



## Inhalt

### Feminist Perspectives in the Sudan

#### An analytical overview

by Balghis Badri

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The main aim of this paper is to document and map the contemporary Sudanese women's movement, which mostly evolved during the past two decades. There is almost no literature on this period. In this paper the movement is analysed both through the lens of contemporary feminist discourses and in terms of its transnationality. A definition of feminism in the Sudan is adopted and discussed at the beginning of section three.

This paper will be divided into three main sections. The first part will introduce the Sudan, followed by an introduction of Sudanese women in history and of the diversities and challenges women face. This introduction is crucial to contextualise the characteristics of the movement.

Section three will establish the history of the Sudanese women's movement in the modern Sudan 1951-1985, followed by the movement in the recent contemporary Sudan (1986-2005).

## 1. Introducing the Sudan

### 1.1. Profile

The Sudan consists of a one million square mile area extending from North Africa to Central Africa. It shares its borders with nine countries. Libya, Egypt to the North, Ethiopia, Eritrea to the East with the Red Sea bordering Saudi Arabia, Uganda, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Republic of Kenya to the South, Chad, the Central African Republic to the West. It stretches from sun-parched deserts of the North to the equatorial rain forests and swamps of the South. The Nile is the most important source and resource of livelihood in the Sudan.

This location setting influences the diversity of cultures and politics within the Sudan. Furthermore the diversity is a result of environmental factors as the Sudan stretches over a large area. The desert covers 35% of the country while 20% are semi-desert and fuel wood plains comprise 8%. The remaining 37% consist of high and low savannah plains and hilly areas mostly in the Central, Southern and Western Sudan.

The natural diversity is compounded by a religious diversity, where Islam is the main religion (app. 75%); Christianity (20%) and indigenous religions (5%) combined form a rather significant minority.

- The ethnic profile corresponds to the Sudanese diversity patterns and is classified into seven main groups: The descendants of Arab-Africans mainly in the Northern and the Central Sudan. Here the dominant tribes are the Galyin, the Shaygia, and the Danagla.
- The Nilotic Africans living mainly in the Southern Sudan, their main tribes are the Dinka, the Nuer, and the Shuluk.
- The Africans of Nuba mountains origin claiming to be amongst the most ancient groups.
- The Beja of the Eastern Sudan who claim a hematic origin.
- Africans of West African origin, mainly the Masalit, the Zagawa, the Fur, and the Felata living mostly in Darfour in the Western Sudan.
- Other Arab nomadic groups such as the Kababish and the Baggara, living mainly in Darfour and Kordufan.
- There are other non-Nilotic African groups living in the Southern part of the Sudan, mostly known are the Zandi and the Bar'i amongst others.

Such an ethnic diversity also implies a linguistic variety. Arabic is the lingua franca of the Sudan; however it is the mother tongue of less than half the population. It is the official language, English the second language. There are several other indigenous languages and dialects.

### 1.2. The political context in the Sudan:

The Sudan gained independence in 1956 on the back of a male elite movement and has been ruled by various governments comprised of different political elites over the years. In 1956-1958 an elected government ruled and was overthrown in November 1958 by a military coup, the resulting military regime maintained power until 1964. In October 1964 a popular uprising brought the regime down and an interim government (1964-



1965) consisting of the main political parties and the independent elites prepared democratic elections. In the following four years an elected government again ruled the Sudan based on democratic principles. But in May 1969 another military coup took place led by leftist communists and protagonists of arabisation projects who preserved their power for 16 years. Another popular uprising in 1985 once more overthrew the military regime and yet another elected government formed from the two main political parties ruled the country in a coalition. Other Islamic, communist and regionally oriented parties were also represented in the parliament leading the opposition. However, in June 1989 the military coup of Al-Ignaz supported the Islamist groups in their struggle to come to power. Thus they declared the Islamic Front government, which remains until today.

Despite the length of the military rule the Sudan has strong political parties who played a role in gaining independence and who maintained their work throughout the military rule. The main political parties are:

- The UMMA party, formed in the 1940s, has been elected into government twice and once had a significant role in the opposition. It is characterised by both enlightened Islamic interpretations and secular principles as a basis for their political program and as a vision for ruling the multifaceted Sudan.
- The Democratic People Union, founded in the 1940s, has once ruled exclusively and twice in coalition with the UMMA party. It has a similar outlook but sports more supporters from the private sector and is hence more open to market principles.
- The Communist party, founded in the early 1950s, gained three seats in the 1986 elected parliament. Their main voters are the educated youth and labourers.
- The Muslim Brotherhood, founded in the late 1950s, became a part of the National Islamic Front (NIF) in the mid 1960s. They won 50 seats in the parliamentary elections of 1986. They are currently divided into the ruling party National Congress and the People's Congress in the opposition. The latter is led by Dr. Hassan el-Turabi who was amongst the main founders of the Muslim Brotherhood in the Sudan and of the Islamic Front.
- The Sudanese African National Union (SANU), founded in the early 1950s, was mainly active in the Southern Sudan.
- The Sudanese People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), founded in the late 1970s, is mainly active in the Sudan. The SPLM led a war against the national government in Khartoum dominated by northern elites reclaiming their rights, equality, recognition of diversity, development and justice in power and wealth sharing. The long war ended in the recent comprehensive peace agreement, signed in January 2005. This agreement includes the Southerners' right for self determination and allows them to hold a referendum in favour of an independent state of Southern Sudan in 2011; it furthermore rules that the Islam is not to be a source of legislation in the South.
- The Sudanese National Party, primarily representing the Nuba was formed in the 1960s, gained one seat in the 1986 elections and currently has become an ally to the SPLA.
- The Beja Congress in the Eastern Sudan, founded in the 1980s, also gained a seat in the 1986 elected parliament. The Beja Congress is currently leading a war against the Ignaz-government and finds support from the SPLA.

In 2001 a newly formed Equality and Justice Party is mainly active in Darfour, as well as the 2002 newly reformed Sudanese Liberation Front. Both Muslim oppositional parties are leading a war against the Khartoum national government. The Darfour and Eastern war are ongoing and negotiations are continuing.

There are other small political parties registered under the 1998 constitution and political parties act.

### 1.3. Sudanese Civil Society Activisms/ Actions

An overall brief profile of the nongovernmental actors is also needed to contextualise the Sudanese women's activism we shall discuss later.

The Sudanese civil society can be considered active since the time of colonialism. There have been traditional, middle range actors like the conventional tribal chiefs and their council, the graduations congress of 1930-45 which led to the evolution of Sudanese political parties, the various Sudanese philanthropic and saving groups at grass root levels, teachers both as individuals and affiliated in association unions, mainly by opening schools since the 1930s, the private sector helping and contributing to the above group initiations in a non formal way on individual basis.



Trade unions in Sudan were active during periods of democracy, but their impact as an opposition force ended in July 1989, when following a coup they regrouped in support of the government and reduced the extent to which they promoted and protected their constituencies.

The current civil society is polarised between pro government Islamist foundations, organisations, associations and unions on the one end and those with a different perspective.

The NGO sector is also influenced by the political context. Under the May regime, NGO activities were curtailed and only scientific NGOs, branches of international NGOs such as the Red Cross, and family planning associations were allowed to register and during the democracy of 16<sup>th</sup> April 1985 – 1989 several NGOs were initiated. The June 1989 coup resulted in the forced dissolution of all NGOs, with only few passing security screening and being allowed to re-form. It has been only since 2000 when the Government of Sudan (GoS) signed the COTNO agreement as part of NEPAD that NGOs have been allowed to register again. The GoS formed its own NGOs at that time and thus felt pressured to allow the creation of others as well. However, a new formal body called the Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC) was established by the government in 2000 to monitor and control registration and activities of all NGOs. A ministry was then established in 2003 to control all civil society activities, especially those of humanitarian or rehabilitation nature. The Civil Society Registration Act, the Public Order Act, and the Security Act all restrict civil society's activities, requiring permission for activities such as the holding of workshops and conferences, the completion of research, etc. (Grace Paolino, Oslo Forum 2005).

The former, pro government NGOs (GNGOs) establish similar bodies as they have been established before by the other category of NGOs, but usually are identified by Islamic titles assigned to them. Hence, the scene is polarised by linguistic symbols.

One can broadly classify the two categories under a certain reserve as Islamists pro government (GNGOs) here and secularist NGOs there.

Both categories include human rights activists, legalist groups, peace building groups, Anti AIDS, reproductive health, education, media and various other development program activists, research, consultancy and charity groups, as well as networks. Religious groups affiliated

to various churches or Islamic sects are also quite frequent and are also polarised between those politicising their work pro and anti governmental. The civil society scene is vibrant; while not united in vision and goals, it is diverse in source of funding and capacities; all are still mainly based in Khartoum, elitist in speech and do not reach the majority of the population. Religious and tribal groupings such as Sufist Islamic sects and churches remain greatly un-reached by NGO and INGO activities and themselves so not form a coherent body, with the exception of Christian churches that became organised under the Sudanese Council of Churches.<sup>1</sup> The gross of the people remain greatly unorganised and do not benefit from the activities and activism organised by the civil society lest for the few groups reached by the civil society actors.

Due to the presence of war since 1955, civil society in the South has remained weak with respect to national activism and remained largely dominated by international NGOs and the Church. It must further develop its civil society sector as well as its trade unions. The above introduction of the Sudan in general reflects the diversity of the Sudanese women's profile and activities. Both diversity and polarisation characterise their movements as will be discussed below.

## Section 2

### 2.1. Sudanese Women: Different Identities

As stated above the Sudan is as a country of multifaceted ethnicity, religion and language.

We need to shed light on the Sudanese women's position in ancient and modern history before discussing their contemporary different identities.

From the early Sudanese history a variety of women's biographies is known, there where those few who had been Queen or on the other end of the scale women who where enslaved or served as concubines, both in quite contrary positions to the many "normal" women.

In the current context there are those who are holding ministerial posts and top decision making positions, those who are experiencing rape, abduction or torture, and again the majority of women living so called "normal" biographies.



The Marawatic kingdom is the most ancient civilisation the Sudan has witnessed; it supposedly ruled over both the Northern Sudan and lower Egypt before our time.

It is known that Sudanese queens and princesses also reigned, as well as the queens in the kingdoms of the Southern Sudan amongst the Shuluk and Anuak.

Moreover, mothers transmitted chieftainships to sons through a matrilineal descent as it is known to have been the case in the Central Sudan. In the Fung kingdom reigning over Central and most of the Northern Sudan heritage used to be passed through the mother's line.

Furthermore, the Fur Sultanate in the Western Sudan, mainly in Darfour, used to have a women council attended by sisters and wives of the Sultan and his main chiefs.

The eastern part of the Sudan used to not know women in authoritative political positions, yet a few female Qur'an teachers and some heads of the Khatimiya Sufists who were daughters of the "Tariga" chiefs held prominent positions

Furthermore, along traditional lines of gaining prestige and power some contemporary women continue having an ascribed privileged status as daughters, wives and mothers of chiefs, priests and Sufist leaders (Islamic mystics). This relatively high ascribed status bestows them with abilities to play a leadership role on household or community level, in conflict resolution, in leading social ceremonies, in decision making at neighbourhood and community level.

However, other women have managed to acquire such leadership roles, prestige and value through their own capacities as traditional healers, including midwives, bones healers etc., as leaders of traditional rituals, such as the "Zar- Cult", "Kigur", as religious leaders in the Nuba areas and the South, as Islamic Qur'an teachers in the Northern and Eastern Sudan, as headmistresses in remote villages renowned for their wisdom and their value in giving education, other elderly women have been renowned for their wisdom and gift with proverbs and folklore to give people advice in personal and communal issues. Women in all parts of the Sudan have also been known to use poetry to direct the course of action, behaviour and even fashion. Men have been known to fear the force of poetry to influence people, to damage the reputation, or conversely to praise and raise the status of men or a whole tribe. Such women are called "Hakamat" (literally meaning judging)

in the Western Sudan and have been acknowledged in Sudanese history and in different parts of the contemporary Sudan. They execute a leadership role as far as provoking war and encouraging tribesmen to seek revenge and to keep the honour of a tribe or in a few cases encouraging peace building and forgiveness. The former dominates their activities.

The majority of the contemporary Sudanese citizens are living in the rural Sudan where poverty is estimated to affect 85% of the people and women are suffering hardship in finding water, collecting fuel wood and cultivating fields under harsh conditions with simple technologies only. 85% of the farmers are women particularly located in the Western and Southern Sudan. Poor women in urban centres sell food in urban markets and pursue several activities including begging, liquor brewing or prostitution to meet their family needs.

However, there are a few women who received higher education and have reached top executive positions. Nevertheless a substantial number of women are employed in the public sector in lower positions. However, in some urban centres like the capital, employed women represent 77% of the employees in the public and private sectors.

According to statistics 35% of all women are currently seeking employment, which is due to increasing inflation and structural adjustment programs that severed social safety net interventions and hinder finding employment outside the public sector. This means men often can no longer be the sole breadwinners to satisfy their family's needs. This indicates that more Sudanese women are productive, be it in the formal, the informal, the agricultural or in the pastoralist sector (CBS 2005, Joint Assessment Mission Draft Report).

However, some women particularly in the Eastern Sudan are mainly encapsulated within the reproductive role and their space is the household. Other women in the Northern and Central Sudan and many women in urban areas also confine themselves to reproductive roles but not due to cultural restrictions but rather due to a lack of education, skills, capital, marketing channels or employment opportunities.

Sudanese women's life styles differ between those of extreme seclusion within the household or dressing in a complete veil, both being the minority, and the major



city who enjoy spaces of freedom within the locality and in the community activities. The dress code of a veil is prevalent for a few women in urban centres and mainly amongst younger generations of Muslims. The Christians of the different ethnic groups in the Southern Sudan, Coptic Egyptian or other Arab Christian descendants, Ethiopian communities all obey "conservative" dress codes as it is culturally expected in all groups.

Yet, some young girls in certain night occasions do not necessarily adopt the conservative dress code. Thus different images of Sudanese women's dress codes are manifested along ethnic, class, or age diversities.

Gender development indicators show an unsatisfactory picture of the Sudanese women's position and a gender gap is the pattern in all indicators.

## 2.2. Sudanese gender development indicators:

- Females constitute half of the population (100.97 males to 100 females) out of an approximate population for the northern regions of 28,363 million (CBS/ UNFPA Population Data Sheet 2003)
  - Maternal mortality rates (MMR) decreased from 537 to 509 per 1000 babies born alive in the last ten years. In the six regions of North Sudan, MMR varied from 582 in Kordofan, to 559 in Khartoum, 556 in the eastern region, 542 in Darfur, 442 in the central region, and 319 per 100.000 infants born alive in the northern states.
  - About 27% of the households are headed by women with variations between regions (26% in urban and 13% in rural areas; SMS 1999).
  - In education females constitute about 46% of the students at the primary school level (SMS 1999).
  - Female literacy varies from 24% in Western Darfour to 68% in Khartoum (SMS 1999).
  - In rural areas 62% females and 44% males are illiterate, a figure declining in the urban areas to 34% female and 21% male illiteracy (SMS 1999).
  - Both school enrolment and intake rates vary among Sudanese states to an extent of an 83 percent point difference between the highest rate of 99.7% in the northern State and 16.6% in the Upper Nile State. This is an important issue that requires further analysis and formulation of policies and strategies to bridge this gap.
  - There are major gender gaps in employment, but since the beginning of the 1990s women's participation in economic activities has increased from 18% to 30% (MoLaR, 1996).
  - Women provide 37.9% of the work force. However, there are no women in first and second top positions in the civil service. (MoLaR, 1996).
  - There is an insignificant representation of women in strategic ministries (Foreign Affairs, Finance, Defence, Judiciary). For example, there are only three female judges in the highest and second highest level courts, while women work in top diplomatic sectors.
  - Records show that women's participation in election registration and voting is higher than men's (National Election Authority 2000).
  - Since 1964 all constitutions have given women "equal rights" and abolished discrimination against gender, race or religion.
  - At ministerial level there are only 2 female ministers in the Ministry of Social Welfare and Social Development and the Ministry of International Cooperation, another woman acts as Legal Presidential Advisor and two ambassadors are women.
- The international human rights documents either ratified or signed by the Sudan and of relevance for women are:
- International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights – ratified
  - International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights – ratified
  - International Convention on Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination – ratified
  - ILO Treaty on Equality on Payment and Opportunity – ratified
  - Convention against Torture and other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment – signed but not ratified
  - Convention on the Rights of the Child – ratified
    - First Additional Protocol to the Convention on the Rights of the Child – signed but not ratified
  - African Charter on Human and People's Rights – ratified.
- All the conventions and treaties mentioned above give women equal rights and the state is bound to them.
- The Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) has not been ratified and remains the most controversial one. It is



cause for debate amongst activists and causes a cleavage amongst women between the supporters of a ratification and those who in opposition.

### **Women's Rights in the Sudanese constitution and laws:**

The above treaties and conventions have had a positive impact on the Sudanese constitution and laws. In the constitution Sudanese women are granted equal rights as citizen such as equality before the law, regarding the labour laws, the right to pass citizenship to their children, equality in political rights like voting, passive suffrage, and holding any civil post including judiciary. Women are entitled equal rights compared to men in education, health, and work. However, some discriminatory articles in some laws and practices prevail regarding the occupation of positions in civil service, in the military, and in certain field of specialisation in education, such as petroleum and navy studies. The most discriminatory law is part of the family law, both the Islamic and the customary version, and relegates women to a subordinate position of rights. We will return to this when discussing the women's movement agenda for actions below.

### *2.3. Conclusion*

Despite the differences indicated above a certain degree of communality affects all Sudanese women. Women as a gender category are characterised as the subordinate gender relative to the dominant gender men. Moreover, women are discriminated against and subject to gender based violence greatly experienced by the majority.

Nevertheless, the women's status despite a shared subordinate role differs amongst themselves. The differences are manifested along human development indicators whereby some women do now have more access to resources in education, health, economic and political participation, wealth and relative power.

The Sudanese women's activists need to address this challenge of diversity in life style, ethnicity, poverty, and quality of life and need to address the issue of women's problems during and due to conflicts, violence against women including rape in conflict areas, as well as problems faced by all Sudanese, such as human rights violations, political instabilities and lack of good governance.

The next section offers a short history of the Sudanese women's movement, current activities and challenges of the future.

## **Section 3 Feminism in Sudan**

### *3.1. Conceptualizing Feminism*

The diversity of women's lives and that of the civil society needs to be analysed by conceptualising the meaning of feminism and the diversity in how those who claim to be feminist perceive feminism.

Feminism could be defined as a school of thought generating new knowledge and methodologies to criticise the causes of women's subordinate position in society and gender power relations. It can also be viewed as a collective or individual course of action to address culture, laws, attitudes, and institutions that lead to the women's deprivation and to provide alternatives to achieve gender equality, to attain women's full rights and to reshape the human societies to become a better place for both genders to live in.

This could be considered the ideal conceptualisation of what feminism is about.

However, one can argue that feminism needs to include action to promote women's quality of life materially, culturally, politically, socially, and spiritually without engaging into scholarly debates of a feminist theory or methodology. Such actions could be isolated national ones and need not be part of a transnational feminist movement. They may not get involved into a critical debate over the root causes of women's subordination and rather merely address the symptoms. Others may do both.

Another dimension of feminism can be related to the agency of individuals or small groups to cross the boundaries that limit women's spaces, to make the binaries fluid, and to open the horizon for some change, more self value and empowerment.

Along this broad understanding of feminism four major categories of feminists groupings could be identified.

1. Academic feminists attempt to engender mainstream disciplines by making women visible, by developing new theoretical frameworks and concepts to analyse historical and current phenomena of gender power relations, etc.



A woman's view and perspective is needed to revolutionise knowledge and to develop a new discipline. This is what academic feminism is about. Furthermore, it is necessary to produce a wealth of new knowledge and to revisit the existing knowledge. However, this pursuit should have a goal.

In my understanding this goal is to influence the feminism outside the boundaries of the academia in order to help with information, tools for advocacy, lobby and action.

Further, the goal is to directly influence policy makers to undertake institutional changes in law, media, education, development, organisations structures etc.

Moreover the goal is to create a change in oneself and others within the academia so that colleagues and students apprehend what feminism is, become feminist and work for achieving its goals.

Consequently, academic feminism has to be both interdisciplinary to bring feminists of different disciplines to work together for the promotion of feminist theories and concepts. But, moreover, academic feminism has to be transdisciplinary to cross the borders of the academia and to reach policy/ decision makers as well as activists in the civil society.

The latter is crucial and should be the focus how to direct feminism into future dialogues on how feminism could be made relevant for both the academia and the practise.

2. Feminists in the civil society are neither a coherent group as those in the academia are to a relative degree nor are they expected to be. On the one hand, they represent the dynamism of a civil society with all its contradictions, conflicts and on the other hand they represent solidarity, networking and complementarity.

Feminism in the civil society is more influenced by the political context than is the case for feminism in the academia, though the latter is not isolated and also has a dialectical relationship with the political context.

3. The third face of feminism is found in formal decision making institutions of the government, the United Nations and international agencies.

Feminists holding positions in ministries, committees,

parliaments, and in the private sector, in the UN and in international organisations are also active, mainly campaigning for change of institutional nature. Hence, despite some positive changes in law, institutional structures as a result of their actions, their impact may not be felt on the attitudinal and behavioural level of change which is the most important. Other agents of change remain out of reach for feminism such as market structures, the media, and the clergy of different religions.

4. The fourth category of feminism may not be catching the attention. It is lived by many women and/or men on the personal level, who critically assess the situation and positioning of women within their families, examine gender power relations and work to either change it into a more radical way of equality or autonomy or to manipulate situations and contexts to stretch the boundaries.

The linking of the four categories is crucial, however, it is not necessarily taking place on all levels and at all times.

In the following I will analyse and map the situation in the Sudan along the four categories of feminism. Moreover, I will take the above mentioned challenges the majority of women face with low human development characteristics, a religious and cultural diversity, a recent dynamism in civil society activities, a war context in Darfour, a new peace agreement with an enforced democratisation stated in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) into account. It is crucial to consider all these variables.

The CPA states that human rights principles are to be respected in the new peaceful Sudan, it calls for the development of a new constitution, a law reform, a civil service reform, an electoral law reform, as well as the addressing of certain governance issues. This process has to be completed within three years, after which the Sudan has to move towards an institutionalised democracy after free elections in early 2009.

This current situation is a historical opportunity for Sudanese women's activists to move ahead and get the most out of these reforms.





### 3.2. *Evolution of Feminism in the Sudan 1957-1989*

The origin of the modern Sudanese women's liberal movement could be traced back to the acceptance of women's elementary secular education in 1907 and subsequently their further tuition at the teachers training school in 1924. Even though they were only few those women later worked as the first female Sudanese teachers and were opening schools in different places of the Sudan. Travelling and living away from the family meant a step of bravery, activism and commitment taken in order to introduce change in a conservative society. Those who accepted to be trained as midwives and nurses, travelled to teach modern midwifery and worked in remote areas, need to also be commended. Many women were active and supportive in different ways, for instance in their actions against the colonial rule, giving role models of women's engagement in politics in the modern history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The women forming the first women's associations in 1947 and 1949 could all be considered the mothers of modern feminism in the contemporary Sudan.

The most collective activist work of women has been the establishment of the Sudanese Women's Union in 1951, which has been working on education issues and requesting equal rights in the work place, at first from the colonial rulers then from the national governments. Moreover, they were calling for equal political rights in voting and standing for elections. The Sudanese Women's Union (SWU) managed to achieve their aims peacefully and with relative ease without being confronted with opposition. At that time the men in executive political positions had either secularist, nationalist or leftist agendas. They were influenced by a regional series of appeals to justice, equality, socialism and freedom (for further details Abdel Aziz Ahmed Ali (2003). Badri, H. 1986) and the Sudanese Women's union as the spearhead of the feminist movement in the period 1951-1970 was mostly coherent and characterised by solidarity. However, polarisation along political affiliation started to divide the union into 3 categories, the Islamists, the leftists, and others who decided to support Nimir's military regime.

This division and the military rule of 1969-1985 silenced the civil society movement in general and had a negative influence on the women's movement. Those women who did side with the government became involved in the political regime and were relegated to serve women in but a few aspects of a home economics nature. The continuing achievements in the labour laws of 1974 and 1979 were

a follow-up to what had been campaigned for by the comprehensive SWU and by all activists during the democratic rule of 1965-1969.

Assessing the movement of 1951-1971 one could conclude that it was a civil society feminism geared towards institutional changes mainly in laws related to women's rights in politics and work.

It has not contributed to the revisiting of knowledge and discourses, nor did it help in addressing cultural embedded practices or values that infringe on women's rights or structural causes that sustain subordination issues such as fighting female genital mutilation, the discriminatory family law, nor did it manage to tackle a change in the educational curriculum. The movement could be described as a women's movement in the public areas of work and politics engaging in activism in a new and organised way. They did not want to antagonise the society which was not yet prepared to disclose culturally accepted patterns. They wanted to safeguard national unity.

Those who held political office during the period 1972-1985 did not address institutional issues of representation in executive bodies, of establishing a women's council, a women's ministry for instance, nor campaigned to fill the 25% of the seats in the national assembly of 1977-1983 reserved for women.

It is beyond the scope of this paper to analyse why this did not take place, here further research is needed.

However, in a non-democratic context and with an exclusionist agenda set by the regime many women were refraining from joining the regime and one would not expect much of women's activism during that period. Having stated this we need to shed light on the few feminist activities that did take place during that period.

Some women's organisations were allowed to register as NGOs outside the umbrella of the Sudan Women Union created by the government in 1971. Three NGOs were formed in 1979, one led by the Islamists known as "Women's Pioneers – Raidat al-Mara" who started a few projects mainly advocating the lessening of bride wealth and making marriage financially less costly. They also used to teach Qur'an to women within the neighbourhood. As they are organised as a distinct Islamist



women group and as a branch of a political party, it needs to be researched how far that has impacted on the future activities of the Islamists.

The second NGO, the "Babiker Badri Scientific Association for Women's Studies", adopted two main programs. The first addressed rural women in the areas of literacy, income generating activities (IGA), health, awareness raising on health and environmental issues, capacity building for some key village leaders to continue literacy, kindergarten education, health education, training midwives and establishing a women's resource centre to carry out the activities. The program attempted to replicate the experience of women's groups both in the region and on international level by adapting methods to the Sudanese rural context thus breaking the seclusion of village women. They worked in the Red Sea area, which is known for a strong ideology requesting the women's seclusion and high illiteracy rates, and in the Central Sudan in villages, which were not reached by the large scale agricultural projects of the Gazira, Rahad, Sennar and Kenana. Their second program aimed at fighting female genital mutilation (FGM) thus breaking a taboo by discussing health hazards and psychological negative impacts of FGM in public and defying justifications of its implementation, be it for alleged moral, religious, pleasure, or hygienic purposes. During the struggle's first phase 1979-1985, great opposition from many sides including some of the state authorities was prevalent. Then the momentum of the struggle gained strength and many other NGOs and networks have gradually been established since 1985 to fight FGM and continue to do so.

The third organisation was led by diplomats' wives, both Sudanese and non-Sudanese, and other activists. Its main activities were fund raising for charity purposes addressing children and women in poor families and holding lectures to inform foreigners about Sudanese women. It could barely be classified as feminist if not for their minimal activities to gather and discuss a few women's issues. The concept of fund raising organised by women is new and their experience should be researched.

However, in 1986 when democracy was restored sixteen women's NGOs were registered and women's activists were negotiating the building of a coalition to serve as umbrella for different women's civil actors including political parties so as to act as a solidarity pressure group. However before this materialised the 1989 group took place. The most prominent achievement for the women's move-

ment in the period 1986-1989 was the establishment of women's sectors in all political parties, representation of women in top positions in some political parties and in key ministries. However, the famine of 1984-86 and the floods of 1988 overshadowed feminist claims for further rights and made them lose the opportunity to ratify the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), when the Sudan ratified the two human rights conventions.

We characterised the second category of feminists as those in the academia. A few academics at the Khartoum University and the Ahfad University for Women started a critical review of women's studies courses and of women in development issues and holding conferences to discuss such issues.

Moreover, research on women's lives, marital power, women's productive and political roles started to take place since the mid seventies but became more prominent during the eighties.

The introduction of a university requirement course at university level at the Ahfad University for Women happened in 1987. However, female enrolment into courses already started in 1980 and research on women's issues was common even before that.

At the Khartoum University the integration and teaching of an elective course on women's issues started in 1979 in the department of sociology and continued till 1990. This academic feminism led to an accumulation of knowledge, introduced the women's issue as an independent discipline into academia and promoted a feminist research agenda and qualitative research methodologies. This paved the road for more academic feminism later in the 1990s up to the present. The impact is more on graduates; young women became activists by joining NGOs and, moreover, linking themselves to civil servants feminists for institutional change.

Activists fitting the third category of feminist activism were civil servants who worked with the academic feminists mainly to promote the need to establish a women's administration or unit in important ministries such as the Ministry of Finance and Planning and the Ministry of Agriculture. Several workshops were held to introduce the issue to public discussions and to engage policy makers. The women's decade proclaimed in 1985 helped them press for the representation of a



women's bureau outside the ministry of social welfare and the addressing of the children's and women's reproductive role. Their struggle started in 1979 and brought success in 1987 during the democratic government. Moreover, UN agencies, women's sections and some embassies, mainly the Netherlands's, played a positive role to support women executives in the civil service and in the academia.

However, by 1991 a regression took place when the Ministry of Finance and Planning was reshaped, dissolving the planning sector and hence making the women's unit part of the Ministry of Social Welfare.

Nevertheless, on the personal level of addressing change, one could claim that many women managed to receive higher education, gained doctoral degrees, occupied different jobs, travelled and lived outside the Sudan, adopted different life styles, used different dress representations for identity, headed households and started their own businesses. A flexible secular context at the private level prevailed until in 1983 a policy change led to the declaration of the Sharia Islamic law as the sole code for conduct and source for legislation.

That was the start of the rise of Islamic fundamentalism in the Sudan that had an impact in further polarizing Sudanese women not only along political affiliation but also along ideological divisions between Islamists and secularists.

### *3.3. The feminist movement 1989-2005*

The period of 1989-2005 is characterised by the rule of an Islamic political party holding power after a military coup turning over a democratically elected government.

After the coup all NGOs were dissolved and had to re-register in 1990. The 16 women's NGOs that were established during the democratic regime between June 1986 and 1989 had to go through a security screening in order to re-register as many were considered affiliates of some political parties and indeed only a handful could continue their work. This period witnessed a relapse of civil society activism until by 1993 a gradual process of revival had begun when the government had established the Women of Sudan Union in 1991 and founded the international Moslem Women Union and the International Women League with headquarters in Khartoum. These are government led and funded organisations. Other government independent groups who were not permitted registration by the

security side stepped by registering as non-profit companies. All non-governmental groups were working with some caution during this period, until the context had become more hospitable when the government started to recognise the importance of the civil society's potential and the international interest to work with NGOs rather than with governments. Hence, a lot of space was opened and many pro-governmental NGOs were established, and even several 'others' that were considered 'anti government or independent' were permitted registration. The number of registered NGOs dealing exclusively with women's rights issues rose to 37 by 2003. There are five other NGOs registered as non-profit companies engaging the same field. Besides those, six women networks were established. Five of them advocated peace, summarised as the Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace Networks (SWEP), which was started in 1998 and formally registered by 2003 and 2004. The sixth network is a "Women in Development" network and was established in 2000. A regional network was also registered, the "Southern Initiative for the Horn of Africa" (SIHA). It mainly addresses issues of conflict, violence against women and women's rights in the Horn of Africa. It was established in 2000 with its office in the Sudan at the Ahfad University for Women. The civil society of NGOs, NGO network and non-profit companies is diverse, pro-government vs. independent or anti-government and also in regard to programs, size of funds, and institutional and human resources capacities.

There is a tendency of other bigger groups with large constituencies to engage in the civil society such as unions of labourers, farmers, teachers, or students, political parties, organisations from the youth and women's sector and the academia, state owned or not. This broad category is usually termed non-state actors and includes NGOs, political parties, unions, consultancies, non-profit groups and the academia, both state owned and private. The main issues that bring them together are national issues such as discussing the peace agreement, constitutional drafts, preparing for donor meetings at Oslo, etc. Many women are actively engaged in the different groups. In certain cases women form their own platforms to discuss women's issues and agendas, for instance to engender the constitution, the peace agreement and present the women's minimum agenda at Oslo donor meetings. For the sake of analysis in this paper, the civil society groups that work collectively will be discussed as one category of feminist action, the academia will be classified as a separate category of feminism



according to the different categories of feminism I discussed above. The third and fourth category are feminist activists on a decision making ministerial level here and on an individual or community level there.

The groups in the civil society category are diverse in their activities. Some engage in development or relief activities including both mostly pro-government/ Islamist groups and other independent NGOs, the latter being associated more with International NGOs and UN agencies. Their activities include LGA for women, credits, education etc.

Others work on women's rights issues in general, address reproductive health, or campaign for law reforms, particularly concerning the family law. In this sector there are few NGOs and mainly non-profit companies. Some of them also work on violence against women issues, mainly against FGM, early marriage or domestic violence, others work for safe motherhood and girls education, while most Islamist women's NGOs concentrate their activities on teaching the Qur'an and mobilising for holy war before the peace agreement was signed in January 2005. Many other civil society actors who do not exclusively consist of women have desks or units and pursue similar activities or target women with their specific programs such as the environmental NGOs, anti-poverty networks, human rights centres, and HIV/ Aids networks.

It should be noted that only those who engage in legal issues or address violence against women practise a discourse that reflects gender relations issues or address the structural causes of women's subordination. While this is done modestly and without reference to transnational feminist debates or discourses in the academia most are linked to the respective literature and debates. They all pose a potential for solidarity work on women's rights and bettering the quality of women's human development indicators or their involvement in the politics.

The feminists in the academia are only few and the concentration of their work is still within the Ahfad University for Women as they have introduced a women's study course first and have many other advocacy activities, celebrating the women's international day and allocating three prizes for the best student graduate researchers on women and gender studies. However, to bring the transnational academic feminist discourses seriously into the country they introduced a master's program on gender and development in 1997 and by 2000 promoted the women

studies unit to become the Institute of Women, Gender and Development Studies to further promote scholarly knowledge on feminist gender issues. Throughout today it remains the country's only institute where feminist scholarship is debated and researched. The Ahfad University for Women assists other universities with capacity building in feminist research methodology or concepts either targeted or upon request. Yet, women's studies or gender issues have been introduced into the curriculum of three other universities, namely at the Sudan University they were integrated into the agricultural courses and their Forestry Master Program with help of Ahfad University for Women staff. Other milestones are the UNESCO chair for women studies established in the same university as well as a new Women, Child and Health Centre offering a diploma in women studies. However, the state owned university is influenced by what the government conceives women studies to be about, which apparently confines women to reproductive role positions, leading to a concentration of the courses on training on women's health, home economics and first aid!

The Gazira University has integrated gender issues in their Reproductive Health and Populations Studies Master Program.

Other universities are including research on gender and women's issues or integrating them into courses upon individual staff members' initiative and interest. The Ismail el-Azhani State University introduced a university degree specialisation on women's studies as part of the faculty of Urban Studies in 2002. It is struggling with what the courses should include and the general idea is to offer a community development with home economics degree. They recently started to recognise the complexity of the degree and they will need support to overcome their difficulties before a decision is made to cancel the degree altogether. This can barely be considered feminism of any kind.

The Khartoum University, the Sudan University and Ahfad University for Women include many activities like workshops, conferences on women's issues, students' extra-curricula activities and doctoral degrees research. Other research centres which are independent of the government engage in research, publications, documentations, conferences debating women's positions, contributions and challenges, and gender training. They are critically discussing the structural causes of women's



subordination and mainly foster a regional Arabic debate on feminism as they train and publish in Arabic. This has brought new and relevant knowledge to help Sudanese feminists to debate their concerns.

On the other hand those research centres that are pro-government or government based do not engage in researching or writing on women's issues of any type. One centre on Women's and Peace Studies recently established in 2004 by the government but as a non-government body is trying to be involved in scholarly research on feminism, but started its own activity with training programs designed to provide planners with gender analysis frameworks. It remains a future potential especially if government positions should change after the peace government is formed.

Hence, from the above it is clear that the same polarisation again holds true that differentiates engagement in women's issues of government academia or research bodies from that of the independent non governmental bodies. In reference to the definition discussed earlier it is safe to consider academic activities and programs offered by government bodies barely feminist as they do not contribute to the dissemination of scholarly knowledge on feminism of any nature nor to the promotion of such knowledge, methodology or research, while those which are independent evidently have more of a feminist agenda. Exceptions on individual level that are not institutionalised remain as a potential to change the political context, help state universities become independent once more and to integrate much of the feminist scholarship. The transdisciplinary crossing boundaries between the academia, civil society members and decision makers is pursued by the Ahfad University for Women, the Sudan University and the Khartoum University, however, at the Sudan University this is limited to the UNESCO women chair, at the Khartoum University to the Institute of Development and Research Studies and its Women's and Development Program established in 1980.

Despite all the restrictions the academic feminist scholarship in the Sudan whether in universities or at research centres has a great potential and could easily be supported to play a greater role by institutional support and capacity building. This most recent period has witnessed more attempts to include women's and gender issues in the academia in spite of the Islamist political context. The impact of the international context was great especially some joint programs with Western universities

which should be encouraged. These have helped both the Ahfad University for Women and the Khartoum University and should be extended to others. There have been no attempts to form a network yet, however, basic networking and taking part in each other's activities has become frequent.

As far as feminism on the ministerial level is concerned there has also been progress during the period 1995-2005. The preparation for the Beijing International Fourth Conference for Women, Beijing + 5 and + 10 as well as other regional conferences on women have put pressure on the government to include women's sections or desks in some ministries. Furthermore UN agencies and one Western government also have given support to help build the capacities of women in the civil service.

Currently, there is a Women, Human Rights and Peace Department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a Women's, Child Affairs Administration at the Ministry of Social Welfare, a Girls Education Department at the Ministry of Education, a Women and Development Section in the Ministry of Agriculture, a Women's Focal Point at the Ministry of Justice, Labour and Industry.

All women holding responsible positions in these offices are subject to training, participate in international meetings and are expected to report to the international community on the women's position in the Sudan at different occasions like meetings. They are expected by civil society and the international community to come up with plans of actions and to help develop a policy framework for women, which has not yet been finalised.

The interlink with the civil society and the academia is a great assistance in developing plans, coordinating reports and executing activities. However, the main problem is that activities are confined within the government framework that understands the meaning of women empowerment only on the economic level and does not recognise equality per se, refuses to ratify the CEDAW. Of the women in top positions in the civil service many are islamically politicised and only few are neutral, thus could only debate certain issues and can barely join in solidarity with all the women in the non-state sector. They themselves are not united for they compete for political recognition and promotion. They also see themselves as patrons or masters of those in



the civil society while many of the latter just ignore them. The issues they have fought for are the establishment of a women's council at ministerial level or a ministry solely for women's issues, a women's committee in the parliament, the preservation of women's rights in labour, maternity leave extension with full payment for eight weeks followed by two years with a basic salary. However, they do not struggle for more women's representation in top executive positions nor do they publicly criticise male domination as the cause of their discrimination and their concentration at the lower scale of employment.

In many cases they take the stands of the male patriarch against activities of the independent NGOs such as in not supporting legislation to forbid all forms of FGM or the ratification of the CEDAW.

However, they join in solidarity with all other women's groups against the passing of an act delivered by the Khartoum state governor forbidding women's work after five p.m. and their participation in work that has been classified by the authorities as damaging their reputation, which includes work in hotels, at petrol stations, in cafés. This was conceived by all women as an infringement of old rights and an opening up to increase the list of what can be prohibited.

A women's solidarity group was established and the case was taken to the constitutional court. Due to all women despite their internal differences opposing the act it was withdrawn, the governor replaced. This so far remains the single joint activity of all women's activists.

The women in the civil service as mostly politicised actors tend to work with government supported NGOs when it comes to writing final reports to agencies or acquiring support from male pro-government consultants. Their feminist project remains limited to forming women's units in parallel ministries in the states and participating in the civil society. Hence, in terms of institutional structures their impact has been increasing compared to the period before 1990, but in terms of societal input their achievement is minimal. They need to acknowledge that they have to stand up for women's concerns and not be the male voice that counters women's activism. Consequently, with even no service and no promotion of the women's profile they have to offer and no changes in the women's civil service positioning they have achieved, they remain to be the least proactive of feminists or activists, particularly as after more than a decade they did not manage to

come up with a state policy for women, a strategic plan of action, funds for women's specific concerns or an improvement of women's human development indicators or government supported projects or programs yet.

Contrary to the women on the ministerial level, women on individual and community level have shown dynamism, formed many country based organisations to help each other, started their own business, headed households, migrated to towns for work or education in large numbers, currently 52% of the students population in universities are females, migrated outside the Sudan, decided to mix with foreigners (an issue that used to be a taboo for Sudanese women especially from educated families). New models of life styles including student or working women living by themselves, marrying in what has become known as secret marriage without family consent, living as partners, becoming active in political and civil societies, in the media and engaging in relief activities that demanded travelling to dangerous zones, aid activities that required late returns home. They managed to combine family responsibility and activism or work without extended family support with only the support of their husbands by negotiating a division of labour.

Consequently, a vibrant change, a feminism on the individual level where women negotiate to stretch their spaces is taking place in the lives of quite different women who differ by political or ideological affiliation, class, ethnic group, age group or marital status.

It is the strength of these women that brings feminism into reality in the Sudanese urban context as well as in many rural areas: changes in gender relations and life styles are forced due to unsettlement and men's absence.

It is the forces of the market economy, education and transmigration together with the little influence of transfeminist movements that brought change to the lives of many women in different ways. We have to emphasise our attention and efforts on these forces as they are the key to let the individual women's forces become collective in order to accelerate change to promote the women's profile, address the root causes of a structural nature to end gender based discrimination, subordination and violence. Seeing this bright picture of individual feminism one must wonder whether it can win against the polarisation of the Sudanese women. This is what



will be discussed in the next section.

### 3.4. *The all Sudanese women's movement polarisation*

The above discussion on feminism in the Sudan along the categorisation of feminism may not capture the true picture in Sudan where polarisation has started to reach a peak between the Islamist and secularist groups. Hence, an analysis of feminism in the Sudan will be undertaken along the categorisation of Islamists and secularists.

The Islamist group could be defined as all those Muslim women who believe that women's rights, identities and any quest for liberation can be found within the Islam, while secularists hold the position that the struggle should be addressed through secular principles and who wish to include women of different religions and ethnic backgrounds.

The women secularists belong to a mixture of upper and middle class, the same applies to the Islamists. Hence, the class discussion conceived as a characteristic of Egyptian feminism does not completely explain the diversity of the Sudanese women along class typologies. However, the rural and poor women are mostly out of touch with the debate. Their lack of basic services obliged all groups to address the basic needs and only minimal awareness raising programs were started aimed at them by some secularists.

#### **1. The Islamists: The Islamists do not form a homogeneous group, but can be sub classified as:**

**1.1.-** Those who do not believe that discussing gender discrimination issues especially as used to be explicit in the Family Law is crucial and emphasise other issues for equality and empowerment basically in the public arena. Hence, they do not consider the private political and fail to spot it as the root cause of women's disempowerment and subordination. They are mostly pro-government and do not indulge in any project that would counter the male dominated Islamic discourse of the pro government conservative theologians. They remain active on women's rights or issues that do not cross with Islamic doctrines, thus debating issues such as education, health and poverty.

**1.2.-** Those who are apologetic to inequalities in Islam, accept them and consider them divine, believe a wisdom to be behind them, even if we as human beings could not perceive its value. Most of them belong to the conservative Islamists and their struggle is to oppose anything

conceived as originating from the "West" including feminist international claims and scholarships. They will remain anti-feminist even if the government were to change its position. They engage in debates to support a conservative Islam as ideal and teach the Qur'an.

**1.3.-** And thirdly, those who think that there is a chance of re-interpretation within the Islam to overcome all inequalities either by a revisiting of the Qur'an by feminist theologians or in the course of comparative law studies and interpretations done in other Muslim countries. The activists of this group do not become involved in issues of re-interpretation themselves and only few are engaged in discussions about what other Islamic groups are disclosing and re-interpreting. This third group of Islamist feminists is mainly non-pro- or outright anti-government.

However, they are not a coherent group either and differ amongst themselves. They share the standpoint that there is no need to refer to discourses outside the Islam. They have not contributed themselves to theology debates, except for a few who refer to male Muslim scholars and their theological standpoints and in a few cases even referring to reinterpretations of the Qur'an.

Some of them consider the opportunity to achieve gender equality by referring to the Republican leader Mahmoud Taha's teachings. Taha points out that the Islam as stated in the Qur'an has two main messages, of which only one is binding to all Muslims at all times concerning the human relation to God. The other message is binding to the people during the time of the prophet only and mainly relates to punishment during life and behaviour, codes of conduct that were specified in Qur'anic verses revealed to the prophet during his time in Medina (622-630). This interpretation makes it easy for women to claim full equality in the Islam by referring to the first message. Any verses that indicate what some feminist consider discriminatory are "Medina Verses" and hence not binding so that Muslims can formulate any new laws as they are relevant to their new sociocultural and political contexts. Therefore Muslims can formulate laws based on the equality principles of the Islam stated in the first message and overcome the details of the second message for the context has changed.

To these women this approach provides the easier road compared to a reinterpretation of each single verse.



However, not many feminist scholars are aware of Taha's writings supporting the Sudanese women. Mahmoud Taha himself was executed for heresy, which has made it difficult for many Sudanese feminists to use his arguments to achieve change in ideology, laws or practice.

It should be noted that at the time when Sudanese Muslim feminists who were not pro-government started to question the need for reinterpretation of the Islam the Sudan was under an Islamic state, hence, they reacted against a state that attempted to usurp some of their rights in the law and constitution in the name of the Islam. Also, they were influenced by the international women's rights agenda and took the relatively progressive discourses of the male Islamist scholars, mainly Turabi, the Islamic Muslim Brothers leader, Sadiq el Mahadi, the Umma Party leader, Mahmoud Taha, the Islamic Republican leader, into account. They could not see how a conservative project for women would prevail in the Sudan. In addition, the international context is conducive to the support of secularist projects.

## 2. The Secularists:

To the secularists it seems easier to change a secular law and depoliticise the Islam considering it a religion for worshipping God and to consider all social or moral issues individual choices of adherence to be judged by God in the after life.

The secularists themselves do not make a coherent group yet. The secularist feminists include Muslims and Christians. What unites them is that their discourse is not based on religion as a source of legislation or on a particular religion, Islam for instance, but rather focuses on the causes of the patriarchy all women regardless of their religion are subordinated to. This unites them in their struggle and could be based on commonalities of plight. In this group issues of belief are only discussed where used by men as source to legitimise their domination, while the struggle itself is not over religion.

What further unites them is that they foresee the achievement of women's emancipation and liberation in reference to international agendas represented in the UN conventions, international conferences recommendations, and plans of actions. They believe that those conventions and recommendations are based on a universal heritage from all civilisations and on the contributions of feminists worldwide and do not conceive them as "Western" or "alien" or irrelevant debates.

Consequently they try to make choices and develop strategies for negotiating their claims. They include different categories of women whose religion is Islam or Christianity or indigenous. They include women from different parts of the Sudan, the North, East, West, South and from the Diaspora. These women also belong to different age groups like those of the first women's movement generation including young women and students. Also they are affiliated with NGOs, the academia, political parties and other nongovernmental actors and with a few women inside the government. They could be classified in two groups, the North based feminist secularists and the South based feminist secularists. The northern group includes a majority of Muslim women, while the southern majority belongs to Christianity.

### 2.1. The North based secularist feminists:

The groups of this category work to preserve political and labour rights against potential regression. Moreover, with males they lead the debate to implement a non-religious source of all legislation. It is worth mentioning that the first Sudanese constitution of 1956 did not refer to sources of legislation and hence remained silent about religion, which resulted in laws not being based on the Sharia. This heritage serves as a precedent for the current debates and laws.

Most activists of this category also campaign for women's rights, legal reform, against violence against women, FGM, for girls' education, peace building strategies and awareness raising at grass root levels, engage in advocacy, lobbying and networking with the International community. There are more capacity building efforts on the medium level and just a few on the grass roots level.

### 2.2. The South based secularist feminists:

The emerging southern feminism (1990-2005) of the Sudanese People Liberation Movement (SPLM) and other southern or Nubian groups have a different agenda, being mostly non-Muslim. However, they also strive for emancipation from an African tradition towards a secular law along international principles of human rights and women's conferences plans of action. Their debate is less complicated, yet the struggle to overcome a patriarchal traditional system is not easy. Recently they have worked united with the men against the Northerners' domination. Yet, they also put forward their women's agenda for public and political representation through a "quota" system. They are organising to address women's





needs during rehabilitation and peace building. However, they may miss the chance to bring their feminist agenda to defy patriarchy as another form of domination in a general revolution against domination. To achieve this they need to consider solidarity with the secularist feminists in the North. Officially, within the new government after the peace agreement, their allies in the government are the Islamists. If it is the Islamist feminist, which side they will take and how they play the game remains to be seen in the future as the CPA has been signed only recently. The whole future of the movement is at a critical juncture.

The part of the Sudanese feminist movement upholding secular discourses has yet to fight a struggle with Islamic theologians, both males and females, with the bureaucrats, judiciary, other political leaders and society at large. They have to unite the Northerners with the Southerners for their future struggle. Both strategic planning and visionary leaders are needed for the new phase of the struggle to advocate and apply gender equality and end patriarchy for the Sudan. There are many issues beneficiary to their unity in the context of legal debates and religion, such as working on literacy, the reduction of maternal mortality and poverty alleviation. Yet, debating patriarchy in both the private and the public spheres is crucial to give women more space to address their diverse plights. The issue of persistent illiteracy and maternal mortality as well as feminised poverty are gender issues and without addressing the structural causes of women's subordination they can not be effectively reduced. Hence, the secularist feminists have to lead the struggle to address these issues publicly and to break the silence by disclosing patriarchy.

#### 4. Conclusion

Reviewing the feminist scene in the Sudan from a historical evolutionary perspective leading to their classification into time periods a solidarity movement prevailed from just before independence to the early seventies. A lack of movement internal solidarity and increasing polarisation is characteristic in the following period up to this date. The polarisation can be located between the standpoints of "Islamism" and "secularism" or on the basis of regionalism between the North and the South. Others may classify the polarisation on a generational gap or along what strategies and/or programs are used. Moreover, an understanding of what feminism is all about and how it is defined could also be the basis of classifications.

I have attempted to use different ways of classifications based on a comprehensive understanding as well as on

different definitions of feminism. Hence, all women's groups and movements, even single actions are considered having a degree of feminism. Feminism to me stretches over a continuum that starts from the minimum of at least addressing women's basic needs or rights to the maximum of addressing the structural root causes of subordination and violence. The horizon for feminism is wide, elastic and changing with time and place. Hence, it is my belief that we need to keep it broad and inclusive in a way as I have tried to present feminisms in the Sudan in this paper. Recognizing the diversity of the Sudanese nation and of the Sudanese women's identities and their historicity one needs to reach a broad understanding of feminism in order to encompass the diversity. Exclusionist agendas, frameworks and theorising can not be part of my standpoint. It is necessary to understand feminism in the Sudan by using a methodology that reaches the scene as it unfolds using different ways of analysis that can lead to classifications helpful for further analysis. These classifications do not reflect closed boundaries but rather resemble the actual context feminists work in as much as possible. The classifications or the polarisation that is indicated need yet to be critically analysed and should be the basis to debating issues of hierarchy and power. It needs to be deliberated which group has power and domination over the political and social scene that influence women's positioning. The question of what is the basis for each category to gain power and legitimacy needs to be further researched. The issue of identity politics needs a framework of analysis encompassed within a broader debate and definition of difference that besides exclusive feminism issues includes racism, ethnicity, and class. The latter are not yet debated within the Sudanese context to discuss the interrelation between the three concepts and feminism. The current polarisation based on ideology or religion can get materialised in the future on other bases of identity politics mainly around not only gender but ethnic and class hierarchies and power relations. The question that remains to be highlighted is whether feminism can transcend them or even more important whether we need them to be transcended. The debate on cultural relativism can make us agree that different forms of feminism are all legitimate. How many will agree to debates of cultural relativism still needs further research.

Future research is needed on how Sudanese feminist groups of the different categories conceptualise and translate feminism. This paper could be considered a



descriptive contribution among others undertaken in this direction. The context still needs further debate and research both on the conceptual level of the meaning of difference, identity, and feminism, as well as on the experiential and relational levels of agency, oppression, power, and social positioning.

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## 6. Endnotes

1 However, few Sufist sectors and tribal groups have been reached by civil society between 2000 and 2005. To obtain their support for political purposes, the government is now trying to organise the Sufists into a council.