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Anarchiving Sudan Memories: The Present War and Troubled Past

Mariasole Pepa

Durham Middle East Paper No.115

Sir William Luce Fellowship Papers

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INSTITUTE FOR MIDDLE EASTERN AND ISLAMIC STUDIES

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Sir William Luce Fellowship Paper No. 23

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Sir William Luce Fellowship Paper No. 23
Durham Middle East Papers No. 115
ISSN 1476-4830
September 2025

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The author is deeply grateful to the Sir William Luce Memorial Fund, whose support made it possible to engage with colleagues at Durham University and work closely with the Sudan Archive. Thanks are due to all the colleagues met during the research visit to Durham, to Clive Jones for his support, and to all those who ensure the accessibility of the Sudan Archive, particularly Francis Gotto. The author is also greatly indebted to the Sudanese friends, colleagues, and artists in Cairo who made this fellowship possible, and especially to Duaa Abuswar, without whom this work would not have been realized. The author also thanks Ana Laura Zavala Guillen for reading earlier version of this text. This paper is part of a broader research process within the AtlaSahel project at the University of Padua.

BIO

Mariasole Pepa is a Research Fellow at the University of Padua (DiSSGeA) and an Affiliate Researcher at CEDEJ-Khartoum. Her research focuses on transformations in the Sahel through the lenses of water and land, as well as on alternative methodologies in research approaches, ethics, and practice. She is co-editor of Water and Land in the Sahel: Mapping the Flow, published by Routledge in 2025. Pepa is a member of the AtlaSahel research group and co-founder of the Italian Association on Africa-China Studies (AISAC).

INTRODUCTION

The war in Sudan, which erupted in April 2023 between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF), led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), under General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo (known as Hemedti), has resulted in a devastating humanitarian crisis,[1] and man-made famine.[2] It has been marked by the destruction of homes, infrastructure, and public services, the collapse of the economy, the loss of countless lives, and widespread forced displacement.[3] While data cannot fully convey the everyday harshness of war—and remain incomplete due to the difficulty of collecting reliable information—the August 2025 IOM report on Sudan Mobility estimated that since the start of the conflict, more than 7 million Sudanese have been displaced internally, while over 4 million have crossed borders into neighboring countries, particularly Egypt, Chad, and South Sudan.[4]

Among the many forms of damage inflicted, the war has also targeted institutions of knowledge—archives, universities, libraries, and museums. The looting and destruction of the Sudan National Museum in Khartoum have been emblematic of this deliberate attack on history, identity, and cultural heritage.[5]

For instance, the Khalifa House Museum in Omdurman, which had been renovated and reopened shortly before the war (Fig. 1), has once again been destroyed. Yet, beyond the capital, many other museums have also been looted, destroyed, or used as military bases.[6]

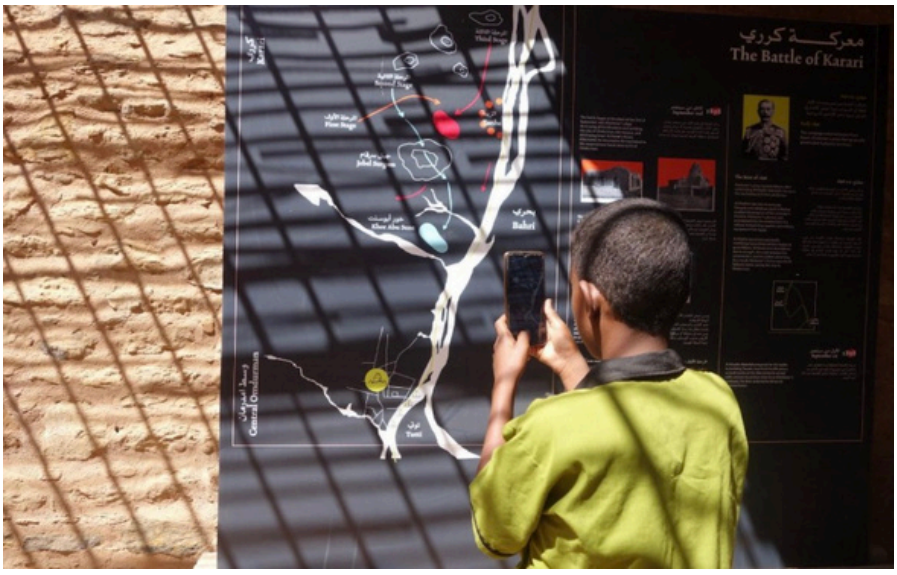


Fig. 1 A picture taken on the 1st of March 2023 during a visit to the renovated Khalifa House Museum in Omdurman. Source: M. Pepa, 2023

Together with museums, also archives – like the National Archive in Khartoum – and libraries – like Khartoum University libraries – have been fully or partially destroyed. The dislocation of archives and the erasure of cultural infrastructures in Sudan speak to broader patterns of epistemicide.[7] As Mezna Qato[8] writes in the context of Palestine, "Without our libraries and universities, how will we tell the story of Gaza?"

"THE SUDAN ARCHIVE, THEREFORE, EMBODIES THE CONTRADICTIONS AND TENSIONS OF THE COLONIAL ARCHIVE…"

This question resonates deeply with the Sudanese context, as well as with many other contexts of war, revolution, and post-colonial geographies in which there is an absence of documents or an inaccessibility of the archive—a "history without documents"—which in many cases has also given rise to alternative imaginaries that blur the boundaries between history and fiction.[9]

With much of Khartoum destroyed and many other parts of Sudan, like El-Fasher in Darfur, still under severe attack, the importance of external archival repositories grows. In this context, and thanks to the opportunity offered by the Sir William Luce Fellowship, which encourages scholars to engage with the Sudan Archive at Durham University, I began to reflect on the role that external repositories can play during the ongoing war in Sudan and on the role that, as an Italian researcher, I have in the current situation.[10]

The Sudan Archive at Durham University is both valuable and problematic. Established in 1957, a year after Sudan's independence, it constitutes one of the largest collections of documents, maps, diaries, correspondence, photographs, films, and artifacts related to Sudan —particularly the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium period (1899–1956).

Yet, these materials were largely collected by white English men—administrators, doctors, and colonial officials—thus portraying a partial narrative of Sudan's history while silencing many others, especially Sudanese voices. Furthermore, many of these records, especially maps, were produced as instruments of territorial control and resource extraction, serving, as elsewhere in Africa, as tools of colonial appropriation.[11] The Sudan Archive, therefore, embodies the contradictions and tensions of the colonial archive: an institution created through extraction, shaped by asymmetries of power, and situated far from the people whose histories it contains.

Engaging with the Sudan Archive, as an Italian researcher and in the context of the ongoing war in Sudan, therefore raises for me urgent ethical and political questions that guide this article

how can displaced Sudanese communities engage with historical materials that remain physically distant from their lives? Who holds the right to access, interpret, and narrate Sudan's past? And how might such materials be mobilized to foster alternative understandings of Sudan's past, present, and future—understandings rooted in the lived experiences and desires of those most affected by the war?

Drawing on these questions and on my engagement with the Sudan Archive during the Sir William Luce Fellowship between April and June 2025, this article proposes both a methodological and conceptual shift: to *bring out* the Sudan Archive from Durham—not only by enhancing its accessibility but also by reimagining the participatory and emancipatory potential of the (colonial) archive itself.[12] Concretely, the research involved moving a curated selection of materials from the Sudan Archive to Egypt, where a workshop was organized with Sudanese artists forcibly displaced to Cairo by the war, to explore the transformative potential of collective anti/decolonial practice

Thinking from Cairo: memory under attack, and the urgency to "archiving"

The ideas of reflecting on the possible role of the Sudan Archive during the ongoing war emerged and were inspired by some months I spent in Cairo since January 2024 working with Sudanese colleagues, collaborating with CEDEJ-Khartoum relocated to Cairo, and in conversation with Sudanese friends and artists.

This has revealed to me a growing and and urgent interest in archives and memory, both within and beyond academic spaces. Since the start of the war, Egypt—and particularly Cairo—has become one of the main countries for displaced Sudanese.

Historically, Sudanese have travelled to Egypt for multiple reasons: for tourism, medical treatment, work opportunities, and higher education, as well as in search of refuge during previous crises. Cairo, for instance, was an important destination for Sudanese fleeing the violence in Darfur in the early 2000s, and even earlier waves of political and economic instability had brought Sudanese communities across the border, turning Cairo into a "border zone" for Sudanese refugees.[14] These mobilities have contributed to shaping Sudanese diasporic networks in Egypt, as well as their "moving stories".[15] In this light, the current displacement must be read not only as a response to the devastating war in Sudan, but also as part of a longer history of mobility between the two countries. Yet it also represents an unprecedented movement of displacement directly from Sudan's capital, Khartoum. Cairo thus emerges as both a place of refuge and a site of contested urban life, where Sudanese communities negotiate forms of "political belonging".[16]

Thinking from Cairo has allowed me to witness how the experience of displacement has generated a powerful momentum around the need to preserve, archive, and reimagine Sudan's past, present, and future(s).

Across informal conversations, academic seminars, art exhibitions, and collaborative initiatives,[17]

“THESE INITIATIVES NOT ONLY RESPOND TO THE VOID LEFT BY INSTITUTIONAL COLLAPSE AND THE LOSS OF PERSONAL ARCHIVES BUT ALSO REIMAGINE THE ARCHIVE AS A LIVING, INTIMATE, ACCESSIBLE, AND DIASPORIC SPACE…”

I felt a growing awareness of the fragility of memory and a collective determination to protect what remains—not only as a record of the past but also as a foundation for imagining futures yet to come.

Sudanese artists, for instance, have begun to reflect critically on what it means to archive during a time of war. As Alnasser observes, “We see many individuals who build artistic production and leave behind significant legacies, but the archival dimension is missing. There is no reference point to return to in order to examine their work or understand the nature of artists in specific time periods”.[18] Responding to this concern, 2025 saw the launch of the Sudan Art Archive, a project initiated by Muse Multi Studios to digitally preserve the last fifty years of Sudanese artistic production.[19]

Since the outbreak of the conflict in 2023, several digital initiatives have also emerged or intensified their efforts. Platforms such as @sudanese_archives, Sudan Memory, @sudanvisualarchive, and the Sudan Tapes Archive[20] have become archival repositories. These initiatives not only respond to the void left by institutional collapse and the loss of personal archives but also reimagine the archive as a living, intimate, accessible, and diasporic space. This moment reveals a striking paradox: the systematic loss of physical, personal, and institutional archives coexist with the determined efforts of displaced communities and diaspora to remember, document, archive, and undo the legacies of colonial narratives.[21]

Turning grounds: from the (colonial) archive to the anarchive

The engagement with the Sudan Archive at Durham University is informed both by scholarship that challenges the notion of the archive as a neutral repository of the past—conceiving it instead as a political space marked by exclusion and erasure,[22] "the result of the exercise of a specific power and authority"[23]—and by a range of counter-practices[24] that seek to "highlight the histories, bodies, and voices that are typically absent or ignored in conventional archives".[25] It is further shaped by decolonial and feminist approaches, which interrogate how knowledge is produced, remembered, and circulated, and by whom.[26]

While the archive traditionally seeks to fix the past within a linear process of memory deposition, it often reproduces a static understanding of time. Drawing on Ingold,[27] archives are frequently imagined as spaces where "grounds are stacked up"—with the past positioned below and the future above—implying that archival work is an act of excavation, of digging into layers of history presumed to lie beneath the surface.

Ingold, however, proposes an alternative lens through which to approach this process. Rather than conceptualizing the archive as a stratified ground that accumulates over time, he invites us to view it as a turning ground. This perspective unsettles the fixed and linear temporalities that dominate conventional archival practices. In this reorientation, under and above are not static indicators of chronological sequence but dynamic movements through time.

In this sense, what has been perceived as under is no longer relegated to a distant, inert past. From this viewpoint, the archive exploration ceases to represent an act of excavation or retrieval of the past; it becomes a process of unearthing. Unearthing, here, is not about recovering what has been lost, but about activating what persists—what continues to move, resonate, and transform. This process of turning the ground, of unearthing, marks a crucial shift in archival practice: it moves away from the static logic of accumulation and toward the dynamic potential of the anarchive.

In proposing the anarchive as a means of challenging the temporalities embedded in conventional archival practices, Ingold draws on Manning's work on the anarchive. According to Manning, "the anarchive has a pull and it is a pull to immediacy. It wants to activate, to orient. Or, better said, it is always already activating, orienting".[28]

As Manning suggests, anarchiving activates the archive in ways that disrupt its colonial legacies and opens new avenues for research-creation, shifting the focus from the product to the process itself. In approaching the anarchive, this emphasis on process resonates with the ethical orientation of my research, which values the ongoing dynamics of collaboration, the people involved, and the embodied and affective dimensions of knowledge production rather than outputs. Moreover, a compelling aspect of anarchiving lies in its open-endedness: while it follows certain "working principles" (Massumi, 2016) that, for instance, stress that "the anarchive is not documentation of a past activity.

Rather, it is a feed-forward mechanism for lines of creative process under continuing variation" (p. 6); it does not prescribe a single method. This openness allows space for the unexpected and for the unfolding of new creative and epistemic possibilities.

In organizing the Anarchiving workshop with Sudanese artists in Cairo, I sought to engage with and extend ongoing conversations on the anarchive.[29] The following sections further examine the process that culminated in the workshop in Cairo. The initial step in this journey, however, consisted of a reflexive engagement with the Sudan Archive itself.

Encountering the Sudan Archive

Walking to the Sudan Archive and engaging with its architecture is quite an experience. Having spent a few months in Cairo before arriving in Durham, the contrast was striking. Cairo is dusty, cemented, and noisy—a city in perpetual motion, a place that is 'alive' in every corner. Arriving in Durham, by contrast, felt like entering another dimension: cold, calm, orderly, green, and almost silent throughout the day. On my first morning, as I walked towards the Sudan Archive, I was struck by the surrounding greenery, the river, the uphill path leading to the building, and the sense of 'peace' that enveloped the place.

Already before arriving in Durham, I found myself questioning how, as an Italian researcher, I could mitigate being the one granted access to the Sudan Archive—the one selecting materials on Sudan to organize a workshop with Sudanese artists in Cairo. I asked myself repeatedly whether this might once again reproduce a "colonial" gesture by imposing my perspective on Sudanese histories through the act of choosing some records over others. With this in mind, I reached out to my colleague and friend, Duaa Abuswar,[30] a sociologist and CEDEJ-Khartoum research fellow, who at that time was based in Cairo, asking her if she was interested in taking part in the process of selection digitally.

I began visiting the Sudan Archive and, with the help of librarians and archivists—in particular, with the generous support of Dr. Francis Gotto—I tried to familiarize with the structure of the archive and its collections. Given the vastness of the material preserved there, soon after my arrival in Durham, Duaa and I decided to narrow the focus of the search to Khartoum, also as a way to think about the city as an archive.[31] Our research places particular emphasis on visual materials, including photographs and microfilm, given that some of the artists engage in visual arts.

The research process unfolded along two parallel paths, combining individual curation with collaborative engagement. In the first phase, I conducted a broad initial selection of photographs, microfilms, maps, and journals related to Khartoum. The materials were uploaded to a shared Google Drive, enabling a collaborative space with Duaa for commenting, annotating, and discussing the records. This digital engagement was complemented by exchanges through WhatsApp and Zoom meetings, allowing for iterative feedback.

For instance, if Duaa identified a photograph or document as particularly

significant, this prompted a secondary search from my side in Durham to locate additional materials. This process of selection and exchanges ultimately led to a final selection of 20 photographs, six microfilms, six maps, several newspaper clippings, and multiple reports that informed the workshop in Cairo.

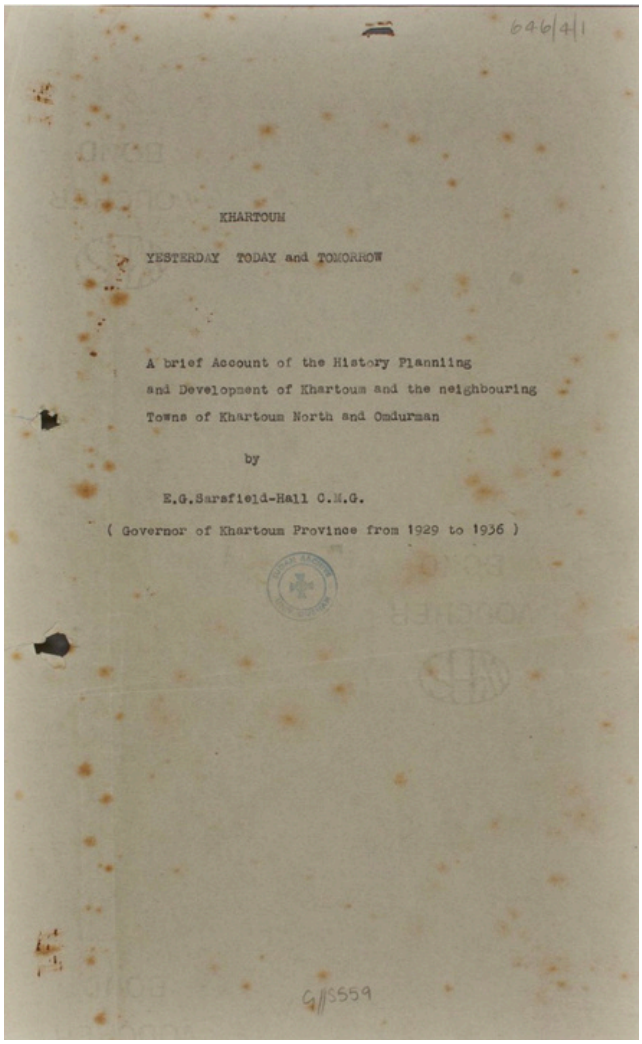
The materials selected from the archive were those that could only be accessed in person in Durham and were therefore unavailable through other means. This raised important questions for our project: could we use these materials during the workshop, and if the artists wished to publish their own reworkings of the archival materials, would they need additional permissions, or could these creations be considered their own independent works?

In this sense, the fellowship also prompted broader reflections on the Sudan Archive and archives more broadly, particularly concerning questions of copyright, the often substantial costs associated with reproducing archival materials—which for photographs and microfilms can be prohibitively high—and, more generally, the accessibility of archival materials beyond the academic context. It also raises pressing ethical questions: is it fair that Sudanese people, particularly in a time of conflict, should have to pay to access photographs or microfilms documenting their own past?

Glimpse into the materials

Before moving to the workshops in Cairo, it is worth revisiting some of the archival records that were selected and the reasons behind their choice. The report "Khartoum Yesterday, Today and Tomorrow" (SAD.646/4/1–83), edited by Sarsfield-Hall during his tenure as Governor of Khartoum Province from 1929 to 1936, provides an overview of the planning history of Khartoum, Khartoum North, and Omdurman (Fig. 2).

This document has been particularly insightful for analyzing the discourses surrounding the planning of Khartoum—the making of a "modern" city—as well as for exploring how the British administration envisioned the "problems of the future". The title of this report, which also became the title of the workshop held in Cairo—"Khartoum: Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow—Creatively Engaging with the Sudan Archive"—served as both a point of


646/4/1

KHARTOUM

YESTERDAY TODAY and TOMORROW

A brief Account of the History Planning and Development of Khartoum and the neighbouring Towns of Khartoum North and Omdurman

by

E.G.Sarsfield-Hall C.M.G.

(Governor of Khartoum Province from 1929 to 1936)

Fig. 2 "Khartoum yesterday, today and tomorrow", a brief account of the history, planning, and development of Khartoum and the neighboring towns of Khartoum North and Omdurman. E.G.Sarsfield-Hall collection, Sudan Archive Durham (SAD.646/4/1-83)

departure and a provocation to rethink "yesterday, today, and tomorrow" from Sudanese perspectives. In other words, it invited the creation of counter-narratives to colonial accounts, exploring what creativity and non-traditional methodologies could offer to the remaking of these histories. In this reflection, *Archive Stories*[32], as a repository of creative archival practices, has been a key source of inspiration for imagining the collaboration with Sudanese artists.

Building on the account of Khartoum, several newspaper clippings were selected that depict the city during the period surrounding Sudan's independence, particularly in the years immediately following 1956. Among these, the newspaper cuttings collected by William Lawrence Twining (SAD.1073/7) are interesting. Of particular interest is an article titled "Colonial City in the Arab World," published in The Times in 1958, in which Khartoum is portrayed as a city where "the British have left their mark" and one that retains a sense of "colonial calm" that led us to ask what can be 'calm' about colonialism.

Moreover, the exploration of maps, photographs, and microfilm complemented the archival selection. For instance, maps related to the planning of Khartoum were used to enrich the narratives found in reports and newspapers. Maps, in fact, offer another language—one that is not written but visual—and, when examined closely, they reveal how Khartoum functioned as a kind of 'laboratory'. What emerges from these cartographic materials is the military nature of the city's planning, characterized by diagonal road axes that enabled colonial control and surveillance over the population, facilitating rapid interventions (Fig. 3).[33]

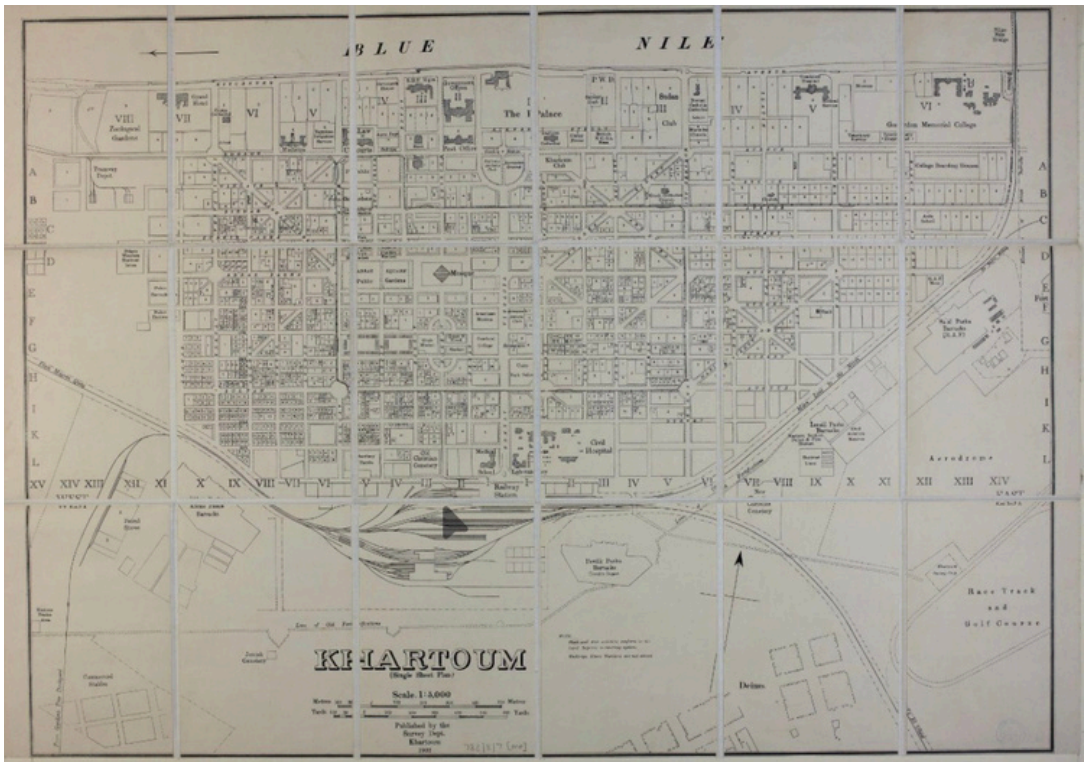


Fig 3. Street plan of Khartoum, 1932 - SAD.783/8/7

Moreover, the selected photographs of Khartoum range from images of the railway station (Fig. 4) and infrastructural works such as bridges (Fig. 5)—structures that have been heavily affected by the current war or mobilized as strategic sites of control—to photographs depicting soldiers in colonial uniforms standing before the statue of Governor Gordon (Fig. 6), a monument that, following independence, was rejected by the Sudanese government and returned to the United Kingdom.

Fig. 4 Railway Station Khartoum. J.A. Gillan collection, Sudan Archive Durham (SAD.A85/170)

Fig. 5 White Nile bridge between Khartoum and Omdurman during construction. From the papers of Mabel Elsie and Gertrude Lucy Wolff within the Sudan Archive, Durham University Library and Collections (SAD.743/2/23)

Fig. 6 Soldiers in colonial uniforms standing before the statue of Governor Gordon (SAD.A75/13)

Archive-suitcase: preparing for Cairo

Preparing the suitcase for travelling to Cairo also meant reflecting on what it materially means to bring out the archive. This process went beyond the practicalities of printing the material in Durham, packing, and transporting selected documents; it opened a space for questioning the spatial and epistemic geographies of the archive itself. The selection was partial and fragmentary—even if we tried to select material that usually remains accessible only by visiting in person the Sudan Archive.

Bringing, even partially, the archive to Egypt was therefore not a neutral or merely logistical gesture. It was a tentative act of reorientation, a way to dis-rupt the asymmetries of access embedded in the archival architecture. At the same time, invite to reflect on the limits of such gestures: what does it mean to "reduce distance" between the sites of preservation and the sites of lived experience when the archive itself was produced to maintain separation—temporal, spatial, and racial?

In this sense, bringing the archive to Cairo was not simply about relocating materials (Fig.7), but an attempt to unsettle the very logics of containment that define the colonial archive. It became an experiment in proximity—not as physical nearness, but as an imaginative practice of relation, opening possibilities for reinscribing the archive within the geographies and voices it once objectified.

Fig 7. Photograph taken after printing the materials at Durham University, shortly before travelling to Cairo. Source: M. Pepa, 2025

In Cairo: anarchiving the Sudan Archive

The encounter with the archive continued in Cairo, where the process shifted toward practices of anarchiving. Two distinct moments were organized: an initial "virtual tour" of the Sudan Archive, followed by a two-day, more practice-oriented workshop held at the Goethe Institute–Sudan.

A "virtual tour" of the Sudan Archive

The first step took place at the end of May 2025, during a seminar hosted by CEDEJ-Khartoum in Cairo, where participants were invited to embark on a "virtual tour" of the Sudan Archive, guided by the archivist Dr. Francis Gotto (Fig. 8). The session offered practical introduction to navigating the online website of the archive how to search for materials, request copyright permissions, and understand the structure of the digital repository. I asked Dr. Gotto to facilitate this seminar because not everyone is aware of the existence of the Sudan Archive beyond Durham, and navigating the online platform can be quite challenging.

Fig. 8 Seminar "A virtual welcome tour of the Sudan Archive", 28 May 2025, Cairo.
Source: CEDEJ-Khartoum

The discussion revealed a range of perspectives and tensions surrounding accessibility. One participant observed that "it is perhaps better that the archive is kept in the UK," suggesting that, had it remained in Sudan, it might have been lost or destroyed due to the war. Others, however, pointed to the inequalities embedded in this arrangement—particularly the difficulties faced by Sudanese researchers in obtaining UK visas to access the archive in Durham. This tension was further underscored months later when a Sudanese colleague in Cairo applied for a visa to access the Sudan Archive and was subsequently denied.

Another point raised, both by participants and by Dr. Gotto, concerned the incompleteness of the records descriptions. This opened up a discussion on the possibility of creating more collaborative spaces between the Sudan Archive and Sudanese communities to work toward more accurate metadata. These concerns, in part, resonate with ongoing debates on the decolonization of museums, particularly regarding the classificatory practices of colonial institutions, which are organized along disciplinary lines and often overlook social biographies. They also highlight the potential of collaborative or co-curated approaches with originating communities to challenge entrenched Western epistemologies.[34]

Anarchiving workshop: about the process

In the days following the seminar, a two-day anarchiving workshop, hosted by the Goethe-Institut Sudan in Cairo, was organized in collaboration with Duaa Abuswar. The anarchiving workshop engaged eleven Sudanese artists: Nihal Kamal, Dalia Mohamed Hussien, Shehab Satti, Mory, Siddig Alhadi, Alii Abuswar, Gadeer Hamdi Ahmed Mohamed, Metche Ja'afar, Razaz Saif, Abdulrahman Salah, and Hind Taha—videomakers, photographers, visual artists, painters, and sculptors—and one urban researcher Sara Hagalhassan (Fig. 9).

Fig. 9 Part of the group at the Goethe-Institut Sudan in Cairo. Source: M. Pepa, 2025

The first day of the workshop focused on sensing the archive, emphasizing both theoretical approaches and affective encounters. The morning session opened with a welcome and an overview of the workshop structure, followed by a roundtable in which participants introduced themselves and shared their motivations for taking part. The session then continued with a presentation of the Sudan Archive at Durham University, offering an overview of its digital collection. This was followed by an introduction to key debates around archives, stressing that archives are not neutral repositories of the past. Building on this, the concept of anarchiving as a research-creation process was presented as one possible way to reactivate archival materials and engage them creatively.

In the afternoon, artists participated in "Feeling, Walking, Touching the Archive," an experimental sensorial exercise imagined to engage the archive through multiple modes of perception. Moving through different stations, participants encountered a diverse range of archival materials—maps, diaries, administrative reports, photographs, microfilms, and newspaper clippings—each table inviting a specific form of engagement, whether visual, tactile, narrative, or affective. This multisensory approach encouraged participants to reflect on their relationship with the materiality of the archive and opened possibilities for engagement, such as drawing on the materials, leaving notes, or re-watching together some microfilm to discuss them (Fig. 10). To guide their movement through the space, a series of reflection prompts were provided: "What new thoughts does it make it possible to think? What new emotions does it make it possible to feel? What new sensations and perceptions does it open in the body?"[35]

Fig. 10 Watching together micro-film from the Sudan Archive. Source: M. Pepa, 2025

After this, the group engaged in a discussion facilitated by Duaa Abuswar, during which artists collectively reflected on their encounters with the Sudan Archive. Responses varied: one artist noted, "When I touched the map of Khartoum, I felt like I was there," while another recalled, "It's the first time I came across these documents; we do not study many of these issues at school". Other experiences were more ambivalent, with one artist stating, "I do not feel anything, because this archive does not talk about my story"—a perception that appeared to shift during the second day of the workshop.

Before concluding the session, the workshop introduced the artists to creative strategies for anarchiving the Sudan Archive, particularly through collage. The work of Frida Orupabo was presented as an illustrative example, demonstrating how collage can "break those [colonial] images up, to create new and more complex ways of seeing and imagining".[36] We left the Goethe-Institut after inviting the artists to consider whether they wished to work with printed materials from the Sudan Archive—or other resources relevant to their practice—to produce collages or other creative interventions as anarchival strategies during the following day's session.

Research-creation process and reflections

On the morning after the workshop began, the artists arrived with a wide range of ideas for engaging with the Sudan Archive materials, each shaped by their individual interests and artistic backgrounds. Some chose to print additional materials from their own personal archives—for instance, photographs from Sudan or images of their previous artworks, such as paintings. Others worked analogically by hand, while some relied on digital software.

This section offers a visual journey through a selection of the artworks—since, due to space limitations, others will be published elsewhere[37]—presented 'by the artists'. Then, it sheds light on some of the reflections that emerged at the end of the workshop, as well as on the practice of anarchiving during war.

Voices of the artists

Gadeer Hamdi Ahmed Mohamed

Fig. 11 Collage Gadeer Hamdi Ahmed Mohamed

Gadeer is a designer, she decided to work with photographs and newspaper cuttings from the Sudan Archive, enriching the collage with colored paper elements in red and blue (Fig. 11). Discussing her collage at the end of the workshop, Gadeer explained: *I wanted to use collage as a way to express my feelings about what is happening in Sudan today. For me, working by hand was a way to return to an earlier time, to a time before the war, when things carried different meanings and life felt simpler. As I started gathering materials, what I have noticed that most are the images of military, soldiers, police.*

I felt a strong need to express something else: hope, sorrow, life that still exists in spite of everything. That is why I chose to work more with colors than with images. In my choice of colors, blue represents Sudan, while red symbolizes the blood that fills the streets.

I intentionally left empty spaces in the collage to reflect the sense of waiting and uncertainty that we are all living through. I placed the image of a soldier to the side, to convey that we are still waiting for someone to bring an end to this war.

Dalia Mohamed Hussien

Fig. 12 Collage Dalia Mohamed Hussien

Dalia is a young painter who graduated from Sudan University of Science and Technology, College of Fine and Applied Arts, Department of Painting. She combined her own artworks on the December 2018 Revolution in Sudan with photographs from the Sudan Archive and excerpts from newspapers, including headlines such as "Sudan for the Sudanese" (Fig. 12).

Reflecting on her work, she explained:

I employed a collage technique to create a visual space that embodies the collective memory of the December 2018 Revolution. I combined archival photographs from Sudan's history with my own drawings that highlight scenes of resistance, such as protesters and frontline figures. The work aims to connect the past with the present, demonstrating how the spirit of struggle has remained deeply rooted across generations.

Nihal Kamal

Fig. 13 Collage Nihal Kamal

Nihal is a visual artist who used both photos and newspaper cuts from the Sudan Archive while also writing on them and burning a piece of the newspaper. Regarding this act, Nihal commented:

I drew inspiration for this collage from the way we often collect and store documents at home. For example, the red paper in the collage is actually a photograph, a passport photo of an anonymous person. It represents how, during the colonial era, many Sudanese people were invisible; life at that time revolved around the colonizers.

I also used a calendar in the collage and burned it with a lighter, I wanted to show that these documents, like us, have suffered, endured war, and gone through so many hardships.

Shehab Satti

The final piece present—particularly compelling for its use of a different artistic medium—is the work of filmmaker Shehab Satti (Fig. 14). His short film, *Where* I Once Walked, begins with photographs of bridges from the colonial archive and reflects on thier relationship to the city of Khartoum, prompting him to ask at the very start of the video, *"How many times have I passed through here… and there?"*

Through the layering of his voice, music, and poetry, Shehab meditates on the past, present, and future of the war. The impact of the war on him: "The Nile is still the Nile, but I am no longer me. Everything has changed", on Khartoum, and on the temporalities that bind them (Fig.15).

Fig. 14 Snapshot of Shebab Satti short film

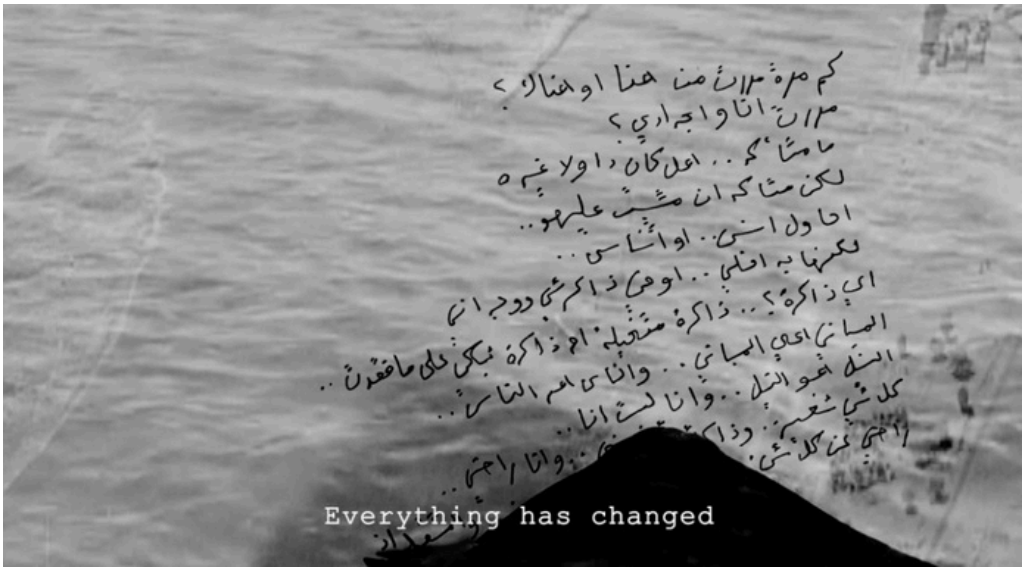


Fig. 15 Snapshot of the poem by Shebab Satti

Reflections from the workshop: "We are the archive of the present"

What struck me most was how, in such a short time, the artists engaged with the Sudan Archive in deeply creative ways, reactivating it to draw connections between the colonial past and the ongoing war. At the end of the workshop, we came together for a collective conversation about the artworks and about what anarchiving might mean during a time of war, as well as what possibilities it could open for the present and the future.

The process of anarchiving functioned as a space through which the artists articulated how the present is shaped by earlier forms of violence: by the imprint of colonial planning on Sudan's architecture and economy, by the legacies that continue to structure everyday life, and by what is missing from the archive itself. Several artists emphasized the absences in the Sudan Archive: missing stories, voices, unrecorded everyday (Sudanese) experiences, and the systematic marginalisation of certain groups—particularly women. Yet anarchiving also became a way to question these silences and challenge their persistence. As one artist asked, "Has our colonial legacy really ended with independence, or are we still living with remnants of it that continue to affect us as Sudanese people today?"

Confronting these absences, silences, and injustices prompted several artists to reflect on the necessity of anarchiving as a way of countering colonial narratives. As one participant remarked, "We are the archive of the present," while another added, "I felt that what we are living through right now is going to be the archive for future generations. So, I felt that we should try to preserve as much as we can—archive the things we've lived through." This emphasis on the present as a site of archival responsibility captures how anarchiving does not simply preserve memory but actively reactivates it. Yet, this process of research-creation also opens for seriously considering the contribution of art in challenging colonial/official archives, not just as a form of visual aesthetics but as a different way to articulate what is missing in these archives, as a way to reflect on the coloniality of the present.

Looking ahead, the group reflected on how anarchiving might continue to function both as a mode of remembering and as a means of countering colonial forms of memory-making. Several concrete proposals emerged from the discussion. One suggestion involved creating an Instagram page to circulate the artworks produced during the workshop, thereby opening the Sudan Archive to wider audiences and inviting others to contribute their own memories and interpretations. Participants also emphasised the importance of involving older generations of Sudanese—both within Sudan and across the diaspora—to help address archival absences and recover narratives that have long remained unwritten. In addition, the artists expressed a desire to develop a longer-term research initiative that could engage more deeply with questions of archival practice, including thematic sessions centred on issues such as women's experiences, education, and everyday life. Finally, the group identified the need for a physical space for dialogue in Cairo: a place where people can meet, share experiences, and participate in critical conversations about the archive and its ongoing reconfiguration.

Conclusion: Anarchiving For Weaving Alliance

Soon after the workshop ended, I returned to Durham to deliver the Sir William Luce Annual Lecture. I travelled back with the archive-suitcase emptied of the copies of archival materials left in Cairo, yet filled with traces of powerful artworks, ongoing conversations, and unresolved questions about the coloniality of the present, as well as with a shared desire to rethink the (an)archive and our relations to it otherwise.

The workshop in Cairo offered a way of engaging with the Sudan Archive not as a fixed repository of the past, but as a relational practice. It created a space for forms of archiving that disrupt conventional archival logics, exceed institutional boundaries, and open up to intimate, creative, and collective modes of co-production. At the same time, anarchiving provided a space to remain with the discomfort of the coloniality of knowledge, to experiment with alternative temporalities in which the boundaries between past, present, and future are blurred, and to open new directions for engaging with colonial archival materials affectively and relationally. In doing so, it reactivated other ways of remembering by bringing in voices, experiences, and artistic practices that have long been excluded by institutional archives.

For me, engaging in anarchival practice also enabled a rethinking of the relationships between artists and researchers, fostering spaces of cross-fertilisation and prompting critical reflection on whose knowledge counts, as well as on privilege, mobility, and responsibility in the process of research-creation. It also offered ways to bridge geographies and forms of knowledge, seeking to overcome barriers by weaving new alliances.

This experiment is intended, hopefully, as a starting point for further creative engagements with the Sudan Archive, as well as with other archival repositories[38], at a moment when—at the time of writing—the urgency of tracing Sudanese stories as living, personal, and politically situated archives is tangible across different geographies[39].

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