

Thorny Issues and Perilous Coalitions: Addressing Women's Human Rights in the context of Conflict and the Struggle to Restore Democracy in Sudan (1989-2000)

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Introduction¹

When people [at the National Democratic Alliance conference in Asmara in 1995] started talking about democratic laws, the issue of women was raised. Of course [a member of a sectarian party] jumped up and said "so women's [issues] have come here as well? Just like that from the start? So what do women have to do with that issue? Why do you want to mess up the story?" A party representative actually said that! (Interview with a former member of the NDA Executive Office and delegate to the Asmara 1995 Conference).

In 1989, the National Islamic Front (NIF), a political Islamist group that developed out of the Sudanese Muslim Brothers' movement, overthrew an elected government in Sudan through a military backed coup. This not only forced active political groups into underground and exile politics, but also initiated a process of rethinking a number of issues that had contributed to the instability of the country since it attained political independence in 1956. The main issues were the question of the relationship between religion and politics, the right to self-determination for historically disadvantaged people in Southern Sudan, and the restructuring

of wealth and power so as to terminate injustices based on religion, culture, region, and socio-economic background.

This re-thinking was manifested in the resolutions of the first conference of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), an umbrella organization of Sudanese opposition parties, trade unions, and the 'Legitimate Command of the armed forces', which was formed in Khartoum in 1989. Held in Asmara, Eritrea, in 1995, the Conference of Fundamental Issues affirmed the secular nature of the state, the need to restructure economic and political institutions, and the right of the Southern region to self-determination. As such, its resolutions held the promise of ultimately ending the war that had haunted the country since 1955, with a short break between 1972 and 1983.

The violent roots of the conflict were laid down during the Anglo-Egyptian colonial era, when, through policies of divide and rule, Northern and Southern parts of the country were subject to different policies that resulted in the formation of distorted structures arising from unequal economic and political relations. Successive post-colonial governments played key roles in exacerbat-

ing regional, cultural, economic, and political injustices by focusing development schemes in the North and imposing on this multi-racial and multi-cultural country a single cultural identity and religion.

Given the neopatriarchal nature of the post-colonial state and society, characterized by the marginalization of women; the mainstream women's movement, which can be traced back to the 1950s, played an important role in introducing some legal reforms and influencing the political atmosphere in the 1960s.

The war intensified after the coup of 1989, which halted the peace process that had been initiated during the democratic period. The government announced the termination of the war in the South as one of its main aims, but pursued policies that exacerbated the war because of its attempt to implement its religious 'civilizational project' and its portrayal of the war in the South as a Jihad (holy war) against non-Muslims. Armed opposition also erupted in Western and Eastern Sudan as well as the Southern Blue Nile, changing the nature of the conflict in the 1990s and problematizing the binary nature of "what had been [in] the 1980s a war between the North and the South, Muslims against Christians and 'Arab' against 'African'" (Johnson, 2003: iiix).

Most of the discourse on the conflict in Sudan has been gender blind, with very few exceptions (cf. Jok, 1997, Abdelhalim, 1998). However, women in Southern Sudan

have been affected by the war in a gender-specific way. In addition to heavy bombardment of villages and the subsequent displacement of about four million Sudanese, the majority of whom are women and children, Southern Sudanese women have been subject to rape, abduction, enslavement, and -- together with women in the Nuba Mountains -- use by the government as tools of ethnic cleansing. Soldiers from the North were encouraged and rewarded

for marrying women from these areas in order to produce Muslim children and were rewarded for this. Women in predominantly Muslim areas in Eastern Sudan and the Blue Nile area have also been subjected to various human rights abuses by the government.

In light of the above, the Asmara 1995 conference constituted a turning point in Sudanese politics. Although its

resolutions endorsed international human rights conventions, they curtailed women's human rights on the basis of religion. This was manifested in Article Five, which contained the only reference to women in the Asmara resolutions:

The NDA undertakes to preserve and promote the dignity of the Sudanese woman, and affirms her role in the Sudanese national movement and her rights and duties as enshrined in international instruments and covenants without prejudice to the tenets of prevailing religious and noble spiritual beliefs (Final Communiqué of the Conference of Fundamental Issues, Asmara, June 1995, 1.B.5, emphasis mine).

Since 1995, this clause, together with the issue of women's representation in the exclusively male NDA Leadership Council and Executive Office, dominated public discourse, mainly through activist women and women's groups' resistance to this marginalization.

Taking the issue of commitment to women's human rights as a point of reference I address the discourse of various on women's human rights by exiled opposition parties, organized under the umbrella of the NDA and produced in a situation of armed conflict and struggle towards restoring democracy. I explore lessons that could be learned by Sudanese women's groups given the fact that, since July 2002, the peace process in Sudan has taken a new turn, making the conclusion of a peace agreement in 2004 a possibility.

Competing Discourses on 'Article Five' and CEDAW
Alfaqra Khamsa (Article Five) of the Asmara declaration mainly emphasized acknowledgement rather than commitment to women's interests, using the language of dignity rather than that of citizenship, interests, and human rights. Needless to say the word dignity is open to many interpretations, including interpretations that could encourage domesticity and discrimination against women in order to preserve their 'dignity'. By limiting the commitment to women's rights on a religious basis, Article Five not only disabled key articles in the Convention on the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), but also contradicted the NDA Charter, which emphasized "full equality of citizens ..., respect for religious beliefs and traditions and without discrimination on grounds of religion, race, gender or culture" [article (2.i.a), emphasis mine].

Various states and parties in Africa and the Middle East share this contradiction between general constitutional arrangements on the one hand and the commitment to women's equal rights on the other hand. Whether in sec-

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ular (liberal, nationalist, and socialist) or religious theocratic regimes, with the exception of the former Northern Yemen, personal status laws are often derived from Islamic Shari'a, Christian law, or local customs. In a Muslim context, these derive from Shari'a and regulate issues of "marriage, divorce, maintenance, child custody and inheritance" (Moghadam, 1994: 144). They generally reflect and consolidate patriarchal structures and male domination. In that way, personal status laws have often contradicted constitutional clauses that prohibited discrimination on the basis of gender. Sudan is no exception.

Given that Sudan encompasses religions other than Islam, the fact that Article Five talks about religious beliefs in general means the maintenance of the prevalent legal arrangements amongst non-Muslims as well. Many of the Southern and Nuba women I interviewed in Nairobi pointed to oppressive customs, and the same was maintained in magazine articles issued by some of the organizations active in Nairobi.

It is often argued that what differentiates secular and Islamist activist women in Muslim countries is that the former draw on CEDAW as their reference for establishing personal status laws. Islamists, on the other hand, draw on Sharia'a laws and the various interpretations of religion as a reference. Although in the case of Sudanese opposition politics it was the secular groups that supported women's demands by reference to CEDAW, some reformist Islamic currents claim that CEDAW does not contradict 'real' Islam. Before the current debate on Article Five, however, women's groups "challenged discriminatory laws by relying strictly on those mechanisms available within the domestic law" (Abdel Halim, 1994: 397; Hale, 1996).

The discourses that evolved around Article Five fall into the center of this debate on CEDAW. This article generated wide criticism from women's groups and activists in Egypt, Europe, and North America. The analysis and protests against Article Five have not identified the heterogeneity and contradictions of NDA discourse and institutional practices on women. As such, this criticism tended to look at the NDA discourses and practices as exclusively detrimental to women. To the contrary, my investigation revealed considerable heterogeneity and fragmentation of that discourse.

As is the case with any alliance, the parties comprising the NDA were founded at different historical eras and have different strategies and interests which are bound to influence their stands on women's issues. The Umma party (which defected from the NDA in 2000) and the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) were founded as the

country was about to negotiate political independence, reflecting the interests of agricultural capital and trade, respectively. Both parties relied on sectarian-religious patriarchal sentiments in maintaining their wide base of supporters in rural areas of the Sudan and continuously won elections in the democratic eras. Maintaining the prevalent neopatriarchal system corresponds well with maintaining the authority of these groups.

The Communist Party of the Sudan (CPS) was established in the 1940s and has since been supported by the educated middle class in towns, laborers in agricultural schemes, and railway and port workers. Although the party promoted women's rights to political participation since the 1950s, it adopted a reformist stand towards patriarchal gender norms prevalent in Northern and Central Sudan so as not to 'offend the masses' (Hale 1996) and kept a 'low profile' on secularism.

The Sudan People's Liberation Movement/Army (SPLM/A) was formed in the early 1980s with the aim of establishing a New Sudan that secures social justice for people who were marginalized politically, economically, and socially since independence. The movement expressed commitment to secularism, although its stand on local customs affecting women is still unclear and although customary law still prevails in SPLM/A held areas in Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains. The Sudan National Alliance/Alliance Forces (SNA/SAF) was formed in the mid 1990s as an alliance between urban, left of center professionals, trade unionists and former military cadres, on one the hand, and marginalized groups in the rural areas, women, and youth, on the other hand. The movement has adopted a New Sudan agenda, with an expressed secular stand. The SNA/SAF endorsed CEDAW officially since its establishment.

The Beja Congress, Sudan Federal Democratic Alliance (SFDA) and Sudan National Party (SNP) emerged out of regional interest groups that were formed shortly after independence in Eastern and Western Sudan and the Nuba Mountains, respectively. These parties transformed their agendas in the early 1990s, adopting New Sudan principles. Gradually, supporters of the Umma party in Darfur and Kordufan (Western Sudan) came to constitute an expanding base for the SFDA and the SNP, while the

... personal status laws ... regulate issues of marriage, divorce, maintenance, child custody and inheritance.

Beja Congress expanded among the supporters of the DUP in Eastern Sudan. While the three groups have adopted the New Sudan agenda, including its secular component, the Beja Congress considers it risky to announce a program that subverts dominant gender norms, given the extremely conservative nature of its constituency.

While some of the groups in the NDA share strategic interests, what brought all these forces together was the desire to overthrow a common enemy, the NIF, and to end the war and restore multi-party democracy. Bringing such diverse forces together obviously involved a bargain and was considered a great achievement on local, regional, and international levels. The Asmara conference is referred to in opposition discourse as *al musawama al tarikhiyya* (the historic bargain). It is argued in this paper that women's human rights were compromised in order to achieve this bargain.

Sectarian Parties: 'The West Imagined'

In public debate and at official NDA meetings and conferences, the sectarian Umma and DUP parties objected to the NDA's endorsement of CEDAW and to any change in Article Five. Umma discourse has shifted superficially over the time. For example, former Prime Minister Sadeq Al Mahdi, who chairs the party, replied to my question on 'Article Five' in July 1997 by stating that "Islam does not discriminate against women." One year later, Al-Mahdi argued: "While Article Five, in its current form, might

contradict with the possibility of obtaining full human rights for women, it is also difficult for us to change this clause, [because] human rights conventions contain elements that contradict with our religion" (addressing the Conference on the State and Higher Education in Sudan, Cairo: August 1998). In later discussions with some of the female participants at the same conference, he stated that CEDAW encouraged "homosexuality, promiscuity, and abortion ... Things that we would not accept in our communities" (emphasis mine).

In interviews, informants from the Umma party and the DUP repeatedly mobilized similar justifications to explain their objections to changing Article Five. This involved the construction of CEDAW as a 'Western' product and the construction of the West as homogeneous and

'immoral' as well as constructions of local discourses that aimed at changing gender relations along similar lines. A DUP leader who was member of the committee that drafted the Asmara resolutions stated that

When we drafted [Article Five], we aimed at preserving women's rights! We ensured public rights by emphasizing equality, democracy, and citizenship rights. Regarding the private sphere, we in Sudan are a believing society, whether people adhered to Islam, Christianity or other local religions. For us, personal affairs are based on religion and each community should tailor its personal status laws accordingly. In Islam we have laws upon which family matters draw, and so is the case with Christianity and other beliefs...there are some with no interest in religion or even with a stand against religion, who would want to erase (Article Five) just because it has the word 'religions' in it. This view might even go further and adopt civil marriage, distancing us from religion. Marriage would become a contract, as is the case with any company or trade. This, in fact, is against all rights... It does not protect the child and family and morals and fidelity in society. Our society, customs, and traditions do not permit certain practices that currently exist in Europe and in advanced countries. We do not permit it to take place in our society.

Similarly, the Secretary for Women's affairs in the DUP stated,

... we have got some reservations on the statement that 'women should be treated according to international human rights conventions'. I believe that religion is a constant, it does not change, but conventions are drafted by human beings and as such, it is these conventions that could be changed. Thus, we are not to ask that our religion be replaced with man-made laws. What Article Five said was that each one should follow what his/her religion tells him/her. I think that this is not a bad idea. I don't think that this limits women's freedom, such as the right to work. Yes, it limits women's freedom regarding some things that I think we agree as a Muslim community that it [should be limited]. Don't forget that the Sudanese are religious. We know what is going on around us. When I now look at the position of women in the West, I thank God that I was raised up in the community where I grew up in. I can't walk naked in the street and think that this way I become equal to men. To the contrary, this degrades women (interview with Secretary for Women Affairs, DUP. London: April 19, 1999).

In his "Women of the West Imagined: The Farangi Other and the Emergence of the Woman Question in Iran," Mohamad Tavakoli-Tariki (1994) argued that the political and cultural encounter with the West in the context of colonialism resulted in shaping the dynamics of the women's question in Iran. The above objection to

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CEDAW was based on the way 'women of the West' are imagined in contemporary opposition discourse. This discourse is influenced by the dependent relationship with that West in an increasingly globalized world. It homogenizes and ossifies both Sudanese and Western cultures, and speaks more about the (internal and external) boundaries that these parties aim to consolidate than it tells about CEDAW, the West, or the local advocates.

Even when I pointed to the fact that the 'three ps: i.e., prostitution, promiscuity and pornography' were not actually in CEDAW, or that CEDAW did not encourage a specific dress (or undress) code, informants pointed to the 'West', where they believe CEDAW originated:

And where do you think this convention came from? ... Here [in the UK] you can see that women are beaten. In our communities, men cannot beat women. Here the man does not have the right to divorce a woman unilaterally, but she can live with someone else [without marriage]. That is why the families are fragmented in the West. These things that they write [such as CEDAW] are just empty talk. For us, we conserve the form of our society, and we are better off than they are. This goes without saying. And things like hijab, etc., are there to protect us.

The situation is complicated for the whole opposition, but especially for the two sectarian parties, given their competition over 'legitimacy' and 'authenticity' with NIF, which consistently propagated an image of the exiled opposition as 'the five star hotels opposition.' Sudanese President Omar Elbashir inaugurated the oil-pipelines in 1999 by inviting the opposition to quit its current practices of "sipping beer" in international capitals, and advised opposition leaders to "cleanse themselves [from sin] in the Red Sea" before returning home. In a society that is becoming increasingly conservative, these charges often deter any tampering with issues that have to do with what is constructed as 'morality.' It is women's rights that are most affected by such contests.

It was interesting to note that the various justifications were not grounded in a direct reading of CEDAW. Informants from Umma and DUP admitted that they had never read the document. Yet their idea of CEDAW's content and their justifications for refusing to endorse it were astonishingly uniform. Asked about the source of their information on CEDAW, several stated that they "followed what was written about mu'tamar bikin [the 1995 UN Beijing Conference] and the 1994 UN International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) in the [Egyptian] press." As the above narratives reflect, the prevalent discourse in the Egyptian media, especially the Islamist press, on these conferences was hostile (N.Ali, 1999; Guenena and Wassef, 1999; Abdelsalam, 1995).

The Islamist media generally argued that the Beijing and ICPD documents were against Islam and that they aimed to consolidate Western hegemony and encouraged 'promiscuity' (Abdelsalam, 1995: 9). As such, these two parties' discourse used constructions of 'Western decadence' produced by the Egyptian media in order to maintain control over women and hence over the social order.

'Progressive' Groups: the Historic Bargain

Parties advocating structural change revealed positions that were critical of Article Five, ranging from integrating such a critique into the political agenda of the movement (the SNA/SAF) to supporting "demands of women's groups who support the NDA" (the CPS and the SPLM/A). The Beja and the SFDA were silent on the issue in public debates, but informants from the leadership of these parties acknowledged the importance of a commitment to women's human rights.

A former executive member in the Cairo office of SNA/SAF responded to my question on the universality versus cultural specificity of women's human rights as follows:

For us in the SNA/SAF, these conventions emphasize freedom and emancipation and they lay the basis for the practice of this freedom. That is why we had no illusion with regard to the change of Article Five. We endorse CEDAW and there is no religious, cultural nor historical contradiction that makes me support an article that does not give women their full rights (interview, Cairo: July 11, 1998).

An SPLM/A leader simply stated that "a woman is a human being, and all human beings should be treated equally. Even religious constraints and traditions that differentiate between women and men should not prevail". (interview, Cairo: April 7, 1998).

The discourse of a CPS leader reveals the dilemma between 'starting from where the masses stand' on one hand, and the need to escape 'worn out traditions,' on the other hand:

We in the CPS believe that we should start from where the masses stand, and eventually raise the consciousness of these masses. At the same time, we would not easily

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surrender to the power of outdated traditions or that of the sectarian forces, but we are not anarchists or arrogant in our relationship to the masses. We support women's social, economic and political rights without reservation but not in a coarse form. We support the demands that women themselves raised regarding their representation in the NDA, and have no reservation to changing Article Five (Interview with Head of CPS office in Cairo: May 6, 1998).

If the stand of the progressive groups was against curtailing women's rights on religious basis, then why was curtailment adopted unanimously by the NDA in June 1995? The main explanation is that women's human rights were compromised in the bargain between these groups and the sectarian parties over more 'fundamental issues': the relationship between religion and politics, the right to self-determination for Southern Sudan, and unity of the opposition.

For some of the informants, particularly those representing predominantly non-Muslim constituencies, the issue of Article Five was seen as solely relevant to Northern/Muslim Sudanese. A former representative of the Union of Sudan African Parties in the NDA Executive Office, for example, stated that:

There are people who have been raising the rights flag in the face of those who think that human rights should be universally applied without any special provisions. Some people try to attribute their objections to what they describe as religious dictates. As a non-Muslim, I think it would be considered rude on my part to really try to challenge the stand of those people (interview, Cairo, May 18, 1998, emphasis mine).

... in our cultures in Sudan if a young girl loses her honor then she thinks that her future is ruined.

Generally speaking, it is often considered among predominantly Southern groups (with the exception of SPLM/A official discourse) that clauses like Article Five affect women in the North more. The argument behind that position is that the major parties and communities in the North are predominantly Islamic. As I argue elsewhere (Ali, 1999), the potentially favorable situation of women in the South and the Nuba

Mountains is often invoked as a boundary marker between these and the hegemonic Arabo-Islamist groups that dominated the 'Old' Sudan. The above narrative makes clear, however, that women's human rights

were also compromised in relation to the cultural and religious rights of male sectarian leaders. Gender was thus an integral part of the historic bargain. This was confirmed by the attitude of the Umma party, while still a member of the NDA, when it threatened to revisit the entire NDA Charter and Asmara resolutions, including its secular components, whenever the issue of changing Article Five was raised in meetings. Similarly, at the second NDA Conference (Massawa, Eritrea, 2000), after female activists exerted a huge effort to change Article Five, the discussion was silenced when the leader of the DUP, who chairs the NDA, threatened to revisit 'Self-determination for the South' if Article Five was discussed.

On War and Human Rights

Activists from various New Sudan parties, who focused on problems facing people in war affected areas, emphasized the importance of acknowledging the specificity of the issues facing women in these areas, while generally emphasizing the universality of rights. A recurrent answer to my question on what New Sudan party leaders understood as women's liberation has been that, at present, women's (and men's) lives are at stake given the conflict situation and that, as such, women's priorities are not necessarily linked to achieving their rights inscribed in international conventions.

During Article 5 related NDA debates, representatives of the Beja Congress and the predominantly Nuba Sudan National Party, invited 'sisters in the women's movement in the cities to remember the problems faced by their sisters in the liberated areas, as a result of poverty and war.' Answering a question on Article 5, the Secretary General of the Beja Congress stated that,

For us as Beja, the issue of women is thorny, that is why we are always cautious to address it with a great deal of sensitivity. Not that this big talking about women's rights and feminism is not a concern for us, but that in our areas there are real problems facing us right now: There are women who are married off at an early age, and they die at an early age. These are real problems rather than theoretical talk on the rights of women in the NDA or in a state that might and might not be achieved. We are concerned with the existence of women in the area: her life and death. Not their culture or identity but their existence... We always lean towards practicality: I bring copy-books, pencils, and a blackboard, I make a conducive atmosphere for women so that they can understand, and then [the woman] can decide for herself whether or not to 'contradict with religions'. My responsibility is to put her on track (interview with Al-Amin Shingirai, Secretary General of the Beja Congress, Cairo, June 6, 1998, italics in bold mine).

Similarly, New Sudan leaders operating in Southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains, including women activists, have pointed to the atrocities to which women in these areas have been subjected, concluding that overcoming these is a more urgent priority compared to a commitment to CEDAW. One of the SPLM/A leaders in the Nuba Mountains argued that:

In the Nuba Mountains, the government army kidnaps women, men and children. Women and children are then kept in the so called 'peace villages'. Young women are then used for the nights. Each soldier takes the girl that he fancies and 'goes away with her.' Elderly women are sent to fetch water and fire wood. These are daily violations, and you know that in our cultures in Sudan if a young girl loses her honor then she thinks that her future is ruined. These are the kinds of problems that women in the Nuba Mountains emphasize (interview with Walid Hamid, Director of the office of the SPLM/A's Commissioner of Southern Kordofan; SPLM/A, Nairobi, March 24, 1999).

That Nuba leader referred to the specific problems affecting women living in the war zones. He argued that if women in the war zones were asked to list their priorities, the achievement of gender equality would come at the end of a ten-point list. Nonetheless, he specified areas of activism that dealt with gender-specific violations of women's human rights. One of the problems with New Sudan groups' emphasis on 'practical needs' is that this discourse can easily be appropriated by the sectarian parties and by forces within the New Sudan that are resistant to gender transformation (e.g. tribal chiefs in the liberated areas).

As such, it is important to highlight sections of CEDAW that address women and conflict, education, health, etc., and to point out that CEDAW is not only about personal status laws, without compromising parts that address personal status laws. In that context, it would also be important to invoke other relevant international conventions or resolutions. An example is Resolution 1325 on women and conflict situations, passed by the UN Security Council in October 2000. A number of Sudanese women's groups (e.g. SWA and the Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace) took part in the campaign to introduce this resolution.

Conclusion

This analysis addressed the way various political groups, united under the umbrella of the NDA, related to issues of women's human rights in the context of armed conflict and the struggle to restore democracy in Sudan since 1989. Forces aiming to induce transformation have favored a commitment to women's human rights, while

groups aiming mainly to overthrow the current regime in Sudan have limited their support of women's human rights on a religious basis.

Collectively, however, parties in the NDA took a stand that contradicted the full realization of women's rights, subordinating women's human rights to wider questions of democratic reform, secularism, and the maintenance of the unity of the opposition. Thus the 'historic bargain' between the progressive forces and the sectarian parties involved a compromise of women's interests. This is not to suggest that progressive movements in Sudan are (or should be) necessarily committed to preserving women's human rights. As "in many progressive nationalist and socialist projects, women's issues are at best paid lip service, at worst greeted with hilarity...[seldom] has feminism in its own right been allowed to be more than the maidservant of nationalism" (McCinnon, 1997:386).

*Each soldier
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with her.'*

There are a number of potential areas for women's activism in order to induce a commitment to CEDAW and to engender post-conflict reconstruction in Sudan. The NDA's focus on the current regime's abuses of human rights constitutes an opportunity for women's groups to further press for change by challenging the NDA's selective approach towards international human rights documents. The NDA's former official spokesperson stated in one of the NDA Leadership Council's meetings (March 1998, attended by the author) that "this article has become an embarrassment for us in our meetings with UN and international human rights groups." This further highlights the importance of building cross-national alliances between Sudanese women's groups and women's groups and human rights organizations with relevant agendas in other countries to help place gender-specific violations on the regional and international political agendas. Sudanese women's groups can co-ordinate, for example, with Egyptian women's groups who have been vocal in resisting Islamist constructions of CEDAW and women's human rights (cf. Guenena and Wassef, 1999; Al-Ali, 1998), given that the same constructions informed views on CEDAW in part of the NDA discourse.

Finally, in the context of conflict, sometimes 'challenges on the ground' and different priorities of women at the

grassroots level are invoked. While these are legitimate concerns, these priorities can be used to delegitimize rather than complement the more subversive agendas that women's groups might adopt. This can include agendas of women's groups working in war affected areas. Instead, the agendas of these groups should be perceived as unfinished (Hill-Collins, 1997), to be complemented by the priorities of women who belong to marginalized social groups in the Sudan, given that

women's groups that are based in Nairobi, for example, are already addressing these issues. This emphasis, however, can be useful in widening the agendas of women's groups in urban centers and in exile, and are directly linked to tools such as CEDAW and UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women and conflict. This is particularly relevant as the country is embarking on a peace-building process and a process of post-conflict reconstruction.



End Notes

This paper is based on research carried out as part of a PhD project. It is based on research conducted in 1998-1999 in Egypt, Kenya, Eritrea and the UK amongst mainstream Sudanese exiled opposition groups. Research methods used included participant observation, in-depth, semi-structured, formal interviews and documentary analysis. Interviews cited in this paper were conducted with both male and female activists from all parts of Sudan, who, with a few exceptions, had access to education until at least secondary school level. Fieldwork was made possible by a ME Award from the regional office of the Population Council, Middle East and North Africa. I would like to thank all the informants for sharing their experiences and views. Thanks are also due to my Supervisor Paul Cammack.

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