1954, there were discussions within the British administration on how to counter Egyptian unionist expressions. It was suggested that the work that had been put into strengthening the armed forces could be used against the Egyptians, if need be. In a telegram sent by British Intelligence in Egypt to the British administration in Sudan, it was noted that the Egyptian army had stated: "There is no Sudanese army. The eight old canons which the Sudanese army had, although unusable, were hired to them by HMG. Egypt will aid the Sudan in righting all these wrongs and practical measures are being studied."[40] The correspondence following this statement between London and Khartoum advocated for providing a free loan to the Sudanese army to "counter Egyptian propaganda and unionist expressions."[41] It is apparent that British administrators regarded the Egyptian critique and suggested interference with a Sudanese army as a threat to their established hierarchical power structure. Although the source does not reveal whether this free loan was granted, the British administration was determined to protect their influence and interests, and regarded the Sudanese army as a vessel through which their political ideals could be reflected.

Evidently, the British administration played a central role in the construction and development of the armed forces. However, more importantly, they recognised that the armed forces could play a central role in supporting their influence and presence in Sudan during moments of political tensions. This, coupled with the British commitment to expanding the technical and intellectual capacities of the armed forces in the run up to independence, prescribed the army with a political importance. Two years after Sudan

38 The term Sudanisation refers to the policies and programmes which emerged during the late colonial period that replaced British colonial officers with Sudanese.

39 El-Battahani, "Civil-Military Relations in Sudan," 138–139.

40 "Arms for the Sudan Defence Force," 1954, FO/371/108474. The National Archives, London.

41 "Arms for the Sudan Defence Force."

gained independence, this empowerment was illustrated by the successful execution of a military coup. Therefore, with regard to Quijano's work on modernism, the desire of the British administration to modernise the armed forces had an empowering effect, which would come to place the military at the centre of Sudan's political and security apparatuses.

Towards a Decolonial Turn: Trade Unions, Professional Associations, and Epistemic Disobedience

Coloniality of power does not exist as an independent phenomenon. The existence of imposed power structures and hierarchical orders have given rise to acts of disobedience and alternative articulations of political, social, and economic imaginings. In Sudan, the British administration was successful in creating a hierarchical social order in which British colonial officers and Sudanese individuals who displayed loyalty to the colonial regime were placed at the top. Alongside the Sudanisation and modernisation of the security forces, the late colonial period was also characterised by a decolonial project from below, which challenged these prescribed modernisation modalities.

The concept of *sub-ontological difference*, as discussed by Maldonado-Torres, is critical to understanding how colonialism shaped these power dynamics. Colonial systems did not merely establish political and economic hierarchies—they also created a "hierarchy of being," where colonised peoples were deemed to possess lesser degrees of humanity or were even denied full humanity altogether.[42] This dehumanisation was enforced through violence and coercion, with colonial security forces acting as the primary instruments for maintaining this hierarchy. The security forces in Sudan, much like those in other colonial contexts, were designed to uphold these racial and social distinctions, using force to keep the subjugated populations in check.

In the postcolonial period, these structures did not simply disappear. Civil resistance movements that emerged in Sudan's early post-independence years continued to challenge not just the political authority of new governments, but the colonial legacies embedded in them. These movements sought to dismantle not only the political control inherited from colonial powers but also the racial, social, and epistemic hierarchies that persisted.

Quijano has stated that "it is necessary to extricate oneself from all the linkages between rationality/modernity, and coloniality, first of all, and definitely from all power which is not constituted by free decisions made by free people."[43] For Quijano, decoloniality involves unveiling and challenging the rhetoric of modernisation and power structures instilled by colonial powers.[44] Therefore, by challenging the power attributed to

42 Maldonado-Torres, "On the Coloniality of Being," 249–250.
43 Quijano, "Coloniality and Modernity," 177.
44 Quijano, 168–178.

modernity and coloniality, an important theoretical question arises—how can this power be shattered? Sylvia Wynter's reinvention of Man-as-Human under a colonial biocentric model underlines that concepts of humanness can be recognised as connective and interhuman.[45] As such, both colonised and formerly colonised peoples must recognise that imperial Europe is responsible for constructing an epistemology that governed how the Human and Humanity are to be understood.[46] In order to confront this, Wynter advocates for a radical delinking of this epistemic tradition and a reconsideration of who embodies the truth of what being Human means.[47]

For Walter D. Mignolo, whose work should be read in tandem with the decolonial thinking of Quijano and Wynter, radical delinking from the coloniality of power can take place through epistemic disobedience. Wynter's work on colonial delinking notes that "it was not enough (for the colonial power) to gain political-economic dominance. It was also necessary to replace the formal monarchical system of signification with a cultural model that 'selected' its values as normative."[48] Here, Wynter highlights that discursive formations are a prerequisite to institution-building[49] and exercising dominance over a colonised population. In addition, Mignolo points out that these formations naturally gave rise to a "decolonial turn"[50] whereby epistemic decolonial practice "arose naturally as a consequence of the formation and implementation of structures of domination."[51] In the context of this article's subject matter, epistemic disobedience will be analysed through the lens of the trade unions and professional associations that, at different historical junctures, responded to the coloniality of power exercised by the security forces.

Epistemic disobedience can be exercised by all facets of a colonised society. It is critical to note that while this article's primary focus is the dynamic between the security forces and trade unions and professional associations, these groups are pluralist in nature and its members occupy a variety of socio-economic spaces in society. As such, colonial delinking has no limitations. In fact, decolonisation and epistemic disobedience can only be achieved if all facets of society engage with epistemic decolonial practices. However,

45 Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument," *CR: The New Centennial Review* 3, no. 3 (2003): 257–337.

46 Wynter, 315–328.

47 Walter D. Mignolo, "Chapter 4: Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean To Be Human?" in *The Darker Side of the Renaissance: Literacy, Territoriality, and Colonization*, ed. Walter D. Mignolo (Duke University Press, 2015), 106–123.

48 Sylvia Wynter, "Beyond the Categories of the Master Conception: The Counterdoctrine of the Jamesian Poiesis," in *C. L. R. James's Caribbean*, ed. Paget Henry and Paul Buhle (Duke University Press, 1992), 63–91.

49 Mignolo, "Chapter 4: Sylvia Wynter: What Does It Mean To Be Human?" 112.

50 Walter D. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience and the Decolonial Option: A Manifesto," *TRANSMODERNITY: Journal of Peripheral Cultural Production of the Luso-Hispanic World* 1, no. 2 (2011): 47.

51 Mignolo, 47.

while it is beyond the scope of this article to identify and analyse what these various categories of society are in Sudan, it is critical to note that the forthcoming analyses on epistemic disobedience will be understood through the thoughts and actions of groups who found themselves outside of colonial and postcolonial power structures. The first of these groups are the trade unions, whose engagement with the British administration during the late colonial period from 1947 until 1956 was characterised by strikes against labour conditions and a desire for self-determination.

In 1947, the Sudan Railway Workers Union (SRWU) was recognised by the colonial administration as the country's first trade union. This recognition was granted after the SRWU engaged in a 20-day strike against negative working conditions and lack of adequate social services.[52] The recognition of the SRWU as the country's first trade union led to the development of the Trade Union Ordinance of 1948, which supported the registration and legal operation of unions throughout Sudan.[53] As a result, by 1952, nearly 100 trade unions were registered under this ordinance. Of note is the Sudan Workers' Trade Union Federation (SWTUF), which was established in 1950. Importantly, the SWTUF played an important role in epistemic disobedience, being one of the first, and largest group, to assert its anti-colonial stance by proclaiming the importance of defeating British imperialism.[54] In the early 1950s, these sentiments were echoed by a variety of trade unions, who argued that the country had found itself in a difficult position during the onset of the decolonisation and Sudanisation processes because "colonialism has been working hard to regain positions in our minds and consciousness, which we have been trying to win back by all means."[55] The reference to minds and consciousness indicates that trade unions were aware that the decolonisation of Sudan was dependent on winning back the narrative that Wynter argues had been "encoded in language and other signifying systems," and that are ultimately responsible for the construction of "complex legitimating discourses."[56] As the primary sources in the following sections will outline further, for trade unions, the epistemic decolonial practices could also be manifested through strikes and protests.

Other groups that have exercised epistemic disobedience at important points in Sudan's postcolonial history are professional associations and labour unions. Historically, professional associations have been recognised for their role during the 1964 and 1985 popular uprisings. In 1964 in particular, the close collaboration between professional associations and trade unions was responsible for overthrowing the November Regime.[57] In order to analyse the contribution of the professional associations to epistemic decolonial practice during the post-independent period, it is important to

52 Abdel Rahman E. Ali Taha, "Reflections on the Structure and Government of the Sudan Railways Workers' Union," *Sudan Notes and Records* 55 (1974): 61–69.
53 Holt and Daly, *History of the Sudan,* 107.
54 Holt and Daly, 107.
55 "Documents of the Sudanese Left in 10 Years," 1965, EAP218/19/1. The British Library, London.
56 Wynter, "Beyond the Categories of the Master Conception," 65.
57 Berridge, *Civil Uprisings,* 104.

introduce its social composition. Willow Berridge argues that it was labourers and students who provided the October Uprising with its "principal foot soldiers" and that these are groups who were already "integrated within the central urban economy."[58] Berridge also points out that it was the professional front, which included groups such as university lecturers, members of the bar associations, doctors, and civil servants, that gave the revolution its shape.[59] For these groups, the exercising of epistemic disobedience was dependent on their socio-economic positionality. For instance, for the lawyers and the judges of the bar association, epistemic disobedience could be exercised through asserting their legal authority. On the other hand, railway workers could engage in epistemic disobedience by going on strike, thus cutting off Khartoum from resources. As the following sections will demonstrate, all these practices of epistemic disobedience became a reality during 1964.

The Decolonial Turn Examined: The Joda Strike

The Joda Strike should be seen as one of the earliest examples of a confrontation between Sudan's security sector and trade union organisations. The incident at Joda demonstrates how colonial-era economic decisions, motivated by capitalist incentives, sparked decolonial thought through demands for reform. The incident also demonstrates the violence of the security forces, and their ability to uphold the coloniality of power during moments of dissent.

The origins of the Joda Strike of 1956 are intrinsically linked with the capitalist exploitation of Sudanese land and its workers. In 1946, Sudanese tenant farmers were part of the colonial Sudanese Plantation Syndicate. The syndicate was responsible for overseeing the Gezira Scheme, which was founded after an increase in the prices of agricultural products.[60] The Gezira Scheme was concerned with increasing agricultural production in Sudan and providing a stable revenue source for the government. To achieve this, the land tenure system was reformed and run by the colonial power, individual Sudanese tenants, and British concession companies.[61] This was met with opposition from Gezira farmers, who argued that the administrators of the Gezira Scheme were retaining a large portion of the cotton sales proceeds. This frustration led to a short-lived strike, where the farmers refused to plant cotton.[62] The incident sparked a realisation amongst tenant farmers nationwide that there was a need to unionise to protect their social and economic interests. As such, in the early 1950s, following the decision from the Sudan Government to create the Sudan Gezira Board to oversee the

58 Berridge, 33.
59 Berridge, 102–103.
60 S. F. Beswick, "The Black Hole of Kosti: The Murder of Baggara Detainees by Shaigi Police in a Kosti Barracks, Sudan 1956," *Northeast African Studies* 2, no. 1 (1995): 62.
61 Beswick, 62.
62 Taisier Mohamed Ali, "The Road to Jouda," *Review of African Political Economy* 10, no. 26 (1983): 8.

management of the Scheme[63] and the subsequent increase in land taxes,[64] farmers' unions emerged across several provinces.

The early pronunciations of anti-colonial discourse that led to the Joda Strike in 1956 were informed by the need to unionise after the establishment of the Gezira Scheme. The retention of a large portion of cotton sales proceeds alerted the tenant farmers to the potential for the administrators of the scheme to exploit their labour without guaranteeing a return. As Wynter notes, capitalism is one of the main aspects of the coloniality of power.[65] One of the driving factors of imperialism is capitalism, which was initiated by the colonial slave trade in the Atlantic triangle.[66] The rise of the current global market has been driven by access to this exploitative labour and the massive appropriation of land. By making the empire richer, the exploitation of people and land has fed into the "self-serving interests of Western epistemology,"[67] thereby further widening the gap between the coloniser and the colonised.

Through questioning the conditions that fostered this exploitation during the Gezira Scheme, tenant farmers began to question the colonial regime itself. In his informative work on the emergence of trade unions, Dr Saad Eldin Fawzi, a Sudanese, British-educated academic, examines the dynamic between the tenant farmers and the British administration. Through extensive research within trade unionist circles in the l940s and 1950s, Fawzi came to the conclusion that "the effects of World War II on the national consciousness of the masses of Sudanese workers cannot be underestimated."[68] He goes on to say that the "British authorities have linked themselves closely to the Sudanese economy,"[69] and that the Gezira Scheme strike was an important political moment in the consciousness of Sudanese workers. In fact, he underlines the important role that capitalist pressures had played in the creation of the Sudanese trade union movement:

> Another factor that had a decision role in the birth of the Sudanese labour movement can be represented by a specific economic factor, which is the severe economic pressures that public workers, who received the lowest wages, were experiencing. The slow and continuous deterioration in incomes was affecting all categories of workers. Due to an increase in knowledge and an escalation in social awareness, sparked by World War II, this situation has become unbearable.[70]

Fawzi points to the Gezira Scheme strike as an important point of development of a national consciousness. Therefore, the proliferation of trade unions advocating for fairer

63 Beswick, "The Black Hole of Kosti," 62.
64 Ali, "The Road to Jouda," 8–9.
65 Mignolo, "Chapter 4. Sylvia Wynter," 113.
66 Mignolo, 113.
67 Walter D. Mignolo, "Epistemic Disobedience, Independent Thought and Decolonial Freedom," *Theory, Culture & Society* 26, no. 7–8 (2009): 159.
68 Saad Eldin Fawzi, "Labour Movement in Sudan, 1955," 1957, EAP218, The British Library, London.
69 Saad Eldin Fawzi, "Labour Movement in Sudan, 1955."
70 Saad Eldin Fawzi, "Labour Movement in Sudan, 1955."

treatment and pay sets the epistemic backdrop for what happened during the Joda Strike of 1956.

The Joda Scheme was a private pump scheme located in the White Nile Region.[71] After not receiving payment for the harvest of 1955, 700 farmers from the White Nile Union went on strike and refused to deliver cotton until they received payment.[72] Alongside their payment, the union also demanded a 60 per cent share in proceeds, independent chartered accountants to review the Joda Scheme accounts, and the participation of tenants in the marketing and ginning of cotton.[73] Their demands were not met by the British administration or the newly independent Sudanese government that took power a few months after the workers submitted their demands. Therefore, by February 1956, "100 percent of the strike was implemented in not just Joda, but in the White Nile, Umm Hani, Al Zalit, and other small projects spread across different regions. The farmers refrained from starting agricultural work and delivering cotton."[74]

The new administration was faced with a direct political and economic challenge from the onset. While the farmers continued to "stress the necessity of standing strong together behind their demands for change,"[75] the administration was deciding on how to confront the strike. Although the demands from the workers were initially presented to the British administration, the execution of the strike during the dawn of independence signifies that independence did not necessarily bring about change in all sectors of society. For the workers who were living without pay and security, independence did not mean resolution. Therefore, the workers exercised an act of epistemological disobedience through their written demands and, eventually, the strike.

The manner in which the new administration decided to respond to the striking workers paints a grim picture of the violent consequences that arise when acts of epistemological disobedience occur. After negotiations between the unions and government representatives failed, the administration arrested leaders of the union and transferred them to Kosti, the administrative centre of the White Nile, while they awaited trial.[76] In response, more than 4000 farmers staged a protest in Kosti, demanding the release of their leaders and compliance with the demands issued by their unions.[77] However, the protestors were met with violence, and a clash between the police ensued, leaving three police officers and 100 farmers dead, as well as a further 281 farmers arrested and placed in the local garrison owing to a lack of space in prisons.[78] By the next day, 195 farmers were found dead from heatstroke and suffocation as a result of the lack of ventilation in

71 Beswick, "The Black Hole of Kosti," 64–65.
72 Ibrahim, "Chapter 9: Police Models in Sudan," 272.
73 Ali, "The Road to Jouda," 12.
74 Hassan Al Obeid Medani, "Joda Hall," 2008, EAP218/15/2, The British Library, London.
75 Hassan Al Obeid Medani, "Joda Hall."
76 Ali, "The Road to Jouda," 12.
77 Ali, 12.
78 Elbagir Ibrahim, "Chapter 9: Police Models in Sudan," 272–273.

the garrison.[79] The outrage following these deaths was felt nationwide. In a statement published in an independent newspaper, *Al Saraha*, the Gezira Farmers Union stated:

> After the unfortunate incidents in Kosti, which shook every living conscience that knows human rights and were denounced by all classes of the people. … The Joda farmers were shot at and died of suffocation because of the negligence of officials. We must all stand against this conspiracy and demand that our demands be met. We must also demand a fair investigation that prosecutes everyone who ordered the farmers be shot at and deprived of water and air.[80]

As Ammar Ibrahim argues, and the source above illustrates, the events at Kosti had a negative effect on the relationship between the police and the public.[81] In fact, politicians and senior government officials attempted to shift the blame solely to the police.[82] While historians have not come to a consensus on who ordered the arrests, it is evident that the negligence that led to 195 deaths within a day occurred under the supervision of the police. In this regard, the events at Kosti demonstrate that, from an early stage, the police could be used to assert the power of Sudan's postcolonial regime. The level of violence executed by the police force in response to the protests demonstrates that the new administration not only wanted to safeguard its economic resources by ensuring that the cotton sales proceed, but that the police were capable of violently suppressing acts of epistemic disobedience.

The Interplay Between Epistemic Disobedience and Decoloniality: The October Revolution

The October Revolution of 1964 presents an example of how acts of epistemic disobedience and the decoloniality of security forces interact during moments of regime change. These moments provide an opportunity for new power structures to emerge at the highest levels of political society. As such, existing power structures are challenged by those outside and inside them, including the security forces. However, challenging these power structures does not mean that the coloniality of the security forces ceases to exist. Rather, their coloniality is reproduced to fit to the status quo.

After gaining power via military coup in 1958, the authoritarian nature of the Abboud regime quickly became apparent. Abboud and members of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces (SCAF) were Gordon College educated officers,[83] who had been directly involved with the Sudanisation of Sudan's army. Berridge argues that the regime "seemed to embody the system established by the British."[84] However, the regime was

79 Ibrahim, 273.
80 Documents of the Sudanese Left in 10 Years, "Statement from the Al Jazeera Farmers Union," 1956, EAP218/19/1, the British Library, London.
81 Ibrahim, "Chapter 9: Police Models in Sudan," 273.
82 Ibrahim, 273.
83 Berridge, *Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan,* 121–122.
84 Berridge*,* 121–122.

also distinctive in its tactics. Censorship, political repression, limited civil liberties, the banning of unions and associations, high inflation and unemployment, and conflict with the south were all long-term factors that pushed protestors to the streets in October 1964. However, the regime was aware of its unpopularity, and had made efforts to restore its legitimacy among trade unions. After banning unions in 1958, the regime enacted legislation in 1960 to allow them to seemingly function, but the legislation rendered union activity useless.[85] Three years later, the regime continued to attempt to display false solidarity between the army and the workers. In a booklet published by the November Regime in the 1960s, they justified the banning of unions:

> At the time when all political parties were dissolved in November 1958, unions were still continuing their work. The country had entered a new revolutionary phase, and, in the name of the revolution, it was necessary to stop systems that were harmful to the country's interests. We enacted new laws, so that social bodies in all their forms, could function with modern conditions.[86]

In addition, in 1963, the November Regime underlined its strong relations with workers in an article about railway unions: "The working class in our country were and are still the source of markedly huge energy, capable of producing creative minds which will ensure an abundant life at present and build up a great and prosperous future for the Sudan."[87] The positive connotations used to describe unions, as well as referral to the November Regime as "revolutionary," distorts the reality of the authoritarian nature of the regime. These excerpts rely heavily on the use of propaganda to win over the minds of the workers who had been protesting the 1960 labour legislation.

The regime's propaganda proved unsuccessful. In an environment rife with censorship, acts of epistemic disobedience arose within the walls of the University of Khartoum, where students had been meeting to discuss resolutions to the conflict in southern Sudan. Within the context of increased tension between police and students throughout the Abboud regime, the incident that led to the shooting of Ahmad al-Qurayshi, widely regarded as the martyr of the October Revolution, is an example of how security forces attempted to violently break up acts of decolonial delinking. After the police stormed the University campus on 21 October 1964, halting the seminar and shooting al-Qurayshi, large-scale protests against the regime began with the students and then spread to major sectors of the urban population.[88] While the protests were initially led by university and secondary school students, professional organisations quickly became

85 Berridge, 104.

86 November Military Government and Workers, 1960s, EAP/24/13, The British Library, London.

87 *Sudan Monthly Newsmagazine*, "Special Issue No. 42/43, October/November 1963, published by the Central Council," 1963, Government Publications 626/50, The London School of Economics and Political Science, London.

88 Moritz A. Mihatsch, "Chapter 19: Liberation from Fear: Regional Mobilisation in Sudan after the 1964 Revolution," in *Ordinary Sudan, 1504–2019*, ed. Elena Vezzadini et al. (De Gruyter, 2023), 571.

unified and played a central role in organising large scale protests.[89] A trade union front was also formed, and they played a central role in the execution of the general strike, which paralysed the economy and led to the liquidation of the military regime on 29 October 1964.[90] Moritz Mhatasch argues that "as a result of the non-inclusive nature of the decolonisation process and the rapid military takeover by an army that was largely of colonial making, the 1964 revolution was perceived by many people as the real decolonisation."[91] If decolonisation is understood through the lens of epistemic disobedience, it is apparent that the various groups that were engaged in the protests envisioned an alternative future for Sudan. In a statement published by farmers unions amid the protests, it is evident that among the unions there was a strong belief that colonialism played a role in the oppression they were experiencing under Abboud:

> We have been exploited by greedy colonialism for decades and it has caused us to lose unity among the ranks of our people. But the movement of the workers and the farmers share the collective goal to earn a living and free ourselves from colonial influence. Independence has heralded a new dawn for the Sudanese people, and we must begin to find the final path towards freedom from the grips of the colonialists.[92]

Alongside the recognition of the role colonialism had played in their exploitation, some groups of protestors pointed to the role that the army has played in upholding the status quo. In a petition addressed to Abboud, lecturers at the Khartoum University stated:

> We are appalled by the mismanagement of the country's affairs and the failure of the Government's policies, which have resulted in the conflict in the south that nearly destroyed our national unity. … We are frightened at the extent of complete corruption that runs through all machinery of the Government and its administration. … The people are being subjected to cruel and tyrannical orders, and are being exposed to weapons of detention, without ever committing a crime and without trial.[93]

Both the farmers' unions and the university lecturers were calling for an overhaul of power structures responsible for the oppression and violence experienced by various facets of society. During the October Revolution, these demands were echoed during the urban protests and strikes. Unlike the late colonial period and Sudanisation process, which involved only select groups in society, the revolution encouraged the public urban domain to engage with new imaginations for the nation.[94] However, as the police shooting at the university demonstrated, these imaginings were threatened by the

89 Mihatsch, 571.
90 Berridge, *Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan*, 104.
91 Berridge, 104.
92 Documents of the Sudanese Left in 10 Years, "Statement from the Farmers Union," 1964, EAP218/19/1, The British Library, London.
93 Internal political situation: sacking of military government, "The Khartoum University Lecturers' Petition: Addressed to the President of the Supreme Council of the Armed Forces," 1964, FO371/178810, The National Archives, London.
94 Mihatsch, "Chapter 19: Liberation from Fear," 571.

security forces, who attempted to maintain law and order in the name of the military regime. Furthermore, throughout the protests, there were instances of the army opening fire on crowds[95] and the police being used to disperse protestors.[96] Distinctively, however, the loyalty of some members of the security forces to the regime faltered during the protests. For instance, after the Abboud regime publicly condemned the actions of the police following the shooting at the university, members of the police force began refusing to accept orders to fire at protestors.[97] In addition, tensions within the SCAF and growing instability in the country led some middle-ranking officers to forge relationships with civilian actors and political parties, in the hopes of gaining a seat at the table if the country was to return to civilian rule.[98]

These divergences disrupt the relationship between epistemic disobedience and the coloniality of the security forces in several ways. Part and parcel of the identity of the military regime was the way it portrayed itself as possessing and embodying the truth.[99] It was able to assert its identity through censorship, oppression, and propaganda. During the October Revolution, this truth was challenged by sectors of society that had been excluded from meaningfully contributing to the future of their country since the colonial period. As the primary sources reveal, protesters were calling for a delinking from the realities that were embedded into the consciousnesses of Sudanese society by the military regime. As a result, the security forces were deployed to suppress these realisations. On the other hand, the historically deteriorating relationship between the police and the Sudanese people led to a breakdown in the relationship between the regime and the security forces they had depended on to uphold their power matrix. In tandem with this, internal strife within the military government and the growing potential for the emergence of a civilian government led middle-ranking officers to reconsider their loyalty to the regime. These officers would ultimately come to assume senior military roles in the parliamentary years following the revolution. However, regardless of these deviations, Sudan would experience a series of attempted and successful military coups in the coming decades. In some ways, the October Revolution is an example of how the coloniality of security could be threatened by epistemic disobedience. On the other hand, the revolution is also an example of the shape-shifting capabilities possessed by the security forces and empowered by the military regime.

Conclusion

Through the Joda Strike and the October Revolution, this article has demonstrated how Sudan's security forces responded to acts of epistemic disobedience. During the late colonial and post-independence period, trade unions and professional organisations responded to what Anníbal Quijano has termed the coloniality of power. The

95 Berridge, *Civil Uprisings in Modern Sudan*, 33.
96 Berridge, 120.
97 Berridge, 120.
98 Berridge, 128.
99 Mignolo, "Chapter 4: Sylvia Wynter."

construction of this system brought with it hierarchical power structures which attempted to define and govern the minds and lives of the people. Walter Mignolo and Sylvia Wynter's discussions on epistemic decolonial practices were used to analyse primary sources produced by trade unions and professional organisations. These groups used both revolutionary rhetoric and acts of civil disobedience to articulate alternate imaginings for Sudan's social, political, and economic future.

While this article is historical in nature, it offers vital considerations for the future of civic and security sector relations in Sudan. The devastating conflict that erupted in April 2023 calls for an urgent re-evaluation of the relationship between the aspirations of civil society and the role of the security sector in transitional political processes. As highlighted in this article, power structures are often safeguarded by suppressing knowledge that falls outside the narrative of the governing authorities. However, it is crucial to recognise that the thoughts and visions of those excluded from colonially embedded nation-building processes hold the potential to transform a country's political future.

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