Reclaiming Feminist Postcoloniality: Negotiating Nationalism, Gender Politics and Violence in Sudan and the Nuba Mountains

by

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Abstract

This dissertation is a study of how and why post-colonial nationalism in Sudan is implicated in violence, and how indigenous, national, and international feminist/women’s organizations in Sudan contest ongoing violence.

Through a literature review, semi-structured interviews and synthesis of organizations’ documents, I engaged in a qualitative case study with three women’s organisations. I interviewed 22 research participants (18 women and 4 men). I disentangle the relationship between post-colonial nationalism and violence by illustrating how gendered racialized violence is viewed by some in Sudan as a condition characterizing the “post-colonial” nation-state.

Although independence brought certain levels of freedom and emancipation, the patriarchal processes of state formation and post-colonial nationalism, aided by global capitalism resulted in gendered and racialized violence. I show how the conceptualization of the national and the international spheres replicate erasure of the experience of intersectional forms of violence, failing to account for the historical specificity of the material conditions of women from the Nuba Mountains. I demonstrate how the three organizations are situated differently at the intersection of the interests of the state’s national agenda and the North-South donors’ desire for “modernization” and “development”.

The study reveals that in Africa, including Sudan, there is no such thing as an authentic African feminism. Instead, there are multiple forms of feminisms and women organizing. Also, the study argues that by not attending to the racialized history of the Sub-Saharan slave trade, the dominant “radical” Third World feminist postcolonial discourse, which fundamentally grounds its argument on important global forces such as imperialism and political economy, fails to speak to differences within Third World nations across race/ethnicity and gender. The study calls for
the need for African postcolonial feminists to deconstruct the ‘post’ in the post-colonial and raise the fundamental question of post-colonial for whom? stressing the need to redefine Africa post-coloniality on gendered, race/ethnicity as well as class grounds. The study deconstructs the local-global locational dichotomies; both national and global forces are implicated in shaping local politics, recognizing that national as well transnational solidarity which is anti-racist, anti-capitalist and anti-imperialist remain promising strategies to address violence at a local level.
Lay Summary

This research investigates the complex relationship between feminism, nationalism, and violence in the context of the state formation process in Sudan and the civil war associated with. Through the theme of violence, I demonstrate how the experiences of Sudanese women from war zones, especially from the Nuba Mountains, are accounted for by the theorization and practical engagement of the local, national and international feminist/women’s organizations. The goal of this research is to identify gaps in both the conceptual and methodological engagement of the theses three level of organizing in order to explore potential strategic linkages to more effectively mitigate racialized gendered violence in Sudan and the Nuba Mountains. This research constitutes an addition to the literature on feminisms, nationalism and violence. In particular, the research enriches African feminist literature by contributing to the understanding of what constitutes as a postcolonial African feminist organization in the context of “post-colonial Africa”.
Preface

This dissertation is an original intellectual product of Amel Abdelfadil Eldihaib Elradi. The fieldwork reported in Chapter 5, 6, 7 was covered by UBC Ethics Certificate H14-02536-A004
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<tr>
<td>CEDAW</td>
<td>Committee on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women</td>
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<td>CPA</td>
<td>The Comprehensive Peace Agreement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DAW</td>
<td>Division for the Advancement for Women</td>
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<tr>
<td>ICC</td>
<td>Criminal Court</td>
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<tr>
<td>IGO</td>
<td>Intergovernmental organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INGO</td>
<td>International non-governmental organization</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INSTRAW</td>
<td>International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-governmental Organization</td>
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<tr>
<td>NCP</td>
<td>National Congress Party</td>
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<tr>
<td>NIF</td>
<td>National Islamic Front</td>
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<tr>
<td>NuWEDA</td>
<td>Nuba Women for Education and Development Association</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>OSAGI</td>
<td>Office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SPLA/M</td>
<td>Sudan’s People Liberation Army/Movement</td>
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<td>SWGN</td>
<td>Sudan Women’s General Union</td>
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<td>SWU</td>
<td>Sudanese Women Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>UN Women</td>
<td>United Nation Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women.</td>
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<tr>
<td>UNIFEM</td>
<td>United Nations Development Fund for Women</td>
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Glossary

For the sake of clarity, here I specify how I intend several key terms to be understood within this research. In my writing, I use **patriarchy** to define systems and structures that sustain gender inequality. I use the term **racialized African/Nuba Women** to refer to a population that has been subjected to racial categorization in Sudan; who are classified as black/Africans (non-Arab) race in the context of Sudan. I distinguish between the use of the terms of **post-colonial** and **postcolonial**. While I use postcolonial to refer to the theory/discourse, I use post-colonial as a historical marker; to refer to time after independence. My use of the term postcolonial signifies an analysis of the legacies of both colonialism (in its historical sense), its ongoing legacies, and imperialism (in the sense of linked contemporary power relations). I use the term **hegemonic nationalism** to refer specifically to the ethnic/religious (Arabic/Islamic) nationalism in Sudan. I use the broad term **violence** to refer to multiple specific forms of violence that extend beyond bodily violence, to also include broader notions such as cultural, political, economic and legal violence. This term includes gendered and racial violence by the state and capitalist globalization. I use **decolonization** to refer to a methodology of deconstructing power dynamics and colonial ideologies in relation to land, minds and actions by attending to power differentials along the axes of gender, race, class, religion and geography. I use the terms “**Western**” and “**Third World**” both as concepts and categories used to broadly group nations based on their distinct cultural, economic and political power. While the term Western countries is used to refer to First World or “developed countries”, Third World is used to refer to “developing” countries of the South that have had a colonial past. It is worth noting that in this thesis, while I use these terms, I refrain from treating concepts of “Third World” and the “West” as denoting singular, monolithic or stable categories, following the position of Chandra Talpade Mohanty.
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Dedication

I dedicate this to

People from the Nuba Mountains, particularly Nuba women

My mother Fatima Elsheikh Elharen, who’s lived experience shaped my orientation to social justice.
Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Sudan Demography and the Nuba

Sudan\(^1\) is a multicultural, multiethnic, and multilingual country that is often described as the microcosm of Africa. According to 1955/56 census—the last one to include data of ethnicity and language—38.9% of the population identified as Arab and the rest as Africans. However, 51.5% of the population are “primary Arabic speakers” (Sharkey, 2008, p. 24). It is estimated that there are 570-595 tribal groups constituting 56 ethnic categories (Sharkey, 2008). Moreover, there are more than 100 African languages and several dialects, with many languages “facing potential extinction” (Sharkey, 2008, p. 24). Although each of the non-Arabic speaking tribes and groups has its own language or dialect, “Arabic is used as a lingua franca by most of them” (El-Battahani, 2009, p. 34). Religious cleavages in Sudan are related to ethnic ones, but the Islam–Christianity dichotomy is as misleading as the Arab–African one (ibid). Generally, Muslims, Christians and Animists can be distinguished, but with each category further subdivided on different bases. While 98 per cent of the northern Sudanese are Muslim (mostly Sunni), Christianity is dominant in South Sudan and some parts in the Nuba Mountains, with four-fifth as Roman Catholics, while the majority of the southerners, and a section from the Nuba and Beja, are animist worshipping (ibid).

The Nuba are an ethnic group that are indigenous to the region of the Nuba Mountains, a hilly space surrounded by fertile land, located in the border between the South Sudan state and the Sudan state. The Nuba are constituted by ten ethnic subdivisions or tribes. Although they share a common ethnic origin, they are heterogeneous in terms of languages and religion\(^2\). The ten Nuba tribes are: Kowalib, Tegali, Talodi-Masakin, Laofa, Talodi-Kadugli, Daju, Temayn, K

\(^1\) Worth noting here that Sudan here refers to old Sudan before the separation of South Sudan.

\(^2\) While each tribe has its own language, some of the Nuba also speak Arabic.
tla, Nyimang, and Hill Nubawi. While some Nuba are Muslim or Christian, most Nuba are animists, worshipping or followers of their own kujurs or rainmakers (El-Battahani, 2009).

1.2 Sudan and Contemporary Violence

The contemporary humanitarian crises, civil war, and violence against indigenous people in Sudan, including the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile and Darfur are rooted in the colonial and precolonial history of Trans-Saharan slave trade, racism and the institutionalized violence associated with them (Deng, 2004; Salih, 1995, Idris, 2005). While legacies of slavery (which are detailed in Chapter 4), racial and religious identities were consolidated early into independence (Khalid, 1990; Deng, 2005; Abdel-Rahim, 1996; Idris, 2005), it should be noted that slave trade in Sudan was abolished by the British in 1920. However, the process of emancipating the slaves took a very long time. Ex-slaves gradually turned to paid domestic and farm work in North and central Sudan. In Chapter 4, where I discuss with more details the legacy of slavery, I will also discuss the process of slave emancipation in Sudan.

Worth however noting that this dissertation will not address the case of Blue Nile and Darfur and will only focus on the Nuba Mountains for the following reasons: First, the pre-colonial and colonial histories of the theses three are different. Secondly, the south-north geographical and cultural locations of the three regions differ; both Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile are a transitional areas (located right in between South and north Sudan, as well, some of the people in these regions are Muslim while others are Christians), while Darfur is part of Sudan and almost all people in Darfur are Muslims.

Sudan’s colonial period involved two periods of rule by foreign powers, separated by a national revolution. The Al Mahadia national revolution (1885-1898) ended the Ottoman or Turco-Egyptian Empire (1821-1881). The British defeated the Al Mahadia national revolution,
resulting in Anglo-Egyptian colonial rule (1899-1955), which lasted until the formation of the independent modern state of Sudan in 1956.

The national governments of Sudan’s tumultuous post-colonial experience have varied between democratic and military regimes, but all embraced the ethno-cultural Islamic/Arabic as the foundation for state nationalism to varying degrees. The Nimeiri government, which ruled from 1969 until 1985, declared Sudan as an Islamic state with Sharia Law as the law of the land. A transitional government existed briefly after Nimeiri was overthrown in 1985 through civilian protests (Intifada). In 1986, a new democratic government was elected but was overthrown in 1989 by a military coup supported by the National Islamic Front (NIF). The new government established itself as the National Salvation Revolution Government led by the National Congress Party (NCP), and has ruled Sudan since.

Amir Idris (2005) argues that through the use of physical violence, the post-colonial Sudanese state differentiated Arab/Muslim identities from African/Non-Muslim ones. Physical characteristics mark racial difference in Sudan, along with language, religion, and cultural practices (Jok, 2007). Non-Arab groups, such as the Nuba for example, are categorized as black African. In forging an ethnic and cultural nationalism since independence, Sudan’s ruling class has imposed an imagined ethnic and cultural “post-colonial” national identity, forcing groups who do not identify with this imagined nation to assimilate. Mostly indigenous black Africans, including people from the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile, Darfur, and East Sudan, as well as the Nubians, are forced to assimilate. The resulting tensions have defined contemporary violence and humanitarian crises in these regions.

Although civil war in the Nuba Mountains began in the 1980s, violence became well established by the end of 1991, two years after the current government took power. According to
Juma Kunda Komey (2015), “Great secrecy, physical genocide and cultural genocide (ethnocide) were perpetrated. As a result, by the early 1990s, some 60,000 to 70,000 Nuba had been killed in government military operations” (p. 21). As people from war zone regions of Sudan continue to live with daily shootings and attacks, especially in the Nuba Mountains, many have also been displaced, losing their livelihoods and social networks. Those internally displaced to North Sudan have become a distinct racial group — “black African” — based on their skin colour and language and have had to cope with new economic and social roles and financial hardship.

In the early 1990s, the Sudanese state rigorously implemented neoliberal structural adjustment policies, which limited state provisions of basic social services. The poorest suffered the most (Sahl, 1996). United Nations agencies and non-governmental organizations (NGOs), including women’s groups, increasingly provided these basic services in war zones and other marginalized regions in Sudan. While difficult for Nuba people displaced to other regions in north and central Sudan, the situation is particularly dire for those still living in the Nuba Mountains. Since 2011, the government of Sudan has restricted humanitarian assistance in the area, effectively ending the comprehensive peace agreement and actualizing the separation of South Sudan.

Violence in Africa and in Sudan is not a result of only patriarchal state formation and post-colonial nationalism, but is also connected to globalization, capitalism and neoliberal economic policies; all intersect into interlocking systems of power to shape women’s experiences of violence. Capitalism, globalization and the neoliberal economy operate at the global level through debt. The presence of transnational and multinational corporations, in most cases, results in armed conflict associated with the exploitation of natural resources.
1.3 Feminism, Nationalism and Violence

Feminist politics, aimed at the promotion of women's position and power in all societies has had to confront the reality that their positions, as that of the men in their national collectivities, are constructed by a myriad of social divisions and other historical forces. Only by acknowledging and confronting differences among women as well as among men, can there be any process of political dialogue which could transcend and bridge these differences. (Yuval-Davis, 2003, p.9)

The relationship between feminisms and nationalism is complex and situated both geographically and historically. Nation-building and discourses of nationalism are multidimensional and historically specific (Yuval-Davis, 2003). In all official nationalist projects, gender relations are crucial in the construction of the collective national identity (ibid). These official hegemonic\(^3\) nationalist discourses are continuously contested however, especially by groups excluded from the collective national identity, indigenous groups, and women, in particular. Relations between people and their home lands/regions have generated alternative discourses of nationalism to contest official narratives (Radcliffe and Westwood, 1996). Many feminist and women’s movements across Third World countries contest nationalist gender politics and women’s embodiments of ideals of nationalism (ibid).

Women generally have an ambivalent position within collective national identities and are “often excluded from the collective ‘we’ of the body politic and retain an object position” (Yuval-Davis, 2003, p.19). Women are not exclusively victims or objects of nationalist discourse however. As argued by Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989), different women within the same nation are situated differently in nationalist discourse, either as victims or as privileged bearers of cultural authenticity (Kandiyoti, 1991). Within the context of ethnic nationalism and armed conflict, women whose identities intersect with other social differences such as race/ethnicity,

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\(^3\) In this dissertation, I use hegemony in the broader sense indicating domination and use of power.
class and religion, and who represent the “other” in the nationalist discourse are often most impacted (Yuval-Davis, 2007).

Independent of each other, women’s movements across Africa developed relationships to their official nationalist discourse by contesting, maintaining or even reproducing it (Tripp, 2003; Salo, 2001). For example, in Sudan, feminist and women’s organizations emerged at different historical junctures and are products of different cultural, social, geographical and political contexts at local, national and international levels. These variables shaped their feminist politics in regard to nationalism and violence. Their activism agendas and engagement are influenced by the different power structures in which each feminist and women’s organization is embedded, as they are constantly contesting and negotiating their gender politics in relation to the broader dynamics of their society, state and international donors.

1.4 Research Purpose and Questions

The research informing this thesis investigates the relationship between feminisms, nationalism, and violence in the context of state formation in Sudan and the civil war associated with, with particular attention to feminist politics and responses in the form of NGOs. Literature on feminisms, nationalism, violence and the gender politics of the state in post-colonial Sudan is limited. Existing work is largely concerned with gender politics at the national level, with less attention to intersectional analysis. Much of this work is in the form of media publications or organizational reports, which are difficult to access. The current government has used non-governmental publications on issues of gender, sexual violence, religion or race in relation to state nationalism and violence as evidence to persecute activists and human rights defenders, which may explain the scarcity of published references.
This dissertation adds to this limited body of literature. Most significantly, it seeks to complicate and enrich existing conversations by conducting an intersectional analysis of gendered violence as theorized and taken up by different levels of feminist/women’s organizations in Sudan. Beyond what is specific to Sudan, this research makes important contributions to African feminist literature by enhancing the understanding of what constitutes an African feminist organization and, more specifically, by complicating discussions about what counts as a postcolonial feminist organization in the context of post-colonial Africa.

By engaging with both theoretical literature and empirical evidence generated from interviews, this thesis addresses four questions. I respond to the first question theoretically by engaging with literature. My responses to the remaining three questions are analyses of empirical data from case studies of three feminist/women’s organizations. These are: Nuba Women for Education and Development Association (NuWEDA), which is a local/indigenous organization; Sudanese Women Union (SWU), which is a national women’s organization, and the United Nations Entity for Gender and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women), which is an international women’s organization.

The questions examined are:

1. How has nationalism been defined in post-colonial Sudan and how is it implicated in gendered and racialized violence?
2. How do the three organizations conceptualize violence against women in Sudan?
3. How are gender politics in Sudan negotiated by the three organizations?
4. What does being feminist mean for the three organizations?

This dissertation explains how feminist/women’s organizations operating at different levels in Sudan address violence. The research also explores how each organization conceptualizes and engages with gendered violence as intersectional —as it relates to the multiple systems of oppression and the centrality of race— in the context of the Sudan state.
formation and post-colonial nationalism. This dissertation ultimately seeks to illuminate the ways in which the politics of feminism and activism of these feminist/women’s organizations are influenced by ideology, geography, race, class, and their relations with the state and international donors. I also seek to understand how these influences may lead to a divergence or consistency between theory and practice in the work of these organizations. By pursuing this goal, the research identifies gaps in both the conceptual and practical engagement of feminist/women’s organizations in addressing violence, while exploring the potential strategic linkages among them to effectively mitigate racialized gendered violence in the Nuba Mountains in particular, and in Sudan in general.

1.5 A Brief History of Sudanese Women Organizing

The Sudanese women’s movements began during the 1940s, mostly engaged with anti-colonial national struggles and therefore becoming an integral part of the national liberation movement (ElBakri, 1995). Following independence, different regimes (democratic and military) adopted different nationalist projects in which gender relations remained central. Common among these regimes is that each set up their own women’s organization to present the hegemonic vision and ideology of the nationalist project of the state vis-a-vis the question of women.

When the current government —the National Islamic Front (NIF) took power in 1989, it implemented a nationalist effort called the “Islamic Civilization Project” that combined modernist and ethnocentric cultural (Islamic/Arabic) nationalisms to counter modern international politics. Leaders saw this nationalist project as a mission for the “renewal of Islamic civilization,” based on the NIF interpretation of “authentic Islam.” In 1990, the government established the “Sudan Women’s General Union” (SWGN), which received funding
from the state and acted as the national machinery for women’s rights and the state doctrine of feminism (Mahmoud, 2008; Khalid, 1987). All civil organizations whose ideologies the government considered un-Islamic or secular were made illegal, including those advocating for competing nationalist projects based on civic citizenship rights. Organizations that promoted gender equality and human rights based discourse were generally not allowed to engage in civic activism and were neither sanctioned nor registered. According to Al Nagar and Tønnessen (2017),

To implement its Islamisation project during the initial years of its rule, the regime banned the activities of all political parties, and all NGOs were dissolved, forced to re-register and go through security screening, since many were considered to be affiliated with the oppositional political parties. Generally, all non-governmental groups worked with some caution during this period, as their activities were monitored closely by security. (p. 145)

Also, in the beginning of ruling of this government, words such as “gender” were widely contested by the government as “Westernized” and imperialist ideas. Civil society organizations, NGOs and UN staff had to be wary of using terms such as “human rights,” “gender equality”, “democracy”, “good governance” and the like, especially when liaising with government authorities or seeking approval for their project’s activities. Therefore, the space for activism was open without restriction only to charity and Islamic organizations that were loyal to the government’s ideology (Al Nagar and Tønnessen, 2017). This politically-tense environment limited the space for social justice movements during these early years of this government.

It is worth noting that in Sudan there is no a single “Sudanese women’s movement”, that brings all women and feminists groups together in Sudan, but scattered organizations with different agenda and gender politics both at national and local level. Sondra Hale (2001) broadly categorizes women’s activism in Sudan into three broad types of movement “one is represented by the secular left [including SWU, SPLAM-Women’s wing, among other] …A second type
comprises the cultural nationalists/religionists [including SWGU, which is NIF women’s wing and women’s wing of Umma party and Democratic Union Part and few Christian groups]…A third type is represented by grassroots activists, including some nongovernmental organizations (NGOs)” (p. 84). Hale argues that while the first and the second type of women’s activism are mostly concerned with gender and the state (i.e. mostly serve the agenda of the state and the political parties’ institutions), the third group of women’s activism remain autonomous, therefore articulate radical transformatory agendas. Sondra notes that despite the diversity of women’s activism in Sudan it varies across race, generations and ideologies: “we are seeing southern women challenge northern women for their racism and conservatism; younger women challenge the old leadership for their outdated ideas; secular and religious women’s organizations each observing the organizing strategies of the other; women protesting war and militarism as a solution or even as good politics; and a number of women theorists and activities resisting the notion that politics consists only of political parties and the state” (p. 84).

The 1995 United Nations Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing opened a new space for women and feminist organizations in Sudan, especially because international donors began allocating funding for gender-related agendas. By 1996, new civil society organizations emerged in Sudan and new discourses on gender equality were explored (Al Nagar and Tønnessen, 2017). It is during this time that local and indigenous feminist organizations from marginalized war zones emerged. With support from international donors, most of these organizations targeted violence and the material conditions of populations affected by conflict. Nuba Women for Education and Development Association (NuWEDA), for example, among other organizations from the Nuba Mountains, South Sudan and Blue Nile, came into being
during this time. In 1997, NuWEDA started its work among internally displaced Nuba in shanty residential areas.

Based on international human rights, the 1995 Beijing Platform of Action outlined its definition of gender equality. The Sudanese state contested this definition, based on its own ideas about what gender equality meant at the family level, as supported by Islamic Family Law, and the public-private distinction of women rights (ibid). Issues relating to violence against women in the private sphere (such as family planning, domestic violence, polygamy, female genital mutilation (FGM)) were finally opened for debate and have been widely debated and contested at the state level by different civil society organizations. The Convention of Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) has been central to this debate, as the state did not ratify the convention, claiming that some of its articles were in direct conflict with Islamic Family Law. A major struggle over what constitutes violence against women resulted, in which international and some national civil society organizations argued for a human rights based conceptualization, while the government insisted on a cultural relativist conceptualization.

In 2000, a new international discourse on women and war that focused on peace and security in countries affected by conflict was introduced with the adoption of United Nations Security Resolution 1325. This discourse enabled women’s engagement with peace and conflict resolution and many feminist and women’s organizations had women participate in peace negotiations, including indigenous women organizations from war zones. Further encouraging women’s participation, many international organizations (INGOs) came to work in Sudan around this period and promoted gender equality. Reflecting the proliferation of these ideas, UN Women established a country office in Sudan in 2010 with the mandate to empower women and to promote gender equality based on the ideas of human rights.
1.6 Conceptual Framework

1.6.1 Nationalism

The pursuit of safe places and ever-narrower conceptions of community relies on unexamined notions of home, family, and nation, and severely limits the scope of the feminist inquiry and struggle. The challenge, then, is to find ways of conceptualizing community differently without dismissing its appeal and importance. (Mohanty, 2003. p. 85)

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The history of nations and nationalism in all parts of the world is a controversial and emotional topic. This response stems from nationalism, in both its primordial and modern forms, being either a unifying emotional force or a destabilizing one. Nationalism is a cultural identity strategy to foster unity among diverse people, and, at times, a political ideological project that reproduces hegemonic power to serve capitalism’s political agenda. Postcolonial scholars (Bhabha, 1990; Anderson, 1991) understand the nation and nationalism to be culturally and socially constructed narratives, including political ideologies of assimilation in which hegemonic national narratives determine who belongs and who does not. In defining the nation, Homi Bhabha (1990) writes: “Nations, like narratives, lose their origins in the myths of time and only fully encounter their horizons in the mind's eye” (1990, p.1). For Bhabha, ‘imagining the nation’ requires the narration and construction of a specific national story, a cultural representation charged with symbols and meaning that, as Benedict Anderson (1991) argued before him, are produced and called upon by the political community in power. Besides being a socially and culturally imagined narrative, the nation is also theorized to be constructed both in the past and for the future. Making such narratives real in the minds of citizens requires the coordinated involvement of all institutions that represent and reproduce the nation “through religious, political, and cultural ceremonies, through education and the uses of media” (Mayer, 2004, p. 155).
In highlighting the limitations and the exclusionary aspect of the imagined ideology of the nation-state, both Anderson (1991) and Ashcroft et al. (1998) point out the limitations of the modern concept of the imagined nation and of nationalism as they function through the process of exclusion for not only outsiders but also insiders who do not fit within the narrative of the defined national identity. Consequently, nationalism can generate ethno-national and ethno-religious struggles and violence, a phenomenon increasingly common throughout the world (Dandeker, 1998; Mayer, 2004).

Feminist deconstruction reveals the gendered and sexist character of imagined nationalisms and associated state forms (Yuval-Davis, 1997), paying particular attention to how they are implicated in colonial legacies and capitalism (Kandiyoti, 1990). Diverse women are homogenized within the nation as ‘woman’ and used as a symbol to embody the nation, while men are presented as the actual representatives of the nation (ibid). Masculinity is central to the construction of nationhood, which requires specific notions of “womanhood…[and] “manhood, through the construction of the idea of the home” (Yuval-Davis, 1997, p.95). As such, women are constructed as symbols of cultural identity as well as biological reproducers of the nation, thus, heteronormativity is also a central part of nationalism (Peterson, 1990; Alexander, 1994).

Gendering nationalism is used to define the “other” and assert cultural difference. For example, during liberation struggles, women and their bodies served as a battleground between nationalist liberation movements and colonial powers. Women were also used as symbols of both cultural resistance and cultural authenticity by nationalist liberation movements against the colonial imperialist “civilization” project. Deniz Kandiyoti (1991) discusses how gendered violence in the form of cultural nationalism carried over from colonial to the post-colonial era. She explains that women’s participation in liberation and anti-colonial struggles did not translate
into liberation for women in most post-colonial Third World countries, where the narrative of the nation and nationalism remain based on culture, colonial history, kinship, and economic capitalism—all of which are intrinsically gendered and exclusionary. The conflicts of interest between post-colonial nationhood and gender oppression on one hand, and the "liberating" narratives of nationalism on the other, placed women in a dangerous contradiction (ibid). This ensured that women continued to serve as tools for imperial resistance, during both colonial and post-colonial periods (Woodhull, 2003). Since the construction of nationalism revolves around women and women’s bodies, it is women’s bodies that “become the site of viewing the nation” (Mayer, 2004, p. 157). Women become the site of contest “not only between men and women but also between men of one nation and the men of another” (ibid, p.157). The result is a complex relationship between feminism and nationalism.

In Africa, women’s experiences of post-colonialism and the violence associated with the post-colonial state vary. Women who represent the “other” in postcolonial nationalist discourse are arguably the most affected, having to bear multiple forms of violence based on their gender, race and ethnicity, religion, class and geographic location. Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) and Patricia Hill Collins (1993; 2000) challenge the notion that gender is the foundation of oppression and violence and the entry point to its analysis. Instead, they argue that oppression based on gender, race, class, and religion combine to create interconnected and interlocking systems of oppression. African feminists emphasize how violence against women is not singularly shaped by patriarchy as a system of power, but also by racism, sexuality, class, capitalism, the history of slavery, and geography (Goredema, 2010). They also emphasize how women from developing nations bear the negative consequences of natural disasters, debt,
capitalism and structural imbalances. Globalization and ongoing war interventions challenge the 
convention about who constitutes the category ‘women’ in Africa and how to eradicate violence.

1.6.2 Violence

In explaining the dynamics of violence, Johan Galtung (1990) theorizes the 
interrelatedness of direct, structural, and cultural violence. Catia C. Confortini (2006) argues that 
feminist perspectives can enrich Galtung's theory by approaching violence as a process through 
which violent social relations are built, legitimized, reproduced, and naturalized. In this thesis, I 
address violence in its multiple forms (direct, cultural and structural) through a feminist lens. 

Feminist theorists deconstruct concepts of violence and security from a perspective of 
gender to reveal their gendered foundations (Tripp et al., 2013; Confortini, 2006, Sjoberg et al., 
2010; Cohn et al., 2004; Enloe, 2000). A gendered approach as such reveals that violence against 
women is a systemic problem (occurring during both social collapse and peacetime) in which the 
state is responsible for enabling, facilitating, legitimizing and/or perpetuating gender based 
violence (Sanford et al., 2016). This approach resonates with my understanding of violence in 
Sudan whereby nationalism and militarism intersect to produce gendered racialized violence. In 
war zones in Sudan, women’s bodies and sexuality are used as political and cultural sites to 
enforce and invoke a nationalist agenda (Sondra Hale. 2010; Jok, 1999). For example, rape and 
sexual violence are used as weapons of torture and as a war strategy, as well as for the social 
production of the nation. Sondra Hale (2010) argues that women’s bodies became physical 
targets of the enemy in Darfur and the Nuba Mountains where rape is used both for identity 
erasure and marker. Alternatively, Jok Madut Jok (1999) explains how the Dinka liberation 
struggle against North Sudan envisioned women as reproducers of the nation. Because so many 
men perished during the war this gave way to young violent men assuming rights over women’s
sexuality and in turn sanctioned violence against women. Women in Sudan are also expected to embody the ideals of nationalism, which is gendered and racial; failure to do so exposes different women to different forms of state violence. Feminist postcolonial scholars have demonstrated how unburied histories of colonialism can explain such contemporary violence against women in Africa. Colonialism enforced specific gendered roles and rendered African women more vulnerable to violence (Mama, 1997; Geiger et al, 2002).

Feminists calling for the theorization of violence have also encouraged scholars to look beyond local contexts to address global power relations. They argue that both state and global systems are patriarchal and implicated in producing violence at local levels (Tripp, 2013; Mama, 2012; Cockburn, 2010; Enloe, 2000). As Amina Mama (2012) explains, militarization and armed conflict at the state level is mediated by highly specific militaristic definitions of national security. For Mama, the notion of national security is shaped by gender, class, and other more context-specific power relations, and the very conceptualization of national security therefore generates insecurity for women in Africa. Redefining national security, according to Mama, requires dismantling the patriarchal base of its power. Chapter 4 of this thesis explores how national security in contemporary post-colonial state of Sudan required specific gender, race and religious divisions.

Contesting global-local power relations, Erin Baines (2017) argues that feminist transnational and humanitarian responses meant to promote gender equality fail to challenge relations of power, therefore confining war affected (refugee/displaced) women to their own bodies. Examining cases from Bosnia-Herzegovina, Rwanda and Guatemala, Baines demonstrates how transnational humanitarian agencies employ “gender mainstreaming” to integrate displaced/refugee women into existing institutions, policies and programs in an effort to
promote gender equality. This approach sometimes challenges but also sustains gender
differentiation, thus confining refugee/displaced persons to their gendered bodies and obscuring
other relations of power. Baines further argues that since nation-building is a struggle over body
politics at the national level and over displaced body at a local level, the politics of the body
must be an integral part of transnational feminist analyses. Heeding Baines’ call, this thesis
illustrates how each of three feminist and women’s organizations engage with the politics of
women’s bodies and the associated violence.

1.7 Methodological Framework

Decolonization is about deconstructing the way power is used to produce systems of
domination and inequality and understanding how our location shapes the way we understand the
world. Mohanty (2003) deconstructs the binary notion of power as powerless versus powerful.
Dorothy Smith (1987) further conceptualizes power as relations of ruling and a way to organize
society, whereby those with power construct values and rules that inform institutional practices.
It is within this conceptualization of power that I engage with decolonizing epistemology.

Recognizing the complex positionalities of women in the nation and nationalism, I have
approached the research and analysis for this dissertation qualitatively. The questions asked, and
methods employed are informed by a decolonizing anti-racist feminist approach, attending to
power differentials along the axes of gender, race, class, religion and geography that are
implicated in violence. As such, I am able to rethink processes of nationalism and feminism
through the centrality of gender and race. Power relations between research participants and the
researcher as insider/outsider is key in this thesis and ensures the research process is guided by a
feminist orientation toward social justice – from research design, to data generation and analysis,
to knowledge sharing activities. For this study, I selected three women’s organizations that
operate at different levels of politics: the Nuba Women for Education and Development (NuWEDA), the Sudanese Women Union (SWU) and UN Women. I sought to examine how each organization conceptualizes and practically engages to address violence in Sudan. Data were generated through literature review, semi-structured interviews and from key organizational documents.

To make claims to knowledge about feminism, nationalism and violence in Sudan, I relied on both a review of literature and field work. I generated empirical data about how different feminist/women’s organizations in Sudan conceptualize and engage in contesting gendered violence. Recognizing my power and privilege as a researcher, I am aware that a speaker’s location or social identity has an epistemic impact on their claims to knowledge. As a mixed raced Sudanese Muslim woman, who has worked for fifteen years with national civil society organizations and development and humanitarian international organizations in the region, and as a student at a Canadian university, I position myself as both an insider and outsider in this research. Through reflexivity, I continuously negotiated the boundaries of my insider-outsider positionality by revisiting the questions I asked and methods I used throughout the research processes.

Postcolonial theorists caution against knowledge production that results in ethnocentric universal knowledge by constituting women as one group. This is important for my study, and for a country such as Sudan, where race is historically a key axis of oppression. In Chapter 4, I explore how racial categories evolved historically in Sudan, specifically in relation to slavery. I therefore refrain from essentializing “women” as a universal category of analysis and have attended to the intersectionality of gender with other axes of oppression such as race, religion and geography in order to understand how nationalism and the violence it generates affect
different Sudanese women. I demonstrate how a distinctive female identity, while being recognized as a powerful political category of analysis, does not in itself, reflect the full realities of diverse Sudanese women’s lives and the intersections of their multiple identities.

1.8 Summary of Thesis Chapters

Through engagement with data from secondary literature and three women’s organizations in Sudan, this research examines the relationship between three themes - feminism, nationalism and violence. In Chapter 2, “Literature review and theoretical framework”, I explore current discussions about nation and nationalism. I critically assess these discussions by interrogating how gendered and racialized violence goes unchallenged and is, at times, even seen as a necessary condition for nationalism in the post-colonial states of the Third World and in Africa specifically. I engage with feminist scholars’ critiques of the theorization of the nation by postcolonial scholars whose accounts fail to address dimensions of gender and discuss how feminist theorists deconstruct the notions of nation and nationalism by uncovering their gendered and racialized aspects. The chapter explores how colonial legacies are gendered and shape discourses of post-colonial nationalism in Africa, according to postcolonial feminist scholars.

Through such ideas, I examine the relationship between feminism and nationalism and how feminist postcolonial theoretical frameworks attend to politics of difference. I interrogate the specificity of nationalism in post-colonial Africa as detailed by African feminists and the different debates informing the engagement and agenda determinations of feminist and women’s movements on the continent.

In Chapter 3, “Research Methods”, I explain the decolonizing anti-racist feminist methodological framework employed to generate and analyze empirical data from existing literature and fieldwork in Sudan. I emphasize how this research is guided by my personal
activism and professional and academic experience, which positions me as both an insider and an outsider.

In Chapter 4, “Sudan state formation, race, gender and violence”, I synthesize secondary data to explain the process of Sudanese state formation. I disentangle how and why post-colonial national identity became framed narrowly as Arabic/Islamic, and how this construction is embedded in precolonial and anti-colonial liberation struggles that are politically, culturally and economically informed. I argue that political violence and civil war between the central Sudanese state and marginalized war zones, especially in the Nuba Mountains, have their roots in the processes of state formation and the post-colonial state, which are fundamentally patriarchal and grounded in racism and a history of slavery in affected regions. I illustrate how, throughout the process of Sudanese state formation, different state nationalist projects engendered regressive aspects (gender, race and religion). To understand the context in which women’s organizations in Sudan must work, I examine how the current state nationalist project cultivates and maximizes the historical processes of state formation, resulting in massive gendered racialized violence, in particular the ethnic cleansing of Sudan’s indigenous people in the Nuba Mountains. I highlight how racialized violence does not result only from patriarchal Sudanese state formation, but is also connected to globalization, capitalism and neoliberal economic policies.

This discussion is followed by ethnographic descriptions of three women’s organizations in Chapter 5, “Working for women’s equality in Sudan: SWU, NuWEDA and UN Women”. I provide a description of the historical, social, political and material environments and contexts within which each of these organizations exist, their agendas of social justice, target groups and types of programs. I conclude with a general discussion on the gender politics, and the different challenges and opportunities presented by each organization.
Chapter 6 and Chapter 7 are informed by empirical data. In Chapter 6, “Contesting gender politics and violence in Sudan and the Nuba Mountains,” I discuss how each of the three organizations conceptualizes gendered violence in Sudan, and how each negotiates political space for action, especially in relation to the state and international donors. In Chapter 7, “African feminism and women’s organizing in Sudan”, I elaborate on the meaning of feminism in Africa and in Sudan, as well as on the different discourses around what constitutes African postcolonial feminism by relating the discussion regarding the three organizations’ views about their activism. Feminism, I suggest, is still in the making in Africa and in Sudan. The chapter concludes with a section on a feminist vision for solidarity, where I discuss different frameworks and potentials for solidarity at both the national and international levels (transnational feminism).

As I discuss in the concluding chapter, “Complexity of Silence: Conclusions, contributions and implications”, the relevance of this study goes beyond the three organizations and their Sudanese context. It evokes discussions about the relationship between feminism, nationalism and violence in the context of Africa and in other post-colonial contexts more generally. As the feminist agendas of the women’s organizations intersect with the gender politics of the state and international donors, their autonomy is constantly negotiated and compromised. These discussions offer a point of entry into rethinking what constitutes postcolonial African feminism and what autonomy means for feminist organizations in a post-colonial context like Sudan. I also hope it opens a space for sharing, learning and building solidarity and strategic linkages between the different feminist and women organizations at local, national and international levels.
Chapter 2: Literature review and theoretical framework

2.1 Introduction

I had the privilege of growing up in a rural area along the border between South and North Sudan. This location provided me with the opportunity to live with diverse people from various ethnic and religious backgrounds, including those from South Sudan, South Kordofan and Darfur. When I joined the University of Khartoum during the early years of the 1990s, the National Islamic Front (NIF) had been in power for two years during which time they established an ethnic and cultural/religious Arabic/Islamic nationalist project. Along with other students in the University of Khartoum, I engaged in political campaigns against the NIF nationalist discourse that sought to exclude non-Arabs and non-Muslims from national identity and subject women to the ideals of the nationalist project. This had already resulted in violent civil war across the marginalized regions of Sudan, especially South Sudan, Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile, resulting in death, human rights abuses, and the displacement and fleeing of refugees (Deng, 2004; Salih, 1995; Jok, 2007; Komey, 2011).

As students, my peers and I were immediately affected by the nationalist discourse. Our education curricula were translated into Arabic and subjected to specific fields of Islamic knowledge. These changes made the curriculum linguistically difficult and largely irrelevant to non-Muslim and non-Arabic speaking students, as well as ideologically and intellectually unappealing to some students across racial and religious differences. Due to my participation in student resistance and boycotting the final exam in protest, I was dismissed from the University of Khartoum Faculty of Veterinary Medicine and forced to join a different university where I changed my field of study to social sciences.
Upon graduation from university in 1997, a colleague from the Nuba Mountains and fellow social justice activist and I set out to address the violence that female domestic workers in Khartoum (who are mostly from South Sudan and Nuba Mountains) experienced in their workplaces. We met with several female domestic workers’ groups in their residential areas. We helped them organize and assisted in building linkages between them. Following several meetings discussing the violence the women experienced in the houses by the families for which they worked, we collaboratively developed a plan of action. The plan aimed to address the problem at a policy/legal level by building community awareness regarding female domestic workers’ rights. These women, who were predominantly war-displaced black Africans from the Nuba Mountains and South Sudan, should have been protected by the Domestic Servants Act of 1955, but the law had never been enforced. Not only did this law not protect these women, but they were largely neglected by international organizations whose work targets women. As a result, we found that initiatives such as ours were not prioritized for funding—most agencies prioritized women’s civil and political rights issues for funding by international donors rather than issues such as female domestic workers’ rights.

Subsequently, I worked for international development organizations, simultaneously engaging with many volunteer-led national and local organizations that addressed social justice and peace building issues in Sudan. After many years pursuing this career, I felt frustrated by some of the practices of both the national and international organizations. Specifically, I was dissatisfied with the impact these organizations had on the people we were working with, especially women from Sudan’s marginalized, war-torn regions. It was at that point that I started reflecting on the practices of different national and international organizations working on social
justice in Sudan, and how we were caught between the Sudanese state’s nationalist project and the agenda of international funders.

In particular, I questioned how these two systems of power were sustained by the ideology and practices of neoliberal capitalism, and how they served to limit what types of social justice activism were possible and supported. I realized that working within these two systems of power negates the existence of a truly autonomous feminist organization in Sudan. The state control of civic space afforded to civil society and organizations working on social justice, in particular, represents one of the main challenges. Association was restricted unless registration from the government was granted. As I discuss in more in Chapter 5, the registration requirements entail that organizations’ work and agenda, should be of non-political nature. Some organizations, for example, will compromise their practices for the sake of government approval and for their own safety, while others resist such modes of engagement. The power and approaches of international development donors, however, and the impacts of their work on the ground, are rarely interrogated in terms of how they limit the ways in which civil society organizations determine their own social justice agendas. For these reasons, I felt dissatisfied with what we were actually doing, an experience that has positioned me well to write this thesis.

This chapter develops a literature review and theoretical framework for this dissertation, beginning with notions of nation and nationalism both as primordial and as modern constructs (Anderson, 1990; Bhabha, 1990). I examine the literature linking nationalism with violence and focus on the ways that post-colonial forms of nationalism in Africa turned violent. I first highlight the gendered legacy of colonialism and violence, especially in Africa and the Middle East, as well as the gendered nature of associated liberation struggles. I then discuss how violence is re-routed and how post-colonial nationalism in Africa and the Middle East is shaped
by experiences of colonialism and the struggle for liberation, linking nationalism with violence toward women and racialized minorities. I move on to discuss gender in theorizing the nation, and how, in all nationalist discourses, women are expected to embody the nationalist ideals of the state and the nationalist project (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Kandiyoti, 2003, 1991; Mama, 2003; McClintock, 1997). I end this chapter with a discussion around feminist politics in relation to nationalism. I engage with three key debates current in feminist and social justice organizing related to violence in Africa, namely debates regarding relations with the state, North-South relations, and transnational funding. This literature review addresses some of my research questions directly while preparing the ground for me to attempt to answer these research questions more fully in subsequent chapters.

2.2 Nations and Nationalism

The history of the nation and nationalism in all parts of the world is a controversial and emotional subject. Nationalism can act as a unifying emotional force and as a destabilizing problem. Nation and nationalism are cultural and ethnic as well as political constructs. Some European scholars conceptualize the nation and nationalism in Europe as a force that unites different ethnic groups, while simultaneously rendering cultural minority groups invisible for the benefit of the larger entity, viz. “the nation.” As some have noted (Yuval-Davis, 1997; Anderson, 1990; Bhabha, 1990; Gellner, 2008), nationalism falls into two categories: primordial and modern.

It is worth noting however that narratives of nationalism are not singular. While ethnic and cultural/religious nationalism are considered primordial, civic nationalism is distinctly modern. Unlike primordial nationalism, which is viewed as a culturally and socially imagined discourse (based on kinship, ethnicity, religion, gender, etc.), modern nationalism (a democratic
citizenship framework) is viewed as politically imagined, embedded in discourses relating to modernity and human rights (Yuval-Davis and Werbner, 1999). While ethnic and cultural/religious nationalism connect to the myth of common culture—shared blood and ethnic origin mostly constructed in the past—democratic citizenship connects to a future of “common destinies” (Yuval-Davis and Werbner, 1999, p. 3).

Scholars of primordial nationalism argue that nationalism is a pre-modern phenomenon that predates capitalism (Gorski, 2000). Within this framework, the nation is viewed more in anthropological terms than in political terms, as a product of ethnic and racial linkages. By contrast, modern nationalism is viewed as a direct product of industrial modernism and capitalism in the West; it is not primarily based on culture or ethnicity (Anderson, 1991; Gellner, 2008; Dandeker, 1998; Giddens, 1985). Gellner (2008) argues that nationalism can only occur if there is already a state, therefore establishing a link between nationalism and nation-state. He points out that, throughout human history, pre-agrarian society did not need centralized states, and that the formation of states only began during the agrarian phase. To centralize authority, Gellner argues that the state relies on a common language and culture to construct a sense of nation and nationalism, which serves to achieve security and a growing industrial national economy. Further, he suggests that this centralization of power in the form of state-building is also important for capitalism. It is worth noting that the terms ‘nation’ and ‘state,’ though distinct processes, are linked and often conjoined (nation-state). That being said, nationalism can also be a primary challenge to the state (or the notion of a unitary state, e.g., in the case of Kurds, Basques, Nuba resistance, etc.).
Benedict Anderson (1991) emphasizes the idea of the nation as an “imagined community.” Anderson argues that the nation, and by extension nationalism, is an imagined social discourse based on kinship, religion, and gender; it is imagined because it provokes feelings of kinship and blood ties, despite considerable diversity: “[the nation] is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communication” (p. 49). Anderson argues that it was only during the modern industrial era that capitalism used the power of printed language to spread the ideas of nationalism and the need for a homogenous national identity.

Bhabha (1990) builds on Anderson’s definition of the nation as a social narrative and a cultural system of representation. For Bhabha, “imagining the nation” requires the construction and dissemination of a specific national story, a “cultural representation” charged with symbols and meaning that are produced and called upon by the group holding political power. Besides being a socially and culturally imagined narrative, the nation is also theorized as being constructed both in the past and for the future. Making such narratives real in the minds of citizens requires the coordinated involvement of institutions that represent and reproduce them “through religious, political, and cultural ceremonies, through education and the uses of media” (Mayer, 2004, p. 155).

In their striving to pursue a unitary nation, some states use violent means (Giddens, 1985; Nixon, 1997). In highlighting the ideology of the nation-state, Ashcroft et al. (1998) point out that the limitation of imagined nations and nationalisms is that they depend on the exclusion of both outsiders and insiders who do not fit within the decided-upon narrative of national identity.

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4While nationalism is generally defined as a political ideology, nation is a political cultural community.
Fanon (2004) and Dandeker (1998) view nationalism as inherently violent, arguing that nationalism generates violence when it functions as a political ideology or as an assimilationist project by nation-states. Dandeker (1998) explains, “[N]ational identity and violence are closely related, as is shown by the close connections between nationalism, territory, political economy, and the history record of nation-state building” (p. 41). State violence against minorities often occurs, particularly when these excluded minority groups contest nationalist discourse (Dandeker, 1998). These processes of exclusion, in the name of consolidating a unitary nation (and state), are at once designed to consolidate power centers within a singular notion of ethnicity, language, or race, depending on the context. In Turkey, for example, the exclusion of the Kurds in the name of Turkishness fomented over time, resulting in violence (Mayer, 2012; Demir, 2014). Rob Nixon (1997) notes that some states, such as France, Great Britain, Germany, and Spain, resorted to conquest and ethnic cleansing to obtain international approval for the nation and statehood they now enjoy.

Other scholars emphasize imagined nations and nationalisms as a political claim. Edward Said (1979) and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak (1985) expand on nationalism as a political discourse. They discuss nationalism as it started in Europe as an imperialist discourse. Through his concept of “imaginative geographies,” Edward Said (1979) argues that the construction of cultural difference (West vs East) is in fact relational and used to justify imperialism. The Third World, for example, is defined by the construction of specific cultural representations of the European. Said explains that the construction of European identity as a superior one was meant to produce the Orient as the “Other.” He further argues that the binary Orient vs Occident, and the construction of the Occident as civilized vs the non-civilized Orient, are nothing but imagined thoughts: “it is not merely there, just as the Occident itself is not just there either” (p.
4). For Said, this construction serves to demarcate difference between spaces as “ours” vs “theirs,” which helps in creating imperial subjects and justifies the imperialist project. Leila Harris (2008) further elaborates that this “characterization of spaces and people as ‘backwards’ and in need of assistance or transformation has served to justify both colonialism and development interventions” (p. 1700). For Spivak (1985), imperialist projects replace colonialism with “neocolonialism.”

The above postcolonial discourse grounds its argument in geographies and cultural imperialism, treating specific geographies as one class in its challenge to the global political economy. While this discourse is important in challenging global forces such as capitalism, I argue, however, that as such, this postcolonial discourse fails to adequately address and speak to differences within Third World nations across gender and race, particularly race/ethnicity. In Chapter 4, I demonstrate that by not attending adequately to differences, especially racial/ethnic differences within the “subaltern,” this postcolonial theory fails to account for the historical materialism associated with slavery that took place within Third World countries and how different groups within the same nation experienced colonialism and post-colonialism differently. This was especially true of Sudan.

Bhabha (1994) criticizes Said’s construction of the binary Orient vs Occident, as well as Spivak’s presentation of the “subaltern” as silenced and without agency, as misleading by presenting colonist contact as controlled entirely by the colonizer. Instead, Bhabha argues that there is a space in-between, a third space he refers to as “hybridity,” in which the subaltern is not silent, but is engaged in cultural negotiation with the colonizer. Bhabha writes:

The representation of difference must not be hastily read as the reflection of pre-given ethnic or cultural traits set in the fixed tablet of tradition. The social articulation of difference, from the minority perspective, is a complex, on-going negotiation that seeks
to authorize cultural hybridities that emerge in moments of historical transformation. (1994, p. 4)

Bhabha acknowledges that this process of negotiation generated violence and clashes of views between colonizers and the subaltern, as the process of negotiation was both “consensual [and] conflictual.” It produces a “hybrid” culture, which “confound[s] our definitions of tradition and modernity; realign[s] the customary boundaries between the private and the public, high and low; and challenge[s] normative expectations of development and progress” (1994, p. 4).

Bhabha’s notions of cultural hybridity and third space figure as very relevant to the process of Sudanese state formation, which I elaborate on in Chapter 4. Bhabha’s argument captures the way in which nationalism as a cultural discourse in the Third World (including Sudan) is in fact a product of negotiation between colonizers and the liberation movement which adopted a form of anti-colonial nationalism. In this negotiated nationalist culture, which is Arabic/Islamic in Sudan, Indigenous non-Arab (African) groups are excluded from participating in the construction of the national culture, while women were constructed as a bearer of the nationalist culture. As I illustrate in Chapter 4, the processes of state formation and national cultural production in Sudan are patriarchal and racialized processes. The very culture that is supposed to be “national” and at the same time “anti-colonial” includes some, while excluding others.

An example where racialization was linked to these processes is discussed by Ferreira Da Silva (2017). In her discussion of the relationship between colonialism, race, and capital, Denise Ferreira Da Silva (2017) follows Anibal Quijons (2000) and Sylvia Wynter (2003) in arguing that “since the early moment of colonialism, European construction of racial differences was meant to facilitate their appropriation of labor and the land in the Americas and then at the global scale” (Da Silva, 2017, p. 92). Da Silva stresses that racism preceded capitalism and should be
understood as deeply implicated with the violent practices of European colonialists to appropriate the total value created by slave labor and native land in the Global South. This theoretical lens is also relevant to Sudan, as it aids in understanding Sudanese state formation and nationalist discourse, as I speak to in Chapter 4. Da Silva’s framework helps us to see the double violence—the historical as well as contemporary violence of capitalism and racism, as they function in Sudan. I speak more fully to how people from marginalized areas (particularly the Nuba Mountains who were subjected to slavery) still experience the materiality of racism in contemporary Sudan in Chapter 4.

2.3 Post-colonial Nationalism and Violence

Post-colonial nationalism, as conceptualized by Africans upon the independence of their countries, was meant to represent a vision and strategy to ensure full power over their respective national destinies. These nationalism and nation-building discourses in many post-colonial African countries, however, have resulted in corruption, war, and violence whereby shared histories and affinities among diverse peoples inside national boundaries seem to have been forgotten (Chatterjee, 1993). Instead of being a uniting and peaceful force, nationalism in many African countries has divided people across ethnic/racial and gender lines. The master narrative of the “decolonizing” and “liberating” nationalisms of post-colonial African countries are mostly imagined and constructed by dominant male elites, and not by the majority (Fanon, 2004; Chibber, 2014). In these states, “slogans of nationalism and its mythos of heart and home, are now the property of national male elites who have been increasingly revealed to be corrupt, capitulationist, patriarchal, and homophobic” (McClintock et al., 1997, p. 3).

In post-colonial African states, notions of nationalism that inform how African nation-building discourses are produced and reproduced via social, cultural, political, and economic
processes shift over time to serve the political and economic agendas of the governing regimes. To foster their aims, different governments have used their power to normalize the aspirations of the “subaltern” (Chibber, 2014). In this way, the post-colonial bourgeoisie claim to speak for the entire nation in the name of culture as a national identity without ever having to consider the impact of this nationalism on class, race/ethnicity, or gender in the everyday lives of subaltern populations. Not only are subaltern groups excluded from nationalism, but in many countries, resistance to the master narrative by those who are excluded is met with state violence (ibid).

In discussing African post-coloniality, Fanon (2004), Sabelo Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2010), and Mahmood Mamdani (2009) each discuss how nationalism has failed to create peace and stability and has instead promoted politics characterized by ethnic, religious, and natural resource-based conflicts. Fanon (2004) recognizes how the African middle classes have failed to deploy a unifying decolonizing nationalist discourse that can generate stability and access to economic resources for all people. Instead, this socio-economic group has historically accumulated profit for their own benefit by using categories of ethnic and religious difference as a strategy to further divide the nation, resulting in civil wars over religion, ethnic and national identity, and resources. Fanon further argues that these nationalist politics cause civil war because they only benefit national leaders and their international allies.

Mamdani (2009), on the other hand, attributes the political violence of post-colonial states in Africa to structural legacies of colonial domination, economic exploitation, and artificial borders drawn by colonial powers. Mamdani explains that ethnic groups were kept apart by colonial power through systems of indirect rule headed by customary chiefs (Mamdani, 2009). This system of indirect rule led to incidents of interethnic violence, which continue today. Ethnic divisions and polarization were deepened by colonial masters as they pursued a policy of “divide
and conquer.” They also manipulated certain ethnicities into turning against one another, when they had previously been living relatively peacefully together.

Other scholars argue that ethnic conflicts in Africa preceded the colonial period (Besley, 2014). They assert that colonialism in fact exacerbated the division by favoring certain ethnic/racial groups over the others (ibid). The idea was that this division would not allow for unification or coming together to resist colonial power, enabling colonizers to fulfill their goals of exploiting natural resources and enslaving populations. In many cases in Africa, the ethnic/racial groups who were favored during colonial times are the ones who came to rule the country upon independence; these same countries either went or are going through violent civil war or “ethnic cleansing” (Mbembé and Meintjes, 2003). Examples include Rwanda, Sudan, Congo, and Sierra Leone.

Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2013) takes a position midway between Fanon and Mamdani, arguing that both African nationalists and colonialists are implicated in producing a violent nationalism that promotes ethnic stratification, racism, and nativism in Africa. Achille Mbembé and Meintjes (2003) refer to this violent political nationalism of the nation-state as “necropolitics,” where post-colonial nation-states in Africa exercise sovereignty as the power over life or death of its citizens, especially those who resist the state’s hegemonic power. Mbembe sees “necropolitics” as an imperialist and economically driven project that is jointly coordinated between African “governmentality” and external forces who supply the state with the weapons required to maintain their power.

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5 It is worth noting that some people in Africa, and especially from marginalized regions in Sudan, view colonialism both as historical as well as currently lived at the hands of their own elites. They use the term internal colonialism or its equivalent in Arabic. Please see: Amin, S. (2013). Samir Amin: Pioneer of the Rise of the South (Vol. 16).
In her discussion of nationalism and national identity, as they pertain to the nation in African, Mama (2001) argues that the meaning of the word “identity” is ambiguous in many African languages. Exposing the contradiction inherent in the notion of an African identity, she states that “in Africa, if I were to generalize, [and] ask a person who he or she is, … his or her name will quickly be followed by a qualifier, a communal term that will indicate ethnic or clan origins” (2011, p. 63). This happens because national identity is both unifying and exclusionary. Mama further elaborates that this duality of the African identity is reflected in the functioning of current state bureaucracies in Africa. States often require their citizens to specify one’s tribe when they are applying for government services (ibid). Such bureaucratic identification is current practice in Sudan. I must identify my tribal association if I, for example, apply for a national identification card, compile a complaint in the court, or report a protection concern to police. Mama (2011) concludes, “[T]he idea of identity is an interesting one to most Africans, largely because it has remained so vexed. We seem to be constantly seeking the integrity and unity that the notion implies, without succeeding in securing it, or coming to terms with it” (p.63).

2.4 Gender and Colonialism

The legacy of colonialism manifested through nationalism is highly gendered and has affected contemporary violence against women in post-colonial states in Africa. Feminist postcolonial scholars demonstrate that violence against women in Africa today is part of the colonial legacy; this is true in Sudan, as I will discuss in detail in Chapter 4. Mama (1997) explains that colonialism in Africa “increased vulnerability of African woman to various forms of violence” (p. 48). The sexist and masculine attitudes of the colonial powers’ officers and representatives exploited existing gender roles, and reinforced and instantiated patriarchal
institutions and politics in Africa (Geiger et al., 2002). The creation of a legal system that is dismissive of women, the imposition of expectations informed by bourgeois Victorian womanhood, along with the creation of the public/private dichotomy in which women were confined exclusively to the home are just some examples of such patriarchal impositions (ibid). Many examples have been documented and analyzed across multiple post-colonial contexts in Africa.

One such example is provided by Judith Van Allen (1972). She describes how prior to British colonialism in Nigeria, Igbo women held social and political influence in their society. Women participated in village meetings together with men and traders, and there were women merchants as well as farmers. Igbo women also had their own political institutions including a powerful method of resistance to male power that reinforced solidarity among women. A man was subjected to this resistance if he violated women’s market rules, mistreated his wife, or let his cows eat women’s crops. In these situations, women got together and protested by surrounding the man’s home. The women then sang a song describing the grievances against the man and questioned his manhood:

[T]he women would stay at his hut through the day, and late into the night, if necessary, until he repented and promised to mend his ways. Although this could hardly have been a pleasant experience for the offending man, it was considered legitimate and no man would consider intervening. (Allen, 1972, p.170)

This practice was outlawed and criminalized by the British colonial rulers as it was considered a “barbaric practice.” Instead, the British introduced a system of indirect rule whereby political and social power was concentrated in the hands of customary male chiefs, while women’s political and social power was weakened (ibid).

Violence against African women is also rooted in the conflictual discourses of the colonial mission with its desire to “modernize” and “civilize” its colonies in Africa, and the anti-
colonial/anti-imperial nationalism adopted by the liberation movements as a resistance/counter based on national traditions and cultural “authenticity.” Caught between these two discourses in the past, women in the present are now exposed to violence through the construction of women as a cultural signifier of the nation and of de-colonizing/anti-imperial nationalism. An example of how women were implicated in the anti-colonial/anti-imperialist cultural nationalism discourse is provided in Fanon’s article “Algeria unveiled.” Fanon (1965) highlighted the inherent cultural tension during colonial times, explaining how French colonialists viewed women’s veils as part of a “backward” culture and attempted to unveil Algerian women (asking them to remove the veil) in the name of “civilization,” which was seen as a pathway to Western modernization. This was viewed by anti-colonial national leaders as an attempt to erase women from the national liberation movement and divide the unified national body which was fighting for independence. Algerian anti-colonial nationalist leaders revolted against the unveiling policy of the colonizers (ibid). To resist the colonial imperialist tendency, they asserted and defended Algerian national culture as Islamic, positing the veil as the cultural signifier of this national identity, and women as a bearer of this culture. Women, whether veiled or unveiled, were therefore called upon to participate in colonial resistance by preserving the national cultural identity through the veil, as an integral part of the nation. Many such examples have been documented and analyzed across multiple post-colonial contexts in Africa, including in Sudan in the case of Female Genital Mutilation (FGM), as I will discuss in Chapter 4.

2.5 Violence Rerouted

Even as post-colonial nationalisms presented by Third World countries’ leaders upon independence in the 1950s and 1960s were framed as emancipatory and oppositional to colonialism (and associated national and identity constructs), they often parroted and reflected
similar constructs. Chatterjee (1993) argues that nationalism is inherently an imperial project, therefore the construction of nationalist discourse by Third World leaders will be “forever colonized.” He writes:

[I]f nationalisms in the rest of the world have to choose their imagined community from certain “modular” forms already made available to them by Europe and the Americas, what do they have left to imagine? History, it would seem, has decreed that we in the postcolonial world shall only be perpetual consumers of modernity. Europe and the Americas, the only true subjects of history, have thought out on our behalf not only the script of colonial enlightenment and exploitation, but also that of our anticolonial resistance and postcolonial misery. Even our imagination must remain forever colonized. (Chatterjee, 1993, p. 5)

Partha Chatterjee’s (1993) quote poses a challenge to the notion that the post-colonial nationalist discourse adopted by Third World countries is a modern European model of nationalism, which was presented upon independence as an “emancipatory” gift by the West. Chatterjee argues that, in fact, the imagining of a difference from colonial power was key to the construction of nationalist discourse by Third World leaders especially in Africa and Asia. However, Chatterjee differentiates between two types of nationalism—political nationalism and cultural nationalism—arguing that both are combined in Third World nationalist discourse. Chatterjee explains that while political nationalism is derived from the Western model of nation and nationalism, cultural nationalism is driven by internal sources, namely the anti-colonial and anti-imperialist struggle. Chatterjee further claims that the history of cultural nationalism in the Third World (especially in Africa and Asia) started as anti-colonial nationalist movements which then launched cultural nationalism (as a national identity) within the colonial state. These were resistance strategies against colonial state programs designed to modernize customs and traditions in their colonies (ibid).

Throughout Africa and Asia, continues Chatterjee, post-colonial nationalism is constructed through a divided world of public-private spheres. He illustrates how, upon
independence, post-colonial nationalism was designed to imitate the Western model in the public sphere (the modern sphere), as well as assert its difference from that model by employing (anti-imperialist) cultural nationalism in the private-familial sphere. Nations were then built on these two foundations, with inherent inconsistency between the public, Western model based on a liberal framework and individual rights, and the cultural private-familial sphere based on communal interest. While the Western model was adopted in the public sphere (i.e., the material sphere of the economy and politics), the inner private sphere is claimed as the heart of national cultural identity to assert its difference from Western imperial power especially in relation to notions of liberty, human rights, and freedom (ibid).

In an attempt to embark on a post-colonial modern nation-statehood, several Third World countries, especially in Africa and the Middle East, have taken various paths, combining, in their own complex and unique ways, the concepts of liberal European-modeled civic nationalism (applied to the material sphere of the economy and politics, i.e., the public sphere) and ethnic and/or cultural nationalism (applied to the spiritual sphere and culture, i.e., the private-familial sphere). The discourse of cultural nationalism in some countries, including Sudan, is fundamentally influenced by European colonial legacies of modernity and gender politics in the Middle East (Abu-Lughod, 1998; Amin, 2007). Samir Amin describes this discourse as reactionary. The reactionary political Islam practised by the Islamists is evoked by a “conflict of cultures” around modernity, democracy, secularism, and Islam (ibid).

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6 I am referring to both Africa and the Middle East throughout this chapter, since Sudan falls somewhere in between the two.

7 It is important to differentiate between rather than conflate the terms Islamist, which is designated for radical political Islamists (more as a political reactionary ideology), and Islam, which refers to the religion of Islam and its theology.
When discussing modernity, Amin (2007) exposes the global political struggle in determining its definition. He argues that modernity as “a rupture in world history” (p. 4) was initiated in the sixteenth century in Europe and was directly connected with the Enlightenment of the French Revolution during the eighteenth century. The Enlightenment introduced the need for separating religion from politics (secularism) as a condition for democracy and modernity, and to liberate human beings and society at large. Such notions were/are understood to pertain only to Christian societies and not Islamic ones. Joan Wallach Scott (2017) suggests that secularism was used to justify Western Christian racial and religious superiority (ibid). Amin concludes that modernity is not only a cultural revolution but also connects to the rise of capitalism: “It derives its meaning only through the close relation that it has with the birth and subsequent growth of capitalism…the concrete forms of modernity, democracy, and secularism found today must then be considered as products of the concrete history of the growth of capitalism” (p. 4). For Amin, the problem with this post-colonial nationalism in Islamic regions is that it reduces anti-imperialism to a cultural struggle with Islam⁸, while in economic and social matters in aligns itself with the West capitalism. Within this cultural struggle, women become the main bearers of Islamic culture based on the focus on Islamic family status law reforms, women’s rights and place, women’s dress code, etc. Consequently, the question of women and women’s rights has become central to this anti-imperialist Islamic struggle.

The combination of civic and cultural nationalisms in some countries in Africa and the Middle East each espouse their own and contradictory ideas about women’s citizenship rights. Civic nationalism, a liberal framework, depicts women as equal citizens and icons of (Western) 

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⁸ Different to this, and as we will see in Chapter 4, Islamist leaders in Sudan have redefined modernity in Islamic cultural terms.
modernity, with equal rights and responsibilities in nation-building projects. Cultural nationalism, as I have explained, is anti-colonial resistance nationalism, which depicts women as symbolic cultural signifiers subjected to cultural codes, who are, therefore, treated as disenfranchised citizens. In other words, women bear the burden of these two contradictory nationalist discourses: they are sites for the construction of a modern national identity, while at the same time they must convey cultural difference from the “other.” Kandiyoti (2003) writes:

[W]omen are relegated to the margins of the polity even though their centrality to the nation is constantly being reaffirmed. It is reaffirmed consciously in nationalist rhetoric where the nation itself is represented as a woman to be protected or, less consciously, in an intense preoccupation with women’s appropriate sexual conduct. The latter often constitutes the crucial distinction between the nation and its “others.” (p. 429-430)

For Kandiyoti, the politics of gender relations informing these conflicting nationalist discourses represent a form of control over women.

Kandiyoti (2003), Charrad (2001), and Mama (2001) discuss how, in many countries in Africa and the Middle East, violence against women has been carried over from the pre-colonial to the colonial and the post-colonial era, despite women’s participation in liberation and anti-colonial struggles. The post-colonial narratives of the nation and nationalism are constructed in patriarchal kinship and capitalist terms, both of which are intrinsically gendered (Kandiyoti, 2003). Mama (2001) calls post-colonial African liberation movements and anti-colonial imagined nationalisms into question by explaining how violence against women goes unchallenged in the construction of post-colonial nationalism. She argues that gendered violence related to specific ethnic and religious minorities remains at the heart of political and cultural discourses and is used to serve the nationalist project. Mama describes the prevailing nationalist discourses in many African states as masculine discourses seeking to recover damaged African manhood. The result is a contradictory gender ideology: “on the one hand, nationalists have
called for their own ‘new woman,’ while on the other hand, they have constructed women as the bearers of and upholders of traditions and customs, as reservoirs of culture” (Mama, 1997, p. 54). While many people in these countries view independence struggles as liberating, the focus on post-colonial nationalism creates ambivalence for key populations, notably women and racial/ethnic monitories.

As previously noted, for example, French colonialist attempts to unveil Algerian women in the name of “civilization” and “modernization” were seen by nationalist movements as an attempt to divide the unified national body fighting for independence. Nevertheless, upon independence, Algerian women were excluded from citizenship rights as full citizens of the nation (Woodhull, 2003). In post-colonial Algeria, an Islamic family law system was implemented at independence. This law “legitimizes the extended male-centered patrilineage that has served as the building block of kin-based solidarities within tribal groups in the Maghreb. It supports the patriarchal power not only of husbands, but also of kin, over women” (Charrad, 2001, p. 5). This exclusion from the liberation narrative of post-colonial nationalism is not unique to Algeria, but rather is common in many African and Middle Eastern countries, including Sudan. It is clear that, even with emancipation after anti-colonial struggles, post-colonial nationalism engenders some regressive aspects, especially along the axes of gender and race. In this case, the transition from a colonial to a post-colonial state made little difference for women. Despite the role women played in anti-colonialism and liberation struggles in African countries, upon independence, women’s agency did not qualify them for liberation (Kandiyoti, 2003; Woodhull, 2003).

Patricia McFadden (2011) argues that the major challenge facing African feminists today is the notion of the “post-colonial” in Africa. McFadden challenges the normative definition of
“post-colonial” as simply the time after independence. Instead, she argues that the perceived post-colonial remains “fundamentally colonial but different in ‘new’ ways that are mediated by shifts in the reconstruction of class, race and gender relations” (p. 11). This is due to the “narrowness and inability of nationalism as a resistance ideology and political practice to deliver an inclusive dispensation for all Africans, mainly because it was/is essentially formulated in the services of the ruling classes locally and globally” (p. 12). It is clear that the hybrid model of civic and cultural nationalism and the distinction made between the private and the public sphere display the gendered character of the post-colonial nationalism discourse in Africa and in Sudan.

2.6 Nationalism and Gender

All nationalisms are gendered; all are invented; and all are dangerous…They represent relations to political power and to the technologies of violence. As such, nations are not simply phantasmagoria of the mind; as systems of cultural representation whereby people come to imagine a shared experience of identification with an extended community, nationalism becomes in this way…frequently violent and always gendered. (McClintock, 1997, p. 89)

Many feminists have criticized nationalist projects as being patriarchal, racialized, and masculine markers of modernity and cultural “authenticity” (Yuval-Davis, 1997; McClintock, 1997; Mama, 2001; Kandiyoti, 1991). The position of women in theorizing the nation and nationalism, however, is not always adequately addressed by postcolonial scholars. Notably, Nira Yuval-Davis, a feminist theorist who has made important and significant contributions to the study of the nation, brings women from the margin to the center of the vision. Anthias and Yuval-Davis (1989) explain how women are active subjects in the construction of the nation and nationalist discourse. Women, they explain, are constructed in multiple ways: as biological reproducers of the members of the national collectivities, as reproducers of the boundaries of national groups, as active transmitters and producers of the national culture, as symbolic signifiers of national difference, and as active participants in the national struggle (p. 7).
Reflecting the above analysis of ways that women are part of the construction of the nation and nationalism, Silke Wenk (2000) suggests that women are discursively positioned to represent both a future national project and a mythological narrative of the past as carriers of tradition and culture:

\[\text{[N]ationalism—veering between a nostalgia for the past and the impatient, progressive sloughing off of the past—is typically resolved by figuring the contraction in the representation of time as a natural division of gender. Women are represented as the atavistic and authentic body of national tradition . . . [Thus] embodying nationalism’s conservative principle of continuity. (p. 69)}\]

Another postcolonial scholar, Anne McClintock (1997), maintains that while women are “symbolic bearers of the nation,” men are most often seen as representatives of the nation (p. 89-90) and that male national power is based, in part, on the construction of gender differences. Reflecting this sentiment that national power is defined by opposing one gender against the other, Jason Dittmer and Soren Larsen (2007) argue that “national identity is created by the foregrounding of some narratives and the silencing of others” (p. 738).

Sexuality is also central to all nationalisms. The construction of nationhood requires distinct notions of “womanhood” and “manhood,” making sexuality—specifically heteronormativity—a central part of nationalism (Peterson, 1990; Alexander, 1994). The heterosexual nuclear family is considered to be the unit of the “home” within the nation. Women are thus constructed as the biological reproducer of the nation, and children are constructed as the future of the nation. Based on these ideals, “not just (any)body can be a citizen any more, for some bodies have been marked by the state as non procreative in pursuit of sex only for pleasure, a sex that is non productive of babies and of no economic gain” (Alexander, 1994, p. 6). Spike Peterson (1990) argues that in this case, nationalism is not only gendered but also heterosexist,
and with institutionalization of difference, those in conflict with it are those “whose identity is at odds with the projected image of homogenous nation” (p. 35).

Examining the intersection of nationalist discourse and gender, Yuval Davis (1997) presents three intersecting nationalist ideologies and identity projects with different criteria of belonging. The three facets are: Volksnation (blood based/ethnic), Kulturnation (cultural/religious nationalism), and Staatsnation (civic/legal citizenship). Women are frequently excluded from the Staatsnation nationalist projects even as their role and place are mostly confined/defined by the Kulturntion and the Volksnation nationalist discourses (ibid). Below I examine the three types of nationalisms and the gender politics each displays.

Ethnic nationalism (Volksnation) is constructed around the myth of common origin, blood kinship, and connection to the land. Membership within a given group is granted based on biological links and shared physical characteristics (Yuval-Davis, 1992), and particularly in relation to these notions, women are often constructed as the biological reproducers of the national collective (Anthias and Yuval-Davis, 1989). In theory, membership to the collective is granted to those born on the land and to those who belong to the ethnic communities of the region. Interestingly, myths can be invented to support identity claims and membership in the nation, while excluding groups who are Indigenous and who were born on the land, as I will discuss in Chapter 4 in the case of Sudan. Those excluded from membership can only be granted access to the group through marriage. In many places, however, this process is gendered. If a man with citizenship marries a foreign wife, for example, his wife and their children will be granted citizenship, but the reverse is not true. In the context of ethnic war, women’s bodies represent the battleground, and raping women from “other” ethnic or religious groups is
a strategy used to humiliate (by feminizing) the enemy and demonstrate their inability to protect their women, nation, and homes (Yuval-Davis, 1997).

The construction of ethnic nationalist ideologies, in many cases, evolves around the ethnic superiority of a group over other ethnicities. In these cases, militarization is often used to maintain the status quo. Amina Mama (2001) attributes present day ethnic-based wars (and subsequent intrastate wars) in many post-colonial nation-states in Africa to two factors. First, nationalism is still in its formative stages in this part of the world, and second, different people within the same state identify more with their ethnic communities than with the collective identity attached to the geo-political entity of the state. Mama sees these difficulties as being connected to both colonial history, which divided people along ethnic lines, and the failure of the post-colonial African states to develop the required institutions to produce homogenized national identities. She writes that this failure has been “orchestrated by colonial power, sustained by nationalist regimes and supported by imperialist global economic institutions” (p. 67). These processes have resulted in tribal identity politics leading to rebellions and conflicts over the redistribution of material resources. In Chapter 4, I will discuss how this pathway worked out in the Sudanese context.

Religious or cultural nationalism (Kulturnation), by contrast, is based on a specific religion and a shared culture that creates a sense of unity and a basis for membership in the collective. This mythical imagined community “divides the world between us and them and is maintained and ideologically reproduced by a whole system of what Armstrong calls symbolic ‘border guards’” (cited in Yuval-Davis, 1992, p. 7). In this system, women reproduce national boundaries and signify cultural differences (ibid).
Some feminists are critical of religious nationalism and its implications for women’s rights. Regarding Islamic nationalism, Fatima Mernissi (2003) explains how the ideological nationalist objectives in defining women’s roles and place in the *Umma* remains central to nationalist discourses in Morocco. She shows how the construction of the nation is based on a clear distinction between the public and private spheres which also divides society into two spheres: the public universe of the “Umma” (which is mainly constituted by men) that represents religion and power, and the domestic universe of sexuality, family, and home (which includes both women and men). Mernissi explains how men who are citizens of the domestic sphere “also possess a second nationality, one that grants them membership to the public sphere, the domain of religion and politics, the domain of power, of the management of the affairs of the Umma” (2003, p. 491). It is this ideological separation of women’s rights and place, in some Muslim contexts, that remains the central discourse of Muslim feminists in these Muslim countries.

*Civic or liberal nationalism (Staatsnation)* has been characterized as an individual contract with the state, where rights are based on a legal citizenship framework. Pnina Werbner and Nira Yuval-Davis (1999) describe this form of nationalism as a social and political construct of modernism in which nationalisms organize around the notion of democratic citizenship which stresses individual rights and rule of law. While ethnic and cultural nationalism connect to the past and the myth of common culture and origin, this citizenship framework connects to a future of “common destinies” (ibid, p. 3). Thus, this citizenship framework has “frequently been in tension with, and even antithetical to, nationalism’s appeals to communal solidarities and primordial sentiments of soil and blood” (Werbner and Yuval-Davis, 1999, p. 1).

In all nationalism projects (ethnic, cultural/religious, and civic), women are expected to embody the nationalist ideals of the nation and the nationalist project. Yuval-Davis (1997) calls
for deconstructing the different positions of women within the same nation and attending to how
gender intersects with other systems of power and domination to shape women’s experience. She
writes:

Like other differences among women, their membership in the different collectivities
should be understood within structures of domination and as articulated by other social
relations. These can affect not only the status and power of some women versus others,
within and between the collectivities they belong to, but also the extent to which their
membership in the collectivity constitutes a forced identity. (p. 11)

Yuval-Davis (1997), Arat (1994), and Mayer (2004) stress how nationalist projects and
the violence that comes with them have distinct impacts on the lives of diverse women.
Differences among women should be noted; a woman’s status is not only based on gender, but
also on being a member of a specific group. Mayer argues that women who “defy the hegemonic
ideology are outside the group. As outsiders, these women are the ‘them’ in the ‘us vs. them’

[I]n different projects of the politics of belonging, the different levels of belonging –
social locations, identities and ethical and political values – can become the requisites of
belonging. Requisites of belonging that relate to social locations – origin, race, place of
birth – would be the most racialized and the least permeable. Language, culture and
sometimes religion are more open to voluntary, often assimilatory, identification with
particular collectivities. (p. 209)

Yuval-Davis’s framework is important in understanding how different women embody
the different facets of nationalism in Sudan—the combination of both ethnic (Arab) and
religious/cultural (Islamic) nationalisms. In addition, applying this framework to the case of
Sudan can expose how different Sudanese women experience and are impacted by Sudan’s
current nationalist discourse and violence associated with it. In Chapter 4, I will illustrate how
gender intersects with race, class, religion, and colonialism to shape how different Sudanese
women experience violence in the post-colonial state in Sudan.
While acknowledging the centrality of the state in constructing gender politics in nationalism projects, Kandiyoti (2003) argues that the focus should be “narrowly on the contradictions inherent in the gender agenda of some nationalist projects, and…examine how women can, at the same time, participate actively in, and become hostage to, such projects” (p. 431).

2.7 Nationalism, Violence, and Feminist Politics

Nationalism has historically functioned as one of the most powerful weapons for resisting colonialism, and for establishing the space of a post-colonial identity. Although nationalism has nurtured much of the movement toward women emancipation in Asia, Africa, and South America (the “Third World” feminism was acted out against a background of nationalist struggle aimed at achieving political independence), yet feminism and nationalism have developed an uneasy, if not antagonistic relationship because of the often conflicting nature of their social and political goals. (Tyagi, 2014, p. 46)

The relationship between feminism and nationalism is considered hostile and complex (McClintock, 1997; Tyagi, 2014) and is both historically and geographically situated. Kumari Jayawardena (1986) is one of the first scholars who wrote about feminism and nationalism. Jayawardena links the rise of feminist movements in the Third World (particularly in Asia and the Middle East) to the anti-colonial nationalist struggle for equal rights, and emancipation of women as citizens of the state. In many African nations, however, women participated in the anti-colonial liberation struggle without the promise of women’s liberation as part of the national liberation (Mama, 1995). In either case—in the Middle East or Africa—the anti-colonial struggle did not result in the liberation of women as equal citizens in post-colonial states (Kandiyoti, 2003; Charrad, 2001; Mama, 1997), including Sudan (Mahmoud, 2008).

It is worth noting that these processes work out differently, for instance, among feminists from Indigenous communities in North America and occupied Palestine (Lawrence and Enakshi, 2005; Mohanty, 2013). Additionally, women in Third World countries have no one position in
relation to nationalism, and feminism and nationalism take different forms depending on the context. Some Third World feminists are in fact troubled by the transnational feminist scholarship of Western developing nations that presents feminism and nationalism in an antagonistic relationship (Geiger, 1997; Kim, 2009). Susan Geiger (1997) and Hee-Kang Kim (2009) present two cases of nationalism in Tanzania and South Korea where women have political agency in constructing nationalism and nation-building discourse. In Tanzania, explains Geiger, women use nationalist ideology to challenge gender inequality in their respective communities. The feminist movement in South Korea, according to Kim, is not only compatible with the nationalist movement, but reinforces it. Aili Tripp (2003) discusses how throughout Africa, women’s movements and organizations developed different relations to the state; while some retained a degree of autonomy, others were created by the state. In an interview, Amina Mama (Salo, 2001) explains the troubling incongruity in the mobilization of women by and in support of nationalist agendas:

[R]ecent history demonstrated clearly that in Africa even the most undemocratic regimes do not hesitate to involve women. Indeed, many of them make particular efforts to mobilize women on their behalf. Women danced on the streets when Mobutu Seseko celebrated women within their traditional roles as wives and mothers in Zaire … Nigerian military wives have sponsored massive women’s programmes to mobilize support for the corrupt dictatorships run by their husbands. These are examples of women being mobilized or taking to the streets themselves to support an agenda no one would describe as feminist. (p. 61)

Feminist/women’s organizations in Africa have positioned themselves differently in relation to the state in myriad ways. While some challenge nationalist discourse, others maintain or even reproduce it (Salo, 2001; Tripp, 2003). Similarly, I suggest that relations to international donors and their agendas vary across different feminist/women’s groups. In this regard, Amina Mama (Salo, 2001) discusses how, in the African context, it is important to distinguish between women’s and feminist movements—that is, those organizations that engage in the delivery of
services to women and therefore need international funding as the means to achieve their stated objectives versus organizations seeking to engage in transformative action and challenge structural gender inequality.

Jane Bennett (2010) explains that there are major debates concerning the nature, shape, and direction of the African “women’s movements” being organized to address violence against women in Africa. In this section, I focus on three of these debates that relate to my thesis. The first two debates are concerned with relations with the state and with international donors, and how both nation-state and donors co-opt the social justice agenda, placing social justice movements in a dilemma. The third focuses on how violence is conceptualized by social justice movements in Africa.

African feminist Patricia McFadden (2011) argues that African feminist engagement with the state is critical in redefining the notion of the “post-colonial” in Africa. McFadden attributes the loss of the transformative opportunity of post-colonialism to the new ways of colonization. She writes:

[T]here were significant changes for African women and their communities as outcomes of anti-colonial struggles, which must be recognized and cautiously celebrated…[however] most of the productive aspects of the transitional moment have often escaped us, and for African feminists, the possibilities that transition has offered so far have been deftly captured and reconceptualised through a very hegemonic neo-liberal ideology.

(p.12)

McFadden (2011) is highly critical of and troubled by the ways in which African feminists imagine and practice their collective struggle against colonialism and imperialism, and for social injustice, claiming that they have been co-opted by the neoliberal agendas of

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9 For this research, it is important to differentiate between social movement organizations and NGOs. Based on the distinction made by Silliman (2003), “NGOs are ‘narrower in scope, constituency and impact’ than social movements, which are ‘an aggregation of people and organisations with a shared set of ideas that seeks to bring about social change consistent with a professed set of values’” (Silliman, cited in Angeles, 2003, p. 286).
international donors who depoliticize the feminist struggle for social justice. McFadden calls for a radical feminism that reconceptualizes the notion of “the Post-colonial” in Africa to define key elements of post-colonialism in feminist terms. She writes:

We cannot pretend that we can have rights outside the context of the state; so-called humanitarian organizations and groups cannot provide—and have never provided—anyone with rights as sustainable social and material resources. We also have to understand that as long as particular configuration of NGOs and agencies stand between us—the people—and our states, regardless of how ruthless and acquisitive the latter may be, we will not be able to transform the state, nor will we become ‘post-colonial.’ (p. 17)

For McFadden, the politics of this radical feminism would center on active engagement with the state for the purpose of redefining citizenship, formalizing the entitlement of people’s rights, and making conditions accessible and sustainable for women to exercise these entitlements. The state, she asserts, should be shaped by African feminism.

According to Bennett,

[Although]though there are, of course, continental contexts in which the concept of a coherent state is not useful, there has been over the past four decades, considerable energy vested in the struggle to hold post flag-democracy states accountable to ideals of gender equality in terms of political representation, state-based budget processes, and the delivery of resources and services. (2010, p. 22)

However, the corruption of the state, state fragmentation, rapid transition, and organization through military rule have fostered debate among African feminists about the value of such work and its vulnerability to co-optation by interests that are far from feminist (Mama, 2003).

The agendas of international donors also affect feminist movements in Africa since not all political agendas of local social justice movements will be funded, as funding depends on how their political agendas match with that of the international donor. In her introductory chapter “The Revolution Will Not Be Funded,” Andrea Smith (2007) questions how non-profit organizations affect the direction of social justice movements. The non-profit industrial complex (NPIC) is defined by Dylan Rodriguez as “a set of symbiotic relationships that link political and
financial technologies of state and owning class control with surveillance over public political ideology” (Smith, 2007, p. 8). According to Smith, this NPIC co-opts the agenda of social justice movements through funding patterns related to philanthropic charity. This appropriation happens when the focus of social justice movements is redirected from activism to professional careerism based on service delivery. The goals shift from radical change to social reforms.

Discussing power relations between international donors and feminist activism in the Global South, Sohela Nazeen and Maheen Sultan (2014) explain how the overt imbalance in power relations determines what gets funded—feminist organizations are forced to compromise their transformative agenda in order to accommodate donors’ interests. Feminist organizations become incapable of tackling systemic and structural barriers to gender equality because donors wish to reorient feminist organizations toward “policy, NGOization and a concomitant defusing of political opportunities” (Sohela and Sultan, 2004, p. x). NGO agendas are often politically guided to support statist, hegemonic, neoliberal types of agendas.

Aili Tripp (2003) raises critical questions about the integrity, sustainability, control, and long-term strategy of Western feminist involvement and influence on feminist movements in the Global South. McFadden (2011) is also critical of the North-South relationship, particularly with regard to the agendas that determine funding allocations. She describes most initiatives as conservative in the sense that funding is either implicitly or explicitly dependent on the depoliticization of the agendas of African women’s organizations, which consequently undermines their autonomy. McFadden also maintains that donors’ funding agendas are largely based on conservative notions of gender that focus on women’s public roles, such as political participation and especially in parliament and political parties: “this formalistic expression of
gendered representation often eclipses the necessity for critical analysis of power relations, thus leaving the status quo largely unquestioned. Such campaigns have been largely a failure” (p. 17).

The debate about the nature of gender politics in Africa and the engagement of women’s movements with the meaning of violence raises major concerns about how women’s issues, and violence against women in particular, are not only linked to patriarchy as a system of power but also to racism, sexuality, class, capitalism, the history of slavery, and geography. This discussion is not relevant only to feminism in Africa but to feminism in general. Postcolonial feminists realize how systems of oppression and domination intersect to produce specific experiences of marginalization. Kimberle Crenshaw (1989) and Patricia Hill Collins (1993, 2000) challenge the notion that gender is the foundation of oppression and the entry point to its analysis. Instead, they argue that other markers of oppression, such as race, class, and religion combine to create interconnected and interlocking systems of oppression. Mohanty (2003) reminds us that defining feminism purely in gendered terms perpetuates the false consciousness that being a “woman” has nothing to do with race, class, or nation. She points out that no one “becomes a woman” purely because she is female, as “ideologies of womanhood have as much to do with class and race as they do with sex and gender. It is the intersection of the various systemic networks of class, race, (hetero) sexuality and nation, then that position us as ‘women’” (p. 55). Therefore, the question is not about gender’s potential as a lens for analyzing the oppression of women, but about the privileging of gender categories as the origin of oppression (ibid).

Linked to intersectionality debates is the debate concerning global inequality and violence. Globalization is characterized by global power dynamics and accumulation of capital, and the increasing gap between the world’s wealthy countries and its poor countries resulted in gendered racialized oppression (Mohanty et al., 2008). With ongoing American armed
Interventions in many countries, plus an increasing economic gap created by capitalism and the false notion of “democracy” deployed to justify these wars, there is an escalation of political protest that calls for alternative strategies to create gender justice. This raised sense of awareness poses a challenge for a new feminist approach to address complex economic, political, and gender injustices with an informed theoretical analysis (Essof, 2005). This approach necessitates the formation of new alliances that transcend the local to embrace national and global feminist alliances and solidarity.

Dilemmas related to feminist politics in Africa go back to the time of the first UN World Conference on Women in Mexico City in 1975, when the hegemony of the Global North in feminist politics was contested (Connell, 2014). That historical moment posed the questions of global solidarity and global inequality at the same time, launching a debate in which ambiguities in the global project of feminism quickly became evident (ibid). The debate has continued to this day, though on changing terms.

While the term “Third World feminism” emerged in the USA among Black feminists in the 1980s, its emergence in the South coincides with the UN-sponsored Decade for Women conference in Nairobi in 1985. The conference was attended by Third World liberation movements, Black and immigrant women’s groups from Western countries, and representatives from the UN, NGOs, and government. The conference represented the first opportunity for a global women’s movement to be informed by an agenda from the Global South. The conference discussed natural disasters, debt, capitalism, structural imbalances, and their impact on women from developing nations who bear the negative consequences. Ways to mitigate this negative impact through the establishment of a new and equitable international economic order was discussed, as well as women’s inequality and how it shapes the gendered nature of development
Iris Berger (2014) also notes that one of the critical issues discussed was the relation between feminism and national liberation movements, with representatives from national liberation groups challenging the official delegates from Western countries who denied that apartheid and Palestinian rights were women’s issues.

Kristen Ghodsee (2010) notes that tensions arose at the international level between Americans and Eastern Bloc women from the Soviet Union backed by their liberation movement allies from Third World countries. The US official liberal feminist delegates’ agenda on development focused on women’s issues appropriate for the US, mostly focused on the Women in Development (WID) approach, which calls for the integration of women in development processes. The WID proposal was attacked by anti-capitalist socialist feminists from the Eastern Bloc and Third World liberation movement feminists as focusing merely on the symptoms rather than the structural causes of marginalization; these feminists advanced a socialist feminist agenda (Gender and Development – GAD came out of Sussex UK), arguing that “the oppression of women stemmed not only from patriarchy or systemic inequalities between men and women, but from exploitation, imperialism, colonialism, violence and warfare waged for the sake of private or national wealth accumulation” (Ghodsee, 2010, p.4). Socialist feminists from the Soviet Union and Africa succeeded in shaping the development discourse with the adoption of GAD instead of WID.

Based on this, the engagement of African feminist/women’s organizations with the issue of violence in Africa including Sudan is critical in redefining the notion of “post-coloniality” in Africa. Drawing upon empirical data from interviews and documents produced by the NuWEDA, SWU, and UN Women organizations, I examine how each of these three
organizations conceptualize and contest gender politics and violence in relation to both the state and international donors from the global North in Chapter 6.
Chapter 3: Research Methods

This chapter begins by reviewing related literature on different feminist postcolonial and decolonizing texts on knowledge production paying attention to power relations in research. Following this, it discusses the concept of positionality and its potential impact on my research and its findings, on the one hand, and on the ethical and confidentiality concerns, on the other. Finally, the chapter describes the methods used for this qualitative study, including the recruitment of the research participants and conduct of interviews. The chapter concludes with discussion of the research limitations and challenges.

This thesis investigates the relationship between feminism, nationalism and violence and how violence is contested by feminist and women’s organizations. It engages with both theoretical literature and empirical evidence. I use interviews, document analysis, and synthesis of secondary literature to generate data that enables us to explore how intersectional power relations inform the ways these three women’s organizations (namely Nuba Women for Education and Development Association, Sudanese Women's Union, and UN Women) conceptualize violence, and thus their practices. Through literature review I interrogated violence generated by post-colonial states and how the construction of the post-colonial state failed to account for gender and race in Africa in general and in Sudan in particular. The qualitative research for this dissertation employs a feminist anti-racist and decolonizing epistemology, which attends to power by challenging colonial ideologies of data and knowledge production. I engage with decolonizing anti-racist feminist approaches as a method in approaching and dealing with the key research questions. For instance, even though my initial research method of data collection was semi-structured interviews, I ended up using the method of oral storytelling in some of the cases to respond to the participants’ preferences. My reference to decolonizing anti-
racist feminist methodology goes beyond the interview method of data collection to include secondary data collected from the literature reviews. The questions raised throughout the thesis attempt to deconstruct power dynamics and colonial ideologies by evoking power differentials along the axes of gender, race, religion and geographical differences, asking how they are implicated in processes of nationalism, feminism and violence and why gender and race are key analytical elements. For example, throughout several chapters (chapter 2, 3, 5, 6, 7, 8), I deconstruct the notion of nation and nationalism and expose how nationalism as essentialized identity politics can both be liberating, i.e., as a colonial resistance strategy to fight for national liberation, as well as oppressing essentialized identity politics which function on bases of including some groups while excluding others within the same national boundaries. While I discussed how postcolonial feminist politics expose the gendered and racialized exclusionary nature of nation and nationalism, I also question the politics of the dominant “radical” Third World feminist postcolonial discourse and its ability to attend to violence experienced by some groups within African nation-states. Particularly those whose lives imbedded in histories of slavery within Third World countries, specifically Sub-Saharan slavery trade, particularly Nuba women in the Nuba Mountains in Sudan.

3.1 Knowledge Production and Power

Linda Tuhiwai Smith (2002), an indigenous scholar, challenges Eurocentric ways of knowing, and the underlying values and assumptions of the researcher that involve power relations. In speaking about qualitative research, different feminist and postcolonial scholars have emphasized how power is central to knowledge production. According to Diane Wolf (1996), three dimensions of power should be identified, acknowledged, and addressed by the researcher: (i) power in positionality; (ii) power during the research process; and, (iii) power in
the post-fieldwork stage. During research, I was conscious of the power associated with my positionality as a researcher in relation to research participants, the power relations in data generation, as well as how I analyzed and would publish findings. I acknowledge some of the challenges posed as a result of power relations and the negotiation of power between myself and research participants, and how I attempted to negotiate the space between ‘I’ and ‘them’. I draw upon the work of a wide range of feminists who attend to the decolonization of the process of knowledge production and remind us that a knowledge claim requires responsibility and accountability as it affects the lives of those living in the researched communities.

Some feminists discuss how institutions play a role in reproducing and maintaining certain discourses. Dorothy Smith (1987) uses the concept of power as relations of ruling to emphasize how society is organized by those with the power to construct specific values and principles of ruling that inform institutional practices in order to reproduce the wider ruling relations. For example, Dorothy Smith (1993) explains how the dominant North American family ideal, which operates through the discourse of constructing the mother as responsible for the success of the children, finds its way to social practice and everyday life, even with unconscious intent. However, Smith further explains how deviations from the dominant discourse are suspect, and that ruling relations are fluid. She further argues that institutions might consciously or unconsciously challenge, reproduce, or maintain hegemonic national discourses (1987). In this sense, the concept of the relations of ruling is very important as it helps us think of power relations as non-binary, fluid and contested.

Furthermore, several feminist scholars also investigate how the researcher can represent the diverse construction of meaning regarding specific knowledge, specifically how certain systems of domination work to exclude some or include others. Margaret Wetherell (2003)
argues that data should not be limited to the participants’ own experiences and views, arguing for the integration of the knowledge of the researcher, who is also a participant in the research and who supposedly has knowledge on the specific topic so that knowledge will be co-constructed by both the researcher and research participants. Thus, both secondary data as well as empirical data will be brought together with my own knowledge and experience of nationalism and violence in Sudan to co-construct knowledge of feminism, nationalism and violence in Sudan and in the Nuba Mountains.

Different feminist and postcolonial scholars also alert us to be wary of “truth” and knowledge claims that can be used by others to justify the domination of certain groups. Mohanty (2003), Smith (2012), DeVault (1999), and Edward Said (1978) emphasize the interaction between power and knowledge production and argue that power can be deployed to enforce an imperialist discourse about the “other”. Mohanty refers to the scholarly power that produces hegemonic discourses as a form of “discursive colonization” (p. 50). My research relies primarily on Chandra Mohanty (1998) for guidance on how to both decolonize, and meaningfully and ethically interrogate the systems of power shaping the diverse lives of Sudanese women, particularly those racialized as African. Mohanty (1988) analyzes and criticizes the three primary assumptions present in Western hegemonic feminist discourse that construct the “Third World Woman,” providing the methodological rationale for this research project. The three problematic assumptions are: 1) conceptual: analyzing women’s oppression based exclusively on patriarchy, treating women as a monolithic group with the same interests and desires regardless of their race, ethnic or class location; 2) methodological: reflecting a sense of universality and cross-cultural validity by presenting Third World women as dependents within structures of family, kinship and religion; and 3) political: failing to acknowledge that
both the conceptualization of women’s oppression and methodological engagements are shaped by global processes such as imperialism. Notably, Mohanty argues that the last assumption omits the struggle of Third World women resulting from colonialism and its material, social and political legacies, and their implication for Third World Women. Though these criticisms are directed towards Western hegemonic feminism in the 1980s, Mohanty notes that her criticism holds for any discourse that “sets up its own authorial subject as the implicit referent, i.e., the yardstick by which to encode and represent cultural Others. It is in this move that power is exercised in discourse” (1988, p.64).

In her argument against the first problematic assumption, which emphasizes patriarchy and the uniformity of women’s interests, Mohanty posits that defining women’s experience purely in gendered terms perpetuates the false and ethnocentric belief that being a “woman” has nothing to do with race, class, or nation. She points out that through the discourse of Western feminist, the “distinction between 'Woman' and 'women' is lost” (1988, p. 65). And that “Third-world women, on the other hand, never rise above the debilitating generality of their 'object' status” (p. 67). She further adds that the problem is not about gender being a category of analysis to women’s oppression, but about privileging gender as the origin of oppression. For Mohanty (1988), "it is only by understanding the contradictions inherent in women's location within various structures that effective political action and challenges can be devised" (p.74). She argues that representation of multiple voices and the discursive power used to construct collective identity through the universalization and generalization of different subjective voices erases the experiences of those on the margins. Doing this, she stresses, means that those in power become and remain the only true subjects.
Mohanty finds that her criticisms of Western feminism also apply within some Third World countries where middle class, urban African and Asian scholars assume a stable category of woman based on the normalization of their own middle class culture. To this point, several national women’s movements and feminist movements in Third World countries advance discourses based on patriarchy, neglecting differences between and among women within the same country across race/cast/ethnicity, class, religion etc. Significantly, challenges to such discourse were made against the women's movement in India by Dalit feminists, in South Africa, and in Turkey as well, by Kurdish feminists.  

3.2 Positionality

Recognizing my power and privilege as a Sudanese Muslim and as a graduate student in a Western University, I am aware that the speaker’s location or social identity has an epistemically significant impact on that speaker’s claim to knowledge, since “our knowledge claims are historically situated, socially embodied, and mediated through multiple and shifting relations of power and privilege” (Creese and Frisby, 2010, p.3). Following Gillian Creese and Wendy Frisby, I position myself in writing as a postcolonial feminist woman of Sudanese descent. However, I am aware I share common experiences and cultural knowledge with my participants to a certain extent, but I am also aware that my research participants may not feel the same way. Based on the construction of race in Sudan, I am of mixed race, both African and Arab, Muslim, and a speaker of one of Sudan’s Arabic dialects and English. I was born and raised in rural areas of Sudan near the border between South and North Sudan, later moving to

urban areas. I have had access to travel abroad, the privilege of a graduate Western university education, and access to professional work at national and international non-governmental agencies.

My positionality as a researcher is not uncomplicated. As a feminist researcher committed to decolonizing methodologies, I consciously bring my subjectivity and social location into the research, as they inform and shape the process of the research, and therefore impact how I construct narratives about the lives of the researched. I am aware that my positionality as a Sudanese woman of Muslim background with mixed race ancestry, an Arabic speaker, and a student in a Western university complicates my insider position. Rather, I am positioned as an insider/outsider. My mixed race and religion background position me differently by each of the three organizations. My social positions might not bother UN Women; viewing me only as a Sudanese woman, the SWU might see me as an insider, while NuWEDA might see me as outsider and insider at the same time. Studying in a Western institution locates me as a political outsider who potentially embodies ideologies that stereotype “Third World women” as oppressed, lacking agency and needing to be “saved”.

My volunteer activism with some of the Sudanese women’s movements as well as my work with international development organizations position me well in the field. They represented a key entry point for building trust between myself and the three organizations I studied (SWU, NuWEDA, UN Women). Being known by some of the members of SWU and NuWEDA helped build trust and rapport. It also enabled me to discuss their gender politics with them, especially in a context like Sudan where organizations working on social justice must be careful about what to communicate and to whom regarding their feminist/gender politics.
Participants indicated to me that they felt safe with me and trusted I would ensure their safety in conducting and publishing this research.

Contrary to the belief that an insider/outsider position complicates knowledge production, I would argue that my insider/outsider position adds strength, but also complexity to knowledge production. Patricia Hill Collins (1999) and Chad Witcher (2010) argue that there are multiple ways to position oneself within research relationships. Both insider and outsider statuses have advantages and disadvantages. Witcher sees what he calls the “relative insider” as a position that acknowledges the diverse nature of the researcher’s position. Collins, on the other hand, refers to this position as the “outsider within,” arguing that being an outsider provides a perspective that an insider may not have, which in turn contributes to greater objectivity because it acknowledges that multiple voices are required for the production of knowledge.

On a number of occasions during the fieldwork I felt as though I was simultaneously an insider and an outsider. While most of the time I felt like an insider and had no difficulty relating to research participants, in some situations I felt like a confused and uncertain outsider. The latter happened when discussions with two research participants led to issues of sexuality. In our conversations, they defined sexuality as irrelevant to feminist/gender politics in Sudan. Engaging reflexively, I realized that my views on the matter have been shaped by my exposure to the West and my studies at the University of British Columbia (UBC). The participants repeatedly reminded me that sexuality was not relevant to Sudanese’ current struggle for social justice, and that it is only relevant in Western countries. When this issue of sexuality came up with another participant, I was able to strategically share my views without offending them or disturbing the interview.
My affiliation to a Canadian university was one of the key aspects of my outsider status and could be interpreted by some participants as contributing to cultural imperialism. I was mindful of the trope of “helpless women in the developing world”, especially in the interpretation of data and the writing process. I sent the descriptions of the three organizations to the organizations for review and feedback. Their feedback is incorporated in the current text. While this review was done with both NuWEDA and SWU, it did not happen with UN Women, since the description was mostly taken from their website and the organization’s documents, and the only participant in this research had left the organization at this point in the process and I was not able to establish communication with her.

Another element worth noting is that the political atmosphere in Sudan is tense. ‘National security’ is a big concern for the state, which employs harsh measures against social justice activists. It is not easy for a feminist researcher to position herself as apolitical and detached in her ideological position. At times I felt much closer to one group or participant than another. This is not to say that I devalue the work of any of the three organizations or any of the participants. On the contrary, I appreciate all of the work the three organizations and their members are doing. I informed all participants that after my thesis defense, I plan to organize a workshop to share the findings of the research with the three organizations, record their reactions to it, and further engage them in a discussion around the possibilities of establishing solidarity and strategic linkages.

3.3 Ethics and confidentiality

We must recognize that ethics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human. (Butler, 2005, p. 136)
Ethical concerns were very central throughout the whole process of my research. My goals are to inspire social justice and my key principle is “do no harm”. I focused on the ethical implications involved in every step of the research process, from obtaining consent, to conducting interviews, to writing, and, finally, to publishing. In addition to reflecting upon the ethical dilemmas inherent in each step of the process, I also ensured that my methodology met feminist ethical standards in research. While traditional research requires the researcher to be detached from those being researched, I shared data with the three organizations. As well, I participated in some of the activities they were organizing during the time I was conducting interviews and shared critical reflections.

Sudan is a politically charged context. Discussion around violence, especially in relation to state violence, will generate risk, especially if it is captured in a written document. Therefore, my main concern was to do no harm to the research participants by making sure their safety came before the research. One example that illustrates the importance of this occurred in 2012 when a teacher and activist from the Nuba Mountains was interviewed by a journalist about the current security situation in that region. In her response, she described how the war had impacted the lives of the Nuba people. She condemned it and called for an immediate cease-fire in order to put an end to the people’s suffering. The journalist, who was a Sudanese woman living in Khartoum, posted the interview on YouTube. In response, the state security agency accused the activist from Nuba of attempting to wage war against the state, and the recording was used as evidence in her trial. Ultimately, the Nuba activist was convicted as a threat to “national security” and sentenced to death for conspiracy to topple the regime, whereas the journalist was only detained for a few days while she was being investigated. The journalist was finally released without being charged. Fortunately, national and international solidarity campaigns
worked together to force the release of the activist from Nuba. At the time of her release, she had already spent one full year in prison where she faced numerous health risks and the psychological torment of knowing she could be executed at any time. 11 This story clearly reflects the importance of ethics to ensure safety and security of the research participants.

I made initial contact with the heads of the three organizations I would be working with by sending a letter that outlined my research. To ensure the safety and security of my research participants, in the letter I indicated the ultimate objective of the research, how and where I would disseminate my results, the language I intended on using, the potential risks associated with participating in the research, security measures that would be taken to prevent these risks, and the protection of the participants’ identities. I assured them that confidentiality would be respected. Information that discloses participant identity will not appear in the interview or the research paper and participants will be referred to anonymously. All data gathered will be kept confidential in an external USB kept in a locked drawer.

In the context of Sudan, consent raises serious ethical issues surrounding confidentiality, security, safety, and publication rights. Smith (2012) and DeVault (2007) argue that written consent is critical, as it is important to integrate researched people’s own protocols and ethical values into academic ethics. However, given the political context in Sudan, where open discussion around issues of gender, race, and religion carry high risk for both participants and researchers, I learned that paperwork might expose them to security risks. In the end, I used oral consent to overcome their security concerns associated with documentation and signatures. All research participants agreed to be quoted using a pseudonym.

Emotions emerged as a very important factor during my interviews. I informed the organizations that there is a possibility that the interview will trigger memories of difficult experiences that could be upsetting, and if it happens, participant may request to take a break, turn off the audio-recorder, move on to a different topic, or end the interview. I also made them aware that I had identified different resources such as counselling and health services in Khartoum that I could recommend and help to establish access if the need arose. Emotional issues arose with a few participants from NuWEDA, due to the triggering of memories of traumatic events that resurfaced during the interviews. I drew from feminist advice to capture and treat emotion as data (DeVault, 1999). I also adhere to Elizabeth Hoffman’s (2007) dictum that the well-being of research participants should be a researcher’s top ethical priority. During the interviews, a few participants from NuWEDA recounted how they had been exposed to mistreatment from security personnel while they were providing services to women in the Nuba mountains region amidst the fighting. Others expressed moments of sadness, anger, frustration, and silence when trying to explain the situation the Nuba women face, as well as what they encountered during their work. I checked with each of them if they needed support, but none of them wanted to follow up.

The accuracy of interpreting and translating the language of the interviews was also a major ethical concern for me, because all interviews were conducted in Arabic, based on the research participant’s choice, with the exception of three that were conducted in a mix of English and Arabic. As stated earlier in the thesis, Nuba do not speak one local language, but several; however due to the national education system, all of them speak fluent Arabic. Since I am also an Arabic speaker, and I am also very familiar with different dialects spoken in Sudan, I consider myself to be in a good position to negotiate interpretation and meanings with participants. I
continually checked with participants with regard to the intended meaning of key words or concepts expressed in Arabic, especially considering Arabic terms carry many meanings. I paid attention to Kirsch’s (1999) call for the researcher to negotiate interpretations of data which are both culturally and linguistically situated. Right after the interview or during a follow up interview, I asked each participant whether they wanted me to omit specific information or opinions they raised during the interview for reasons of confidentiality.

Finally, I made a commitment to the three organizations to organize a feedback session and share the findings of this thesis with research participants after my defense, in order to explore the possibilities of solidarity and strategic linkages between the three organizations. I also told both NuWEDA and SWU that in the near future, and if circumstances allowed, I would do my best to publish the research in Arabic after being published in English and would make it available to them and their members.

3.4 Methods: Interviews, Documents and Data Analysis

In order to answer the questions which guided this research, I relied on interviews, document analysis, and a synthesis of secondary literature to answer the questions:

1. How has nationalism been defined in post-colonial Sudan and how is it implicated in gendered and racialized violence?
2. How do the three organizations conceptualize violence against women in Sudan?
3. How are gender politics in Sudan negotiated by the three organizations?
4. What does being feminist mean for the three organizations?

The first research question is addressed through a synthesis of the secondary literature on state formation, nationalism in post-colonial contexts, and its links to gendered and racialized violence. The remaining set of questions on feminist conceptualizations of violence and engagement with state and international donors is addressed through the data generated by the interviews and analysis of organizational documents. The data generated from both the
interviews as well as from the different documents was interpreted to categorize the data under themes related to the research questions. The themes are: conceptualization of violence, relation with the state, relation with international donors, identification with feminism and solidarity linkages. Emerging discussion regarding feminism, postcoloniality and solidarity/networking were also captured. I used different feminist theoretical frameworks to situate the conceptualization of violence by each of the three organizations and analyzed how their strategies are shaped by their relationship with the state and international donors.

As indicated earlier in Chapter 1, women organizing in Sudan engage broadly with three discourses that are informed by secular left, nationalists/religionists and grassroots activism (Hale, 2001). The three organizations I chose as case studies (SWU, NuWEDA, and UN Women) do not represent all these three major discourses. NuWEDA can be considered representing grassroots activism while SWU represents the secular left. My choice for UN Women is that it is the only international organization in Sudan that is exclusively working with women in Sudan. While inclusion of women’s organizations that advance the nationalist/religionists discourse could have enriched this dissertation, for security concerns, I decided not to include them, since most of these types of organizations are believed to be linked to the current government; any contact with them may confiscate the research and potentially put me and other research participants in danger.

For this study, I chose to work with Nuba Women for Education and Development (NuWEDA), the Sudanese Women's Union (SWU), and United Nation Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) because I hoped to get a sense of the variability of the approaches and the local-national, and local-global dichotomies that inform each organization's conceptualization and actions in addressing violence against racialized
women in the context of the Nuba Mountains. My close knowledge of women’s organizations working in Sudan helped me to identify the three groups for this study. My choice for the local/indigenous group was based on their rootedness in the region as well as the resilience they have shown in continuing to work with Nuba women despite significant threats from security forces. The national organization (SWU) is the oldest women’s organization in Sudan, established during colonial rule. It claims to represent the agenda of all Sudanese women. The international organization is the only UN organization that is working exclusively with women and coordinates the work of other UN agencies with women in Sudan. Together, these three organizations provide diverse approaches to addressing the situation of Sudanese women in general, and Nuba women in particular.

I relied heavily on interviews in this research since I believe that qualitative, open-ended interviews can be an empowering process for both the researched and researcher. In doing so, I draw on the work of Kirsch (1999), who argues that open-ended interviews help to establish a non-hierarchical relationship between the researcher and her participants, allowing collaboration. This approach can help uncover hidden and untold stories by both the privileged and the marginalized (DeVault, 2007). I made a conscious effort to exercise self-reflexivity, especially when discussing controversial issues such as race and religion. In this regard, I drew from Anita Pomerantz and Alan Zemel (2003), who call for the researcher to pay special attention to how to formulate a neutral question that is not implicated explicitly with a known position on the topic. This attempt at neutrality is very important for this study, as the issues of race and religion in relation to gender are extremely sensitive political topics in Sudan due to their relation to the contemporary nation-building project.
I interviewed 22 research participants—18 women and 4 men. Nineteen of the 22 participants were working in different capacities with national and Indigenous organizations, two were from an international organization (UNFPA) and one was a feminist scholar who provided ideas regarding the research theme from outside the organizations. Interviews were conducted during the periods of January to April 2015, and between September to October 2015. These participants represented a diversity of backgrounds and worked in different capacities with their various organizations including as board members, managers, programmers, and community mobilizers. It was important to have men in the interviews to challenge the essentialization of feminism as only relevant to women’s struggle. The interviews aimed to document the participants’ views on the organization’s engagement with gendered violence. The interviews were conducted in an open-ended format, including storytelling, in order to generate data that would capture variations in how violence against women in Sudan is conceptualized and addressed by the three organizations. The interviews were further developed to explore how that conceptualization is informed by intersectional power relations shaping violence, and how the work of these organizations is facilitated or hindered by the state and international donors. Nine of the interviews were audio-taped, but 13 were not due to the preference of participants, or because the interview location was not convenient for recording. In these instances, I took field notes. Most interviews (15) were conducted face to face, while 7 were carried out via the phone. The face to face interviews generated more in-depth data, since the interviews took longer than what than the time initially agreed upon, of course, with permission from participants. Throughout the interview process, I kept my journal with me and recorded my own reflections regarding the process itself.
In order to schedule interviews with the three organizations that collaborated in this study, I had to enter into negotiation processes with each in regard to time, location and mode of interviewing. Before conducting interviews, I spent time building trust, especially with the executive board and key staff. The heads of the organizations had to consult their members and then come back to me for clarification before agreeing to participate. The negotiation process varied with each of the three organizations. With the UN Women, scheduling meetings were based on their availability. I chose this approach because unlike the other two organizations, the process of negotiation was more complicated as I needed to navigate the UN system by approaching different staff in the UN hierarchy. They decided interviews would be limited to one staff member as a spokesperson and it was impossible for me to recruit more staff. With SWU, we negotiated mutual agreements for meetings and interviews. I know that many members of NuWEDA work on a voluntary basis live far from the downtown area where their offices are located. Therefore, I asked participants to decide when, where and for how long we should meet. In fact, many of the participants preferred to meet over the phone to save time that they needed to devote to other duties.

While the negotiation process went smoothly with NuWEDA, whose members were very welcoming to the idea of the research, the negotiations with SWU took some time, since they needed to engage in wider consultation with their members. Negotiation was most time consuming with UN Women. While my target was 5 research participants from UN Women, they noted that the organization has no specific program in the Nuba Mountains. Rather, they work nationally with programs to support women in Sudan in general, with the only regional programs located in Darfur and East Sudan. Therefore, they suggested that only 2 staff be interviewed, one from the national program and one from the Darfur program. In the end, only
one interview was completed with a staff member working at the national level. The second international staff declined to be interviewed, and instead preferred to forward documents regarding the work she is doing. Therefore, the questions were adjusted for UN Women so that they could focus on the overall support of UN Women in Sudan, with a specific emphasis on programs targeting the war zone areas.

I think the reluctance of UN Women was due to the fact they had their own reservations talking about the conditions for women from war zone areas: during the time I was in Sudan (in 2015) for my fieldwork, the UN system in Sudan was accused by human rights groups of not intervening in a crime case where the mass rape of 200 women by government militias took place in Darfur. Given this, it is likely that talking about conditions of women from war zone areas became a politically charged and sensitive topic for UN organizations.

Recruitment of participants was done in close consultation with the respective organization. The key criteria I determined for recruitment necessitated participants be currently involved in policy making, programming, and implementation (as staff, board member or as a volunteer), and they should also represent diverse backgrounds in terms of race, religion, age, and physical ability (dependent on availability and willingness). I met research participants individually and engaged in detailed discussion about the objectives of the research, as well as discussion relating to the Sudanese women’s movements in general.

Consent was sought before the interview was scheduled and once more right before the interview began, with the location and time of the interview being decided by the research participant. The circumstances of the interviews were varied. Some participants preferred to

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conduct the interview at their homes, while others preferred doing so in their organization’s office. Some preferred the evening, others during the day. Additionally, some preferred to be interviewed face to face, while others wanted to do it over the phone. Most interviews were digitally recorded and very few notes were taken based on the request of participants. During the interview process, three participants asked me to use my own judgment to remove sensitive information that might lead to their identification. Other participants said they wanted all that was said to be on the record. This willingness to go on the record with their statements is likely attributable to the fact that they knew they would remain anonymous during the interviews and in the subsequent thesis and publication.

Storytelling is an important aspect of life in Africa in general, and in Sudan, in particular where it is employed for socializations and knowledge sharing purposes. Through storytelling as a mean of communication, people learn that being direct and to the point are less educational. Unlike traditional mythologies, it is argued that storytelling allows the researcher to explore how the present narrative is constructed in relation to the past (Bennett and Detzner, 1997). Telling a story provides listeners with more context, and therefore a better way of understanding the ideas that the teller wants to share. I intended to use semi-structured interviews to generate my data. Some participants were fine with the semi-structured interviews, but others preferred to read the interview checklist beforehand and then respond to the questions through storytelling. Some of the research participants indicated that oral storytelling was much easier for them because it allowed for the order of information to flow naturally as the story is told. It is interesting that those who preferred this type of interview invited me to meet them at their homes or in public spaces. Six out of the 22 interviews were obtained through storytelling. During the first storytelling interview, I started disrupting the story, hoping to direct the participants to the points
I wanted to cover. However, the reaction from the participant made it clear that she preferred telling her story her way, although it took longer than expected. Storytelling is considered more culturally appropriate for some, giving participants more power and control over the interviews. This eventually leads to the production of hybrid texts that “at once give voice to indigenous memory systems long silenced by the history of imperialism and transform the usually solitary reading experience into a more cooperative and responsive act of listening” (Dickinson, 1994, p, 321).

Interestingly, I reflected on how my own African socialization around an oral story style of communication was undermined by my style of communication in Western academia, where one must be articulate and to the point. Although I was concerned that storytelling would affect the quality of the data, it proved to not be the case. In fact, it resulted in a deeper discussion. I became less nervous and more appreciative of diverse styles of communication and ways of interviewing research participants. This positive feeling helped me enjoy the conversations even more. To make sure the story responded to my checklist of questions, we agreed that after I reviewed the story, we could have additional conversation if more information were needed. I had to follow up my initial interviews with two of these participants.

I reviewed the three organizations’ documents that were made available to me, such as organizational project documents and related information from the organizations’ websites. I conducted content analysis from the documents using similar codes to those used analyze the interviews. The thematic codes included: conceptualization of violence, interaction with the state, interaction with international donors, feminism, and solidarity.
3.5 Research Limitations and Challenges

This research has some challenges and limitations. First, my initial plan was to conduct my fieldwork in the Nuba Mountains in order to be able to get a sense of the impact the three organizations on the lives of women. However, due to the ongoing war and the lack of security in the region, UBC’s policies and regulations prevented me from conducting my fieldwork in the region. Instead, I interviewed members of the three organizations who were operating in Khartoum, and I conducted phone interviews with those who were working in the Nuba Mountains. In addition, I was also unable to conduct observations of the organizations’ activities in the Nuba Mountains as I had originally planned. Secondly, my initial plan was to have 5 interviews with members of UN Women. I ended my fieldwork having conducted only one complete interview. The negotiation process with UN Women was somewhat complicated. Although the head of the organization, the Deputy Representative at the time, was very welcoming and took my study seriously, it was not easy to get staff to agree to be interviewed. At the end, I had one complete interview with a national staff member in Khartoum, while the international staff member who was working in Darfur was too reluctant to engage in an interview and preferred to send documents through emails, which she did.

The resulting lack of interviews with UN Women is thus a limitation of my research. The inability to record all interviews led me to take field notes for some interviews. The inability to do all interviews face-to-face was also a limitation of this research, since the quality of data was relatively less rich than the recorded interviews and the ones done face to face. Another research limitation is that national and local organizations in Sudan have real security concerns over sharing written material. This concern limited my access to key organizational documents like annual reports, project documents and meetings reports. Organizations were not
able to tell me information in relation to funding due to sensitivity surrounding funding details. These security concerns arise from the continuous raiding of civil society organizations by Sudanese security officers where they take all of the organizations’ written documents that could later be used as evidence of working against the state. Therefore, much of the information related to the organization’s programs was generated during the interviews rather than gleaned from documents.

One of the challenges I encountered regarded time management. For example, participants from SWU all had different schedules due to being professional working women with other commitments beyond their work at the SWU. This was challenging for me because I had to work around their schedules, I had to learn to deal with my frustration when appointments were cancelled multiple times, or when I was given a vague time frame for when they could be interviewed. On the other hand, my interviews with the participants from NuWEDA were one of the easiest parts of my research. In fact, I interviewed more participants than I had initially intended.

Before addressing my research questions, I recognize that it is important to familiarise readers with Sudan as the research context, specifically the history of Sudan and state formation since pre-colonial, colonial to post-colonial eras before moving on to analyse fieldwork data. I provide this context in chapter 4.
Chapter 4: Sudan state formation, race, gender and violence

This chapter disentangles how and why national identity in Sudan has been framed narrowly as Arabic/Islamic. I will trace the production of such racial and religious identity categories to show how the interlinking of gender, racial and religious categories act to produce multiple forms of violence against women in Sudan. I emphasize that in order to understand the current state violence in Sudan, it is important to attend to Sudan’s history of pre-colonialism, colonialism and the chronology of Sudan’s state formation. To do so, I will first revisit the legacy of slavery and then consider how gender, race and religion have been consolidated in early state/nationalist discourse and practices in Sudan. After that I will examine post-colonial state nationalism and nation building projects in Sudan to reveal how the ideals of Islamic/Arabic nationalism are embodied by Sudanese women from different racial/ethnic and religious backgrounds, particularly by women from Nuba Mountains.

4.1 History of Sudan

The root causes of Sudan’s civil war are complex: “religion, local perceptions of race, and social status, economic exploitation, and colonial and post-colonial interventions are all elements in Sudan’s civil war, but none, by itself, fully explains it” (Johnson, 2003, p. 1–2). The current political and humanitarian crises in modern Sudan, including in the Nuba Mountains, have been attributed to different factors and causes. While some view them as racial and religious struggle over national cultural identity (Arabic/Islamic), others categorize them as a class struggle, based on the dialectic relation of the center and the margins and the unequal distribution of power and wealth between the center and the periphery (Ismail, 2015; Jok, 2007).

13 The word “Sudan” is derived from the Arabic word, “Aswad”, which means black.
Francis Deng (2004) argues that the current humanitarian crisis is ultimately and directly connected to Sudan’s history of slavery in both precolonial and colonial eras. Deng writes: “the connection between slavery and humanitarian crises in modern Sudan is inherent in the atrocities associated with slavery, the resistance to it, and the tragic consequences on the victims and their communities” (p. 2).

The modern state of Sudan is a colonial creation and not an indigenous/internal evolution of different Sudanese societies (El-Batthahani, 2011; Mayo, 1994). Throughout its precolonial history, Sudan has not known a central unified state, but different kingdoms and tribal communities (El-Batthahani, 2011). The first centralized Sudanese state was introduced by the Ottoman Empire, during the rule of Muhammad Ali Pasha in 1821, later consolidated by the British after they defeated the Al Mahdia state and defined Sudan’s borders (El-Batthahani, 2011).

Mansour Khalid (1990), a prominent political thinker and political advisor to SPLA/M until 2005, pointed out how the Sudanese ruling elite from North Sudan, having been entrusted with running the country after independence and throughout different governments, constantly failed to achieve development and manage cultural diversity. Instead, independence resulted in conflict, cultural bigotry and underdevelopment of many regions due to the ruling elites’ narrow sectarian politics. Diversity has been one of the major challenges for Sudanese leaders in their attempts to forge an independent nation. Unfortunately, only a few of Sudan’s influential leaders have concerned themselves with addressing this diversity, while the majority have chosen instead to ignore it or eliminate the minority cultures (Khalid, 1990). Thus, the narrowly “imagined” ethnic national identity of “Arabic/Islamic” has instead become the main focus for nationalist and statist campaigns.

14 Sudan’s People Liberation Army/Movement
In forging an ethnic and cultural nationalism since independence, Sudan’s ruling class has imposed a “post-colonial” national identity based on their imagination of the Sudan nation as “Muslim Arab”. This forced the assimilation of indigenous groups in Sudan who are not Muslim or Arab in many regions including: South Sudan, Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile, Darfur, East Sudan and the Nubians. The degree and systemization of the assimilation projects varied among the different governments in the extent of power utilized, with more forceful and systematic projects during military regimes and less intensity during democratic regimes. This forcible assimilation was encountered with resistance from indigenous groups who contest hegemonic nationalism and propose an alternative citizenship rights framework that is more inclusive. This tension has led to civil war that began before independence in 1956 and has been interspersed with brief periods of peace. The civil war and accordingly the resistance, or liberation movements, reached its highest intensity early in the 1980s with the official declaration of Sudan as an Islamic state. The second period of high intensity conflict began during the current military regime from 1989 to the present.

After decades of struggle and civil war, a Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed between the Sudan People’s Liberation Movement/Army (SPLA/M) and the Government of Sudan in 2005. One outcome of the CPA was that South Sudan was granted the right to a referendum and self-governance in 2011. Due to their location near the junction of North and South Sudan, South Kordofan (Nuba Mountains), Blue Nile, and Abyei (referred to in the CPA as The Three Transitional Areas) were granted a separate deal. These regions were expected to hold popular consultations by 2011, with each region’s constitutional future being determined by the feedback from the people of that region (Totten and Grzyb, 2014). Jan Pronk, then UN Special Envoy for peace in Sudan, was convinced at the time of the CPA’s signing that, “the
future status of South Kordofan has not been unequivocally established in the CPA. Will it belong to the North or to the South, after the people of Southern Sudan will have used their right of self-determination in the referendum foreseen in 2011?” (Komey, 2011, p. 16).

In 2011, South Sudan voted overwhelmingly for separation. In July 2011, the new state of South Sudan became an independent country. The popular consultations to take place in the three areas were interrupted and fighting started again between SPLA/M and the government of Sudan (Komey, 2011). Intensive violent conflict immediately restarted in the Nuba Mountains, Blue Nile and Abyei regions as well the conflict in the Darfur region which started 2003 and is ongoing at the time of this writing (2018). According to John Young (2015), though the peace agreement claimed to be comprehensive, the CPA only addressed the conflict between the north and South Sudan. Young further explains that, people from regions in transition, specifically the Nuba, who fought alongside SPLA/M with the vision of a united new Sudan were left behind, “when the movement they supported turned its back on them and opted for southern independence, the Nuba pressed for self-determination. In the end, they got neither” (2015, p. 163). Leaders from the Nuba Mountain region were disappointed with the outcome of the CPA. In their view, although the CPA ended the longest civil war in Sudan’s history, it also denied them the right to self-determination and failed to address and acknowledge their historical land rights and right to cultural identity, both of which were their primary reasons for joining the SPLA/M (Komey, 2009). This disappointment, combined with the CPA’s failure to address Nuba’s grievances, has led to the reemergence of a Nuba ethno-political movement that focuses on promoting Nuba identity and rights to land and Nuba culture (Komey, 2011). Mohamed Salih

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15 The Sudan state changed the land rights from private property rights to state managed common property rights.
(1995) describes the contemporary grievance of the Nuba Mountains in Sudan as both internal and external colonialism. Salih writes:

[The Nuba] as indigenous people of Sudan suffered persecution and dominance under external and internal colonialism. Human rights abuses, including genocide and ethnocide (or cultural genocide) have persisted and the Nuba are increasingly under pressure to give up their traditional way of life, lose access to their lands and other natural resources while immigrant Baggara and Jellaba ethnic groups are supported by the state. (1995, p. 71)

4.2 Construction of Race and Racial Categories

Amir Idris (2005) and Jok Maduat Jok (2007) explain that the construction of the identity categories “Arab” and “African” was both ideological and deeply racialized, with populations in North and Central Sudan claiming Arab descent. Idris explains that, while some “Arab” Sudanese are as dark as “African” Sudanese, their superiority is rooted in their historical connection to the enslaving group rather than their skin color. Al-Bagir al-Afifi Mukhtar explains the politics of color in Sudan:

The first color in rank is asfar. This literally means “yellow,” but is used interchangeably with ahmar to denote “whiteness.” The second is asmar. This literally means reddish, but it is used interchangeably to describe a range of color shades from light to dark brown… The third in ranking is akhdar. This literally means green, but it is used as a polite alternative to the word “black.” Last and least is azrag to mean “black,” which is the color of abid, (slave)… In order to avoid describing self as aswad (black), the collective Northern consciousness renamed the akhdar (green)... Whereas a very dark Northerner is only akhdar, an equally dark Southerner is bluntly aswad (black). (Cited in Deng, 2004, p.1)

Jok (2007) further adds that, while Sudanese conceptions of race draw upon some Western methods of racial differentiation (especially physical characteristics), they also rely on religion, economic activities, and cultural practices to confirm the differences. Arabism and pride have also been attributed to an internal struggle to delineate from the African race. 16

16 There is currently interesting move by some Sudanese activist in the diaspora (Europe, US and Australia) to revert to science, i.e. DNA Genetic Test to contest the constructed racial categorization of North Sudanese as Arab and the rest as black Africans.
Sharif Harir (1993) problematizes the polarization that results from the “Arab/African” dichotomy, noting that Arabization in Sudan is mostly a cultural construct rather than a racial reality. He further adds that “most of the Sudanese fall into the category of Arabized Africans rather than the opposite” (p. 294). Despite being regarded as a signifier for Arabic belonging, the Arabic language is only one of 100 other languages, and is spoken in numerous dialectics across Sudan’s different regions (ibid). Emphasizing the importance of genealogy for Arab/Muslim in Sudan, Abd al-Rahman al-Bashir, a notable Sudanese intellectual, explains how this combination of both Islam (as a cultural factor) and the Arabic (as a race and language) are somehow interlinked. He explains that:

You must belong to something [a known ancestry] … say the Abassids [which means] that your great, great, great grandfather [original ancestor] is Al-Abbas, the Uncle of the Prophet, so that you are distinguished. Some of the Sudanese think of themselves as Ashraf [descendants of the Prophet’s closest friends and associates]. This might be forced, but it gives them satisfaction. These are the things that are in the mind of the people: that you speak Arabic, the good language of the Koran, and you are from the Arab world which is the best nation God has created. Rightly or wrongly, this is the way people think. They find pride in this and in their origin, asl. The word asl is very important in the Sudan. If you want to marry, you should look for the asl. People think that way: How pure is this man? Is he contaminated or not? I am just explaining the way people think. (Interviewed by Deng, 2004, p. 7)

This way of thinking about race and purity explains how various “Arab” groups in Sudan are arranged in a social hierarchy that is based on their “Arabic” purity. In regard to the hierarchy of “Arab” groups in Sudan, Harir (1993) explains that “the riverain Arabs [in North Sudan] come out on top, since they define this hierarchy, and the rest comes after them. This is an important point since most of what is Sudanese, for instance music, prototypes, food, costume, etc., is defined from the riverain perspective, which again holds political power” (p. 295). It is worth

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17 Riverain refers to Sudanese people living along the River Nile in the North Sudan part of Sudan, where most of Sudanese leaders who ruled/ruling Sudan come from.
18 He refers to those Arab in central and west part of Sudan like Baggara and the rest.
noting here that political power throughout post-colonial Sudan is mostly monopolized by riverain Arab groups and individuals. According to Jok (2007), the ongoing civil war was interpreted by most African groups as a fight “not only for political inclusion but also to prevent the country, whose population is over 70 percent non-Arab\textsuperscript{19} … from being labelled as an Arab country” (p. 5).

4.2.1 History of Slavery

Africa underdevelopment can only be understood by understanding the historical process of how extraction of surplus created by African slaves and peasants had led to the accumulation of wealth in Western Europe. According to Rodney Walter (1972), development and underdevelopment have a dialectical relationship and underdevelopment of Africa has helped to develop Western Europe and vice versa. Walter further explains that European accumulation of capital was made from surplus in African colonies created by African slaves and peasants. The surplus was reinvested in industrial and mercantile activities and eventually it resulted in increasing the national wealth of European countries. Because of the accumulation of this wealth, West Europe continues to dominate Africa politically. As a result of this domination, Africa remains dependent on Western Europe and America economically, culturally and politically (ibid). However, worth noting that in East Africa, both European and intermediary locals (Arab and Indians in particular) were part and parcel of the apparatuses of surplus extraction, the profit of which was shared between the two groups (ibid). Sudan and its history of slavery should therefore be understood along this framework of capitalist accumulation.

To understand the construction of race in Sudan and the violence against non-Arabs (Black Africans), it is important to revisit the legacy of slavery in Sudan, since these categories

\textsuperscript{19} This estimate predates the separation of South Sudan.
are associated with the history of slavery. Slavery in Sudan is part of the Trans-Sharan slave trade, which is said to precede Trans-Atlantic slave trade. Slaves were traded off mostly from South East Africa and traded to North Africa/Middle East countries, Persia and European colonies in the Far East, where slaves were forced to work as soldiers, laborers and servants for their owners. It is worth noting that Arab, oriental traders as well as some local Africans are all implicated in this trade (Lodhi, 2000). According to Ahmed Sikainga (1996), throughout pre-colonial and colonial times in Sudan, slaves were defined in ideological, racialized/ethnic, and geographical terms, with populations from the Nuba Mountains, South Sudan, and Darfur being the main targets of slavery.

While slavery was originally a state activity since the pre-colonial era run by Islamic kingdoms (Deng, 2004), it was later jointly carried out by Turco-Egyptian officials, European traders, and North Sudanese Arab traders (Johnson, 2003). The Funj Kingdom/Sultanate, which is considered Africa’s first Islamic state, emerged in 1509 and had strengthened Arab influence in Sudan during pre-colonial times. This was followed by the rise of other Islamic kingdoms, such as the Tagali Kingdom in South Kordofan and the Fur Kingdom in Darfur. The main sources of income in these Islamic Kingdoms were the slave trade, animal hides, and traditional agriculture (Badri, 2009). During the pre-colonial era, the Nuba were subjugated to enslavement initiated by these Islamic Kingdoms, where “allied forces of the Fung kingdom and local Arabs invaded Kordofan and created further disorder and insecurity among the Nuba. They were forcibly pushed [further] southwards and ended up occupying uninhabited jebels [hills]. From that time onwards, there were periodic raids” (Komey, 2015, p. 16).

Sudan’s colonial period was demarcated by the rule of two foreign powers: The Ottoman or Turco-Egyptian Empire (1821-1881), and Anglo-Egyptian (1899-1956) colonial rule. During
these colonial periods, slavery was practiced with and without the participation of the colonial state. The Turks invaded Sudan in 1820 and established a joint Turco-Egyptian government as part of the bigger Ottoman Empire, introducing the concept of the modern state in Sudan for the first time in Sudan’s history (El-Battahani, 2011). The Ottoman-Egyptians had two main objectives in their conquest of 1821: to find gold and other minerals and to acquire “negroes” as slaves, largely from the Nuba Mountains, South Sudan and Darfur (Abdel-Rahim, 1996).

During the Ottoman rule, the Turks, as well as some north riverain Sudanese (who owned slaves), depended on slavery, especially in agricultural production which was the backbone for their economy. According to Janice Patricia Boddy, the Turks preferred Sudanese slaves to work on the land instead of free Sudanese men, since “slaves had no legal claim to a portion of the yield” (2007, p.155). This led to the association of the slave with manual hard work. This free slave labor became central for the Turks, especially given that commercial crops such as cotton, sesame, tobacco and indigo were in high demand to the Ottoman state (ibid). During the rule of the Ottoman Empire, slaves were the absolute property of their owners, referred to as “‘talking animals’, legally classed with livestock, and sold by the ‘head’” (Boddy, 2007, p.157). Boddy notes that by the 1860s, slave labour in Sudan became key to commercial crops production, especially of cotton, sesame and tobacco for foreign trade. This demand consistently resulted in:

[A] slave trading boom in Sudan…Thus slavery in Sudan was neither atavistic nor aberrant but [became] an economically ‘rational’ response to the pressure of European industrial capitalism mediated by the Ottoman Turks…From counting as 4 percent of the population in North Sudan [in the beginning of the Ottoman rule in Sudan in 1821] , by the end of the nineteenth century virtually all domestic and agricultural work in northern Sudan was performed by slaves, whose portion of the population had risen to as high as a third. (Boddy, 200, p. 157)

Juma Kunda Komey (2015) describes how insecurity and enslavement of the Nuba were institutionalized by both the Turco-Egyptian and the subsequent El Mahadia national Islamic
states, both of which became active in slave raiding, displacing Nuba from their own land, and pushing them further up in the jebels (hills) to seek protection from enslavement. During the Turco-Egyptian rule, Komey writes:

[T]he processes of Nuba enslavement and the dispossession of their plains land was reinforced and institutionalized. The Turco-Egyptian rulers did not attempt to conquer the Nuba region, ‘but took tribute, at first in the form of slaves, for recruits from a number of more accessible jebels… For several years, the Turks, Egyptians, and foreign and local traders raided these areas… four years after the conquest, the number of Nuba who had been taken into captivity was estimated at 40,000, but by 1839 the figure had reached 200,000…the best men were recruited into the army, others were handed over to Turkish soldiers in lieu of pay, and all those remaining were sold at public auction. (p.17)

Captured slaves were placed in camps in Aswan-Egypt, where they were either recruited into domestic slavery (especially women) or into the army (especially able-bodied men, (ibid)).

Komey further explains that the systematic raids and institutionalization of insecurity led to the dispossession and displacement of the Nuba from their fertile plains land and therefore their livelihood, as they took the top of the hills as their home.

The Ottoman rule established and forced the link between the Arab race and Islam with the application of formal Islam as a base for the state. By the end of the Ottoman and beginning of Mahadist national state, North Sudanese society was already stratified on the axes race and religion, a distinction rooted in the precolonial and colonial history of Muslim Arab migration to Sudan and the legacy of slavery. This legacy “bestowed servile connotations on the adjective Sudanese (sudani in Arabic), which derived from the Arabic term sud, meaning ‘black people’…In the view of high-status Muslims who regarded themselves as Arabs, being Sudanese meant being black, as the Arabic root of the term denoted, and being black, in turn, meant having low social status” (Sharkey, 2008, p. 29). By the collapse of the EL Mahadia national state and the establishment of the Anglo-Egyptian colonial rule 1898, Sharkey notes:
[T]here was no such thing as a self-identified ‘Sudanese Arab’ among the riverine region’s Muslim elites. At that time to be Arab was to be Muslim, to be Arab was to be free, and, ideally, it was to claim an Arab pedigree. Arabs, in short, were not slaves and the term ‘Arab’ (arabi, pl. arab) connoted high status. That is because in the northern regions of the Anglo-Egyptian Sudan, where both Islam and the Arabic language prevailed, Arabness was associated with Muslims who claimed Arab clan and tribal affiliations (that is, genealogical credentials) and who styled themselves as the local heirs and bearers of Islam. (Sharkey, 2007, p. 29)

Emphasizing the centrality of slavery to the production of these racial and religious identities, Deng writes:

Slavery was central to the normative classification of groups along racial, religious and cultural lines because it determined who was superior to be a master and who was inferior to be legitimately enslaveable. In turn, slavery contributed significantly to the consolidation of those qualitative identities. The broader context of Arabization and Islamization provided the framework for the formation of identity categories. (2004, p. 3)

Deng (2004) observes that the practice of slavery enabled the categorization of people into a master race of Arab/Muslims and an enslavable race of black Africans who “were deemed to have no culture, but could be redeemed by their adoption of Islam, the Arabic language, [and] Arab culture” (p.2).

The Ottoman consolidated power hierarchies along the lines of race and religion, favoring Arabs/Muslims over black African Sudanese who are mostly Christians and animist. Boddy notes that “the hegemony that formal Islam had attained under the Turks furnished a context in which claiming Arab descent and adopting a genealogy to support it were at the very least- sensible, pragmatic means to define oneself as “unenslaveable” (2007, p. 158). This genealogy of and process of racial characterization was in fact picked and used later by the British to serve their own imperialist and colonial project in Sudan after the abolishment of slavery.

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20 Same as riverain.
The Anglo-Egyptians ruled northern and central Sudan largely through direct rule by the central state, while marginalized regions like South Sudan, Darfur and the Nuba Mountains remained largely under the system of indirect rule; under the rule of customary chief-based systems. In the early 1920s, the Anglo-Egyptians introduced the Closed District Policy, which prohibited residents of North Sudan from entering regions of South Sudan and Nuba Mountains without permission from the colonial authorities. While formal education was introduced in North Sudan, the closed areas of South Sudan were left to Christian missionaries (Johnson, 2003). Arabic was promoted as the official language in North Sudan, while English was introduced as the official language in South Sudan and the Nuba Mountains. Additionally, while Islam informed the state laws in the north, the laws in South Sudan and the Nuba Mountains were mainly shaped by each region’s respective customs and traditions (Akolawin, 1973).

Though some northern Sudanese leaders argue that this policy has served to divide the country geographically by strengthening Nuba Mountains and South Sudan’s ties to East Africa and North Sudan’s ties to the Middle East/Arab countries, this policy was in fact to protect the Nuba from Arab-Muslim. Mayo (1994) cautions that “we should be clear about assumptions we make, especially when one emphasizes the concept of ‘Sudan-ness’” (p. 173). He further observes that the Closed District Policy was in fact partially intended to be a measure of protection against Arab slave traders in an effort to end slavery, as well as a mechanism to help establish self-contained racial units in South Sudan, the Nuba Mountains, and Darfur, a mechanism which was intended to help preserve the culture and traditions of the people in these regions.

When the Anglo-British took power, the Nuba were already displaced and the Arabs were in possession of former Nuba lands; active slave raiding continued even during the first few years under the new colonial rule. According to Komey:
To force the Nuba down from the hills, the Anglo-Egyptian again institutionalized violence against the Nuba by mobilizing Baggara Arab to force migration (ibid). This was a violent activity during which defiant Nuba leaders were killed, crops were destroyed, and young men were captured, almost destroying the Nuba’s means of livelihood up in the hills (ibid). This was the exact time when the British introduced the Closed District policy. In 1925, the British introduced cotton production in the Nuba Mountains region to serve European needs for raw material. For this project the British allocated land to Arab Baggaraa, Arab Jillaba\(^{21}\) merchants and Felata migrants from western Africa (ibid), while failing to empower the Nuba economically, culturally or politically (ibid). Instead:

[I]t simulated the involvement of more powerful actors who presented a further threat to the powerless Nuba’s livelihood and survival. Thus by the time of independence of the Sudan in 1956, the communities of the region were highly stratified where the Jillaba, the Baggara and the Nuba essentially occupied the top, the middle and the bottom of the ladder vis-à-vis socioeconomic development in the region. Within this stratification, the Nuba were largely bereft politically and economically. (p. 19)

Eventually in 1920, the British established a policy that abolished the slave trade in Sudan; however, although outlawing the sale of slaves, this policy continued to allow for their use. This relaxed slave policy was described by Warburg (1990) as being based more on economic reasoning than on moral considerations. In fact, the British views about Sudanese which were supported by the Egyptians, led the former to preserve the racial/ethnic hierarchy of Sudanese society (Boddy, 2007). The British started moving from scientific racism (that was

\(^{21}\) Jillaba refers to riverian Sudanese from North Sudan.
already established in Europe) and started viewing their subjects in relation to their capitalist agenda, ranking them based on what they see as relevant to their capacity as ethnic subjects, by considering “‘Soudanese’ –then meaning Southerners, slaves, and former slaves—to be strong, energetic workers but innately undisciplined, whereas “Arab” or northern Sudanese were possessed of a ‘slave-owning mentality’ and averse to manual work toil” (Boddy, 2007, p. 158).

In viewing their subjects more in ethnic and racial terms, the British reverted to “scientific racism” and later to “race” in connection to labour, to ascribe to Sudanese slaves and former slaves the capacity for hard unskilled manual work and ascribe to northern Sudanese a slave owning mentality and thus the inverse of manual work (ibid). The Anglo-Egyptian Condominium therefore turned slaves and ex-slaves into commodities connected to the economy as free and unpaid labour to create surplus for the Sudanese high class who owned the slaves and Europe which was in need of cheap agricultural raw materials for its industrial economy (ibid). During the first 25 years of their rule in Sudan, the British retained the owner-slave relation in Sudanese society and were not willing to interfere. The justification was to keep peace and prevent disorder (Boddy, 2007). Intervention in this relation was limited. According to a government memorandum in 1902: “runaway slaves were to be investigated: those with legitimate grievances were to be forced to work on public projects, and those considered to be without such grievances forced to return to their ‘masters’” (Boddy, 2007, p. 159). Later, the British governor General Archer wrote in 1925 “the ex- ‘slave’ obtains and continues in some employment, in which case all is well; but all often the man takes to a life of idleness or crime, the woman to prostitution” (Boddy, 2007, p.160). Therefore, ex slaves in towns were further restricted to specific residential areas as they were viewed as corrupt, immoral and with no

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22 It is interesting that this belief still exists in Sudan today.
ability to perform formal paid jobs (ibid). If convicted of living in the town without working in formal jobs they became subjects of state –through their enslavement\(^{23}\) (ibid).

On the other hand, the British invested in education for northern Sudanese men. They viewed the Arab high-status male as suited for academic education and professional administrative work within the state as a process of “co-opting these men and thwarting their resistance to the regime.” (Sharkey, 2007, p. 30). By doing this, “the British cultivated a group of men who had the literacy and the political know-how to develop and articulate nationalist ideologies upon Sudan independence. Not surprisingly, these men defined a nation in their own social image, as an Arab Muslim community” (ibid., p. 30).

Interestingly, upon independence of Sudan in 1956 and to forge a nationalism identity or Sudanization, the term Sudan quickly shifted and became associated with the identity of northern Sudan where the ruling class elites come from (Sharkey, 2007). Sudanization (elsuadna) then became closely connected with Arab identity, mastered by Sudanese Arab and Muslim affiliated elites:

In what is now Sudan there occurred over the centuries a process of *ta’rib*, or Arabization, entailing the gradual spread of both Arab identity and the Arabic language among northern peoples. After the Anglo-Egyptian conquest of 1898, British colonial policies favoured a narrow elite from within these ‘Arab’ communities. Members of this elite went on to develop a conception of a self-consciously Sudanese Arabic national identity, in the process adapting the term ‘Sudanese’ (*sudani*), which derived from an Arabic word for blackness and previously had servile connotations. At decolonization in the 1950s, these nationalists turned *ta’rib*, into an official policy that sought to propagate Arabic quickly throughout a territory where scores of languages were spoken. (Sharkey, 2007, p. 21)

4.2.2 The Coloniality of Gender

To perpetuate its oppressive practices, colonialism sustained the feudal relationships that furthered the contravention of women’s rights. During and after colonial rule, women’s

\(^{23}\) In other words, working for free for the state.
isolation from the political sphere was an accepted practice. This separation has in turn forced women into a situation of persistent subservience to their male kin... The lack of educational opportunities afforded women fewer avenues for upward social mobility and gainful employment. In this respect, the colonial regime was extremely successful in its efforts to undercut women’s mobilization and incorporation in the labor force ... Sudanese women, as colonial subjects, experienced problems comparable to those encountered by their male counterparts under British rule. (Fatima Ibrahim, cited in Abusharaf, 2004, p. 158-1959)

In order to understand the contemporary status of different women in Sudan, we should address women as colonial subjects. Through Sudan’s pre-colonial and colonial power, the question of women was central for both colonial powers and national Sudanese male leaders. During the pre-colonial Islamic kingdoms, the role of bondmaids (female slaves) was generally domestic and included tasks such as cooking and child care; they also participated in broader economic activities, such as agriculture, handicrafts, and animal rearing, as well as looking after their male and female masters (Badri, 2009). Bondmaids were also expected to please their masters with body massages and performing duties of a transcendental nature (ibid). On the other hand, aristocratic ladies in these Islamic kingdoms made no economic contribution, instead serving as “a source of pleasure and mental diversion for the husbands” (Badri. 2009, p. 19). Few aristocratic women were involved in religious school education (Khalwas). Likewise, few women in Southern Sudan held positions of power as religious or tribal leaders in their own tribal kingdoms during the same time period (Beswick, 2000).

During the Ottoman Empire, as with other states within the Empire, formal primary schools were established only for boys in order to prepare them to work as state employees in various state public sectors. A few women were permitted to run Islamic schools (Khalawas), which is only the case for women in central and northern Sudan. However, women in regions where the Turkish influence was less pronounced—such as the South, the Nuba Mountains, and western Sudan (including Darfur and Kordofan)—remained active in socio-economic and
political life (ibid). Particularly in South Sudan, female tribal leadership was promoted in order to serve the colonial economy, which was based on the slave trade and the collection of taxes from southern communities; male chiefs who were unable to fill their tax quotas were executed and replaced by female chiefs (Beswick, 2000). The application of formal Islam, in its hegemonic form, started during the Ottoman Empire. It included the application of Islamic rules in domestic spheres of marriage and divorce, as well as Islamic property rights and inheritance whereby female rights of inheritance are limited to half of male rights of inheritance (Boddy, 2007).

To implement its vision of an Islamic state, the subsequent national revolutionary movement, Al-Mahadia, which overthrew the Turks, was socially reactionary. It closed formal primary schools for boys established during the Ottoman Empire in an effort to expunge the Turkish education system. Occupied with the military and political agenda of the Islamic state, the Mahadist state focused on religious schools rather than formal education (Badri, 2009). Another major item of the Mahadist state’s agenda pertained to the place of women within the society. The Mahadist’s Islamic family law was the major source of rights for women in north and central Sudan. Women belonged in the home and should be allowed only a limited education that was predominately based on religion (Badri, 2009).

British efforts to foster Sudanese girls’ education were very limited if not nonexistent. British elementary schooling was mostly directed to make reliable workers of northern boys to become employed as low ranking administrators for the state. The only schools for girls were private Christian missionary schools where girls were taught the ideals of being a mother and a wife, beside reading and writing. Literacy, numeracy, home economics, and child care were taught, all based on Christian foundations. Sudanese Muslims defined the curricula of this
education as Westernized and culturally inappropriate for their girls. Therefore, few Sudanese girls were enrolled in these schools, only in Omdurman school. In the early 1900s, the British refused a petition by Sudanese who asked for government elementary schools for girls based on Sudanese cultural standards. As a response, the Sudanese nationalists publicly accused the British as wanting to force Sudanese girls to join missionary schools in order to advance Christianity and Western culture among Muslim girls (Boddy, 2007). The British governor in Khartoum was ordered by his headquarter in Britain “not to open state primary schools for girls so long as mission schools met government criteria” (p. 189) and that “it would be a test to Islam to attempt to do for herself what Christian bodies were doing without any government assistance” (ibid, p. 189). It was the objection to British government schools for girls that motivated Sudanese nationals to take up this task. Babiker Bedri (a former Mahdist warrior) started up schools for girls (kuttabs) mostly in north and central Sudan, with help from many sheikhs who taught these girls the Quran, along with reading and writing and native women who taught embroidery (ibid).

By 1912, Girls’ Middle School (GMS) existed in Sudan were four, all were in North and central Sudan. Though Muslim girls were encouraged to attend, these schools were mostly attended by Christians Greeks, Copts and Egyptians (ibid). Early 1920s, the colonial government established high school in Khartoum called Unity High School aimed to attract daughters of cotton-rich Sudanese as well as Greeks and Copts origin. The school has strong Christian foundations, used English as medium of instruction and was though of to “lead to production of development personality, noble standards of life and culture for the women” (ibid, p. 191). At

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24 In Khartoum, Omdurman, Atbara and Wad Medani.
25 Unity High School existed until today, runs as private international English school.
the end, both British involvement as well as nationalist efforts to promote girl’s education focused in Central and North Sudan, leaving women in other marginalized regions behind.

To protect their economic interests in the country, the British showed respect for Sudanese customs and tradition, including religion, and avoided interfering with personal affairs (Akolawin, 1973). They introduced a new law that married elements of English Common Law (penal code) and the Egyptian Civil Code (ibid), combining both formal and informal justice systems. Under this law, personal/family matters were subject to Sharia Law in North Sudan, while other customary laws governed personal matters in South Sudan. For public matters, the British penal code prevailed (ibid). This public–private distinction in the application of law remains to date one of the key structural problems concerning violence against women in the domestic sphere. According to this distinction of the public-private, women’s rights were determined by cultural traditions with the state abstaining from intervening to protect women in the private sphere. In general, and in the name of satisfying their own profit motives and minimizing tension with the colonized community, especially men, the Anglo-Egyptian rulers reinforced patriarchal power by deferring to men in matters of women’s issues and expressing admiration for the culture and traditions in which these attitudes were founded (Bardi, 2009). In general, the question of women was left unaddressed and remained much the same as it had been under the Mahadist state.

The situation described above was much harder for Sudanese women of the African race, who were subjected to slavery since pre-colonial times. While slave women faced the same hardship of exploitation, violence, and displacement as their male counterparts throughout precolonial and colonial periods, their experience of slavery was much harder and shaped not only by their race but interlinked with their gender. Boddy writes:
Female slaves were doubly disadvantaged by the property logic on which British and Arab concurred. Their alleged propensity for prostitution made officials even less disposed to liberate them than men. A woman could not earn her own redemption; her only hope was to marry a free born man, who was first required to pay the *fidya* on her behalf. Women who escaped or were let go because their owners were too poor to keep them had few opportunities. If hired as servants their pay was much lower than men’s, making illegal beer brewing and prostitution their principal options for self-support (some, in fact, would be hired out by their owners as prostitutes in the past). A few likely became *zar*²⁶ healers, others midwives who performed pharaonic circumcision and infibulations, thereby sustaining the ‘backwardness’ of women in British eyes. All such pursuits enabled women to tap the resources of ‘Arabs’ and whites, and the wages paid to men. (Boddy, 2007, p.161).

Enslaved women faced a harder time during the liberation of slaves in Sudan (1920s-1930s). In fact, the liberation of enslaved “African” Sudanese women was much more complicated than their male counterparts. Difficulties were imposed by both the British and some Sudanese nationalist leaders. While influential northern Sudanese leaders generally supported the abolition of slavery, some objected to freeing female slaves.²⁷ These leaders wrote to the Anglo-Egyptian colonial powers arguing that if female slaves were liberated, they would have no option other than to turn to prostitution, which is against “Sudanese customs and traditions” (Nugud, 1995). Of course, the Sudanese national customs and traditions to which they were referring were rooted in north and central Sudanese culture.

Ahmed Sikainga discusses the failure and inability of the Anglo-British colonial rule to challenge both the ideological and structural foundations upon which slaves and slavery are perceived by the Sudanese dominant class culture. According to Sikainga the Islamic legal system that was constructed by the Anglo-Egyptian Condominium to govern family law in Sudan further delayed the liberation of female slaves decades into the British rule of Sudan:

²⁶ *Zar* cult the belief that certain spirits are endowed with power to enter human bodies. These humans then are said to be possessed. The practice is prevalent mainly in Sudan, Ethiopia, Somalia, and other countries in Africa.
²⁷ As mentioned earlier, it was during Anglo-Egyptian rule that the antislavery policy was officially introduced.
This is because female slaves were considered concubines whose disputes with their owners were family matters to be decided by sharia courts. Ostensibly officials were reluctant to break up families and disrupt domestic arrangements, though their hesitation likely owed more to a fear of social chaos than humanitarian concerns. Male owners took advantage of this, retrospectively claiming female slaves as lawful concubines and their children as legitimate offspring, hereby denying them the possibility of manumission. The women had no choice but to lose their children or stay with their masters against their will. Yes, the alternative was also bleak: if unacknowledged, the children would be stigmatized as bastards with no patrimonial claim. (Cited in Boddy, 2007, p. 161)

It is worth noting that after the formal emancipation of slaves, many ex-slaves turned into workers in north and central Sudan. This made it look more like a labor system than slavery, since ex-slaves had no assets to start their own life (Sikainga, 1996).

4.3 Gender and Race in the Anti-colonial Liberation/Struggles

The nationalist anti-colonial liberation movement emerged in the late 1940s, led by Sudanese graduate students from the Graduate General Congress (GGC). This anti-colonial movement was not a unified one however. According to Atta Hassan El-Battahani (2009), in 1938 a group of graduate students from West Sudan formed the al-kutla, which means the Black Bloc 28. They attracted people from Darfur, the Nuba Mountains, and former slaves from Central Sudan. The Black Bloc was formed in anticipation of the replacement of colonial powers by educated elites from the north (jallaba) who would perpetuate colonial structures (ibid). A central resolution was passed by the Black Bloc that, “power should never be handed over to the Arabs who had, within living memory, been their slave masters” (El-Battahani, 2009, p. 44). El-Battahani offers a critical view of the theorization of the nation and nationalism by the Sudanese anti-colonialist movement, later named Sudanese Anti-Colonialist Front’s (ACF). He points out that it was mostly informed by the ideology of the Communist Party of Sudan (CPS), which was

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28 Al-kutal (al-Sawda) the black block emerged as counter response to nationalist leaders of the 1930s leaning more towards Arab - Muslim while excluding non- Arab- Muslim.
based on Stalin’s theorization of the nation as a historically-constituted category belonging to the
dstage of early capitalism. This theorization fell short of offering a nationalist discourse sensitive
to the cultures and histories of different Sudanese groups. Hence, it completely disregarded race
analysis and the histories of the different racial groups. Instead, it favored class analysis as the
basis for addressing the question of nationalism across socio-ethnic differences (ibid). Joseph
Garang notes:

The Northern petty-bourgeoisie inherited the colonial state apparatus and failed to solve
the problems of social and economic change, particularly the problem of uneven
development of the country. Neo-colonial capitalism widened the gap between the more
developed areas and backward regions as well, aggravating socio-economic differences
between Northern capitalists and Northern masses. Hence to the people of the North
(from whom the rulers come) the problem appears in its true light as class struggle.
However, to the people of the oppressed nationalities the problem appears as one of
struggle between their people on one hand and the national grouping in power on the
other. (Cited in El-Battahani, 2009, p. 46)

During the anti-colonial liberation, Sudanese woman’s body was constructed as a
national symbol and a cultural battlefield for both Sudanese men, anti-colonial liberation leaders,
and British colonial rulers. The British viewed the Sudanese practice of Female Genital
Mutilation (FGM) as a “barbaric custom” and a backward tradition that degraded the body and
the mind. Therefore, in 1946, the British passed a law to criminalize all forms of FGM. By
abolishing this practice, the British claimed to fulfill their mission to “civilize” and “modernize”
Sudanese people and hence “rescue” Sudanese women from “barbaric” traditions of FGM29.
Boddy (2007) argues that even though pharaonic circumcision (which is the worst form of FGM,
mainly practiced by Muslim/ Arab women in north and central Sudan) did offend the British

29 The British colonial rule prohibited and criminalized FGM in its pharaonic version in 1946. However, it did not
criminalize the other types of Sunna circumcision because of the fear that such an act might upset the religious
leaders in the country. The British legislation on FGM remained active till 1983 when the Numeir regime
introduced Sharai laws in the country and consequently the article prohibiting FGM was removed altogether from
the Sudanese criminal act.
colonial rulers, it was not the actual reason behind their efforts to abolish it in Sudan. Boddy argues that the need to “civilize” Sudanese Arab Muslim women was undertaken for economic purposes and that there was a direct link between slavery, population growth and infibulation. The Sudanese population was reportedly declining significantly after the Islamic Mahadia era, and the ratio of females to males had changed due to the fact that most of the able-bodied men were killed during the Mahadia battles and only senior citizens or very young boys were left behind. Additionally, by officially abolishing slavery, the British needed to foster population growth in the riverian north, the majority of whom were of Muslim and Arab descent, in order to bridge the gap in the workforce needed for cotton production. The British saw infibulation as something that would impede procreation; therefore, abolishing female circumcision in the name of “civilizing” Arab/Muslim women was a necessary condition to revive the economy.

The passing of the law to criminalize FGM was met by a major dispute among the Sudanese leaders, especially the male members of the Graduates Congress leading the liberation movement. Motivated by their nationalist loyalty, those leaders opposed the law banning FGM despite their awareness of its harmful impact on women (ibid). It is interesting to note that contrary to these Sudanese male leaders, educated Sudanese women widely favored laws abolishing the practice. As noted earlier by Chatterjee (1993), anti-colonial nationalist movements in Africa and Asia were mostly launched around cultural nationalism as a resistance strategy against colonial efforts and engagement which sought to modernize customs and traditions of the colonies. Heather Sharkey (2003) notes that educated northern Sudanese men, who traveled across Sudan working for the government, started to view Sudan as an “imagined nation community” transcending all tribal and ethnic divisions that characterize the country. This image was aided by the availability of low cost print technology which enabled Sudanese
graduates to share ideas and Arabic literature (Boddy, 2007), rendering the “imagined Sudanese nation” in their collective imagination. To forge a nationalist identity, Sudanese anti-colonial leaders imagined an identity that was “rooted in what was specifically and authentically ‘Sudanese’. Here, women as ‘keepers of traditions’, and women’s bodies as the principal vehicles through which that ‘tradition’ was expressed, became debated terrain” (p. 282).

Discussion shifted towards whether to “condemn pharaonic circumcision as irrational and un-Islamic or to rationalize its modified form … whether to ‘indigenize modernity’ or to ‘modernize indigeneity’” (p. 282). Hence, “the issue of female circumcision was caught up in the currents of nationalism, modernity, and capitalist development” (Boddy, p. 176).

Unlike other traditions, the abolishment of FGM was viewed by many male leaders as a threat to Sudanese national culture. FGM was seen as a key cultural signifier deeply rooted in North Sudanese culture, distinct from that of the British (Boddy, 2007). Despite its highly controversial nature, FGM was not condemned by many anti-colonial movement leaders, especially men. As noted by Boddy:

[T]he persistence of pharaonic circumcision in northern Sudan despite significant controversy and efforts at reform suggests that the circumcised female body symbolized the authenticity and integrity of the wider group. But also its exclusivity. For infibulation was not, like male circumcision, required for membership in the umma, the world community of Islam. To be the son of a pharaonically circumcised woman was to be born not only of honorable Muslim Sudanese, but of the Arab Sudan, the imagined nation itself. (Boddy, 2007, p. 283)

When the British law criminalizing FGM was actually enforced, a midwife who was found guilty of breaching the law by circumcising a girl was imprisoned in the town of Rufa. The enforcement of this law was protested by some Sudanese men under the leadership of a Sudanese
religious modernist and renewal leader, the late Mahmoud Mohamed Taha\textsuperscript{30}. The protest has commonly been referred to as Rufa’s revolt/riot. The revolt viewed the ban on FGM as “colonial nonsense” that attempts to justify colonialization (Ibrahim, 2011).\textsuperscript{31}

4.4 Gender and Race in the Sudanese Post-colonial State

The North, feeling that it is Arab and Muslim, has always sought to define the whole country in these terms. It did not only resist any attempts by the non-Arab segment of the country to identify Sudan with black Africa, but also tried relentlessly to assimilate the South through Arabization and Islamization policies, and to turn the Southern identity into a distorted image of the Northern self. The South, on the other hand, perceiving this scheme as a kind of cultural cloning, has always resisted it. (Mukhtar, 2004, p. 2).

After an intense struggle, the independent modern state of Sudan was formed in 1956, retaining its colonial boundaries. Upon independence, Sudanese national leaders embraced what they advanced as a decolonizing nationalism. Sharif Harir (1993) criticizes this imagined decolonized Sudanese national identity for its narrow-mindedness, citing its roots in Islam and Arabism and the cultural symbol they selected to represent Sudan, \textit{Aza}.\textsuperscript{32} As Harir observes, \textit{Aza} is not “race-free or religious-neutral” (p. 292); rather, it is a symbol that represents the politically-dominant riverain Sudanese. Francis Deng (2005) explains that the imagined Islamic-Arab nationalism constructed by the northern nationalist Sudanese leaders upon independent led to the enforcement of “Arabic” and “Islamic” culture as “the national identity that determines the distribution of power, wealth, services and development opportunities” (p. 10). According to Juma Kunda Komy (2011), this northern centralization of the country’s political and socio-

\textsuperscript{30} It is worth noting here that Mahmoud M. Taha was later executed by president Nimerie in 1985, under the apostasy code of Sharia law for his modernist progressive religious belief.

\textsuperscript{31} Taha was a progressive modernist Islamic leader with a feminist agenda. He stood with women’s rights in Islam. His labour to promote women’s rights from within Islam is remarkable. However, his position on abolishment of female circumcision by the British was controversial and it was met with criticism from some who, after independence, accused him of using political reactionary movement as a battle against colonialism that has contributed to the silencing of postcolonial regimes on the issue. However, for Taha the laws of the civilizing mission were less about women and more about imperialism and colonial interests (Ibrahim, 2011).

\textsuperscript{32} \textit{Aza} is an Arabic female name.
economic apparatuses actually resulted in the underdevelopment of all aspects of Sudan’s peripheral regions where the majority of the population are African non-Muslims, and which suffered from uneven development in terms of the distribution of resources and services.

Upon independence, Sudan embarked on modern nation-statehood by embracing both liberal European-modeled civic nationalism on the one hand, and a culturally imagined ethnic/cultural nationalism on the other hand. Despite the different nationalist projects of various post-colonial government in Sudan, they all resulted in different degrees of ambiguity in regard to women’s citizenship rights in three arenas – political, socio-economic, and cultural. This ambiguity left women caught in between the two ideologies. The positioning of women between the conflicting binaries of modernity as citizens of the state (as per civic nationalism) and traditionalism as subjects governed by kinship and religious rules (religious/cultural nationalism) was a difficult hurdle for women. The impacts varied for different women, depending on how their gender intersected with race, class and religion. As well, the adoption of Islamization and Arabization policies promoted cultural, religious and linguistic assimilation, especially in the education system (Komey, 2010). Nuba people, along with other racialized groups in marginalized regions of Sudan, were forcibly and systematically marginalized, culturally, politically, and economically. In order to enforce these policies, “indigenous languages were forbidden, including their banning in schools in the Nuba Mountains. Nuba children were not allowed to attend school unless they adopted Arabic names and spoke Arabic in school” (Johnson cited in Komey, 2016, p. 8).

The first post-independent government was characterized by democracy and civilian rule. With the introduction of Arabic as Sudan’s official language, Southern Sudanese leaders lost hope for gaining autonomy as their views did not matter to nationalist leaders from the north.
They contested the Arabic/Islamic nationalism imposed by northern leaders who favored establishing ties to Egypt and the Arab world. The first armed resistance group in the South was then formed, named Anyanya, and fought for an independent South Sudan. Amid this crisis and political tension, a military coup took place in 1958. The military regime retained Arabic/Islamic nationalism. In 1962 civil war broke out in the South. This conflict, coupled with the government’s failure to address the country’s economic crisis, and a Communist-led civilian strike resulted in the October 1964 Revolution. The result was a new democratic civilian government, which developed relations with the Soviet Union to solve the country’s economic crisis and built ties with neighboring Arab countries. However, the constitution remained unchanged. A second coup, led by a socialist army officer, Jaafar Nimeiri, took place in 1969, claiming that the democratic government had failed to put an end to the war in the South to properly address the country’s economic crisis. The Nimeiri government ruled Sudan from 1969 until 1985. In 1972 a peace agreement was signed (Addis Ababa Peace Agreement) between Nimeiri’s government and Joseph Lagu, the leader of the Southern Sudan Liberation Movement, that put an end to the civil war and gained autonomy for South Sudan (Shinn, 2004).

Towards the second half of the Nimeiri rule, oil was discovered in the South Sudan-Upper Nile state in 1978. As a result, in 1983 Nimeiri changed course and pursued a goal of radicalization and the construction of an Islamic state. In so doing, he enacted Sharia Law as the law of the land for the first time in Sudan’s history. In the same year, the government revoked South Sudan’s autonomy, which created tremendous unrest among people in the South and caused people from the Nuba Mountains and Blue Nile to join the Sudanese Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M), reigniting the civil war. While war was breaking out in the South, the Nimeiri government received economic aid from the International Monetary Fund (IMF)
and support from the US military to aid its war against SPLA/M in return for its support for pro-Western forces fighting Ethiopia’s Marxist government (Bassil, 2013). Structural Adjustment Economic Programs (SAPs) were introduced by the IMF in the late 1970s to early 1980s to “modernize and liberalize” Sudan’s markets. This new economic policy had negative consequences, especially in regions already suffering from uneven development in South Sudan, the Blue Nile and the Nuba Mountains. The encroachment of modern large-scale mechanized agriculture with credit from the World Bank in the Nuba Mountains, with the involvement of the state in allocating land which was owned by indigenous Nuba to “Jellaba” landlords³³, displaced indigenous Nuba people from their own land (Suliman, 1999).

The discovery of oil, mainly in the South Sudan and Nuba Mountains regions, was also a significant factor in the violent conflict in these regions between the central government and the SPLA/M, with multinational oil companies also playing a key role in escalating the violence (Patey, 2007). Through the expansion of large scale mechanized farming at the expense of Nuba traditional framers, Nuba people were forcibly displaced to central and North Sudan in search of livelihood (El-Bathanni, 1986). In urban north and central Sudan during end of the 1970s and early 1980s:

[T]he Nuba and other migrants faced other forms of marginalization: a brutal and forced deportation campaign, known locally as *Kasha*, was launched in Khartoum against all those without identification cards or employment on the pretext that they were a threat to public security and order. They were taken against their will to the area of their respective ethnic origins or otherwise to agricultural schemes in central Sudan as forced labor … the Nuba, and all those with obvious African features, were the main target. The army was

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³³ John Gwarang De Mabior (2008) defines the Jellaba as “a social group which has developed in Sudan since the 15th century from elements of foreign and local traders, including slave traders, and who have established themselves in trading centers which later became important urban centers and towns such as Dueim, Omdurman and Sennar. The Jellaba are a hybrid of different races and nationalities from the indigenous Africans, and the immigrant Arabs, Turks, Greeks and Armenians, who have interacted and intermarried in the long historical process which took place mainly in northern Sudan. The Jellaba are therefore part African and Sudanese, but they choose to identify themselves as Arabs” (p.216).
deployed in the streets of Khartoum to implement the decree […] the kasha was performed in a brutally humiliating and inhumane way. (Komey, p. 9)

The early 1980s marked the start of the second civil war in Nuba Mountains and south and the emergence of SPLA/M. Nimeiri was overthrown in 1985 through civilian protests (Intifada). After a year of transitional government, a new democratic government was elected in 1986. With the economic crisis at its height and political unrest rising, a military coup was staged just before the new constitution was to be adopted on June 30th, 1989. The military coup was supported by the National Islamic Front (NIF), an Islamist group. The new government established itself under the name Salvation Revolution Government under the lead of the National Congress Party (NCP) in 1989 and has ruled from 1989 to present, claiming that their nationalist project is to “save the nation”.

John Young (2012) notes that when the Salvation Front came to power in 1989, they claimed that the previous democratic government failed to achieve national security by “instigating ethnic and tribal feuds until the sons of the homeland carried arms against their brothers in Darfur and southern Kordofan, not to mention the national humanitarian tragedy of the south” (p. 32). Moreover, the claim was that the previous government failed to achieve economic and political stability, leading to deterioration of the national economy, with the “the social class of scroungers getting richer and richer by the day” (p. 32). However, by July 2011 and after 22 years of NCP rule, the country was divided, and these problems persisted “including… a class of nouveau riche scroungers” (Young, 2012, p.32).

In an attempt to forge a modern nation-state, the National Islamic Front (NIF) combined modernist and ethnocentric cultural nationalist discourses. This project adopted Islamic culture

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34 It is important to differentiate between the terms Islamist, designated for radical political Islamists (more as a political reactionary ideology), and the religion of Islam and its theology.
as the national identity for Sudan in order to create a viable modern Islamic nation-state that could both co-exist with and counter imperialism. The Civilization Project was conceived by the NIF as a mission for the “renewal of Islamic civilization”, based on their own vision of “authentic Islam”. The Civilization Project required Islamization and Arabization policies in place, along with the application of Sharia as the main source legalization. To further consolidate this policy of Arabization and Islamization, the regime’s focus turned to culture, science, and language. Arabic was declared as the official language in all parts of Sudan, and school curricula were all Arabized through the use of Arabic knowledge and culture (Salomon, 2016). As with their Arabization policy, the NIF regime identified education as the most critical area for building an authentic Islamic state “curricula were amended, or replaced altogether, to adhere to the NIF demands” (Bassil, 2013, p. 174). These efforts were part of what the government referred to as ta’sil-al-ma’rifa or “fundamentalization of knowledge” intent on tracing knowledge to its Arabic/Islamic origin (Salomon, 2016).

The imposition of the NIF’s nation-building project has been met with resistance from non-Muslim and non-Arab minority groups as well as many other Sudanese who oppose this mono-cultural ideology. These groups present competing national frameworks and also resist by taking up arms. The SPLA/M, who claim to represent the voices of minorities including people from the Nuba Mountains, presented a new approach to nation-building in Sudan by introducing the concept of New Sudan, a democratic, multi-racial, multi-lingual, and secular state. SPLA/M’s vision for a New Sudan has been criticized as being anti-Islamic and separatist by some Islamic politicians from the north. In contrast, Elwathig Kameir argues that the concept of New Sudan “has no racial, ethnic or separatist connotations but rather it is a framework, a national project, for building a true and sustainable Citizenship-State capable of accommodating
the multiple diversities of Sudanese society” (2006, p.2). In response to the rejection of its vision, and to defend its imagined national “Umma” and sovereignty of the nation-state, the government and SPLA/M declared war against each other.

According to Al Nagar and Tønnesen (2017), in order to ‘civilize’ women, the government under the Civilization project (al-Mashru al-Hadari) configured women’s rights based on a very strict interpretation of the Quran “through mechanisms that included legislation, indoctrination, education and the use of violence” (Al Nagar and Tønnessen, 2017, p. 142). Sudanese women had to embody the authentic Islamic civilized culture and its ideals as prescribed by the regime both in public and private spaces. The project entails that “women should be active participants in the public sphere: getting an education, working and participating in trade and politics on condition that they behave and look pious, moral and chaste. At the same time, in the private sphere, the man is designated the main decision maker and the guardian and protector of women and children” (Tønnessen cited in Al Nagar and Tønnessen, 2017, p. 143).

These Islamization and Arabization policies are backed up by major political, social, cultural and legal reforms, of which the central ones are moral reforms including public order law, family law, and a militarization of institutions and the nation. Freedom of expression and association was forbidden or restricted, unless permission from the government had been granted and registration is made. The work of many human rights and justice organizations has been greatly affected by these policies, including SWU.

4.5 Nationalism and Racialized Violence in Contemporary Sudan

Over the past three decades Islamization has become codified as part of the state nationalism and nation building project in contemporary Sudan. The way in which nationalism and state power has been consolidated favors particular visions and articulations in Islam. This
works against the interests of Sudanese women in general, and Sudanese women from African indigenous backgrounds, including women from the Nuba Mountains, in particular ways. Below are some examples of the implication and the differential effects of the contemporary regime’s policies, laws and militarization on different communities and women in Sudan.

Islamic dress and moral decency code: In 1996, Sharia Law was enforced and accelerated by the introduction of the Public Order Law that required women to wear “Hijab” in all public spaces and prohibited her from intermingling with men unless they had a first-degree relationship (mahram\textsuperscript{35}) to her. According to the Sudan Human Rights Monitor (2009), Public Order, which alleged to introduce and maintain moral reform, is state legislation that applies mainly to two articles, 151 and 152, of the 1991 Criminal Act. This moral reform, which represents the heart of the nationalism Civilization Project, is where women’s rights and their place in the nation are defined. The moral reform of individuals emphasized women as the symbol for authentic Islamic civilization and culture, and as icons for modernity of the imagined “Sudanese Arabic/Muslim Umma”. In order to achieve this vision, moral reform placed an emphasis on legal codes. Women’s dress, spaces, and actions all became highly regulated through the Public Order Law.

The Public Order Law is enforced by the “society security police”, a special unit that was formed specifically to enforce this law. What makes this law even more problematic is that a guilty verdict depends almost entirely on the social security police’s interpretation of what indecent dress or acts might entail. Different local governments in Sudan took this law as a basis for regulating women’s movement or their presence in public spaces in different ways. For

\textsuperscript{35} Mahram is a person with whom a woman considered safe and who a woman should not marry as per Islamic rule (like her father, grandfather, brother, uncle).
example, in south Darfur, the State governor used the Public Order Law to prohibit/criminalize women working after 6pm (ibid). In Khartoum, the governor used this law to prohibit women from obtaining jobs in specific areas, such as hotels and gas stations (SIHA, 2009).

The Public Order Law is incompatible with both Sudan’s constitution and its human rights obligations. It has resulted in massive arrests and punishments, with women accounting for the majority of its victims (SIHA, 2009). The moral decency aspect of the law, together with the violence associated with enforcing it, remains an everyday reality for all Sudanese women, except for those who are identified as pro-NIF\textsuperscript{36}. Stemming from this reality, the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) notes that this law “reveals that the public order regime, in all its manifestations, its underlying values, prohibitions, enforcement mechanisms, and penalties is having a significant impact on the lives of many women from all walks of life in Sudan, most particularly the poor, marginalized and those who challenge the status quo” (2009, p. 5). “Ordinary women”, SIHA adds, “particularly those from southern Sudan and those who are poor, are regularly prosecuted for such infractions” (ibid, p.1). Not only is this so, but also the Public Order Law has diminished economic, social, and political participation of women (ibid).

The public order framework “contains tools which can be deployed proactively to target and control particular women” (ibid, p.6). For example, it states that women, regardless of their cultural background, have to wear the Islamic dress that covers their whole body. This provides “a pretext for detaining, beating and otherwise humiliating, large numbers of women and girls, particularly those identifiable as “non-Arab”, mostly by skin tone and dress. Little of this widespread abuse is reported because of the indignity and shame associated with it (Amnesty

\textsuperscript{36} National Islamic Front
International cited in Osman, 2014, p, 51-52). According to reports by Sudanese council of churches:

[T]he targets of the Public Order Police are primarily displaced persons, especially women held by authorities in Omdurman Women’s Prison for charges ranging from prostitution to alcohol-brewing, the latter made a crime under the law. The law also made the Islamic dress hijab 37 mandatory, even among women irrespective of their religious affiliation. (Abusharaf, 2006, p. 66)

In this way, public order law redefined cultural rights, whereby indigenous groups, especially from marginalized regions such as the Nuba Mountains, were forced to change their cultural clothing/dress to avoid being exposed to violence under the law. The greatest effects of the law impacted on women’s economic rights by limiting their options in their struggle for a livelihood, especially for those women working in the informal sector, the majority of whom came from the poor displaced sections of society, and from war torn regions, especially from the Nuba Mountains.

Militarization is accompanied by sexualized violence including rape in the war zone regions of the Nuba Mountain and Darfur, with rape often used as a weapon of war by soldiers and paramilitary militias (Hale, 2010). Sexual violence has mostly been experienced by women in war zone areas of Nuba Mountains and Darfur. As stated by Hale:

Rapes occur in the Nuba and Darfur areas not just because men target women for revenge, power, and booty; men are raping specific women, that is, members of a particular group. The defiling of women’s bodies becomes both symbolic and material/physical, and the culture itself, through the bodies of women, becomes defaced and deracinated. The body, the village, and the ethnic group are left violated. The raping of women of Darfur and of the Nuba Mountains reflects, simultaneously, both erasures and markings. Rape is an erasure of identity and a marker of identity. (2010, p. 106)

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37 Hijab is a head cover (veil of scarf) that Muslim women wear in public space as well as in private space in the presence of adult male from outside the family
The situation is further complicated by the failure of the law to address sexual violence which represents a major concern for women in war zones in particular. According to the law, if a complaint fails to prove the occurrence of rape by not being able to bring four righteous male witnesses who must have observed the actual act of penetration as the only evidence permitted by Sharia, the victim will be subjected to the crime of adultery (“Zina”), which is punishable under the “Indecency Act”. This law, as such, has denied justice to so many rape and sexual harassment victims in the recent past, especially for rape victims in the war zones in Darfur, the Nuba Mountains, and Blue Nile. Many women prefer to keep silent about their experiences of aggression and rape and hence continue to struggle with its physical and psychological impacts. After many years of advocacy by Sudanese women and human rights groups, the rape law was finally amended in February 2015 by changing its legal definitions and the introduction of the new Law of the offence of sexual harassment (ACJPS Report, 2016).

The amended law differentiates between rape as a forced sexual act that causes physical and psychological harm, and adultery (“Zina”). However, a June 2015 report released by Women Living Under Muslim Laws, “Sudan’s Revised Penal Code: A mixed Picture for Women”, expresses continuing concerns with the law. Although the new amendments are a step forward, the distinction between adultery and rape remains vague, and the categorization of sexual violence remains up to the judges and police to determine. Thus, a woman who claims that she has been raped can easily be accused of adultery by a judge or the police, especially because the legal evidence of four witnesses to the act is almost impossible for women to provide. According to one study (ACPJS, 2016), under article 151 of the new “gross indecency” law, women are often discouraged from reporting sexual violence, especially rape “for fear that they will be accused of “gross indecency” (ibid, p. 2). According to Live Tønnessen and Samia al-Nagar the
rape/zina legal reform process was politicized, especially after the Criminal Court (ICC) arrest warrant was issued against Sudan’s president, El-Bashir in 2009. While in Khartoum, the capital of Sudan, activists working on sexual violence were allowed to operate with restriction, activists in Darfur were completely restrained (ibid). Furthermore, soon after the ICC arrest warrant, the Sudanese government expelled a total of 13 key INGOs and 3 NGOs working in Darfur on grounds of aiding the ICC.

Additionally, women experience economic and material hardship, especially those from war zone regions including the Nuba Mountains. While some women continue to live under the threat of daily attack in the Nuba Mountains areas, others sought refuge in neighboring countries, and the majority became internally-displaced persons scattered around main cities in central Sudan. This last category has constituted a distinct racialized group, who had to cope with new economic and social roles associated with being female heads-of-households, since most men had joined the fight. According to the Nuba Women for Education and Development Association (NuWEDA), women, especially from Nuba Mountains who were displaced to different parts of central Sudan, face a great deal of hardship as they are struggling to make a living for themselves and their families. Most of these women were left with no options but to engage in risky activities and bear the consequences. Accordingly:

> Once in the north, (women) are forced to live in cramped camps around the big cities that lack all conditions of a decent living. This situation forces women to compete for the very limited opportunities available, such as washers and maids. The rest opt for the brewing of local gin (araqi), or prostitution, two lucrative but dangerous businesses if the women are caught by the police. If convicted, the women are moved to an all-female prison. Convicted of trafficking in araqi or prostitution. (Yahya el-Hassan, cited in Abusharaf, 2006, p. 70)

Many women from the Nuba Mountains in particular have been working as domestic servants for families in Central and northern Sudan since the precolonial era but only recently
they have begun to work as tea vendors in the streets or as garbage collectors, where there are no labor laws protecting their rights\textsuperscript{38}. Furthermore, Mahmoud El Zain points out, “96 per cent of the women imprisoned between December 1993 and November 1994 were from southern and western Sudan” (2007, p.29). Nevertheless, tea sellers continue to be frequently chased by the police, have their assets confiscated, and they are often required to pay fines for working in public spaces without a proper government license, which is hard to obtain.

4.6 Globalization, Capitalism and Violence

Both patriarchal state formation and post-colonial nationalism are implicated in violence in Africa and in Sudan, as well as capitalism and neoliberal economic policies. All of these (racial violence, capitalism and neoliberalism) interlink to shape women’s experiences of violence. Both Samir Amin (2006) and James Ferguson (2006) argue that characterizing the crises faced by many African countries today as being “internal problems” is misleading\textsuperscript{39}. Ferguson explains how these economic and political reforms were meant to bring African countries in line with global neoliberal standards. Ferguson writes:

[T]he promise of democracy has been held out to African publics at just the moment in history when key matters of macro-economic policy were taken out of the hands of African states … these programs “became a way of placing the blame for the structural problems of African economies squarely on the shoulders of African governments – and by implication on African voters themselves…Meanwhile, substantial matters involving the policies of external donors have tended to be insulated from processes of representative democracy, often via the use of nongovernmental organizations (NGOs), glossed as ‘civil society,’ as a kind of surrogate demo. (2006, pp. 12-13)

\textsuperscript{38} With no official contract, these women are vulnerable on a daily basis to different forms of exploitation by the families and companies hiring them. Though there is a law for domestic workers, referred to as the “Domestic Servants Act 1955”, historically it has never been enforced.

\textsuperscript{39} Amin (2009) and Ferguson (2006) call neo-liberal globalization into question. They both argue that structural adjustment programs (an economic program concerned with economic growth rather than social equality) were imposed on African countries in the late 1970s–early 80s by Western powers – the US, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund - as a solution to fix African problems and end poverty are to blame.
As market-led development as opposed to state-led development, neoliberalism was introduced in the 1970s in the form of structural adjustment programs to fix economic stagnation, which was attributed to states’ overspending in public goods and services and social protection. This led to a shift of power relations and responsibility towards third party, voluntary organizations, which Jennifer Wolch (1990) refers to as the “Shadow state”. This Shadow state is responsible for what was previously the responsibility of the welfare state. Elora Halim Chowdhury (2011) explains how, in contexts where states are weak, donors’ agendas take over the locally driven agendas, so that local non-governmental organizations become mere implementing machineries for donors. Local NGOs thus become more accountable to the latter than to their local populations (Chowdhury, 2011).

Capitalism and the neoliberal economy operate at the global level through transnational and multinational corporations. Armed conflict associated with exploitation of natural resources are directly related (Le Billon, 2001), and very common in Africa. Since the national independence of most African countries in the 1960s, the United States and some European countries have used various intervention strategies in Sudan, Congo, Angola, DRC, Chad, Sierra Leone, Liberia, and Mozambique. These countries are currently undergoing interstate civil wars, where women and their bodies are the battleground (McFadden, 2008). These corporations exploit the local land and its natural resources at the expenses of the indigenous people, who are the primary owners of this land. Land rights have been largely disputed between government and indigenous people in many parts in Africa, including the Nuba Mountains (Komey, 2009), where the state facilities the work of such corporations (El-Battahani, 2009). This has resulted in conflict and significant gendered racialized violence between the central government and the indigenous people resistance group (SPLA/M). As an example, Audrey Macklin, a Canadian
expert who participated in assessing the accountability of Talisman, a Canadian oil company, offers some insight into the effects of global companies on the lives of local women. This particular oil company worked as part of a consortium with the governments of Sudan (GoS), China and Malaysia in oil extraction in the transitional region of the Upper Nile State. Macklin documents the company’s complicity in abuses committed against the people of South Sudan. She and her colleagues interviewed local women, some of whom stressed their need for basic services and resources since their area was beyond the reach of state services or humanitarian services (a situation similar to the current situation in Nuba Mountains). One woman said:

We were not given any services, we had to find our own food and make our own living. When the women would go to gather wood and cut grass to build shelters, the Arab militia followed us to take what we had and rape us. I tried to escape with three others from the town. The GoS [the government of Sudan] shot at us. The others were killed. I was hit in the leg but managed to escape. (Harker, cited in Macklin, 2004, p. 93)

Women also mentioned the urgency of stopping the violence which killed people, burned houses and forcibly displaced people from their home land, arguing that even if basic needs were provided, the government would still continue to kill them. Another woman described the horrific violence they experienced as patriarchal violence caused by men. She called on transnational sisterhood and solidarity from women in the Western world, which represents a necessary tool to stop this violence, claiming that this was more important than filling basic needs. Dora spoke:

Our sisters from stable countries: this problem of our country is caused by men. Most people have not come to see you because they fear bombardment. Since we ran away, we have lost cows, children, and men. The people coming to you today are here not because they think you have food, but because they want you to convey our problems to the world. Since our tukuls [huts] were burnt, elders have died without blankets to keep them warm. If women have come to interview us, we know women are equal. (Harker, cited in Macklin, 2004, p. 96)

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40 Talisman left Sudan as a result of the pressure from Canadian government and advocacy and lobbies by Human rights groups in 2004.
The testimony of the first women, as well as Dora’s account reflect the demands and needs of women who experience violence caused by both the state and its neoliberal nationalist agenda as well as global capitalism, which are both material and strategic. It is upon this background of violence generated by processes of state formation and post-colonial nationalism, as well as neoliberal global capitalism, that organizations working on social justice in Africa and the Middle East, including Sudan, must articulate their feminist politics in relation to violence.

Issue of violence discussed above, whether it is physical, psychological, social, political or economic, result from civil wars and laws based on the current government’s hegemonic nationalist project and the application of Sharia Islamic law represents particular challenges for Sudanese women in general and women from the Nuba Mountains in particular. Examining the process of state formation and the contemporary state nationalist project in Sudan, particularly the vision and operationalization of the ideals of Islam, helps us understand the violence experienced by different women in Sudan. It is worth noting here that violence is not only a result of Sudanese patriarchal state formation, but is also inextricable from processes of globalization, capitalism and neoliberal economic policies. Therefore, violence as experienced by different Sudanese women is a result of an interlocking systems of power in the patriarchal process of Sudanese state formation and global capitalism. This helps us to better understand the various methods by which different women’s organizations in Sudan deal with these enactments of violence, and the differential situation of women across the country (race, class, religion, geography), and thus, how they tend to conceptualize violence and negotiate feminisms and gender politics.
Chapter 5: Working for women’s equality in Sudan: SWU, NuWEDA and UN Women

In order to analyze the ways in which each of the three feminist/women organizations included in this study engage with and negotiate political space between state and international donors, it is important to understand the historical (cultural, social and political) contexts that led to the emergence of each of these organizations. Further, it is equally important to identify the contemporary circumstances that influence their existence as organizations, and how each organization is embedded in different power structures. This chapter presents descriptions of the three organizations in this study: Sudanese Women Union (SWU), Nuba Women for Education and Development Association (NuWEDA) and United Nation Entity for Gender Equality and The Empowerment of Women (UN Women). I outline the historical and contemporary contexts of each of these organizations, their visions, objectives, agenda and programs, their positioning in relation to nationalism, violence and gender politics in Sudan. Challenges pertaining to each organization are also highlighted. The data presented in this chapter were obtained through a combination of field interviews, literature reviews and analyses of organizational documents.41

5.1 Sudanese Women Union (SWU)

Sudanese women worked alongside men as equal partners in the struggle for liberation of the country, linking the struggle for national liberation with the struggle for the liberation of women. In 1952, the Sudanese Women Union (SWU) was formed as a national women’s organization. From the beginning, SWU has defined its ideology as postcolonial and has linked issues of gender inequality to colonial conquest (Abusharaf, 2004). In 1955, SWU founded the

41 I note here that organizations were not able to tell me information in relation to funding due to political sensitivity.
Women's Voice magazine, “Sout al-Mara'a”, which focused on issues pertaining to women’s position and status in post-colonial Sudan in the areas of education, health, and culture.

SWU sees violence against Sudanese women in general as part of a national class struggle against colonialism, capitalism and authoritarian regimes (Mahmoud, 2008). Since the primary objective of SWU at the time of its formation was to contribute to the fight against colonialism, its membership drew affiliates from diverse ideological backgrounds including Communists, Socialists, Liberals and Islamists. At the time of independence, SWU changed its agenda by focusing on women’s education, health and paid work in order to combat the gender gaps in these domains inherited from the British and Mahdist regimes which had restricted women’s role to the private domain. By the time of independence, 94.2% of the national budget allocated to educational service was preserved for boys, while only 5.8% went for girls. By the same token, women represented only 1% of the total labor force and earned far less than their male counterparts (Mahmoud, 2008). It is worthwhile mentioning here that after independence and because of the refocus of SWU on the question of women’s rights and position in society, the Islamist members deserted SWU and joined the Islamist movement, since they did not agree with the shifts in the SWU agenda (ibid). At the time, according to Mahmoud, the SWU’s position on and agenda regarding the question of women was ideologically mixed. Mahmoud writes:

> From a liberal position, the Union demanded equal rights to women in education, training, employment and wages. The Union followed secularism and scientific ideology to fight against female genital mutilation and some other harmful customs. Politically, the positions of SWU were socialist and democratic. Culturally, however, it was modern, with high conservative values.  

42(Mahmoud, 2008, p. 71)
It can be said that during the 1950s and 1960s, SWU’s agenda followed the transformational path of first wave feminism (voting rights, employment rights, education rights and rights in marriage) and second wave feminism (reproductive rights, equal pay for women, and the challenge patriarchal culture writ large). This is no surprise, like many other women’s movements in Africa during struggles for liberation, the SWU was both inspired and influenced by the models of the women’s movements in the Soviet Union, Eastern Europe and the ideology of the communist party in Sudan. In fact, the SWU’s membership was predominately drawn from female members of the Sudan Communist Party (Mahmoud, 2008). Upon its emergence, SWU envisioned a socialist context in which women and men shared equal social, political and economic rights without contradicting women’s reproductive roles as mothers and family caregivers (Mahmoud, 2002). According to Mahmoud, the feminist socialist model adopted by SWU prevailed in the Soviet Union. It differed from the model of Western Marxism which emphasizes equal sharing of child care and household work by husbands and wives.

The 1950s through 1970s represented a golden era for SWU, which focused on the political and economic empowerment of women. It also gained the recognition of the Sudan Communist Party (ElBakri, 1995). Its advocacy for ‘equal pay for equal work’ had appeal to many female professionals. During the period of the 1970’s through the 1980’s, the SWU’s activities became clandestine following the dissolution of Sudan Community Party and the crack-down on its activities by the May Regime (1964-1985). This period was SWU’s major setback, leading to the fragmentation of the organization. While the resilient members, notably affiliates of the Communist Party, struggled to keep SWU alive and continues to do so to this day, the defected members joined the government and formed a state sponsored “Socialist Women Union” whose membership was obtained mainly by appointment (Khalid, 1987). The
Sudanese Socialist Women Union succeeded in achieving some gains for Sudanese women, especially the abolishment of the house of obedience law (*bayt etaa*). 43

Generally, SWU’s position with regard to the question of women varied according to the prevalent political regime. Mahmoud (2002) maintains that adoption by SWU of feminist socialism 44 is more likely to occur during periods of democracy, while Marxist feminism emerges during military regimes. 45 It seems that the current postcolonial feminist politics adopted by SWU goes along with Mahmoud’s analysis. The struggle for women’s rights, according to SWU, cannot be realized in isolation from the agendas of the broad national struggle for the restoration of democracy and justice, that is, class struggle. Since the coming of the current NIF regime to power (1989), SWU has adopted a more or less Marxist feminist position. In an interview in 2004, the late Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim responded to a question about SWU current feminist/gender politics stating:

> We concentrated on our vision for parity by highlighting central concerns and stressed that we did not consider men our enemy. Instead, we exposed the main roots of women’s subordination: men, as males, are not responsible for discrimination against women. Most of them are also exploited and discriminated against. (Interview with Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim, cited in Abusharaf, 2004, p. 165)

SWU is attentive to class dynamics, and this has a particular inflection in terms of how they understand and engage with gender in general. Sondra Hale (1996) criticizes SWU’s politics, arguing that SWU is, in fact, affiliated with Sudan’s communist party (SCP), and therefore adopted its patriarchal ideology of focusing on class struggle at the expense of attending to the struggle for gender equity. Trying to rebut this claim, Mahmoud (2008) argues

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43 “House obedience” (*bayt etaa*) was a long subject of resistance by women activists. This law stipulated that a woman who leaves her husband’s house without his permission should be brought back to the husband’s house by the police (Tønnesen and Kjøstvedt, 2010, p. 4).

44 Addressing both patriarchy and capitalism as sources of oppression.

45 Exclusive focus on capitalism as system of oppression.
that SWU was not a wing of SCP, but rather that a large number of SWU’s active members are affiliates of the Sudanese Communist Party. What Mahmoud shares with Hale is that during the current military regime, the SWU primarily focuses on class struggle and relegates gender struggle agenda to lesser status. This ideological positioning of the SWU has not gone unchallenged by its own membership. A number of SWU’s affiliates argue that women’s agenda should not be postponed and that they must not wait until democracy is restored to fight to achieve gender equality. Instead, class and gender struggles could go hand in hand (Mahmoud, 2008). Others argued that women and feminist agendas should be at the forefront of the SWU (participant from SWU).

The relationship between gender politics and culture/religion is another highly contested area among SWU members. Such contestation takes the form of a debate regarding modernization vis-à-vis traditional culture. This has led to another internal debate among SWU, centering around the position of SWU on national culture. In an interview, the late Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim stated that:

Significant was the explication of the true stance of Islam towards women’s equality … We were convinced that it was the male-dominated interpretations of Islam, not Islam itself, that sanctioned discriminatory practices and oppression. To us, parity and emancipation did not mean getting rid of our good national traditions or for Sudanese women to become copies of Western women. Instead, we expressed our respect for the positive traditions in our culture. (Interview with Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim, cited in Abusharaf, 2004, p. 165)

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46 On the same matter, Abdullahi Ali Ibrahim (2010) provides a historical account for the position of SWU’s leaders in regard to Marxist feminism and the focus on class struggle. Ibrahim recalls a conversation he himself witnessed in 1964, between the late Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim, the president of SWU, who was also a member of the Political Bureau of SCP and the secretary-general of the SCP Abdel Khaliq Mahgoub. In this conversation the secretary general had suggested to Fatima two reform paths: SWU should focus its efforts on gender relations in Sudanese society OR; SWU should go through a restructuring based on a Marxist platform, whereby SWU should have a central committee and branches to better serve grassroots women. According to Ibrahim, Fatima “dismissed the gender part of Mahgoub’s initiative as premature and secondary to engaging women in national politics at large. Worse, she rejected restructuring the SWU as a liquidationist idea. The SWU continued to conduct business as usual” (p. 53-54).
While some members embraced Ibrahim’s position of preserving good aspects of national culture, others viewed that position as cultural conservatism. It is worthwhile mentioning here that as discussed in Chapter 4, the struggle to define national culture in Sudan is one of the main catalysts for the protracted civil wars. Such discussion of national culture also relates to women’s position and rights. Below I discuss three major issues in relation to this discussion, namely: the SWU and the Islamic family law, the SWU and its urban-rural focus, and the SWU and the meaning of ‘national culture’.

Some participants mention that the SWU’s involvement in tackling issues affecting women in the private sphere such as Islamic family law, FGM and other traditional yet harmful practices has drastically diminished since the 1970s. For some feminists, this shift is not surprising at all. Historically speaking, the SWU has never directly challenged Islamization of the law, nor has it considered the Islamic family law an urgent area of focus (Tønnesen and Kjøstvedt, 2010). This position, in fact, has different implications on the lives of different Sudanese women, as we showed early in Chapter 4. According to Tønnesen and Kjøstvedt (2010), “the Sudan Women’s Union was successful very early… but they were not aware of the effect of religion and culture on women’s rights, particularly the family law. They thought it would ‘fall’ by itself and they didn’t take the battle” (An interview with a Sudanese human rights activist, 2010 p. 4-5). By not viewing the private sphere as a primary area of focus, the SWU has historically shied away from criticizing Islamic family law and Sharia law, triggering a heated debate among members of the SWU. Some participants also attributed the SWU’s silence regarding the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) to SWU’s ambiguity regarding national culture and women’s rights agenda.
As articulated by some critics, including the late Khalda Zahir and Belghis Badri, both prominent SWU members, the SWU’s focus on the public sphere of rights primarily benefits the middle class and hence neglects the majority of women in rural areas, who suffer the most from wars, displacement, poverty, FGM and domestic violence. Khalda Zahir, the first Sudanese woman to assume the chair of SWU during the 1950’s, stated that “we have remained for nearly half a century addressing women’s issues from the viewpoint of urban women, while 80% of women are living in the country side facing completely different problems throughout their daily lives” (Mahmoud, 2002, p.334). Zahir’s critique appealed to some members from SWU, who continued to advocate for her position within the organization.

Despite its modernist identity, defined by its focus on a limited urban setting and issues such as gender equality and rights, SWU has opted to preserve some elements of “Sudanese traditions” since its emergence in the 1940’s. In an interview with the former president of SWU, Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim stated:

We demanded political, civil, economic, and social rights for women; equal opportunities for work; and an equal role for women within the family. We conveyed our belief that women’s rights must be understood within the context of the welfare of the family and the community and must be sought in ways that do not disrupt our sociocultural roots. (Interview with Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim, cited in Abusharaf, 2004, p. 165)

Ibrahim’s statement raises a legitimate question regarding which culture she was referring to as “our sociocultural roots”. The answer to this question is found in a nostalgia for a national culture that had emerged in the past during the anti-colonial nationalist struggle in which the SWU took part. SWU has opted to promote a symbolic “culture of nationalism” by, for example, emphasizing the Tob (a Sudanese female dress) as a symbol of an authentic national dress that would act to preserve the traditions of “patriotism”. A participant argued that embracing such traditions “is a very clever strategic move from SWU since it would make the
SWU more appealing and acceptable by Sudanese society and would enable it to reach to all women, and most importantly achieve its goals”. Other participants also expressed their endorsement of this view. However, according to some participants, since the Tob mostly represents Arabs-Muslims’ cultural tradition, the choice of the Tob as a symbolic for national culture excludes many Sudanese women, especially Black Africans whose cultural dress is different, and even some women from North Sudan who might decide not to put on the Tob, and instead, prefer other forms of dress. Fatima Babiker Mahmoud argues that the Tob, which, represents only northern Sudanese Muslim women, is, in fact, an indication of a class-based choice leading to the exclusion of non-Muslim African women from other geographical locations. Women in South Sudan, the Nuba Mountains, the Blue Nile and Darfur do not embrace the Tob, they, instead, choose other dresses that suit their specific environments (Mahmoud, 2002).

One participant mentioned that she, along with others, had been challenging SWU’s conservative culture (in the form of dress) all along through the 1960’s and 1970’s. These women have debated the authenticity of Tob which, according to them, represents only the Arabic-Islamic culture of northern Sudan. For these women, Sudanese culture is both African and Arabic, and as such it should allow for manifestation of various dress styles symbolizing diversity within the country. Another participant also indicated that during the 1970’s she and other members of SWU had been inspired by Alice Walker, Angela Davis and the Black Civil Right Movement in the USA in general. Accordingly, they began to dress in African styles and cut their hair the same way Angela Davis used to, as a means of protesting the alleged claim that the Tob was the national dress. It is worth noting that the bulk of the new generation from the SWU do not wear the Tob.
When participants from the SWU were asked to list some of the important achievements made by the SWU throughout the course of its activism, they referred to a wide range of issues, some of which are discussed below. For example, some participants referred to SWU’s main focus on women’s rights in the public sphere, notably education, political participation and work, and, to a lesser degree, on women’s practical needs such as women’s reproductive roles, health issues and provision of essential commodities for family consumption (through forming associations of housewives in different residential areas in urban cities to help women play their roles as mothers and wives). One example of the SWU’s strategic intervention emphasized by participants was women’s right to education. The SWU’s interest in women’s education is linked to its anti-colonial agenda that was formulated to battle the colonial neglect of women’s education. In countering that negligence, the SWU has since provided education and improved literacy levels for women and girls. The curriculum, which in in Arabic language, focuses mostly on women’s civic and political rights as well as reproductive health, nutrition and hygiene. The SWU’s current literacy programs focus on marginalized, displaced and poor women living in urban areas.

Participants also focused on the SWU’s endeavor to secure political rights for women for voting and receiving equal pay for equal work. Accordingly, the SWU’s struggle in these areas has resulted in significant progress. Women in Sudan were granted the right to vote in 1954, and the right to equal pay for equal work in 1956. A participant also credited the SWU with the successful efforts in the 1970’s to stop the implementation of the “bayt etaa” law and achieving paid maternity leave for women in the early 1980’s (including five years unpaid leave for women working in state jobs if they decide to accompany their husbands abroad). However, some participants believed that these achievements should be credited to the efforts made by the
Socialist Women’s Union whose members had defected from the SWU during the 1970’s and whose work was sponsored by the state (Nimeiri regime 1969-1985) (further details in Chapter 4).

Again, some participants also referred to efforts made by the SWU during the 1970’s to combat harmful traditional practices against women and girls, particularly FGM. However, rather than challenging its patriarchal base, the SWU addressed FGM through an integrative health approach which emphasized its negative health consequences without attending to the gender power relations and dynamics justifying the practice. The list of achievements attributed to the SWU by some of the participants also included the issuing in 1955 of a women’s magazine, Saut el-Mara’a (Women’s Voice), which focused on knowledge production and discussion of a wide range of national and women’s rights issues. The magazine was instrumental in raising the awareness of the public as well as policy makers in regards to issues affecting women. In the early 1970’s, the magazine was banned and closed down by the May government (1964-1985) following its aggressive campaign against the communists in Sudan.

With regard to the question of representation by the SWU of Sudanese women and their diverse agendas and issues, a participant admitted that the organization had historically failed either to attract women, especially from South Sudan and Nuba Mountains, or to include them at the organizational board level. According to a SWU participant “the physical isolation of the region, communication difficulties and insecurity in the Nuba Mountains, all interlinked to make efforts done by the delegated member of SWU unfruitful”. Such failure could be used as evidence of the SWU’s inability to represent the interests of women from war zones and marginalized regions.
Yet another participant stated that more recently (as of the late 1990s) women from South Sudan and the Nuba Mountains have formed their own organizations addressing the particular needs of women in their regions or in camps for displaced persons in the cities in the north and central Sudan. Soon after the Beijing conference in 1995, funding by international organizations, especially for women and gender agendas, including peace building efforts, has increased. This trend has been echoed in Sudan where many international organizations and national women’s organizations have begun to engage in initiatives on the themes of women and peace building in their agendas and initiatives.

During the current government, as discussed in Chapter 4, forming associations is restricted and forbidden for some civil society organizations, especially those viewed by the authorities as communist or anti-government. The government states that organizations are not allowed to operate and/or receive international funding without obtaining permission from the authorities. The SWU is unable to register with the state because it is viewed as a political organization with links to the Sudanese communist party. The national non-governmental organizations (NGOs) as well as international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) are required to register with the Ministry of Humanitarian Aid Commission (HAC). HAC requirements for registration include, among other things, that the objectives of the organization seeking registration should be limited to areas of development and/or humanitarian efforts of a non-political nature. Thus, organizations registered with HAC are supposed to be closely monitored by HAC, which is responsible for security approval of all organizational activities. Moreover, organizations are required to renew their registration annually. Renewal of registration requires submission of annual reports detailing how the previous year’s funds were spent. A participant attributed the SWU’s prioritization of the fight for the restoration of
democracy to the inability of the organization to function under the current restrictions imposed by the state against civil society organizations. Moreover, some participants also argued that the SWU’s inability to register and function legally reduced its chances to have some of its activities approved by the authorities or receive international funding. As a result, SWU chose to function through different channels and platforms including the creation of a separate organization: Organization (A).  

Participants also mentioned that in spite of the continuous rejections of its applications for registration by HAC, the SWU has not given up on placing such applications from time to time. It is worth mentioning that international donors who breached the HAC’S rules, for example by providing funding to an unregistered organization, will immediately be expelled from the country. In spite of these unfavorable conditions, the SWU would always find the means to partially pursue some of its objectives. For example, it channeled its political struggle for democracy through alliances with women from other political parties and organizations. In the area of peacebuilding, according to the participants, the SWU collaborated with other civil society organizations working towards that goal. However, the engagement of the SWU in women’s literacy activities has exposed it to an uneasy, but necessary relationship with the Ministry of Education, which monitors all educational activities and requires all organizations and other bodies working in area of education follow government-approved curricula. In spite of that, however, some participants mentioned that the SWU managed to find room to engage its own materials in teaching activities. In most of these activities, the SWU relies exclusively on membership resources. One participant from SWU proudly argued that “while registration will help SWU to fully function, the organization actually draws its legitimacy from its

47 For security concern, I only use A to refer to the organization to prevent any disclosure of its link to SWU.
constituencies, its presence and continuous fight for women causes and not from recognition by
the government in the form of a registration paper.”

Like the case with many other civil society organizations, the SWU’s largest hurdle
comes from the security services. For every time it plans to implement an activity, whether
through Organization (A) or in collaboration with other organizations, security approval is not
easy to get. Security clearances are needed all the time, whether the organization and its affiliates
are planning to implement an activity locally or somewhere else. The state security establishment
controls all activities under the pretext of “national security”. This situation causes a lot of
frustrations for SWU’s members because, on many occasions, security services interfere to
prevent them from pursuing certain activities for reasons that often appear to be arbitrary. A
participant and member of the SWU, actively involved in facilitating the women’s literacy
program, stated that:

Negotiations with the state security never end, and they are always tough. We have to be
prepared for them every time we are out to implement an activity. We developed
different strategies, including spending time just sensitizing them [the authorities] on
issues of gender and women’s rights, hoping to sensitize them as individuals and assure
them that our work is never a risk for national security. On very rare occasions we were
able to have their approval easily, other times, we couldn’t meet their expectations for
whatever they were, nor could we convince them about the importance of our program,
and in these cases we would not have much choice but to cancel the activity. However,
most of the times, we have to reach a compromising situation by trying to meet their
expectations.

With regard to the SWU’s failure to access funds from international donors, a participant
attributed it to both the political orientations of the organization and the failure to register with
the authorities. International donors, one participant explained, avoid funding organizations
viewed as radical with political revolutionary agendas; they instead prefer to work with those
whose work aligns with their agenda. This position typically resonates with Smith’s (2007)
argument that revolution is never funded. The issue of access to funding was repeatedly
mentioned by participants, who viewed it as a major source of tension between the older and younger members of the SWU. All members agreed that as a matter of principle, they would not accept state funding, especially from a corrupt entity like the current government in Sudan.

When it comes to receiving funds from international donors, the SWU’S older generations reject conditional funding and the “imperialist” connections believed to be associated with such funds. Instead, they would rather seek funding from membership contributions, mobilization of local resources and voluntary work. Participants from the new generation, on the other hand, claim that international funds are indispensable because sources of funding suggested by and relied upon the older generation are currently not feasible. For them, working under organizations such as Organization (A) which accepts funds from international organizations, is more sustainable. The new generation substantiated their position of accepting funds from international organizations by arguing that volunteering has become difficult, that there is no longer a welfare state in Sudan, and that local businesses are not willing to make significant contributions to non-government organizations. It was these opposing views and tensions that eventually led to the creation of Organization (A) by the SWU’s new generation, which was officially registered with HAC under educational and peace building mandates.

According to one of the members from the older generation, the debate around international funds started after the Beijing Conference on women in 1995. She claims that before the Beijing Conference, the SWU used to fund its activities with contributions from members and locally mobilized funds from the business community. However, one of SWU’s prominent leaders confirmed that tensions among members around international funding are persistent, but she hoped that they would be able to bypass these tensions by organizing an intergenerational conference as a platform for dialogue to address this and other related issues in the near future.
Some of the participants, whose activities were linked to the literacy program run by Organization (A), explained that international funds have been used primarily for activities pertaining to civil and political rights, which are of particular interest to the international donors. As such, they mentioned that they would use this opportunity to push the civil society organizations to hold the government accountable for human rights and democracy. Such activity has, however, exposed many national organizations, especially women’s groups, to risks of being harassed by the national security services. It is therefore clear that NGO organizations are often trapped between the donor’s agenda, their own agenda, and the need for funding. In most cases, organizations tend to reconcile these two sets of agenda. For example, SWU manages, through the work of Organization (A), to offer literacy programs for women, but it has to assure the donors that the program is crucial for addressing civil, political rights and democracy for women. Sometimes, however, Organization (A) is not able to revise important aspects of its development program to match those of the donor’s agenda, and in this case, it would eventually fail to get funded. A participant running a literacy program under Organization (A), mentioned with deep sadness, that they had recently been forced to stop the literacy program because of lack of funding. She explained that:

Although the program was successful and there was high demand for it, we had to suspend operations because there were no donors out there who were interested in funding it, and the only one potential donor had to suspend its funding program because the government had refused to renew visas for its staff. The donor couldn’t fund us unless their staff are physically present in Sudan.

Some SWU members also participate in different political activities by means of collaboration with other civil society organizations. Such activities include, for example, raising awareness about women’s voting rights and reviewing women’s issues in the national constitution. During the presidential elections in Sudan in 2010, in collaboration with the United
Nations Development Funds (UNDP) and Shareq El Nile University, SWU organized a workshop on federalism, local governance and the electoral process. One of the organizations which SWU members collaborate with is “No to Women’s Oppression Initiative”. This organization was established by Sudanese women from different walks of life to challenge the Public Order Regime introduced by the current government to control public behavior including dress codes.

Some participants also argued that secularism is a necessary condition to achieving greater rights for women in Sudan, particularly within family and personal status law, but this is still in a gray zone. They attributed SWU position in this regard to the diverse opinions among SWU members. Nevertheless, some participants believed that younger generations, who lean more towards secularism, will eventually influence the SWU and push it to endorse secularism. The SWU’s ambiguous position on secularism is clearly reflected in its vague position on the Convention for the Elimination of All forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDWA), which has not been ratified by the Sudan government which opposes Article (16) of the convention that provides for the equal rights for women within the family.

Some SWU members mentioned that through Organization (A) they had managed to establish the “Women Peace Ambassadors’ Initiative” as a tool that can be used to train women at local levels in south Kordofan on peace building skills. Also, some participants mentioned that they had also managed to implement an important literacy program, titled “Literacy as a way for Community Development” through Organization (A). The program provides literacy classes for women, especially displaced and marginalized women dwelling in the slums of Khartoum. In addition to teaching women basic reading and writing skills, the program also helps them to understand their civil and political rights and equips them with basic problem analysis and
communication skills. The main objective of the program is to empower women by using a “reflective mirror” methodology based on Paulo Freire’s educational pedagogy for oppressed people. The program also seeks to connect women with local authorities, especially in matters related to access to quality education and health. Women attending these classes also explore social cohesion, a concept based on respect for the racial, ethnic, and religious diversity among various groups. A participant pointed out that this component of the literacy program was gained from working with a Canadian organization which had successfully implemented the program in Canada. The same participant asserted that the program has indeed enabled them to learn to solve some of the key problems they had encountered in the course of trying to access educational and health services. Another participant mentioned that during the last year alone, more than 500 women graduated from the literacy program. These graduates demonstrated that they can read and write and that they are fully aware of their civil and political rights. The participant added that Organization (A) managed to compile a series of booklets and mini-manuals that can be used by those who might not have the chance to attend the literacy classes. These booklets and manuals were made available to other organizations engaging in literacy education for women throughout different parts of the country.

In summary, the SWU emerged during the anti-colonial national liberation struggle in Sudan. While twinning both class and gender as bases for its feminist politics, the SWU’s current attentiveness to class dynamics has a particular inflection on how it understands and engages with contemporary gender politics and violence in Sudan. Its gender politics is contested by some members who view it as narrowly framing women’s issues, describing its feminist/gender politics in relation to contemporary state nationalism as being in a grey zone. The SWU is not

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yet registered with the state, which views it as an oppositional political organization. However, despite its struggle to secure funding, which it could not get from international donors, the SWU shows resilience and the capacity to function by using different tactics to enter into a delicate negotiation with both the state and international donors.

5.2 **Nuba Women for Education and Development Association (NuWEDA)**

Women from the Nuba Mountains area are deeply affected by the ongoing civil war in the region. The current conflict in the Nuba Mountains has resumed after about five years of relative peace following the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in Sudan (CPA) (2005-2010). Eruption of the war occurred immediately after the separation of South Sudan and its formation as an independent state in July 2011. More than 700,000 people from the Mountains have been displaced as a result of war, while 400,000 others have been trapped inside SPLM/A controlled areas (Arry Organization, 2013). According to the International Rescue Committee (IRC) (2012), women and girls in the Nuba Mountains have been under continuous threat because of the current conflict in the region. To secure safety and livelihood for themselves and their families, many women sought refuge in either the south or North Sudan. Women were seeking refuge in South Sudan before the war erupted in South Sudan in December 2013. 49 Those who sought refuge in Sudan became internally displaced persons, particularly in Khartoum, the White Nile and north Kordofan regions. Whether they are refugees in South Sudan or internally displaced in Sudan, Nuba women face tremendous hardships and difficulties securing livelihoods and are constantly under the risk of physical and sexual violence. The IRC reports that Nuba female activists in Khartoum and the Nuba Mountains are vulnerable to violence perpetrated by government officials.

49 Women were seeking refuge in South Sudan before the war erupted in South Sudan in December 2013.
In addition to the challenge of trying to cope with their new economic and social roles, as a distinct ethnic minority, the displaced Nuba women face new challenges in urban settings. By the same token, women who were left behind in the Nuba Mountains became responsible for maintaining their family’s livelihoods amidst an ongoing fight and an array of ever-present threats such as sexual violence committed mostly by government soldiers. The majority of the displaced women living in big cities in northern and central Sudan are not educated. All of this happened largely due to historical factors of oppression, marginalization and neglect. As displaced persons, these women were forced to take low-paying jobs as tea vendors in the streets, garbage collectors in private factories, alcohol sellers or domestic helpers in order to meet the basic needs of their families. Many of the participants argued that this situation is exacerbated by the lack of labor laws or legal contracts in such informal sectors to protect these women. As a result, these women are subjected to different types of exploitation and harassment by the families they are working for, by private employers, and the police.

A participant indicated that many Nuba women, who are working as domestic helpers, have been frequently harassed by the families they work for and exposed to various forms of legal punishments including imprisonment. Even though these women are theoretically entitled to the legal protection offered by the Domestic Servants Act of 1955, in reality this act has never been enforced. In fact, the police constitute a major threat, especially for tea sellers and street venders. A recent study conducted in Khartoum reveals that 88.6% of tea sellers in Khartoum come from displaced and migrant communities of women (DABNAGA, 2016). A large number of these displaced women comes from the Nuba Mountains, South Sudan and Darfur. The bulk of them engage in brewing and selling alcohol as a major source of income. Eventually, these women are exposed to the threat of the public order law, which criminalizes dealing in alcohol.
Many of the women who engage in the alcohol business end up in court where they are convicted and either flogged, fined and/or imprisoned. In the period between 1993 and 1994, 96% of the total number of imprisoned women in Sudan came from southern Sudan and the Nuba Mountains (Hamid, 2007). In October 2015, three women and a boy drowned in the Nile trying to escape police brutality following a night raid by the latter to the women’s alcohol business in one of Khartoum’s suburban neighborhoods (SIHA, 2015).

The story of the establishment of NuWEDA goes back to 1997. As elaborated by some participants, it was initiated by a high school student, the current president of organization. The high school student started her community activism by organizing literacy classes for women in a church in Khartoum. The class accommodated 45 displaced Christian Nuba women living in one of Khartoum’s many shantytowns. The group leader explained that she had often wondered why the social, legal and material situations for Nuba people, especially women, were so much worse than situations faced by the rest of the population in the country (perhaps apart from the southern Sudanese who were also facing hardship at that time). She further elaborated that she had struggled to understand the causes of war and violence in her homeland, and why the Nuba people have been socially, economically and culturally excluded from centers of power and wealth in the country. She was motivated by these reflections to set up a literacy class for women. According to her, she took long risky walks through dangerous roads by foot during the evening, from her home to the church, ignoring the mounting pressure from her family who was trying to stop her from pursuing such activities due to fear of potential violence and danger.

According to the leader of the organization, after two years of literacy classes, she and other friends decided to establish and register the organization. The process of registration took approximately three years to complete. This was due, in part, to the fact that they needed to
consult with other civil society organizations for advice on how to go about the registration processes and draft the organization’s constitution, as none of them were familiar with the process. They chose to name the organization Nuba Women for Education and Development. According to participants, the group has since grown to include members representing Nuba women from all religious backgrounds including Christians, Muslims and other African systems of belief. The organization managed to reach out to many women from the Nuba Mountains, especially those who had shown some interest in the initial idea of forming an association for Nuba women. These enthusiastic women eventually joined the group. Following that, a group of four women (including the leader) were selected to be responsible for the establishment of the association. In 2002, NuWEDA was officially registered as a national organization working with displaced women in the Nuba Mountains, Khartoum and the White Nile. Registration was made possible because the declared mandate of the organization was limited to the provision of educational services without a political agenda. Today, NuWEDA is well known, regionally, nationally, and internationally. It has three main branches in Khartoum, the Nuba Mountains, and the White Nile regions of Sudan. NuWEDA’s vision statement reads:

All Sudanese people and internally displaced people, particularly the poor and marginalized, will be empowered by education for citizenship and decent life and the ability to participate actively in the achievement of sustained and lasting peace in Sudan. The slogan is: Empowering through Education. (NuWEDA’s Strategic plan document, 2015)

NuWEDA’s mission statement reads:

NuWEDA is committed to increase access to formal and non-formal education for those who are out of school and are not able to continue their education due to social, political, or economic reasons. (NuWEDA’s mission, Strategic Plan document, 2015)

NuWEDA has evolved over time and added new objectives and programs to its original mandate. Its need for expansion is reflected in its current vision and mission statements, and in
its strategic plans. NuWEDA’s definition of violence covers a wide range of social, physical, psychological, cultural, economic, and political practices based on both gender and race. One participant stated that “it is hard to be a woman in Sudan, but much harder to be both a Sudanese and a Nuba woman, because, as Nuba and Sudanese, we have been going through a lot including war and displacement”. At the present, NuWEDA’s core organizational principle states that diversity across gender, race, ethnicity, religions and age is key to peace, justice, sustainable development, and social and political equality. Although, at the beginning, NuWEDA limited its activities to the Nuba women and identified exclusively as a Nuba organization, recently it has expanded its mandate to include providing for internally displaced people and poor women in many areas throughout Sudan.

Even though it is officially registered, NuWEDA has to renew its registration annually. The registration renewal process is often hectic because it requires significant paperwork and negotiations that sometimes become, as described by a participant, a “torturous ordeal”. The annual renewal of registration usually takes several weeks or months to complete. Some participants mentioned that the process needs someone who is brave and resilient. It is worth noting here that state authorities ordered the shutdown of NuWEDA’s office in the Nuba Mountains as part of a state policy of cracking down on all humanitarian interventions in the region, including those of indigenous organizations. As a result, the organization currently operates from offices in Khartoum and The White Nile.

Since the main duty of the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs is to oversee the activities of NGOs, sign technical agreements, and provide security clearance for the different activities, most NGOs have a difficult relationship with the Ministry. This relationship becomes easier when the only permission needed is associated with the government’s primary roles of providing basic
service such as education, building schools, and the provision of water and health care services. Permissions are not easily granted for projects concerned with civil and political rights and social justice issues, including gender equality. These activities, according to a participant, are always viewed by the authorities as being part of the “Western agenda” and a threat to “national security”. Although NuWEDA does not receive any state funding, as a registered organization and in order to pursue its activities, it has to liaise with the Ministry of Humanitarian Affairs, the Ministry of Education, and, to a lesser extent, with the Ministry of Social Development in order to obtain the necessary security clearances.

Since educational services have increasingly been privatized in Sudan, NuWEDA has begun to extend these services to internally displaced people who otherwise could not afford them. However, the Ministry of Education requires that the organization must use state curricula in all kindergartens, basic schools, and adult literacy classes. Meanwhile, even though it does not provide any resources, the Ministry monitors the work of the organization very closely to make sure that the latter adheres to state regulations. As one participant stated, the Ministry collects registration fees from the organization because it views it as a private school run by volunteers and non-governmental employees. Some participants described the dilemma faced by displaced Christian children from the Nuba Mountains because the state curricula only allow for the teaching of Islam. To bypass this dilemma, some families decide to either prevent their children from attending public schools or send them to private ones if they can afford them. NuWEDA has acted to address this problem by setting up basic schools in which both Christianity and Islam are taught primarily by volunteer teachers. For the adult education literacy curricula,

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50 It is worth noting here that not all Nuba children face the same problem since not all Nuba are Christians; in fact, some are Muslims.
NuWEDA has had to add its own vision to meet the needs of its target group. Although it follows the Ministry’s curricula, one participant, a senior leader with NuWEDA, stated that “we, however, have to maneuver it [state curriculum] to include issues of diversity, gender equality, and women’s empowerment as integral parts [of our teaching strategy]. Our volunteer teachers are trained in these issues, so it is easy for them to deliver it.”

While discussing strategies of how the organization deals with the use of language related to social justice issues without getting into trouble with the authorities, a participant mentioned that they tend to use lesser charged terms such as “women in development”, “peaceful co-existence” or “diversity management”. This way, according to her, the organization manages to both obtain security clearance and address the important issues of human rights and gender. Alas, some participants mentioned that despite all the strategies used by the organization to meet the authorities’ expectations, it sometimes fails to obtain security clearance, and that obtaining clearance would not immediately guarantee the implementation of certain activities. Despite these roadblocks, NuWEDA has shown a great deal of resilience in navigating through the state’s ministries and security officers. Some participants told stories of being harassed during the break down of the conflict in the Nuba Mountains, while they were working hard to address violence against Nuba women.

The major challenge for NuWEDA comes from working in conflict areas of the Nuba Mountains. One of NuWEDA’s top leaders explained that:

Because humanitarian assistance was not allowed in the Nuba Mountains since August 2011, the conditions of living there became very difficult. We mobilized local resources from our communities here in Khartoum and, along with other Nuba organizations, we collected a good stock of clothes and commodities. We drove towards the mountains, but we were stopped about half way by the security forces who confiscated what we had, arrested and interrogated us and later released us. After that I was asked to report daily to the security headquarter in Khartoum. This is just so you know how difficult it is for us to operate, but in spite of this we carry on with our work because it is crucial for the daily
survival of Nuba women, especially since there are not so many organizations on the ground offering assistance for our people there.

Since NuWEDA’s agenda is mostly concerned with the provision of everyday necessities for women that include social and economic services, this agenda makes it extremely difficult for the organization to solicit funds from international donors who do not consider the provision of these services as a high priority. Other projects executed by NuWEDA that do not attract funding from international donors include: human rights, developing a culture of peace, and women’s political participation. In order to bridge funding gaps, NuWEDA began to look for funding by reaching out to private national companies with well-known records of committing to community well-being, such as the Hajar Foundation.

The majority of participants believed that funding from international donors was conditioned by engagement with civil and political rights. In this context, one of NuWEDA’s senior members stated that:

The agendas of current international donors in Sudan are mostly focused on human rights, good governance, and political participation, and, if you would like to access funds from them, you have to prove that you can do such work, regardless of its relevance to your target group or how hard it is to negotiate such activities with state authorities. We are trapped between our agenda and the agendas of the donors.

Civic and political rights issues are of particular interest to international donors, something that they emphasize in their call for funding proposals. Some participants argued that international donors focus on these areas because they want to hold the state accountable and responsible for human rights abuses and the lack of democracy in Sudan. Pursing donor’s interests, however, put national NGOs, especially those from war zone regions, in a perilous situation, particularly those such as NuWEDA who work and identify with women from the Nuba Mountains. Lack of national funding sources traps many NGOs, including NuWEDA, between the agendas of the international donors and their own. Currently NuWEDA receives
funding from some international donors that covers some activities in its programs. Some of the activities NuWEDA receives funds for include activities related to the promotion of women’s civil and political rights, peace building efforts and, to a lesser degree, education and economic empowerment.

NuWEDA’s organizational programs address the everyday lived experiences of violence of Nuba women including threats to their safety, by focusing on three strategic areas. These areas are: firstly, formal and non-formal education for children, youth, and women affected by armed conflict and natural disasters. Secondly, democracy and peace building by equipping women and youth with necessary skills to contribute to the consolidation of a culture of peace. In this regard, NuWEDA focuses on building capacities for women and youth to enhance communication between communities from different cultural backgrounds and the values of coexistence during times of conflict and in the post-conflict era in the Nuba Mountains. Thirdly, women’s livelihoods and the enhancement of emergency preparedness through economic empowerment of poor and marginalized people and equipping them with the necessary skills that would enable them to protect and claim their rights to resources and assets essential for a secure livelihood.

By increasingly becoming responsible for providing for their families and engaging in the informal economy as domestic workers, tea sellers, garbage collectors, and alcohol brewers, the displaced women actually risk their own safety because these activities expose them to police brutality, blackmailing, and fines or imprisonment that are often imposed on them by the Public Order courts. These conditions requires NuWEDA to develop practical ways and means to accommodate these rising challenges. Some of the ways and means include increasing economic

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51 Please note for confidentiality of information, I did not mention here the name of the international donors who are providing funds to NuWEDA.
opportunities for women by providing them with training in business skills and the formation of cooperatives and small loans entities; establishing kindergartens and daycare programs; and promoting women’s rights by addressing domestic violence against girls and women through the provision of paralegal and psychosocial support. Other programs implemented by NuWEDA in the Nuba Mountains included the promotion of women’s participation in local governance to assure proper service delivery.

Family planning, particularly the spacing of pregnancies, emerged as a new and pressing issue that NuWEDA needed to address. The issue emerged after some women had observed that giving birth to too many children in a short period of time leads to deterioration in the health of both the women and the babies. This is beside the fact that these women need the time to work and earn incomes in order to support their families. Therefore, short pregnancy spacing has led to a high infant mortality rate among displaced women. This, in turn, has led to the draining of women’s energies by child rearing duties, preventing them from contributing economically (through income) to their families. To address this issue, NuWEDA started working with both men and women to educate them on matters related to reproductive health. It emphasized the importance of spacing out pregnancies by two–to-three years and encouraged breastfeeding. Emphasis was also placed on the importance of having men take more active roles in providing for their families. Men had reportedly opposed child spacing, believing that they were the one responsible for determining this by virtue of the large dowries they had to pay in order to marry. These men had also believed that producing and taking care of children are the wife’s primary duties. Nevertheless, NuWEDA has succeeded in persuading some younger men that spacing pregnancies is beneficial for all parties involved. This conclusion was reached from the feedback received from some women and men with whom NuWEDA had worked.
NuWEDA believes that improvement of women’s position is conditioned by the ability to address gender relations and include men as key allies in the campaign against violence against women. NuWEDA’s membership includes men from the Nuba community, some of whom participated in this research. As a point of fact, NuWEDA targets young men and women, especially university students, to encourage them to become active participants in the development of their communities. It provides these young recruits with a platform where they can contribute their skills and knowledge as teachers and community mobilizers. NuWEDA highly values the important roles played by young people, particularly men working alongside women, in determining the future activities and directions of the organization.

Some of the participants mentioned that NuWEDA is actively responding to the emerging violence faced by Nuba women, in particular, and displaced women in general, in both private and public spaces. It is worthwhile mentioning here that when funds are not available, NuWEDA tends to mobilize local resources, especially volunteers, to bridge that gap and address issues of domestic violence. For example, it set up counseling teams of volunteers whose duties include guiding women through the course of their daily activities, reaching out to their partners and families, and providing legal aid when needed. During the occurrence of an incident of violence in public spaces—especially against domestic workers, tea and food sellers, and garbage collectors—the counseling team intervenes and provides the victim with legal aid and counseling. A participant, who volunteered in this program, recalled that “the program has helped many women settle their cases and advised them on how to deal with the case. Many women reported that the assistance provided to them had been useful”. A telephone hotline was set up for women to access urgent help. Usually, when a phone call is made, the counseling
group of volunteers make the necessary arrangements based on the residential location of the
caller in order to be able to attend to her as quickly as possible.

Many participants pointed out that among NuWEDA’s most successful programs are the
kindergarten and the day care services. Both were established immediately after the formation of
the organization. These programs prove to be essential, especially for working women who
would spend long hours in the city and return home very late. A participant mentioned that
before the introduction of the kindergarten and day care services, working women were hesitant
to leave children behind for fear of being exposed to violence. Further, before the establishment
of these services, working women would usually assign the duty of taking care of young children
to their older brothers and sisters, who would then not be able to attend school. It is clear that
NuWEDA provides an alternative childcare that has helped working mothers and allowed
children go to school. Both programs are run by volunteers and the services are offered to the
targeted women free of charge.

NuWEDA also runs an economic empowerment program. Even though it is a small scale
program due to lack of funding, the program manages to provide small grants in the form of
revolving funds for women to establish small businesses. Participants acknowledged the
tremendous impact the program has had on the lives of women, especially those who used to
work as domestic laborers and garbage collectors, jobs that are usually characterized by
exploitation and long working hours. A leader from NuWEDA praised the positive impact of the
economic programs by explaining that:

Through this program, women working as domestic workers or garbage collectors, who
had experienced unfavorable working conditions, finally managed to run small
businesses of their own, mostly food business, and [hence] liberated themselves from
abusive and exploiting working environment and promoted [their living conditions] and
those of their families.
NuWEDA provides free meals for children in the kindergarten and daycare programs through donations collected from local merchants and ordinary people. A participant volunteering with NuWEDA for this program, who did not identify with the Nuba ethnically, indicated that she decided to volunteer because she was encouraged by the genuine efforts and work done by the organization to help women and the children. She stated that:

I was convinced by [NuWEDA]’s genuine efforts after I had met one of the women [who took advantage of the daycare program] on the bus on her way back home after a very tiring [working] day. Yet, the woman was smiling. She called me by my name and greeted me. I was even convinced more [of the importance of organization] after I saw one of the children enrolled to school from the daycare.

In summary, NuWEDA emerged in late 1990’s amidst an intensive civil war between the north and the south in Sudan. The organization was the result of efforts by local and displaced Nuba women. NuWEDA started as a literacy program for women and gradually grew to provide a variety of key programs necessary for empowering Nuba women and for their everyday survival. NuWEDA’s feminist politics combines both gender and race. Race, in particular, is central to the organization’s efforts of analyzing violence experienced by women in Sudan.

While NuWEDA is officially recognized by the authorities in country, its relationship with the state is delicately negotiated, but sometimes it becomes tough. Over the years, NuWEDA developed skills in negotiating its relationship with the state. NuWEDA does receive some funds from international donors, but this is often not achieved without negotiating and compromising the funded agenda.

5.3 United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women

The United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women) is an international United Nations organization with headquarters based in New York and offices located across the world in Africa, Latin America, Asia, and the Middle East. As its
name indicates, the organization’s goal is to promote gender equality and the empowerment of women. Based on information from the organization’s documents, UN Women has come into being as a result of a long process of negotiation and advocacy by women’s groups from UN member states on the urgent need to strengthen the UN’s role in advancing women’s empowerment and gender equality. In July 2010, a new entity called “UN Women for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women” was founded and was endorsed by the Secretary General along with the UN member states. The goal of UN Women is to strengthen and coordinate UN agencies’ responses to gender inequality and women’s rights issues through their work. UN Women was formed by merging together four different institutions, namely the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM), the office of the Special Advisor on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI), Division for the Advancement for Women (DAW), and the International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) (UN Women, 2017).

UN Women is grounded in the vision of equality enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations. It works towards the elimination of discrimination against women and girls, the empowerment of women, and the achievement of equality between women and men as partners and beneficiaries of development, human rights, humanitarian action, peace and security. By definition, UN women is an intergovernmental organization, and by virtue of this status, it becomes accountable to member states, and thus, should respect their rules, regulations and sovereignty. In principle, UN Women’s programs are based on human rights, and women’s rights become the guide for all UN Women efforts. UN Women coordinates all UN efforts to achieve gender equality. It supports states’ priorities and efforts to achieve gender equality, in
addition to forming working partnerships with civil society to achieve the same goal (UN Women, 2017).

UN Women, like other UN agencies, does not have to go through the same registration process as other NGOs, rather the government endorses the presence of the UN system as a whole. Moreover, its staff are obliged to work closely with state’s machineries to ensure that UN Women policies, like any other UN agencies, are aligned with those of the member state. In this regard, according to my interviews with two staff from United Nations Population Funds (UNFPA), INGOs, International Rescue Committee (IRC) and Oxfam for example, are in a far better situation when it comes to challenging the state, especially on issues of gender-based violence, than UN Women. This could be attributed to the fact that the mandate of the international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) does not necessarily require its members to work or collaborate with nation-states.

The main goal of UN Women comprises provision of support for inter-governmental bodies, such as the Commission on the Status of Women, in their attempts to formulate policies, global standards, and norms. It also seeks to help member states implement these standards through suitable technical and financial support. UN Women also attempts to forge effective partnerships with civil society, leading and coordinating the UN system’s work on gender equality as well as promoting accountability through a system of regular monitoring.

UN Women is the global champion for gender equality, working to develop and uphold standards and create an environment in which every woman and girl can exercise her human rights and live up to her full potential. We are trusted partners for advocates and decision-makers from all walks of life, and a leader in the effort to achieve gender equality. (UN Women website, 2017)  

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The global body believes that “All human development and human rights issues have gender dimensions. [Therefore it] focuses on priority areas that are fundamental to women’s equality, and that can unlock progress across the board” (UN Women website, 2017). UN Women’s programs thus focus on addressing gender equality in different sectors related to social, economic and political spheres. Globally, UN Women’s key areas of intervention include: violence against women, peace and security, humanitarian action, governance and national planning, gendering state budgets, political participation and economic empowerment (ibid). Below is a general description of each of these areas, drawn from the organization’s website.

UN Women conceptualizes violence as violation of basic human rights, and emphasizes its various sexual, physical and mental impacts on women and girls in particular, and on family and community at large. UN Women also refers to the high costs to national budgets resulting from violence. It advocates for a number of international conventions and treaties to help women live free of violence. These conventions and treaties include (among others) the Convention of the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW), the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, and Peace and Security. The international organization also encourages member states’ governments to adopt these conventions and match their legal and policy reforms with the international standards of human rights (UN Women, 2017). 53

UN Women also recognizes that crises often lead to death and displacement, loss of basic infrastructure and community social support systems. Therefore, it contributes to responding to these humanitarian crises. UN Women also recognizes the impact of conflict on the population and its gendered outcomes, whereby women and children become more vulnerable to risks and

displacement. It further recognizes that, in times of crises, women have distinct needs and capacities during phases of preparedness and recovery, as well as during post conflict periods.  

Additionally, UN Women recognizes that women are excluded from accessing recovery opportunities, justice systems, and decision making on laws and policy reforms. It also recognizes the fact that despite their contribution to peace building, women nevertheless are often excluded from peace negotiations. This situation necessitated that UN Women work with member states’ governments in order to enforce the Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security. This resolution was endorsed by the Security Council in 2000, and it entails that women in conflict zones must be protected from human rights abuses, provided with access to justice systems and allowed to participate in peace building at all levels.  

UN Women recognizes the global underrepresentation of women as political leaders and voters due to structural and institutional barriers. As such, it works to promote women’s political and leadership roles by addressing discriminatory laws and practices as well as building women’s capacities to engage and participate in the public sphere. Based on the UN General Assembly resolution on women’s political participation, and guided by CEDAW, Beijing Platform for Action and the Millennium Development Goals, UN Women has implemented a variety of programs to promote women’s leadership and political participation. The international body also helps women to overcome poverty, gender discrimination, and contributes to economic growth in member countries. It works to influence both social policies and public institutions to secure women’s access to jobs and assets. Also, in collaboration with

54 http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/humanitarian-action
56 http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/leadership-and-political-participation
different partners, UN Women works to enhance poor women’s access to what UN Women refers to as “decent work”.57

The UN Women office in Sudan was opened in 2011 as a part of the global UN Women structure. It has the same vision and goals as other UN Women offices across the globe. The Sudanese UN Women program focuses its work on issues at the national level, with lesser focus at the regional level. In addition to its main headquarter in Khartoum, UN Women has a regional office in Darfur, western Sudan. In Sudan, the organization’s specific areas of programming cover peace and security, ending violence against women, promoting women’s leadership and political participation, gender responsive state budgeting, humanitarian action, and information sharing. For each of these programs, UN Women Sudan retains the same objectives as those embedded in the programs of global UN Women office.

While it is expected to provide humanitarian action as part of their programs in Sudan, UN Women only does so in Darfur, while it has no presence whatsoever in the Nuba Mountains. The regime rules dictate that, except in the case of few organizations controlled by HAC, there should be no humanitarian assistance activity in the Nuba Mountains or the Blue Nile State. As a UN organization, UN Women is forced to adhere to these rules. My own interpretation is that this position could be attributed to the ongoing fighting between the central government and the liberation army (SPLA-North) in the Nuba Mountains. The government position is that the humanitarian aid might help feed the war by empowering the rebel groups and enabling them to continue the fighting. By cutting humanitarian aid from these rebel groups, the government expects that the rebel groups will become willing to put down arms and pursue peaceful means.

57 http://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/economic-empowerment
of resolving their disputes with the government in Khartoum. Fighting has forced many Nuba people, especially women and children, to leave their homes and become internally displaced in central Sudan and Khartoum.

According to a participant from the organization, UN Women seems to have no problem accessing funds for its own work, since it is part of an international system. Furthermore, funds are mostly directed to the activities of the state of Sudan and, to a lesser extent, those of civil society. Funds directed to the state are mainly used to build state capacity in delivering protection and social services, which includes a budget for capacity building and policy reforms. The participant mentioned that UN Women receives funds from different governments, the private sector, and foundations from across the globe. She also explained that the UN Women office in Sudan receives funds on a project-to-project basis and that some of the programs are globally-managed from the UN Women headquarters. The participant also acknowledged that the UN Women program coverage is limited and that it is not enough. According to her, the UN body sometimes requires much more funding to be able to respond effectively to issues of gender violence in Sudan, but currently this is not the case.

According to the one and only participant from UN Women, a program officer, UN Women in Sudan works hand-in-hand with both the federal and regional governments in Khartoum and Darfur, respectively. The state counterparts with which it cooperates include the Ministry of Social Development and the Commission on Violence Against Women. Its joint work has included the creation of a database on violence against women and girls, building support for data collection on victims of sexual and gender-based violence and providing funds for referrals for victims of gender-based violence. It monitors the Commission in terms of setting up a database system, while the actual process of referral is conducted by the Sudanese
government, UN Women’s involvement is limited to the provision of funds for the referral of victims of violence.

Furthermore, UN Women has no monitoring role over the actions the government might take based on the data generated. I inquired about whether or not this was a concern in the case of sexual violence—particularly in Darfur, considering that NGOs, INGOs and other human rights groups have reported that sexual crimes against women and girls are mostly committed by government militias (Human Rights Watch, 2005). I received no definitive response to my inquiry. The participant to whom I voiced my concern stated that it was the responsibility of the government, not UN Women, to deal with and act upon all cases of gender-based violence as manifested by the database. As discussed earlier in Chapter 4, sexual violence represents a major concern for women in Sudan, in general, and in war zones in particular since victims of rape who fail to provide the legal evidence for rape can easily be convicted of violating either the laws against adultery (“Zina”) or the “indecency Act”. 58 Because both these Acts are characterized by vagueness and ambiguity, rape cases could easily be misconstrued as “Zina” if the victim failed to bring four witnesses, as required by Sharia law. 59

Consequently, the law has denied justice for many rape victims in Sudan, especially in the war zones regions, and silenced many women about their experience of rape and sexual violation. Commenting on the implication of this situation and the limited access justice, the participant mentioned that UN Women had engaged judges and customary law leaders in Darfur through sensitization workshops on gender and human rights with the hope of amending these laws. It was only when national and international human rights organizations (including UN

58 Under the Sudan Islamic Sharia Law code, bringing four witnesses who observed the actual penetration is the only legal evidence permitted.
59 Due to the politicization of the Rape law, especially after the Criminal Court (ICC) an arrest warrant was issued in 2009 against Sudan’s president, ElBashir.
Women) campaigned against these laws that the rape law was amended in February 2015. As discussed earlier, the amended law remains vague and the categorization of sexual violence remains up to police and judges, leaving rape victims vulnerable to punishment for adultery when they try to access justice.  

The participant also mentioned that while UN Women provides direct support to individual women’s organizations in Darfur and Khartoum, its support for civil society organizations is limited to civil society’s collective action and does not include support on the individual level. For example, UN Women, according to the participant, provided a small amount of funding to some women’s groups, including those who were trying to promote women’s political participation during the 2011 Sudanese national elections. They also supported work on the implementation of UN resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security. UN Women’s past and present work with civil society organizations in Khartoum has been mostly limited to the implementation of U.N. Security Council’s Resolution 1325 on women for peace and security that aims to promote the participation of women in the peace process, identifying women’s needs and priorities, and protecting women and girls from sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). UN Women’s support in these areas was substantiated by launching and organizing an annual 16 days of activism against gender-based violence campaign, which included a variety of short activities, such as public lectures on SGBV, screening videos, displays of posters, the establishment of the Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Forum on Ending Violence against Women and Girls and providing seed money for academic support to Ahfad University for Women.

60 For more information please see http://in.reuters.com/article/sudan-rape-law-idINKBN0NF1B920150424
In 2015, as a part of its support to civil society organizations, UN Women carried out a study aimed at mapping actors who focused on addressing gender-based violence in Khartoum. The main objective of this mapping was to identify all stakeholders working on issues related to the protection, prevention, and response to Violence against Women and Girls (VAWG) in the Khartoum State. Following that, the key stakeholders identified by the study were encouraged to join the newly organized “Civil Society Organizations (CSO) Forum on Ending Violence against Women and Girls in Khartoum”. At the present, the forum focuses on sharing information and discussing challenges.

One of the projects that has been implemented by UN Women in partnership with civil society organizations in Darfur is “The promotion of Women’s Rights and Protection under Islamic, national, and International laws”. This project aimed at sensitizing traditional Islamic leaders in Darfur about gender equality and persuading them to advocate for women’s rights. Another project is aimed at addressing the needs of internally displaced women for protection and their livelihoods through economic empowerment and the provision of income generation activities and skills (such as enterprise development, marketing, savings, and income management). The project also provided paralegal training for internally displaced women and men in camps. The paralegal training program included analysis of Sudanese legislation and its limitations in providing protection against sexual and gender based violence (SGBV). UN Women also funded and organized the annual 16 days of activism against gender-based violence in three cities in Darfur. Even though UN Women strongly believes that its collaboration with civil society organizations and the government has yielded many achievements, my research did not come across any available documents proving these achievements.

61 From different projects documents shared by UN Women.
In summary, UN Women’s emphasis is on gender and gender inequalities; for this reason, it focuses on promoting gender equality and mainstreaming gender within existing policies and programs. However, as an intergovernmental organization, UN Women is not expected to challenge the sovereignty of the nation-state because, by virtue of its mandate, it is obliged to collaborate with the latter. Therefore, UN Women works in coordination with the state by strengthening the capacity of the state and promote its ownership of the development processes in order to achieve its set of goal and objectives. However, while the UN enters into negotiation with a member state on matters regarding discriminatory laws, the state’s decision will rule in the end. UN Women also works with civil society organizations, but this happens only when its agenda matches with those of the civil society organizations. In terms of funding, UN Women in Sudan has no major difficulties accessing funds. However, it often does not get enough resources to meet all of its goals and objectives.
Chapter 6: Contesting gender politics and violence in Sudan and the Nuba Mountains

In order to address how the three feminist/women’s organizations address violence in the context of Sudan, we first need to analyze their conceptualizations of violence. This chapter considers how the three women’s organizations — NuWEDA, SWU, and UN Women — conceptualize violence and how their definitions inform their activism and gender politics. Specifically, this chapter discusses how the three organizations address the experience of violence among Sudanese women and among women from the Nuba Mountains war zone, in particular.

I draw empirical data from interviews and documents produced by the organizations to examine how each of these three organizations conceptualize and contest gender politics and violence. Doing so helps to address several issues widely debated among women’s movements that are striving to address violence in African “post-colonial” states: the conceptualization of violence, relations to the state, and North-South relations with international donors.

6.1 Conceptualizations of Violence

The Nuba felt forgotten by everyone. With nothing but themselves to rely on, they found [the] necessary determination and reserves of energy. (Winter, cited in Komey, 2016, p. 12)

As I have suggested, state violence resulting from the ongoing civil war in marginalized regions of Sudan, including the Nuba Mountains, affects women in particular. However, some are more affected than others based on the intersections of their gender identity, ethnicity and race, class, and religion. The women who represent the “other”, the non-Arab and the non-Muslim in nationalist discourse, are arguably the most affected and have to bear multiple forms
of violence based on their gender, race and ethnicity, as well as their class and geographic location.

Empirical data from NuWEDA, SWU, and UN Women, reveal competing conceptualization of violence. While NuWEDA combines both gender and race, the national organization, SWU, twins both class and gender but currently focuses primarily on class (capitalism). The international entity UN Women focuses exclusively on gender and gender inequalities. Their choice of a central category of analysis is based on their interpretations of factors that contribute to violence against women. These different approaches to understanding violence inform specific feminist politics of social justice activism. Furthermore, the organization’s context, which includes the organization’s history, the material conditions of the women they target, the social circumstances of the women they target, as well as the organization’s specific political ideology in regard to the state citizenship framework will in turn inform their agenda for change.

SWU began as an anti-colonial movement and was dominated by Marxist feminist and socialist frameworks. Based on their analysis of violence against women in Sudan, the SWU sees violence against Sudanese women in general, including women in the Nuba Mountains and other war zones, as part of a national class struggle against capitalism and the authoritarian regime. They emphasize class struggle as the core cause of the violence experienced by women and acknowledge that their analysis is informed by Marx and Engels, especially Engels’s book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State*. The late president of SWU, Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim, noted that:

Liberation comes from self-reliance…because women’s subservience historically can be attributed to the fact that men were responsible for their economic well-being ... [Engels’s book *The Origin of the Family, Private Property, and the State* by] stressing the significance of economics and class for women’s social status’. (Abushara, 2004, p. 155)
She also emphasizes that the SWU does not subscribe to what she refers to as “victimization ideologies” based exclusively on sex. Rather, she sees women’s oppression as part of class oppression.

Thus, the SWU currently prioritizes the fight against capitalism and authoritarianism as central to the fight against violence. As indicated by some of the SWU participants, as well as indicated in the objectives of the organization, democratic transition has come to take precedence over a women-centric agenda. Historically, it is worth noting that the SWU’s agenda has varied across different democratic and military regimes in Sudan. SWU understands that democracy and capitalism do not go hand in hand and that democracy contradicts capitalism. Therefore, during democratic regimes, the SWU focused on a feminist agenda in relation to patriarchy, especially women’s rights in the public sphere, while during military regimes, they focused exclusively on fighting capitalism and for democratic transition.

There has been what one participant called “intergenerational tension” among SWU members both in Sudan and the diaspora, especially in regard to the organization’s orientation to focus on class. This participant noticed that during this government, the SWU focuses exclusively on the issues in the public domain, such as democracy, while ignoring (or remaining silent about) those in the private domains which have a direct impact on the majority of women in terms of their individual freedoms and experiences of domestic violence. The SWU’s silence could also be interpreted, according to this participant, as an unspoken approval of the dominant Arabic-Islamic identity of the country. She further argued that the contemporary situation in Sudan and the increasing violence against women demand focus on patriarchy as well. As another participant noted:
It is high time that we revisit our agendas. The fact that during this government women became the primary target by the Sudan’s state laws which affect women’s presence especially in public spaces, as well as their rights in family sphere, requires us to focus on these patriarchal laws. This doesn’t mean we have to give up our fight against capitalism and authoritarian regimes, the fight can go hand in hand.

Another participant also argued that while fighting for the restoration of democracy, the SWU should pay equal attention to the urgent and pressing issues that Sudanese women face. This, according to her, should include addressing working conditions in the informal sector and the fight to end the harmful practices against women and girls in Sudan, most notably FGM.

Reluctance from some of the organization’s key leaders (the older generation)—who were among the founders of SWU in the 1950th during the anticolonial struggle—to incorporate patriarchy into their analysis of the current situation in Sudan is explained as advancing the agenda of “hegemonic Western feminist” donors and is not part of a feminist nationalist agenda. Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim argued that by focusing on patriarchal agendas, the organization shifts away from addressing the root cause of the problem, which is capitalism and corruption (Babiker, 2008). Another participant from SWU cited global inequality and global capital in the form of the arms/weapons trade—particularly the trade from Western countries to East Africa—as major factors contributing to gendered and racialized violence in marginalized war zone regions in Sudan. She stated that:

Let us talk about the weapons trade. We all know how some Western countries—because of the very fact that they manufacture weapons—contribute to conflict in Sudan, since they trade and provide both the government and the army groups with weapons. This war has resulted in gender-based violence and displacement, which mostly affects women from marginalized regions, including the Nuba Mountains.

Another participant had a different opinion, arguing that the problem with SWU’s prioritization of the fight for the restoration of democracy over women’s issues can also be attributed to the fact that the majority of the members of the Union have strong political
affiliations, mainly with the Sudanese Communist Party (SCP). SWU’s definition of democracy, according to the participant, is very narrow because it relates to the current ruling regime. Democracy, this participant argued, should be extended to include all situations within the political parties, civil society organizations, and leadership of the SWU itself. This participant also raised the issue of women’s representation in the SWU. She suggested that the SWU should make efforts to extend its representation to include women from all walks of life in Sudan irrespective of their geographical location, ethnicity, race and religion or political affiliations. This, she argued, is the only way that SWU itself could become a truly democratic national platform.

When participants from NuWEDA were asked about the organization’s idea of violence, they emphasized the experiences of women from the Nuba Mountains. Their approach implied an intersectional analysis. Their focus was on both race and gender, but they also acknowledged religion and colonial history, and slavery in particular, while there was no mention of capitalism and unequal global power relations. A participant from NuWEDA stated:

The suffering of women from the Nuba Mountains, whether they are in exile, in the Nuba Mountains under military action, internally displaced or refugees in the neighbouring countries, started since the early 1980s and continued to date (silence) or let me say that it started way back before 1980s, since colonial times, as Nuba we were subjected to humiliation of slavery and many other forms of violence, including our region was declared a closed area, thus with limited options for education and development, Nuba women were left without education, except for a few of them.

Many participants commented that women living under daily air attacks and military violence in the Nuba Mountains are the hardest hit by militarized violence including sexual violence, physical injuries, separated families, hunger and starvation due to the absence of humanitarian assistance. Those displaced in north and central Sudan are also experiencing violence. A program coordinator in NuWEDA explained:
Once Nuba people are displaced to Khartoum and other regions in central and North Sudan, these people immediately became racialized and refer to as “Nuba”. For example, working Nuba women are referred to by emphasizing their race (this or that Nuba woman). In their displacement to urban areas, these women have to fight for the ability to feed their children with little options available to them, they sometimes had to take risks.

The fight for displaced women is full of challenges. Being uneducated, most of these women take on jobs such as domestic workers, tea sellers or garbage collectors. In these jobs they encounter many difficulties and violence, and gain very little money in return, while others simply end up in prisons. According to one participant, “Sometimes when the accusing party did not show up for a trial, these women were left in the prison for a long time.” A male participant commented that racism is one of the key causes of violence for all Nuba people, and that Nuba men also experience violence associated with racism; as Nuba men, they share with the Nuba women some of the violence based on their race. However, he added that Nuba women’s suffering is further exacerbated by internal social and cultural norms that discriminate against Nuba women. He elaborated:

As Nuba men we share with Nuba women some of their experience as Nuba and displaced, but the fact that as Nuba women they also face cultural norms that discriminate against them, especially in the family and community level and this in fact doubles the Nuba women’s suffering. This multilayered suffering is what in fact motivates me to work with them, because they are far more oppressed than us as Nuba men.

Another participant commented that while all Nuba people suffer from violence, Christian Nuba suffer even more. As explained in Chapter 5, state school curricula are based on policies of Islamization and Arabization. Christian children, whose families cannot afford to pay for private schooling, have to attend church run schools, which offers little education. Where church schools are not available or accessible, Nuba civil society organizations will run community-based schools. This is the case for NuWEDA, as explained in Chapter 5. Another

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62 Some Nuba people are Christians, others are Muslim.
difficulty encountered by Christian Nuba in general, as explained by a research participant, is that they are excluded from state jobs as a result of the government Islamization and Arabization national policies. She also notes that some Christian Nuba women had to integrate themselves into North Sudanese Muslim culture, especially when they take on domestic work, as a strategy to be accepted. On the same point, Rogaia Abusharaf (2009) notes that as a survival strategy, displaced women from South Sudan and Nuba Mountains have adopted some North Sudanese Muslim cultural rituals, including practicing female genital circumcision (FGM) in order to integrate themselves and be able to earn a living.

This intersectional analysis of NuWEDA’s conceptualization of violence shows the interlinkage of gender, race, class and religion in women’s oppression and violence. Some research participants from NuWEDA commented on the historical silence of national women’s organizations on racialized violence in the Nuba Mountains, and suggested multiple ways to interpret their silence. She speculated that this silence could be due to the urban character of the groups representing the national movements whose priorities for a women’s agenda are based on interest of urban women in central Sudan.

One participant from the SWU explained that historically the SWU fell short of reaching out to women in marginalized regions, such as the Nuba Mountains and South Sudan. She candidly acknowledged that little effort had been made to set up committees in these regions in the early 1980s. She noted that the “SWU, like other national movements linked to the liberation of the country, has an urban and elite character, and fails to represent or address issues affecting rural Sudanese.” Others also commented on this historic silence of the SWU. Amir Zahir (2003) argues that “the mentality of elite, middle class, Arab-Islamic leaders of this national movement
in fact followed the state in the silencing and erasing the experiences and needs of marginalized women” (Zahir, 2006, p.13).

NuWEDA’s activism focuses on violence in relation to militarization, displacement, and the material hardships of the everyday life experienced by women from the Nuba Mountains. It addresses these hardships through development interventions and by indirectly challenging the state. In an effort to both address racism (which represents the core element in their analysis of violence against women) and avoid serious confrontation with the government, NuWEDA designed a program called “Diversity”. Diversity addresses racism and represents a vision that allows NuWEDA to address racism without being labeled or harassed by the government. We can attribute NuWEDA’s avoidance of the concept of “racism” to the sensitivity of the issue and security concerns regarding the use of the term. Civil society organization offices have been raided, interrogated and closed down because of the use of politically charged terms, such as racism, in their documents. As one participant notes:

Diversity is NuWEDA’s core principle and strategy, the main stream in our organization’s structure and programs and a key guiding principle. This principle, in fact, reflects our dream to live in a national Sudan, yet multi-ethnic, religious and culturally diverse. This vision attracted some people who are not Nuba who are inspired by our work and now joined our efforts.

It is worth noting that while NuWEDA addresses cultural (religious) Islamization biases of the nationalist discourse through its education program, it does not tackle the law. Though there is no specific explanation given as to why this is the case, it is possible that this framework allows them to operate more effectively in the present, given the high risk of their involvement with law as racialized and Christians. Though NuWEDA’s members include both Christians and Muslims, many of them see their racial identity as the main cause of violence, as both Christian and Muslim Nuba are subjected to the same forms violence. In addition, since some of
NuWEDA’s key leaders are Christian, instigating a religious debate might put them at high risk as they would be viewed as direct threats to the nationalist Islamic project. As indicated by most of the participants, immediate material needs, economic, psychosocial and paralegal issues are particularly emphasized as a matter of saving lives. NuWEDA also challenges structural causes of violence. One of the main problems for NuWEDA, vis-à-vis the nation-building project, lies in the name of the organization. Nuba Women for Education and Development. As stated by one of the participants in Chapter 5, including Nuba in the name of the organization, poses a question regarding competing narratives of national identity.  

The broader social and political struggle of Nuba people against racism is embedded in post-colonial state nationalism projects and the contestation of the multiple violences experienced by the Nuba as a result. As a region in transition, there are many factors that led to the rise of Nuba ethnic identity. These include the continuation of state war and violence evoked by the hegemonic nationalism project and Nuba people’s disappointment with the failure of the Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA). As discussed in detail in Chapter 4, the CPA does not address Nuba grievances in relation to their right to their land and cultural identity. Consequently, a large Nuba ethno-political movement emerged that focused on promoting Nuba unity in an effort to decolonize their land and their cultural identity. To achieve these goals, the

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63 The current Sudanese government, like other military governments, views the unity of the non-Arab population as a threat to its political program of Arabization. In order to disrupt attempts to unify the non-Arab population, the government has employed different strategies, specifically in Darfur and the Nuba Mountains. In 1994, the government declared that the historical region of the Nuba Mountains was no longer an autonomous region, and that it is now part of a newly-formed, bigger region called South Kordofan, which includes other areas bordering the Nuba Mountains. This redrawing of Sudan’s geography was a blatant effort on the part of the government to erase Nuba identity, which is mostly attached to the land.
movement rejected the state’s ideology of common land property rights, advocating for the rights of the Nuba to their land and cultural identity.  

The UN Women’s analysis of violence against women is focused on sexism and gender discrimination. As indicated in Chapter 5, its conceptualization generally neglects colonialism, racism and global capitalism as contributing factors in the perpetuation of violence against women in Sudan. UN Women defines violence against women and girls as “any act of gender-based violence that results in, or is likely to result in, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to women, including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life”. This focus, though important to women’s experiences, does not allow for recognition of how different women experience violence. Differences can result from how women are impacted by patriarchal nationalist laws that discriminate on bases other than gender. This gender-focused analysis masks the experience of violence of multiple systems of oppression.

UN Women’s engagement to address violence is rooted in a liberal feminist framework. Liberal feminism sees women’s oppression as based on a social contract between the state and individuals. It views the state as a key holder of individual rights (Connell, 1990). Therefore, liberal feminist strategies do not focus on challenging patriarchy as a system of power (Jaggar, 1983), but rather focus on working through the state as a “neutral arbiter between conflicting interests and a guarantor of individual rights” (Connell, 1990, p. 512). As clearly indicated by the participant from UN Women, the organization is an intergovernmental organization and by the

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64 It is worth noting here that there is still an active armed struggle going on between the liberation movement (SPLA-Nuba Mountains) and the government of Sudan. SPLA-Nuba Mountains political demand call for an independent Nuba Mountains region.

virtue of its mandate, it works in close coordination with the state to assist the government to be accountable to gender equality.

To realize its objective, UN Women emphasizes “gender mainstreaming”, which includes engendering social policy reforms and gendering the state budget to deliver equitable social services. According to Baines (2017), while mainstreaming gender sometimes results in positive change, it also sustains gender differentiation and structural power dynamics. UN Women’s Sudan office does not reflect the kind of society it envisions since its work is based on a global scale. As an international organization, UN Women works under a liberal democratic framework with a citizenship framework based on civil rights whereby women and men have equal rights in both public and private spheres.

While the UN Women’s programs are important, especially in the context of Sudan and the state’s inability to deliver social services to women, its approach has been viewed by some civil society organizations and international non-governmental organizations (INGOs) as not radical enough to achieve transformative results. Participants from both the SWU and NuWEDA criticized UN Women’s work regarding their impact as largely invisible. These organizations feel neglected by UN Women because it does not provide support to them. My history of working in this field is largely connected to international non-governmental organizations (INGOs). The INGO I worked with (Oxfam Canada) was more in control of their relationships with the state and civil society than UN Women, especially when it came to a social justice framework and navigating tensions between human rights and cultural relativist discourses. This difference in approach between UN Women and INGOs is largely the result of funding sources because INGOs are often not funded by the state, and therefore have more control over their
agenda and politics, while UN Women is funded by the United Nations and thus accountable to member states.

It is clear that each of the three organizations has strengths and weaknesses in their analysis of violence, resulting in points of overlap and tension among the three organizations. In summary, while SWU and UN Women’s analyses of violence are situated in the macro-level, NuWEDA’s analysis focuses on the regional and micro-level, especially as it relates to women from the Nuba indigenous ethnic/racial minority. While focused on important structural and global forces, SWU and UN Women’s understanding fails to capture the multiple forms of violence caused by interlocking systems of oppression experienced by indigenous Nuba women, leading to a complete erasure of their experience, along with that of other women from marginalized war zones in Sudan.

The ideological positions and the social justice agendas of the three organizations have been challenged by the state and consequently have not received equal attention and interest from international donors. I turn now to explore how each of the three women’s organizations negotiate their feminist agendas with both the state and international donors.

6.2 Feminist/Women’s Movements and Interactions with the State.

As discussed in Chapter 4, throughout the process of Sudanese state formation, the state deployed specific forms of gender politics to suit its nationalism projects. Often, these gender politics simultaneously situated women as an embodiment of the nationalist identity, icons of culture and a symbol of modernity. Sudan’s post-colonial nationalist discourse depended on a clear distinction between rights in the public and private spheres, with women’s rights being largely confined to the private sphere and governed by cultural laws such as Islamic family law and other customary laws. Like many African post-colonial states that argue that human rights
are not universal, Sudan evokes a cultural relativistic rights discourse. This rights discourse is predicated on an imagined cultural nationalism that is constructed in gendered terms in which a clear distinction is made between rights in the public and private spheres.

Human rights-based discourse uses international human rights as its point of reference rather than rights that are based on specific cultural frameworks. Generally, the application of human rights-based discourse to address violence against women depends on the implementation of the human rights standard in national legislative assemblies and constitutions. The cultural relativist discourse and its private/public distinction of human rights in the current Sudanese constitution creates an uneasy relationship to a human rights-based approach to women’s rights. In conflict-ridden regions of East Africa, including Sudan, civil society organizations generally face few risks when addressing issues related to social and economic rights, since their work is “interpreted by the state as complementary and part of nation-building” (Hyden and Halimarium, 2003, p. 225). However, they face greater risks when they become involved in political and civil rights matters, because such work “is seen as lobby[ing] for changes in the way the state of society operates” (ibid, p. 225).

Different women’s movements in Sudan have developed different relations with the various ruling regimes, both military and democratic ones. Elsewhere in Africa, as discussed in Chapter 2, not all women’s organizations challenge the state’s nationalist agenda, and when they do challenge the state, they do not do so in the same ways. While some challenge the state, others maintain or even reproduce the state’s nationalist discourse on gender politics. Simultaneously, the state has its own position regarding whether it will form relations with specific feminist/women’s organizations. In Sudan, state officials are generally hostile towards
women’s organizations that openly challenge state laws, including public order laws and family law, as they view these organizations to be anti-government and pro-Western.

Similarly, the government can be hostile to organizations based on the racial identity of its members or the political agenda of the organization. For example, indigenous organizations whose members come from marginalized regions and who flag their ethnicities in the title of the organizations (like NuWEDA), are considered a potential challenge to the state Arab-Islamic nationalism and, accordingly, “national security”. Such organizations can be accused of being anti-government and pro-rebel based on little more than declaring their racial/ethnic identity. In addition, international organizations are also targets of government hostility because their mandates do not necessitate accountability to the state’s views on gender. Indeed, some of these organizations (especially INGOs) have advocated gender equality, which has led to the state branding them as enemies due to their perceived “imperialist agenda” as a result of their gender politics. Reflecting such hostility, the Sudanese state expelled thirteen INGOs in 2009 in reaction to their advocacy against state violence in Darfur, among which were Oxford Committee for Famine and Relief (Oxfam GB), Save the Children and Care International. 66

Below, I examine how the three organizations in this study relate to the state. It is worth noting that the current government does not provide financial support to any of these three organizations. In general, the current government does not fund civil society organizations. Instead, they fund a select few organizations that are either government affiliated or serve the nationalist agenda.

Based on their practices, the SWU’s position can be associated with some African feminist views that see the current government as corrupt. Therefore, they have limited connection with the current state. However, as discussed early in this chapter, the SWU’s relationship to the state has varied throughout its history. While the SWU has maintained good relations with Sudan’s democratic regimes, it has had a much more difficult time with authoritarian and military regimes. As discussed in Chapter 4, the current government of Sudan came into power through a military coup and subsequently enforced an ethnic/cultural nationalist agenda. In response, the SWU directly challenged the current military regime by declaring it undemocratic. They see democratic transition as a precondition for the liberation and protection of women from violence. Given the SWU’s ideological and antagonistic stance, the state has refused to register it on the grounds that the organization is ostensibly a wing of the Sudanese Communist Political Party with secular ideologies. Therefore, the SWU’s work and activism is banned within Sudan’s borders. Consequently, the SWU has developed alternative strategies that will allow them to achieve their objectives. For example, the SWU has established groups/branches outside Sudan where members in the diaspora can continue to carry out their advocacy work. As detailed in Chapter 5, Organization (A) was created by some SWU members as an independent organization registered with the state to be able to implement the literacy program which is a core program for the SWU. In addition, the SWU organizes general assemblies, mostly outside Sudan, and collaborates with registered organizations to carry out some of their activist work. A participant from SWU commented that:

Although different strategies are accompanied by their own challenges and implications, we nevertheless never stop trying our best to minimize challenges and assert some degree of control over our circumstances. We also never gave up trying to register with the government, though our applications are always turned down. However, we continue, for example, sending government memorandums, especially against the rise of living expenses in Sudan.
NuWEDA, on the other hand, challenges the state’s nationalist gender and racial discourses indirectly through its programs and activism. In fact, NuWEDA is officially registered with the state and is required to obtain state approval for its activities. The organization’s relationship with the state extends beyond the approval of its activities. As a registered organization, it must acquire government approval for the implementation of its programs and, in some cases, it has to work closely with the state throughout the implementation process of a specific program. For example, NuWEDA has worked closely with the Ministry of Education to run its education program, which is compulsory when working with any state curricula, both in basic schools and adult education. Another example is NuWEDA’s collaboration with Ministry of Social Development to advocate for increased female participation in local governing structures in the Nuba Mountains in an effort to enhance the delivery of social services to women in the region. Through this effort, NuWEDA advocated to hold the state accountable for delivering services to women in the region. While the latter program appears to have been as successful as the education program in terms of activities, the end result remains unclear in the context of ongoing war in the region. Also, the implementation of program stopped following the closure of NuWEDA’s office in the Nuba Mountains in 2011. The organization’s relation with the state is both tough and complex. As a participant from the organization commented:

Despite these tentative successes, it should be noted that our work with the state has not come easily; rather, it is a relationship that has been time-consuming, and fraught with mistrust, risk, and insecurity. We had to develop delicate negotiation skills and strategies to fit different scenarios and for navigating governmental red tape at the start of a new program. However, these strategies will sometimes succeed, sometimes fail and some of our activities have been stopped by authorities in the last minutes claiming it poses a threat to “national security”.

NuWEDA’s primary challenge to state politics has been in the form of resistance to the hegemonic nationalist agenda, though in implicit ways to avoid confrontation and state violence.
NuWEDA’s resistance lies in its name, which incorporates “Nuba” (Nuba refers to a non-Arab and non-Islamic racialized group) and thus challenges the state’s conception of national identity. The current government has requested that civil society organizations from the Nuba Mountains drop the designation, “Nuba,” from their titles. Nonetheless, NuWEDA has insisted on retaining its title despite increased harassment from the government, including having to go through a long process of interrogation in order to renew its registration every year. A participant summarized this challenge:

We regularly pay a price for holding to the name Nuba. For example, we are given a hard time during our yearly registration renewal and we are required to submit more papers, which proves to be a very exhausting and time consuming process for us, yet we are proud to hold onto our name and identity.

Conversely, UN Women has a strong relationship with the government. UN Women’s presence in the country is endorsed by the Sudanese state as part of the United Nations system in Sudan. Like other UN agencies, UN Women is an intergovernmental organization that is accountable to the state; that is, it respects the state’s rules and regulations. It is required by its very mandate to cooperate with the member state. Moreover, its staff is obliged to hold to this mandate when carrying out their work in the country. Therefore, UN Women in Sudan delivers its work mostly through the government, and its programs largely involve addressing women’s political participation, gender-based violence and peace and security. Their programs are carried out in collaboration with the state and through the provision of resources to different ministries. In addition, UN Women also provides limited grants to civil society and women’s groups. Again, the degree to which their programs have been successful is not clear at present. Although they negotiate government demands, a participant from UN Women commented:

As UN Women, our negotiation of meanings with the state counterparts is an ongoing process. We still disagree sometimes with the government on the meanings of key concepts like violence and what constitute violence against women, as well as laws and
policies to handle and to respond to this violence. The tension arises from the irreconcilable nature of the human-rights-based discourse used by UN Women on the one hand, and the cultural discourse used by the government on the other, particularly in relation to issues such as domestic violence against women and FGM/C. A situation in which compromising meaning prevails. However, the challenge remains in addressing sexual violence against women in Sudan’s war zones.

As stated by UN Women, work with the state on social justice and violence against women requires that they continuously negotiate meanings as a first step towards agreement on action and changes in laws. This is particularly imperative, as discussed in Chapter 2 and 5, on dealing with Islamic law on rape, which requires that the accusation of rape be corroborated by four witnesses. As discussed in Chapter 5, many efforts have been made by the UN, human rights groups, and women’s movements to change this law. The amended law, however, continues to pose challenges to addressing sexual violence as explained earlier in both chapter 4 and 5.

The advocacy work of these three organizations on violence, social justice, and women’s citizenship rights is intensified by the current government’s unwillingness to commit to international or regional women’s rights conventions and protocols. For example, Sudan has yet to ratify the international Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW)\(^\text{67}\), which set the agenda for national action to end violence against women. Nor has it ratified the regional Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol)\(^\text{68}\), which set a pan African agenda to end violence against African women. Sudan’s reservation with regard to both CEDAW and the African Women’s Rights Protocol is based on the grounds that some of their articles contradict Islamic rules and codes. This disagreement on CEDAW creates tension, not only between the

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\(^{67}\) For more information, please see: http://www.un.org/womenwatch/daw/cedaw/

\(^{68}\) In 2003, the African Union adopted the Protocol to the African Charter on Human and People’s Rights on the Rights of Women in Africa (Maputo Protocol). Maputo protocol (ratified in 2005) advocates for African women’s equal social and political rights with men, autonomy in reproductive decisions, and an end to FGM. For more details, please see http://www.achpr.org/instruments/women-protocol/
government and civil society organizations, but also among civil society organizations, including women’s organizations, reflecting their diverse positions. For example, the Sudanese Women General Union (SWGU), the current “Sudanese state feminist wing”, endorses the government position against CEDAW. There is also disagreement with other civil society organizations including women’s organizations over article 16 concerning equality in the family:

> While both the Islamist government and civil society agreed on the importance of women’s equal rights to work, education and political rights, they very much disagreed on women’s equal rights in the family. While the Islamists put an emphasis on qawama 69, civil society [groups] called for equality (Tønnessen cited in Al Nagar and Tønnessen, 2017, p. 147).

Despite the challenges, the three organizations try, to varying degrees, to use the unratified international convention and African protocol, as well as other international documents and treaties, to inform their agendas and pressure the government to ratify and implement them. UN Women currently refers to and uses Beijing Platform for Action, as well as the international Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security as accountability mechanisms. NuWEDA also uses different national and regional conventions and protocols as advocacy tools. For example, NuWEDA refers to Sudan’s interim constitution that implements a 25% parliamentary quota for women, as a reason for the state to ratify Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, pointing to the ways Sudan’s policies are already in line with this resolution. NuWEDA also mobilizes women around CEDAW and Maputo, raising women’s awareness about the two and working towards a collective voice to lobby for CEDAW and Maputo to be ratified by the Sudanese state. While I reported in Chapter 5 that the SWU was silent in relation to CEDAW, SWU participants mentioned that a number of the members advocate for the

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69 Guardianship is in the hands of the man; men are the protectors and maintainers of women.
Maputo Protocol to be ratified by the state and mobilize with other groups around Sudan’s interim constitution regarding the 25% women quota as minimum in the legislative body.

We must acknowledge the reality that in Sudan, different organizations are vulnerable to state power in different ways and to varying degrees. Indeed, the three organizations in this study are positioned differently in relation to state power as a result of their work and activism. While UN staff have privilege and immunity from legal processes as per the UN conventions in relation to their words and actions, national and indigenous organizations tend to have hostile relationships with state authorities. Members of local and national social justice organizations, whose agendas and activities are viewed by the state as challenges to its power and politics, are sometimes targeted by state security, especially when their activities relate to the state’s gender politics, human rights abuses, or conflict situations. Most of the time, members of these organizations are forced to contend with imprisonment, different forms of harassment, and having their activities disrupted or cancelled. As for the local organizations, especially from war zones and marginalized regions in Sudan, members are at high risk of state violence. Some participants told me stories of being harassed by the state because they address violence, with some being placed in detention. Generally, members of indigenous organizations are vulnerable to sexual harassment, abuse and detention. The Sudanese government has frequently been accused of using sexual violence to silence women’s rights defenders (Human Rights Watch, March 23, 2016, para. 1).

To conclude the discussion regarding these women organizations’ interactions with the Sudanese state, it is clear that the three organizations are positioned differently in their relation to

70 http://www.codebluecampaign.com/fact-sheets-materials/2015/5/13/immunity
71 For more details, please see https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/03/23/sudan-silencing-women-rights-defenders
the state. In an authoritarian regime such as Sudan, informed by ethnic and cultural nationalist discourses that are both gendered and racialized, and which uses violence to enforce the official hegemonic narrative, it is no wonder that social justice work is not an easy task. Establishing a relationship with the state is consequently characterized by resistance and challenges. While the SWU directly opposes the current state in Sudan and openly calls for over-throwing it, NuWEDA is managing a degree of strategic relation with the state. Meanwhile, UN Women developed a relatively good relationship with the state and actually works through the state.

It is interesting to note that, as discussed earlier in this chapter, UN Women’s close relationship with the state is viewed by some participants, as well as by some other feminist and women’s organizations, as a depoliticization of UN Women’s work. However, the participant from UN Women remarked that radical change in gender equality and women’s rights is a difficult goal to achieve in contexts such as Sudan. Since UN Women is an intergovernmental organization, it must do its best to work with even very conservative governments evoking cultural relativist discourses when it comes to human rights to be able to achieve at least some change. For the participant from UN Women, the search for middle ground positions UN Women in a tense spot between the state and the civil society organizations.

As mentioned earlier, feminist/women’s movements negotiate their social justice agendas not only with the state but also with international donors. The Sudanese state generally does not provide funds for social justice organizations, especially the ones that challenge the state’s nationalist agenda and nationalism projects. Therefore, International donors are important in realizing the goals of these organizations. In the following section, I assess how the three feminist/women’s organizations are positioned in relation to global North-South funding relations.
6.3 Feminist/Women’s Movements and Interaction with International Donors

In discussing the nature of the financial relationship between the global North and the global South, Amrita Basu (2000) identifies the tension that arises between the local and the global over both what constitutes “gender equality” and the priority of agendas for women’s movements in the global South. Basu notes that North-South partnerships must be reconfigured in a way that allows for the autonomy of Southern feminist organizations to set their own “local agenda” and to have an equal say in determining the nature of these partnerships. Basu goes on to explain that, while the focus of feminists in the global South is on local issues related to poverty, inequality, and basic needs, Northern feminists focus on women’s civil and political rights. This focus on the part of Northern feminists conforms to principles of international human rights frameworks and illustrates Ngan-Chow’s observation that,

> [E]ven when they agree on the importance of an issue such as human rights, women from various world regions frame it differently. While Western women traditionally have based their human rights struggles on issues of equality, non-discrimination and civil and political rights, African, Asian and Latin American women have focussed their struggles on economic, social and cultural rights. (Cited in Basu, 2000, p. 71)

However, Basu warns against generalizing transnational feminist and global Northern interventions as merely vehicles for domination, as there are some examples of feminist organizations in the South who have been able to formulate their own agendas and decide how to allocate funds from international donors.

In their efforts to uplift women in Third World countries, post-development Western interventions have been largely based on the notion of modernization, facilitated by a specific developmental framework. Outcomes of these interventions are already determined, based on ideals of modernity and development. These ideals involve economic, political and social visions that international funders have defined and adopted as a universal development agenda for
underdeveloped countries.” North-South development interventions that specifically target women from Third World countries have been widely criticized by post-development scholars as interventions locating the source of gender inequality and oppression in a particular culture rather than recognizing the West’s complicity in creating and perpetuating such inequality. Laura Briggs (2003) is critical of the epistemology adopted by transnational interventions that allow some Western women/men to travel to impoverished communities in the Third World to act as “saviors” through the mobilization of a “rescue” ideology, while turning away from “structural explanations for poverty, famine and other disasters, including international, political, military and economic causes” (Briggs, p. 180). Such transnational interventions (mostly informed by a hegemonic liberal Western feminist approach) are criticized by Briggs as “play[ing] a powerful role in shaping popular support in the US for a variety of public policy and foreign policy initiatives, from IMF loans to the globalization of an international labour force to US debates about family” (Briggs, p. 180).

Post-development scholars, such as Arturo Escobar and Gustavo Esteva, contest the meaning of modern development as being rooted in a historical colonial discourse that views the North as “modern” and “progressive” and the South as “backward” and “underdeveloped”. This framework requires Third-World countries to adopt the ideals of the modernization of the West in order to develop. This approach is widely criticized as perpetuating global social and economic inequality. The uneven power relation between Western donors and local social justice organizations has turned the donors into authorities of modernity (those who define the terms and condition of modernity), the local organizations into implementing agencies, the activists who work for them into professional staff, and views local organizations as technical implementers. Dawn Currie and Vernooy (2010) pointed out that if people in the South are to have control over
their destiny, priorities should be determined by local communities, which requires “Western”
development ‘professionals’ to be “mindful of potential hierarchical relationships between
themselves as ‘expert’ and their ‘development’ partners” (Currie and Vernooy, 2010. p.8).

There is a lively debate about the sustainability of funded social justice work: donors tend
to provide funds for short term projects (three to six months or one year), where funded
organizations have to quantify the outcomes. Outcome indicators of these development
interventions are monitored by donors, who often set the agendas. Andrea Cornwall (2014)
claims that in this unequal distribution of power between donors and local feminist
organizations, the efforts of southern local feminist activists to promote gender equality and
improve the wellbeing and rights of women largely go unnoticed by the international
community. Cornwall further criticized development efforts in the global South by stating,

[T]he focus on instruments, indicators and institutional reform has sanitized the field of
feminist engagement with development from a more overtly political concern with
injustice, discrimination and inequality. Strategic framing to match the interests of donors
and lenders has tended to produce a politics of compromise in which there is little scope
for a genuinely transformative approach that is concerned with tackling the systemic and
structural barriers to gender equality. (2014, p. x)

As discussed in Chapter 2, by redirecting social justice movements from activism to
professionalism, the revolution is never funded (Smith, 2007).

The discussion above about funding relations is not meant to generalize the experience of
all international donors, as there are alternative examples. Drawing on empirical case studies
across the African continent, Balghis Badri and Aili Tripp (2017) challenge the assumption that
African women’s activism is informed by Western notions of rights. They note that while
collective actions by African women on issues such as democracy, land rights, violence and
reconciliation, are influenced by international feminism and international donors, African women
actively shape both ideas about women’s rights and the global struggle for women’s rights.
I have four years of professional experience with Oxfam Canada—an international non-governmental organization—while I was volunteering with a national organization in Sudan that had a negotiated funding partnership with Oxfam Canada. Our local organization set the agenda and priorities of our constituencies in five sub-office located in different regions in Sudan. Together we developed monitoring indicators for the kind of impact we wanted to achieve and programs we want to implement. I subsequently worked for Oxfam Canada as a local staff in the Horn of Africa Civil Society Capacity Building program. What inspired me about Oxfam Canada is the equal partnership that allowed local organizations to negotiate and set the social justice agenda. As well, the allocation of funding, which is long term (mostly four years), is decided by local organizations with yearly monitoring by from Oxfam. 72

Most of the international funding for social justice activism channelled into Sudan is from North America and Europe. As indicated in Chapter 5, the SWU and NuWEDA claim that donor funds are mostly tied to engagement with civil, political, and human rights, since these areas of interventions are of particular interest to the donors. In addition, the international donors’ agendas also emphasize protecting human rights and legal reform. Meanwhile, UN Women has no major difficulties accessing funds without compromising their agenda. The funding is mostly linked to advancing women’s rights in the public sphere, especially women’s political participation, and addressing gender-based violence. According to the SWU and NuWEDA it is very rare to find international donors who provide funding for social or economic intervention. A participant from NuWEDA commented that:

The international donors’ ties to political, civil and human rights agendas is clearly outlined in their calls for funding proposals, and the application forms tend to be fixed; that is, the applying organization must fill in the spaces of the analytical framework and

72 For more details on Oxfam Canada North-South partnership on social justice matters in the Horn of Africa, please see Oxfam’s report “In their Own Idiom” http://www.genderatwork.org/Portals/0/Uploads/Documents/Resources/In-their-own-idiom.pdf
output indicators and demonstrate how their activities will produce the specific outcomes that the donor wants to see. In fact, an organization’s ability to write a successful proposal is largely dependent on having a good command of the English language, and, of course, that the organization is properly registered with the state.

Predictably, civil society organizations’ attempts to work with the state and hold governments accountable for human, civil, and political rights through their funded projects give rise to tension between the organizations and the state due to the competing gender politics and agendas of both the state and international donors. As such, some organizations try to find a balance between the donors’ interests and their own agenda, their need for funding and doing what they can with whatever the government allows. Organizations have tried different ways to reconcile these competing needs. For example, while donors cannot directly provide funds to the SWU because it is not registered and because its agenda is seen as highly political, the SWU has entered into collaborative partnerships with other organizations, such as Organization (A) in order to establish literacy programs for women in the shanty areas of Khartoum. Since their goal is to improve literacy rates among women, the SWU views education as an empowering tool, and they pitch their literacy initiatives as a means of addressing civil and political rights for women. A participant from the SWU stated,

> An organization is simply unable to present important aspects of their development program to suit the donor’s agenda. At the same time, SWU finds it difficult sometimes finding collaborators or international funders, leading to several planned projects not being implemented.

Though NuWEDA receives most of their funding from international donors, funding some of their programs proves difficult, since many of their programs address women’s practical/material needs. As stated by participant from the organization:

> NuWEDA faces a hard time accessing funds, especially for improving their education program as well as for their economic empowerment program—which helps displaced women, the needs of whom are mainly material, so that they can run their own business instead of working in exploitative environment as domestic workers or alcohol sellers,
exposing themselves to sexual violence and imprisonment. Also, there is no funds for psychosocial support programs, which are highly needed by women for their own health wellbeing.

The above programs, as stated in Chapter 5, represent the organization’s key strategies to address the needs of historically impoverished women, most of whom are female heads of households, by liberating them from the economic and/or sexual exploitation they experience in the informal sector. The programs also provide the psychosocial support needed for most of them to strike balance in their lives, which is affected by the multiple forms of violence they experience in their daily lives at home and in public spaces.

The dilemma of dealing with international donors is summarised by a research participant from NuWEDA as follows:

The agendas of current international donors in Sudan are mostly focused on human rights, good governance, and political participation, and, if you would like access to funds, you have to prove that you can do such work, regardless of its relevance to your target group or how hard it is to negotiate such activities with state authorities. We are trapped between our agenda, the agenda of the donors, and the agenda of the government. With the little power we have, we engage in a very delicate negotiation and compromises.

In some cases, this challenge may expose organizations to risk, especially for feminist and other women’s organizations, depending on how an organization decides to implement their programs and agendas. As such, some organizations find themselves trapped between the agendas of the donors and their own mandates or local agenda. With no funds available from either the state or local resources, they must find a way to reconcile and sometimes comply with funding conditions.

As for SWU, while they never received state funding, they nevertheless maintained that they would not accept it on principle, as doing so would require them to fall in line with the state’s nationalist agenda and state gender politics. As discussed in Chapter 5, the issue of access to international funding was repeatedly cited as a major source of tension between the older and
younger members of the SWU. Whereas the older members strongly believed that dependence on international donors curtails the organization’s autonomy, the younger members observed that mobilizing local resources is not viable in Sudan. A SWU participant noted:

Historically SWU existed and functioned throughout the different governments in Sudan independently, as well, it retained an autonomous position from any international funding. In fact, SWU was owning its destiny, goals and vision. The only source SWU used to receive was from local contributions. It was not until Beijing conference (1995) when some members from SWU started talking about international funding. I and others strongly believe that it is for the best interest of SWU to remain autonomous. Having said this, I have to say that this is in fact an ongoing internal debate.

A second argument advanced by the younger members was that in order to devote sufficient time and effort to achieving the movement’s objectives, they needed financial resources. Nonetheless, many participants from the SWU said that they took a middle approach that distinguished the organization’s work as a movement developing projects and activities that speak to the SWU’s agendas but that were funded and implemented through Organization (A).

As discussed in Chapter 5, for UN Women, the question of donors is not an issue; as a UN organization, it is in agreement with their donors in regard to funding frameworks and the modality of funding. NuWEDA, on the other hand has recently started to mobilize local funds, though very little has been achieved so far. However, the organization is also formulating a strategy for mobilizing local resources in order to respond to the material need of displaced people from the Nuba Mountains. 73

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73 It is worth noting here that, since the beginning of the conflict in the Nuba Mountains in 2011 (right after the separation of South Sudan), the Sudanese government has never allowed humanitarian organizations to deliver any services to the region or establish camps for displaced people in the urban areas of North Sudan. Those displaced persons who have access to humanitarian services are the ones who sought shelter in Abyei (South Sudan), though they found themselves trapped in the middle of the recent South Sudan conflict. Those displaced in North Sudan, especially women and children, lack any national or international support, except from national civil society organizations, specifically women’s organizations like NuWEDA.
Interestingly, while some participants from NuWEDA stressed that they agreed with the international donors that civil and political rights were relevant to their agenda, they noted that they saw them as being complementary to their other objectives and not hierarchical in nature. One NuWEDA organization leader explained that a purely civil and political agenda might not be possible and may actually expose activists to state reprisals, nor would it respond to the actual needs of the Nuba and other women from war zones. On the same note, the SWU members said that civil and political rights were important in the Sudanese context. However, they also pointed out that the key issue was how local and national organizations could work together to formulate an effective framework that combines the pursuit of civil and political rights with other social and economic objectives for Sudanese women from different backgrounds. Participants from NuWEDA believe that local organizations should identify priorities, not donors. This, they thought, would allow local organizations to own the process, have control over their directions, and make sure they are relevant to the constituency they work with and the political space they have to negotiate. One of the participants from NuWEDA said that:

> The most embarrassing thing comes in when the donors wanted their logos and name to be posted in the project documents as well as on the project’s site. Local organizations sometimes face negative consequences about this publicity of the specific donor, especially if the government is not happy about the ideology of that specific donor for any reason [government officials most likely hold negative opinions about Western donors, especially in relation to gender politics]. This put the organization and the staff in an awkward position.

In conclusion, the three organizations, SWU, NuWEDA, and UN Women, advance their work from different conceptualizations of violence, and challenge Sudan’s hegemonic nationalism in different ways. Furthermore, they are imbedded in different power structures and relations which situate each organization differently at the intersection of the interests of the Sudanese state’s nationalist agenda and the North-South donors’ desire for “modernization” and
“development”. With limited civic space and few resources, the strategies used to negotiate political space between the gender politics of the state and those of donors, inevitably diminishes the autonomy of these feminist/women’s movements in Sudan and their ability to affect changes for women, particularly from the Nuba Mountains’ war zone region. This raises questions about the broader meaning of feminism in Sudan.
Chapter 7: African feminism and women’s organizing in Sudan

In this chapter, I will review the broader trends regarding the meaning of feminism in Africa and the Middle East, and among participants in Sudan. I will then discuss what African postcolonial feminism means and conclude the discussion on the potential for solidarity in linking local, national and global efforts in Sudan and particularly in the Nuba Mountains.

7.1 Feminism Redefined

The SWU’s position on being identified as a feminist organization is ambiguous and lacking clarity. Some leaders from NuWEDA identify NuWEDA as a feminist organization, yet generally do not publicly pronounce it. It does so only strategically with organizations that share the same conceptual understanding of what feminism means to them. UN Women is outwardly focused on gendered discrimination and equity but is silent on a broader political identification with feminism. The reluctance of the three organizations to identify themselves and their work as explicitly feminist is rooted, in part, in the confusion about what feminism is in Africa.

A political and linguistic struggle corresponds with tensions regarding the association of feminism with the West. African feminists largely agree that feminism originated from European and American feminists who provided its conceptualization and strategy (Goredema, 2010). Contemporary African feminism differs radically from Western forms, as African feminism is necessarily concerned with political and economic troubles facing African countries (Mikell, 1997). Rooted in African women’s resistance to Western hegemonic power, African feminism considers African men to be women’s partners in the struggle against colonialism, and their respective roles are regarded as essential in the survival of families and society (Goredema, 2010; Mikell, 2017; Nnaemeka, 2004). African feminism is thus distinctly heterosexual and not concerned about the essentialist discourse around the female body, but rather with ‘bread, butter
and power’ issues (Mikell, 1997). Because of the economic impact of colonialism, class became an integral part of African feminism. Commenting on the nature of their activism, the SWU’s president, the late Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim, states that, “[a]s Sudanese women, we refused to subscribe to ideologies of victimization and passivity. We recognized that our liberation as a sex was tied to the emancipation of the society overall” (interview by Abusharaf, 2004, p.161).

Finding words equivalent to feminism in Arabic or other local Sudanese languages and language reflective of the nature of the gender politics of the national and local organizations remains a difficult task. As a participant from NuWEDA explains,

It is just that I am not really comfortable, or let’s say (silence) confident enough to say “I am a feminist”. While I see that my activism is different from the activism of many others who are only focused on things that are easy to do like coordinating the delivery of humanitarian assistance, my activism involves challenging global and national patriarchal systems and capitalism in general that lead to violence. I am still not sure what feminism is actually supposed to be and what Arabic word I should use to tell exactly what I mean.

For many participants from both the SWU and NuWEDA, the concept of feminism and its connotations are problematic. Some of the participants from the SWU mentioned that they had engaged in heated debates about feminism within the organization over the last few years. Such debates created tension in the organization between those who supported using the term in public reference to the SWU’s activism and those who objected. Those who were against using the term, argued that the word feminism is a Western term that has a negative connotation in Sudan and does not reflect their gender politics or issues of concern to Sudanese women. Reflecting on SWU’s position with regard to feminism, a participant stated:

There was in fact a heated debate within our organization about the Westernization of the concept of feminism and the connotations that come with it. Therefore, the discussion was more on a collective identity as SWU, and whether as a movement we wanted to call our movement a feminist movement, and if so, what kind of feminism? and how is it different from Western feminism? However, as individuals we hold different beliefs about being a feminist or women’s rights activist. This is why we delegated this question to one of us who is knowledgeable about this field to prepare a paper that will serve as a
focal point for a discussion on what feminism is and how to contextualize our own activism in relation to this term, both linguistically and politically, since feminism doesn’t have a direct translation in Arabic. Until then, I personally call myself a women’s rights defender.

Generally, the majority of participants repeatedly used terms like women’s rights advocate, women’s empowerment and gender and development to describe their activism. Some participants share concerns about the linguistic definition of feminism. A participant from NuWEDA stated that “the concept is foreign to the Sudanese and it has no local linguistic equivalent, and because of this it is often viewed by many people, including some elites, as a Western concept”. Another participant from NuWEDA confessed that “we do not all use the term feminist because we do not know much about it, its meaning and its gender politics. However, a few members from our organization know about it, since they are more exposed to knowledge outside Sudan than us”. The participant emphasized that what matters most to them about feminism is how its politics relate to the condition of displaced women from the war zones of Sudan and those living under attack in war zones, particularly to issues of poverty and sexual violence. Some participants, however, wanted to discuss the meaning of feminism. One participant from the SWU expressed that the semantic dispute over the term is of little use. She suggested using ‘Nisawiyya’ (Arabic which equivalent to womanism) in place of feminism to reconcile concerns. It should be noted that in Arab countries in specific, there is no agreed upon equivalent Arabic word for feminism, but “women’s liberation movement” or ‘Nisawiyya’ are frequently used instead (Saad, 2008).

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74 The Arabic term “niswiya” is a possessive form indicating that something belonging or related to female and hence femininity. It is used in connection to the ideological position of woman movement.
Women’s rights advocates and ‘Nisawiyya’, are the alternatives to feminism provided by the two organizations (NuWEDA and SWU). This comes with no surprise, as equivalent to these alternatives is the term womanism which was advanced by Africa-American Alice Walker in 1983. Walker challenges the conceptualization of feminism, arguing that while both culture and femininity are key to feminism, culture is the main intersectional point to understand her feminist positionality and not her class or other social differentials, i.e. a woman’s blackness is the lens through which we understand her femininity. Walker uses the metaphoric phrase “womanist is to feminist as purple is to lavender”, meaning that womanism is the larger ideology under which feminism falls. In the same line as Walker, Clenora Hudson-Weems (1995), who is critical of both Western feminism and black feminism, rejects feminist ideology for its inability to incorporate African women’s agenda and their cultural perspective due to the history of slavery and advances the term Africana Womanism. She argues that feminism characterizes men as the enemy, while Africana womanist advances issues not only affecting black women, but black men as well.

Stressing the centrality of family to Africans, Ama Ata Aidoo describes a common sentiment about feminism: “[Y]ou know how we feel about that embarrassing [W]estern philosophy? The destroyer of homes. Imported mainly from America to ruin nice African homes” (Kolawole, 1997, p.11). While nevertheless fighting for women’s rights, African women take issue with feminism for how it is conceptualized by and transplanted from the West, where issues that are relevant to them are expected to be relevant to all women globally (Kolawole, 1997). Stating her reaction to feminism as a Western concept, Buchi Emecheta states,

I am a feminist with a small ‘f’, I love men and good men are the salt of the earth. But to tell me that we should abolish marriage like the capital ‘F’ (Feminist) women who say

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75 Arabic term which, means femininity or womanism in Arabic
women should live together and all that, I say No. Personally, I'd like to see the ideal, happy marriage. But if it doesn’t work, for goodness sake, call it off. (Kolawole, 1997, p.11).

According to participants from the SWU and NuWEDA, understanding feminism as a Western concept has to do with its politics and the association with sexuality and sexual preferences, such as lesbianism. According to participants from the SWU, this understanding is the reason the SWU rejects the term altogether. Many participants mentioned that the SWU leadership rejection and stigmatization of the word feminism is rooted in their strong belief that it is both linked to sexuality and advocates for homosexuality (lesbianism). One mentioned that:

The SWU exaggerates its reaction to [the concept of] feminism because of its understanding of it as being linked to sexuality, in particular having women acting like men or being lesbian. I don’t know why the concept has been stigmatized by linking it to sexuality. The reason for this could be because of the emigration and exposure of some young generations from Sudanese women to the West and their advocacy for sexual rights. Also, the leader of the organization lived in exile in Europe and she had the chance to interact with several feminist groups in the US and Europe, where sexuality rights is part of the feminist movement.

A participant from the SWU explained that unlike feminism of the West, the SWU values family and communal life over individualism and considers women’s family role as a mother and wife as fundamental to the development and wellbeing of society. Therefore, the SWU has always been very active in forming and supporting what they refer to as “housewives’ groups” in different residential areas in major cities in Sudan, and mobilizes resources to make household items and food available for women at cheaper prices. She added that she and many others support such initiatives and would also advocate for greater support from the state for women’s role in the family. Some of the younger members of the SWU generally advocate for gender equality in household work, which challenges gender roles in the family. One participant
elaborated that the younger generation has these views because of their exposure to gender trainings offered by the UN and INGOs which are grounded in a Western gender framework. On the problematic of identifying with feminism when it is considered to be linked to sexuality, a participant from NuWEDA stated:

Talking about and openly endorsing feminism has had negative impacts on the work of the organization since feminism is understood as linked to sexuality and lesbianism. Many people have been discouraged from joining the activities of the organization, which in turn failed to send its message of women’ rights and equality between the sexes within the community. However, as NuWEDA we do strategically identify our organization as a feminist organization, depending on who we talk to, i.e. those who share our own definition of what feminism is for us as NuWEDA. We use the concept with great caution and we place the emphasis on issues of gender equality and women’s rights.

NuWEDA participants mostly acknowledge that the (heterosexual) family is central to their feminist politics. They mention that due to war and displacement, women are increasingly taking on multiple roles—as the breadwinner of the family in addition to being a mother and a wife. Therefore, NuWEDA emphasizes providing support to improve, in particular, the material conditions of women’s lives and their families. The organization, however, also targets men, especially Nuba men, as equal partners in the family and in society to address discrimination against women and the Nuba people.

One participant from the SWU however, protested the stigmatization of feminism as linked to homosexuality and lesbianism. She argued that women should have rights over their own bodies, which include sexual and reproductive rights. She therefore felt the link between feminism and sexuality should remain, and that this will not make her reject feminism. African feminist Amina Mama (2002) similarly criticizes African feminism for distancing itself from engagement with the politics of sexuality. For Mama, this reservation limits the potential for
transformational change offered by the feminist movement in Africa. Summarizing SWU’s position in relation to feminist movements globally, a participant stated,

SWU converges and diverges with the global feminist movement. During the 1950’s and 60’s it shared with its international counterpart most of the issues of the first feminist wave, particularly equality in work and wages. However, because of the currently perceived linkages of the concept with sexuality, SWU prefers to distance itself from this evolution of the global feminist movement, since it does not reflect its agenda.

Notably, while the majority of participants from both the SWU and NuWEDA did not identify as feminists, two participants (one from the SWU and the other from NuWEDA) who did so attribute their association with the term to their educational backgrounds (MA in Gender and Development). As one of them put it,

Though I have been a feminist for the greatest part of my life, it is only when I started my MA that I realised that this was feminist activism. We were also taught different feminist schools of thought, so I was able to reflect on my own activism and not only define myself as a feminist but also what kind of feminism my activism was.

The other participant mentioned that her work with international development organizations further strengthened her confidence in identifying as a feminist. One of them asked me to discuss this issue with her at a later date so she could have time to process her thoughts more fully, but we were unable to subsequently continue this discussion. While none of the three men interviewed from NuWEDA identified their activism as feminist, two of them mentioned women’s rights and empowerment, while the third summed up the general wariness regarding the use of the term feminism as follows:

Why do we actually need to give our work a name? Is it necessary to do so? If yes, then there is a need to carefully define terms that we don’t have an equivalent meaning of in our own language (terms such as feminism) that reflects our gender politics and issues we are concerned about, to make sure that what we mean it when we say it. Nowadays, such a word can actually create a backlash for you and your organization, even from the very community you are trying to help.
On the other hand, a participant from the SWU questioned the significance of the debates about feminism and whether or not to be identified as or labeled a feminist organization. According to her, the issue “is nonsense and does not serve the interests of Sudanese women. The important thing for SWU is to focus on the struggle for women’s fundamental issues, challenge capitalism and authoritarian regimes and to make changes both politically, economically and socially.” A participant from NuWEDA argued that whose definition of feminism is being used is key. Conversely, a participant from UN Women did not comment on the concept of feminism during her interview, or whether UN Women identified itself as a feminist organization. This participant, however, referred to her professional work and work of the UN as centering on “gender equality” and “advocacy for women’s rights and the empowerment of women.”

Most women in my generation feel ambivalent about whether or not they should label themselves feminists. This debate about whether one should call themselves a feminist is also intergenerational, with older generations tending toward womanism, especially when interacting with Western feminists. Conversely, some from the younger generations of women76, some of whom have received a Western education and/or have worked with the UN or international NGOs, proudly want to be called feminists. A participant from the SWU attributed the variety of discourses on feminism and women’s roles to generational differences. Older women generations, she suggested, endorse the traditional role of women as mothers and wives, which she felt reflected African culture and family values. Alternatively, by virtue of their exposure to Western values, particularly through education, newer generations adopt a more radical view about women’s role in society and politics of the female body.

76 As there are many from the younger generation, even with similar exposure, that do not identify with feminism.
Responding to the disagreement and different views over the meaning of African feminism, a forum was held in Ghana in 2006, attended by 100 activists broadly representing a younger generation of women from within Africa and the diaspora. The objective was to devise new collective ways to strengthen African feminist movements. The forum ended with the adoption of the “Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists”, which was intended to be an accountability mechanism for feminist and women’s organizations in Africa. Those who attended the forum stressed that they call themselves feminists as a form of identity politics:

By naming ourselves as Feminists we politicize the struggle for women's rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action…we have multiple and varied identities as African Feminists…Our feminist identity is not qualified with ‘Ifs’, ‘Buts’, or ‘Howevers’. We are Feminists. Full stop. (Charter of Feminist Principles For African Feminist, 2006, p. 4).

Along the same lines, the pioneer Arab feminist Nawal El Saadawi contests the idea that feminism is a Western notion invented by American women. While she distinguishes between what she calls “Arab feminism” and “Western feminism”, because the former is embedded in the struggle against capitalism, she argues that feminism is not a Western notion, rather it is a diversity of struggles against oppressive and discriminatory patriarchal culture, which exist across regions and religions.

In the same line and contrary to the representation of African feminism as distinctly heterosexual, Amina Mama argues that while most African women are trapped in the struggle of securing survival needs for themselves and their families as a result of poverty —which in itself is a symptom of global patriarchal power— there are also a number of African women who went beyond the struggle for survival needs and traditional roles to challenge the status quo and engaged in struggle for dignity and life free from violence (Salo, 2001). I would also add here that there are many African women who engage with both the material struggle in daily life
simultaneous to challenging the status quo. Also, for Mama, the representation of feminism as “Western feminism” constructed entirely by Westerners is misleading. Instead, she argues that, historically, African women took part in the conceptualization of this so-called “Western feminism.” Therefore, for Mama, the point should not be about the terminology (feminism) and its semantic territory, which can always be appropriated, rather, the point is with the politics involved in its conceptualization, and the ability of feminism to challenge power and global domination. To such ends, Mama explains the point is that: “white feminism has never been strong enough to be ‘the enemy’ - in the way that say, global capitalism can be viewed as an enemy” (2001, p 61). However, Mama notes that the critiques of Western feminism may have had relevancy 20 years ago, as, since then, “many Westerners have not only listened to the critiques of African and other so-called third world feminists — they have also re-considered their earlier simplistic paradigms and come up with more complex theories … Western feminists have agreed with much of what we have told them about different women being oppressed differently, and the importance of class and race and culture in configuring gender relations” (p.61).

This discussion, especially the uncertainty about identification with feminism, is one that resonates with my own experience. I have always felt more grounded in my own lived experience as a feminist rather than identifying myself with how the groups or institutions I worked with chose to identify. At the same time, I am also conscious and careful not to advance my own feminist agenda over the interests and agenda of those I work with as an activist or professional. I was born and raised in Sudan, and most of my activism has occurred within Africa. In that time, I have come to realize that there is no such a thing as ‘authentic’ African feminism. African feminist ideologies are shaped by their individual social, cultural and political
relations, which are in turn the result of the intersections between gender, race, class, religion and geographical location.

I was born and raised in a rural area on the border between south and North Sudan. From a very young age, I realized how Sudanese people are diverse in terms of religion, race, culture and class. For example, in the areas where I grew up, people from South Sudan and Nuba are racially distinct from the Arab-affiliated tribes in north and central Sudan. Furthermore, I observed how economically disadvantaged people from Nuba and South Sudan are, given the fact that many were displaced from their homes. In my village, I witnessed the injustices my mother and other women experienced, especially in relation to such issues as domestic abuse, divorce, child custody and inheritance rights, all of which were normalized by civil laws and customary traditional systems. These structures were based on the notion that women are subordinate to men in such matters. At the age of six, I had to endure female genital cutting (FGM/C). Growing up, we were told that women ought to confine themselves to the private sphere and to restrict their presence in the public sphere. In the few instances where I decided to break these rules, my rebellion was met with violence. I learned many other gendered and socially endorsed norms and practices as I grew up, all of which were concerned with defining women’s place and rights.

When I began my university studies in the city of Khartoum in the early 1990s, I had to wear the hijab when I was in public spaces due to the state Public Order Law and as required by the University of Khartoum. This was not my choice; even though I was raised Muslim, I had never worn a hijab before. Some of my fellow Muslim female students chose to wear their hijabs and had done so even before the law came into effect. During my time at the university, I started questioning the injustices inherent in the patriarchal systems in the family, community,
university and state. It became clear to me that ours was an unjust system that was supported by a patriarchal culture whose norms are enforced by law.

I recall a time when a colleague and I were meeting with an official from Sudan’s Ministry of Justice to obtain approval for a workshop on customary law and women’s rights. During this meeting, the official asked me whether I was a feminist. At that time (2006), I was somewhat hesitant to call myself a feminist, since I did not know what feminism actually meant. However, within my heart, I knew that feminism was about social justice. I was concerned that if my response did not appeal to this official, I would jeopardize the work we were seeking approval for. After a brief pause, I replied: “I am not sure what the term ‘feminism’ means to you, but for me, it means working for social justice.” To my relief, the official accepted my response, and he began to lament how Western feminism means that women are free to do anything they want, including having sexual freedom. My colleague and I found this conversation odd and uncomfortable. To diffuse the situation, I said that we had never been to America or Europe, so we could not comment on their feminism. However, since coming to Canada to continue my studies, I have studied a diverse array of feminist theories, and I have learned that my confusion was valid, as there is no such thing as a single, homogenous feminism. Rather, feminism is an ideological plurality that offers tools that can be applied to one’s social and political positionality.

I am a feminist and for myself, feminism is either personal activism or collective activism. It is both a political ideology and epistemological position for analyzing patriarchal systems of oppression including colonialism, racism, capitalism, nationalism, and imperialism. Feminist analysis examines formal or informal systems of oppression at all levels (local, national, and global) with the primary objective of transforming the daily lived experiences of
the most oppressed. This demands an analysis of the multiple systems of oppression to which women and other marginalized groups are subjected, including gender, race, class, religion, sexuality and geographical location. In the case of Sudan, I believe that those whose race intersects with gender, religion and class among other systems of oppression, must be placed in the center and agendas for change must be based on the experience of these groups. This methodology offers a greater chance for challenging the entire patriarchal system of oppression, and therefore represents the greatest potential for liberating all. Moreover, it may be able to provide a model for governance to support permanent liberation.

Some participants believed that the term feminism should be viewed as bearing different meanings depending on the specific context in which it is employed. As such, the term would be acceptable if it is understood within the Sudanese context. One participant further explained that feminism should not be understood to refer to a single political and social position or politics. According to her, many forms of feminism exist, and each is culturally, politically and socially specific and reflects a particular agenda. Another participant from NuWEDA noted, “[S]temming from the fact that NuWEDA centers its activism on both race and gender, its membership consists of both females and males, and feminism in this case should also be viewed as a politics that deals with issues pertaining to both women and men.” Variation in meaning reflects the case of Sudan, where women in different regions have different lived experiences. Their experiences are shaped differently by the contemporary post-colonial context and the broader historical context of colonial history and slavery, as well as in terms of racial, religious, regional and linguistic variations. This diversity makes it very difficult to form a homogenous feminism that reflects the experiences, circumstances and needs of all Sudanese women.
The general confusion around the meaning of feminism is not unique to Sudan but is part of a larger debate within Africa as well as the Middle East. Both African and Middle Eastern feminists challenge the politics of feminism.

7.2 African Feminist Postcoloniality

African feminists contest the idea that African feminism is part of Third Wave feminism and that it applies to simply African women. Third Wave feminism, they argue, is an ideology founded by European and American struggles for female equality, which “subsequently carried forward in an imperial march across the globe” (Oyewumi, cited in Goredema, 2010, p. 34).

Goredema argues,

African feminism cannot be defined by one or several movements that are discernable as in Western feminism where the distinction between the first, second and third wave movements are clear. For African women, feminism is very dependent on a temporal scale shaped by political eras. These eras are precolonial, colonial and post-colonial Africa. These eras are dissimilar across African countries because the histories of the liberation struggle are different for each country. The result of this is that the definitions and experiences of feminism are different from region to region within Africa. (Goredema, 2010, p. 35)

In discussing feminism and post-coloniality in Africa, Goredema (2010) illustrates how postcolonial African feminist discourse is a “double edged sword” by exposing the discourses African feminists must negotiate in order to clarify how their goals are distinct from those of Western feminists. One discourse deals with preserving cultural authenticity and cultural values of African nations while contending with increasing globalization and imperialism and the oppression of women. This discourse supports efforts to detach from colonialism by arguing that during pre-colonial times, African women had the same rights as men; that pre-colonial culture was not oppressive to women, and that colonialism itself was gendered. Linked to this, the second discourse considers the differences between African and Western conceptions of what constitutes gender equality and the relations between men and women in both the public and
private spheres. That is, the second discourse considers the Western model’s conception of the independent woman against the African model of women as selfless, content with their position as a wife and a mother, and able to negotiate her rights within her family and marital relationship. On this latter point, Fareda Banda (2005) observes that the liberal citizenship framework—which is based on a human rights framework—that informs the Western model is irrelevant for African women and African states. Banda highlights the pluralistic character of African societies, where the personal is not political, where there is a clear divide between public and private rights, and where women’s social rights are mostly confined to the domestic sphere. Banda argues that the African Women’s Rights Protocol, not an international human rights framework, can be a promising tool for change because it was framed for the African cultural context. 77

Though with a slightly different argument, feminists in the Middle East engage with a discourse similar to that of African feminists in which feminism is considered to be a Western notion. Feminists from Muslim states do not constitute a coherent group and can generally be classified in three ways: secular feminists, Islamic feminists 78, and Muslim feminists 79 (Saadallah, 2004). Both Islamic feminists and Muslim feminists deal with the convergence of Islam and feminism and the question of women’s emancipation (Seedat, 2013). Their debate around gender justice and women’s rights in Islam differs with regard to two competing narratives, which include Islam as a patriarchal power, on the one hand, and Islam as a liberating force, on the other (Cook, 2004). These competing narratives are informed by the experiences in each Muslim country with the application of Islamic laws (ibid). Ziba Mir-Hosseini (2004)

77 See debates on FGM, honor killing and polygyny
78 Islamic feminism bases its discourse on ideologies of conservative Islamic movements.
79 Muslim feminism engages with Islamic sources while reconciling faith with international human rights.
reminds us that the work of Islamic/Muslim feminism is based on a reinterpretation of Islam, noting that “the gender inequalities embedded in Islamic law are neither manifestations of divine will, nor cornerstones of an irredeemably backward social system, but human constructions” (p. 3). Mir-Hosseini argues that these inequalities reflect how “Islam’s sacred texts have been tainted by the ideology of their interpreters” (ibid, 2004, p. 3).

The gap in emancipation of women between Western and non-Western societies, argue Muslim/Islamic feminist scholars, should not lead to the conclusion that Western culture is superior or that Western feminism should be enforced (Seedat, 2013; Saadallah, 2004). Deniz Kandiyoti argues that “there is a culturalist bias in [such] a discussion that reduces it to querying whether certain conceptions of rights and citizenship, and for that matter feminism, may find any resonance in a Middle Eastern environment” (Kandiyoti, cited in Saadallah, 2004, p.2018). Nor should Muslim feminism be understood as a discourse of cultural relativism, posits Fatima Seedat (2013), but rather it should be recognized as a feminist tactic to respond to contemporary political and socioeconomic realities of post-fundamentalism Muslim societies.

Mir-Hosseini (2004) explores the relationship between Islam, feminism and nationalist anti-colonial movements, arguing that Islamic feminism has to attend to the tension inherited through colonial histories and anti-colonial nationalism in postcolonial states with regard to women’s rights. She writes:

With the rise of anti-colonialist and nationalist movements, Muslims were thrown on the defensive in relation to traditional gender relations. Muslim women who acquired a feminist consciousness and advocated equal rights for women were under pressure to conform to anti-colonialist or nationalist priorities. Any dissent could be construed as a kind of betrayal. Western feminists could criticize patriarchal elements of their own cultures and religions in the name of modernity, liberalism and democracy, but Muslim women were unable to draw either on these external ideologies or on internal political ideologies (i.e. nationalism and anti-colonialism) in their fight for gender justice. For most modernists and liberals, ‘Islam’ was a patriarchal religion that must be rejected. For nationalists and anti-colonialists, ‘feminism’ – the advocacy of women’s rights – was a
colonial project and must be resisted. Muslim women, in other words, were faced with a painful choice. They had to choose between their Muslim identity – their faith – and their new gender awareness. (2004, p. 2)

This inherited tension remains a challenge for Muslim women in how to position themselves as feminist; how to be loyal to their past as well as to their present at the same time.

7.3 Feminist and Women’s Movements

African feminists position themselves and relate to the different feminist discourses within Africa in various ways depending on how these discourses reflect their lived experience vis-à-vis categories such as race, class, geographical location. As this research shows, indigenous (NuWEDA), national (SWU) and international (UN Women) feminist/women’s organizations in Sudan are advancing diverse conceptualizations of gendered violence. Their practical engagement in addressing this gendered violence ranges from addressing the manifestations of violence (addressing immediate practical needs through a women’s empowerment approach) by delivering services to women, to a transformative approach that attends to the structural and root causes of gendered violence, or some combination of both. The approach to practical engagement is determined by the organization’s understanding about the root cause/s of violence, which is informed by the organization’s feminist politics as well as the organization’s understanding of the impact of violence on the everyday lives of women. Where postcolonial nationalism has generated racialized gendered violence in African countries, women’s organizations have responded in a variety of ways. While some women’s organizations challenge the nationalist discourse, others maintain or even reproduce it (Salo, 2001; Tripp, 2003). In this regard, Mama (2001) discusses how, in the African context, it is important to distinguish between women’s movements and feminism; that is, those organizations that engage in addressing the symptoms (the manifestations of the patriarchal system), versus organizations
engaging in transformative action and challenges to structural gender inequality that is embedded in the patriarchal system. Another term used to differentiate between feminist and women’s organization is radical (feminists’ organizations), versus non-radical (women organizations).

If we follow this distinction between addressing the symptoms of violence as a manifestation of gender and racial inequality (women’s empowerment approach) versus transformative solutions by addressing structural causes of gender and racial inequality and violence, the three organizations in this study can be placed slightly differently. This distinction places the SWU in an ambiguous category. While SWU adopts a transformative approach that can directly place it as a feminist organization, its focus is exclusively on capitalism and not patriarchy. Organizations like NuWEDA address immediate practical needs and long-term goals of transformation and embody both transformative action and efforts to address symptoms of violence. NuWEDA can therefore identify with both feminist and women’s movements. UN Women is more representational of a women’s organization than a feminist organization, since it focuses on addressing symptoms of inequality and violence and does not challenge structural causes of violence.

The SWU’s focus on structural causes of violence, while not attending to patriarchy as a cause of violence, has not gone unchallenged. In Sudan, as indicated in Chapters 6 and 7, the SWU has been accused by some of its own members of focusing too much on challenging capitalism and authoritarian structures and thus failing to attend to the manifestations of violence and the pressing issues affecting women on a daily basis. These many issues include displacement, women’s struggles in the informal sector, rape, FGM, domestic violence and the high mortality rate for mothers giving birth in rural areas. Responding to this accusation in an interview, the late president of SWU, Fatima Ahmed Ibrahim, said:
Most women’s organizations are interested in the scales of justice and confine themselves to them, rather than directing their activities towards making women aware of the real reasons for women’s oppression and inequality. For example, rape and violence are symptoms of oppression and are not caused by it; it is known that a focus on the symptoms of the disease does not lead to treatment, only discovering the root causes will lead to treatment. Capitalist systems have attracted many Sudanese organizations, groups of intellectuals and intellectuals, and have given them ample money to focus on fighting circumcision. What really amazes me is that these groups respond to capitalism’s call without asking themselves a simple question: If we completely eliminate FGM, will women’s illiteracy disappear? Or will women be equal to men? Or will women free themselves from all other harmful habits? Of course not, and then another question, did the pharaonic circumcision impede the Sudanese women from movement, sleep and education? What is the most effective, the elimination of circumcision or elimination of illiteracy? (Dawn London newspaper 2 May 1999, cited in Mahmoud, 2008, p. 146 (Arabic translated)

While I agree that it is important to challenge the structural causes of violence and to pursue a transformative agenda, I also recognize the conditions of women from marginalized war zones like the Nuba Mountains and other marginalized regions (Darfur, Blue Nile, East Sudan and women in rural areas) and their needs for empowerment both materially and psychosocially. These women are directly affected by civil war on a daily basis or left without basic state social services and the resources required to meet their day-to-day needs. Neither the state nor humanitarian organizations have stepped up to address these needs. These women’s very survival is in constant question. As discussed in earlier chapters, women’s subordination is a complex system of oppression; patriarchy, capitalism, racism, and the history of colonialism. Women experience violence and oppression to varying degrees depending not only on their gender, but also on their race, class and history of oppression. Because women at the intersection of all these systems are affected on a daily basis, addressing the violence requires attending to both everyday life and long term transformation.

During my professional work with Oxfam Canada in Sudan and my activism with national feminist/women’s groups, I noted that many women living in marginalized regions were
left to deal with difficult situations and manifestation of violence on their own, especially in regions like the Nuba Mountains. Displaced women showed considerable capacity for resistance and coping. Some of these coping strategies, however, need to be addressed because they render the women vulnerable to further exploitation and abuse. As discussed in Chapter 5, displaced women in Sudan, particularly those from war zones and especially women from the Nuba Mountains, must contend with working conditions in which they do not have contracts, as well as being a distinct racialized group in their new urban settings. Factors such as these lead displaced women to be particularly vulnerable to violence that is associated with their status as outsiders. Improving material conditions of women in marginalized regions, as well as displaced women, is one of the key interventions that indigenous feminist/women’s groups in particular employ to protect women from daily experiences of violence and potential long term mental and physical consequences. In the context of Sudan’s civil war, those with the greatest material needs are often the “others” in the national discourse—those who are marginalized and whose bodies are the sites of the political violence employed in the name of national security and state sovereignty. In the context of political violence in Sudan, activism oriented toward addressing the material conditions of the people in these regions should be looked at as an integral part of feminist work in general and should not be the responsibility of only indigenous feminists.

I argue that by applying the term feminism only to movements that engage in long term transformative objectives and ignore women’s pressing daily needs results in the privileging of the interests of a particular group of women. Such a view and focus excludes the experience of violence of women who are subject to interlocking systems of oppression and violence and who carry the burden of not only being a woman but also a woman from a particular group. We must also attend to the key question of who determines the feminist agenda and whose voice is heard.
In the same vein, Mohanty (1988) questions the power in feminist movements. She argues that by privileging gender as a unit of analysis for women’s oppression and ignoring the material realities between and among women, “the distinction made earlier between ‘woman’ and ‘women’ is lost” (1988, p. 77). I therefore argue that the distinction and hierarchy between feminist and women’s movements in the discourse concerning what constitutes a feminist organization is misleading. From my perspective, feminism should attend to both immediate material needs of women affected by violence and opportunities for transformation by addressing structural causes of violence. Feminists should also strike a balance, addressing violence in both the private and the public spheres.

Saskia Wieringa (1994) criticizes this binary between women’s movements and feminism, arguing that feminism is located at the intersection of the material and the symbolic. It is important to look at the political dimension of feminist work. She writes:

Rather than speaking about feminism or the feminist movement, it is better to speak of feminist processes and practices which are always historically and culturally specific and thus need to be contextualized… Feminism should be understood as a highly complex, multi-layered transformative set of political practices and ethics, elements of which may be in contradiction with each other, and intersect with other transformative practices, such as the struggle against oppression on the basis of class, race, ethnicity and sexual preferences. (1994, p. 834)

In her discussion of how the women’s movement in South Africa creates alliances, Shireen Hassim (2005) explains that women’s struggle towards full citizenship requires that we similarly attend to both approaches. Hassim writes:

Like the distinction between women’s practical needs and gender strategic interests, the transformatory and the inclusionary approaches to defining women’s interests are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they need to be seen as part of a continuum of women’s struggles for full citizenship, which may take a linear historical form (that is, a shift from inclusionary demands to transformative demands over time) or may be present within a single movement at a given time. (Hassim, 2005, p. 3)
Reacting to Hassim’s views, Elaine Salo (2005) argues that in South Africa there is no such thing as a clear-cut line between women’s movements that work purely toward addressing women’s immediate practical needs and those advancing a transformative approach. Salo instead draws our attention to the importance of considering class divisions and urban-rural divisions between different feminist/women’s movements within the country. It is the lower class and rural women who disproportionately experience social and economic (material) exclusion and who most need such alliances and solidarity.

It is worth noting that this distinction between women’s and feminist movements is largely influenced by the political context. Importantly, feminist and women’s movements should not be placed in a hierarchy. Additionally, understanding differences should question both how the action of any feminist/women’s organizations addresses nationalism and violence and also how their action maintains, reproduces or challenges gendered and racialized nationalist projects. For example, a pro-government women’s group that focuses on strategic interests, such as promoting their own political candidates in order to advance the government’s hegemonic nationalist agenda, can be considered a feminist group without necessarily looking at the connection between the group’s actions and how they contribute to gendered and racialized violence.

In conclusion, I advocate for a combination of attending to both immediate material needs and long term transformation, addressing both macro and micro levels of violence. Diverse approaches that come together as a collective voice represent the potential to both achieve a transformative goal and meet the immediate empowerment needs of women. Doing so would mean no one is left behind.
7.4 Feminist Solidarity

Solidarity does not assume that our struggles are the same struggles, or that our pain is the same pain, or that our hope is for the same future. Solidarity involves commitment, and work, as well as the recognition that even if we do not have the same feelings, or the same lives, or the same bodies, we do live on common ground. (Ahmed, 2004, p. 189)

A key question raised during the interviews for this study was whether violence against women in Sudan and in the Nuba Mountains had decreased over the past few years. Many of the participants agreed that, although much work has been done over the years by different feminist/women’s organizations, violence against Sudanese women—especially women from marginalized war torn regions—seems to be increasing since South Sudan’s independence in 2011.80 A participant from NuWEDA summarized what other participants were trying to say:

There must be something wrong with our approaches to dealing with violence. A lot of work has been done over the years by many organizations. However, efforts are very fragmented, and experiences are not shared; facts are not checked; local agendas are not prioritized; there is no sustainability for the work since funding is short term; affected women were not listened to; and, especially for local organizations, it is very hard to conduct our activism without being harassed. Here I don’t mean being harassed by our families or communities—they in fact appreciate our efforts—but by the government authorities. The only way we can avoid harassment is if what we’re doing is not perceived as a challenge to them—something that has nothing to do with the words ‘human rights’, ‘democracy’; ‘gender-based violence’, ‘sexual violence’, ‘gender’, or ‘social justice’.

I asked the participants to share their experiences of their organization working in solidarity with other groups. I wanted to know their thoughts about how feminist/women’s movements might develop strategies for dealing with violence against Sudanese women, particularly against women from the Nuba Mountains, strategies that are cognizant of local, national, and global systems of power.

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80 This is because South Kordofan is caught between North and South Sudan and remains an undecided region. The current conflict has led to mass killings, displacement and sexual violence against Nuba women.
As discussed in Chapters 6 and 7, participants from the SWU and NuWEDA, in particular, mentioned that their organizations are involved in different network and solidarity groups, but not necessarily in solidarity with the groups informing this study (NuWEDA, SWU, UN Women). The SWU has several close connections with international and regional organizations such as Club de Madrid, the International Socialist Women Union and Horn of Africa Women Leadership in Peace and Security. NuWEDA is connected with national, regional and global groups such as the Sudanese Women Coalition for Peace and Security, Babiker Badri Association, Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA) and the global network “Women’s Education Partnership”. Participants also noted, however, that when it comes to addressing violence, solidarity work is difficult to pursue. All participants recognized potential value in creating strategic linkages not only between the organizations forming this study, but in general across local, national and international levels. They felt that such connections could help transform the lives of women in the war-affected areas and in the Nuba Mountains in particular. The remaining question however, is how? Participants discussed two possibilities—one at the national level and one at the international level. All participants from the three organizations stressed the importance of combining their efforts to address violence against Sudanese women, including those in the Nuba Mountains and other marginalized regions or war zones. Each of the three organizations recognized the work of the other two groups as crucial for change.

I asked participants to comment on the role that each of the three organizations can play and what gaps the other two organizations can fill. Two participants from NuWEDA noted the historical silence of the national women’s organizations, including the SWU, on issues affecting racialized women from the Nuba Mountains. One of these participants suggested that the silence was tantamount to neglect, as if to say, “their problem is not ours.” The other member observed
that the national women’s movement based their agendas on the common experiences of all Sudanese women while ignoring the particular experiences of some. A male participant from the Nuba Mountains argued that the national organizations have reservations about coordinating their work to address violence with that of local organizations from the Nuba Mountains. According to him, this reservation is linked to the some of the national organizations’ fear that local organizations from the Nuba Mountains are suspected of being linked to the fighting of the liberation/resistance— the SPLA/M. In this context, the participant further argued that this silence from national organizations could be understood as reflecting the view of the government about the people of the Nuba Mountains as a racial group connected to rebel resistance groups fighting the government (SPLA/M), i.e. Black African, as discussed in detailed in Chapter 4. At the same time, however, most participants from NuWEDA see the SWU and other national women’s movements as crucial allies in the area of social justice. They think that some women leaders from these national movements have the power of social and political location and the capacity to deal with and challenge the state, mobilize resources at the national level and forge alliances with international women’s organizations.

Similarly, the SWU members see NuWEDA and other indigenous women’s organizations as critical due to their ability to work effectively at the local level, given their localized knowledge of culture and languages. A participant from the SWU explained their challenge with forging solidarity relationships with local organizations from war zones. She attributes the lack of relations between national organizations and local organizations to beliefs about the affiliation of local organizations from war zones with armed and liberation movements. The participant also suggested that national organizations fear getting embroiled in local politics that are considered by the state to be threatening to national security. That might be the reason,
she continued, why the SWU, among other national organizations, prefers to associate with national and international organizations to condemn war, address violence and advocate for peace. She expressed her dissatisfaction with the lack of solidarity between national and local organizations, hoping for strategies to build relations without fear.

Both the SWU and NuWEDA see international feminist/women’s organizations such as UN Women as important, but for different reasons. For the SWU, global/international feminist organizations are important for their ability to challenge global power inequality as one of the structural causes of violence. While NuWEDA members agreed, they also added that international/global feminism is important for their ability to secure funds, which is critical in order to enact the pressing agenda of violence against women from war zones areas. A participant from UN Women thought that linkages among the three levels of women’s organizations was important and could enhance the chances of having a lasting impact on the lives of Sudanese women. For her, this perception stems from the fact that local and national organizations have more legitimacy and more opportunity to challenge the gender agenda of their own state, which is an option less available to UN Women, among other international organizations. Participants from the SWU and UN Women both supported the idea of collective action to address the experience of violence by women from marginalized areas/war zones and the multiple forms of daily oppression and violence. A participant from SWU stated that:

We recognize that women from the Nuba Mountains and war-torn regions, including Darfur and the Blue Nile, are in fact dealing with tough and harsh realities whether displaced or living under the shelling. These women face violence in all its forms in order to make a living for their families. While local women’s organizations from these regions are very engaged in providing basic needs and protection for displaced women, national organizations like ours (SWU) with a more strategic mandate to challenge the structural systems that produced such violence can play a very effective role when we come together.
Many of the participants emphasized the importance of being conscious of power relations when forging alliances between organizations and the importance of clear common goals and strategies. These elements were particularly critical in regard to setting agendas and determining which issues, concerns and ideologies to prioritize. There was agreement that joint discussions between the three organizations, or with other organizations, could help to establish agendas that meet the needs of the most oppressed first of all, and then everyone else later. Since each organization has its own ideology, vision, and mandate, participants agreed that alliances should be temporary and/or focused on specific agreed upon issues. Such an approach would foster collaborative action while allowing each organization to retain its own identity and independence. There was also mention of representation within these movements in terms of who is represented and in what capacity. This discussion raises hope for the possibility of fruitful alliances among different levels of feminist/women’s organizations, despite the different ways that the three organizations conceptualize and tackle violence against Sudanese women.

Feminist postcolonial scholars advocate a politics of differentiation and solidarity among and between different groups of women in order to enhance the ability to effectively challenge the multilayered systems of power that oppress women. The increasing integration of countries from the Third World, including Sudan, into global capitalism requires that the conceptualization of racialized and gendered violence against women goes beyond local and national boundaries to embrace a global perspective. Different strategies for creating solidarity include adopting intersectional frameworks, employing strategic essentialism, and promoting transnational feminism. I see two potential strategies to formulate an effective response to the multiple forms of violence (state violence and class-based violence associated with capitalism and globalization)
in Sudan, particularly in the Nuba Mountains, these are strategic essentialism, and
transnationalism

Gayatri Spivak (1988) advances the notion of ‘strategic essentialism’ to refer to the use of
collective identity categories based on essentializing discourse of identity especially those related
to gender, race, and the nation. For Spivak, this ‘strategic essentialism’ can be used temporarily
as a tactic and strategy to organize collectively to achieve specific political goals. Spivak
recognizes the inherent limits of identity politics, arguing that representing or 'giving voice' to
‘others’ is problematic because it essentializes the messages. However, Spivak highlights
conditions wherein strategic essentialism might offer an important mode of intervention,
particularly in contexts where a national identity may be supported by hegemonic powers that
suppress significant differences like gender, race, and class. Strategic essentialism can provide a
base for building coalitions for empowering others, as the subaltern groups need to consolidate
their action with those from the same group who have power to revisit the history and the
narrative of the nation (ibid).

Since it is not easy for women from the Nuba Mountains to challenge all systems of
oppressions and the resulting forms of violence all by themselves, “strategic essentialism”, i.e.,
the collective voice of women in Sudan coming together as “women in Sudan” to address the
racialized gendered violence that are particularly experienced by women from the Nuba
Mountains, remains a potential and provisional strategy. Through learning and unlearning
privileges, Sudanese women who are in privilege positions may use their privileged status to
challenge racial violence faced by Nuba women. I argue that strategic essentialism has potential

81 It is worth noting that, later, Spivak detached herself from what she describes as misuses of the notion of strategic
essentialism.
as a social justice strategy in Sudan without falling into the trap of silencing and misrepresentation that Spivak and others warn against. Spivak’s strategic essentialism aligns with the opinions of participants from the three organizations in this study about the importance of recognizing the different ideologies, types of work, and mandates of each organization, while at the same time appreciating the potential for alliances via the different points of engagement of each organization, where their work intersects as well as points of divergence.

The possibility of having a national collective women movement capable of attending to the multiple positions of different women groups in relation to the existing social realities without losing sight of self-coherence is discussed by Hassim (2005) earlier in this chapter. Hassim’s inclusionary approach is based on collective/single women movement that takes up women’s struggle as a continuum. In this case, women’s movement in a specific national context might not entirely focus on common agendas, for usually the struggle might take a linear historical form, by first attending to the agenda of the most disadvantage groups and then move to consider the common transformatory agendas for all women. This could be a potential strategy in the context of Sudan, whereby the fragmentation of Sudanese women’s movements can come together and priorities the struggle of the most disadvantage women in the country, especially those from war zones regions, and whose lives have been imbedded in history of slavery. While the agenda of the collective group may prioritize the struggle of the most disadvantage women, I think in the Sudanese context the collective women’s movement may also need to attend simultaneously to some of the common strategic women agenda.

In Sudan, the policies implemented by the state have continued to generate gendered and racialized violence, especially in the Nuba Mountains. Some women have lost their lives, others are displaced with their families and some continue to resist while being exposed to different
forms of violence and exploitation, including daily aerial attacks, suffering from hunger and forms of sexual violence, while national and international women’s groups remain largely silent (Totten, 2017). Pettman (1999) calls for feminists to challenge the global system that excludes women and she suggests feminists adopt a more global perspective that goes beyond the nation-state to address the global system. This suggests transnational feminism as a way to link both the local and the global. Transnational feminism is often used in opposition to both the simplistic notions of global feminism and a focus on the power of the nation-state, which was widely criticized by feminist postcolonial scholars as an imperialist discourse. Basu writes:

It may be time to replace the bumper sticker that exhorts, ‘Think Globally, Act Locally,’ with one that reads, ‘Think Locally, Act Globally’. Or perhaps it’s time simply to retire the bumper sticker, for with the growth of transnational social movements, we need to rethink entirely relations between the local and the global. (Basu, 2000, p, 68)

Leonora Angeles (2003) contributes to the discussion, defining feminist transnationalism as “an analytical perspective [that] is said to have emerged out of Marxist and postmodern critiques of global capitalism that dispute the centre-periphery and local-global locational dichotomies. Transnational approaches propose analyses of more complicated and contingent historical and geographical linkages in the increasing circulation of goods, money, services, people and politics” (p. 286). At the same time, many feminist postcolonial scholars are skeptical about the politics of some transnational feminisms (McFadden, 2008; Mohanty, 1988; Briggs, 2003). Within the context of economic globalization, Mohanty (2003) envisions a “feminism without borders” as a social justice framework for transnational feminist engagement that recognizes differences and envisions social justice across divisions of nations, races, classes, sexualities, religions and disabilities. Mohanty is critical of power deployed by transnational feminism under the notion of ‘sisterhood’. She criticized the discursive construction of the category “Third World woman” by Western feminism, showing how the category homogenizes
women in the Third world. Mohanty further argues that this categorization is ideological and used to set a binary distinction between the powerless and powerful. Mohanty advances a theorization of feminism that is fluid, which moves away from categorization and essentialism, crossing borders for a new understanding of different cultures and historical material realities. According to her, this transnational anti-capitalist feminist movement should be based on “a historical materialism analysis of concrete disenfranchisement” (2003, p. 46). She calls for a framework of solidarity and shared values among Western feminists and Third World feminists. However, Mohanty (2013) warns against the depoliticization of transnational anti-racist feminism. She discusses the impact of neoliberalism on social movements, and how “neoliberal governmentalities discursively construct a public domain denuded of power and histories of oppression, where market rationalities redefine democracy and collective responsibility is collapsed into individual characteristics” (p. 971). Asking, “[W]hat happens to the key feminist construct of ‘the personal is political’ when the political (the collective public domain of politics) is reduced to the personal?” (p. 971). Mohanty concludes that the contestation of the political must be at the heart of “post” feminist/race/transitional discourse.

Recently, Mohanty responded to critics of her philosophical position in her “Under Western Eyes” essay. She explains that her essay was misread and misunderstood. She writes:

I did not write “Under Western Eyes” as a testament to the impossibility of egalitarian and noncolonizing cross-cultural scholarship, nor did I define “Western” and “Third World” feminism in such oppositional ways that there would be no possibility of solidarity between Western and Third World feminists … in 1986 I wrote mainly to challenge the false universality of Eurocentric discourses and perhaps was not sufficiently critical of the valorisation of difference over commonality in postmodernist discourse. Now I find myself wanting to reemphasize the connections between local and universal . . . In knowing differences and particularities we can better see the connections and commonality because no border or boundary is ever complete or rigidly determined … The challenge is to see how specifying difference allows us to theorize universal concerns more fully. (2003, pp. 502-505)
I support what Mohanty proposes – linking local and global through a transnational feminism that is anti-capitalist, anti-racist and anti-imperialist. It offers a way to effectively address and mitigate the multiple forms of violence faced by women from the Nuba Mountains in Sudan.

To conclude, the notions of African feminism and Western feminism are used to stereotype feminist discourse in the Third World/Africa and in the West as monolithic categories that are both geographically and ideologically fixed. While Western feminism is largely perceived as being “hegemonic”—largely focusing on patriarchy and sexuality, neglecting class analysis and located in the West—African feminism, on the other hand, is perceived as being largely centered on class and global political economy and, to lesser degree, on patriarchy, while neglecting sexuality. I complicate this binary of feminist essentialism, as based on this description, by recognizing that a Third World/African feminism exists in the West as well as the existence of a Western feminism in the Third World/Africa. I argue that African as well as Western feminisms comes in multiple forms, and there is in no such thing as authentically Third World/African or authentically Western feminism. In fact, dominant forms of feminism exist in both the Third World/Africa and in the West. While I identify myself as African feminist, I do not entirely prescribe to the dominant form of Third World/African feminism, nor do I prescribe to the dominant form of Western feminism. The kind of postcolonial feminism I identify with is based on, first, my personal gendered experience as a woman in Sudan. Secondly, it is informed by the experience of different women and men in Sudan based not only on their gender but the intersection of gender with their race, class, religion, sexuality, and history of slavery. Thirdly, while I recognize class as a key category of analysis of oppression, I equally recognize gender and race as main categories of analysis, and without intersectional analysis of the three, the analysis of gendered and racialized violence is never complete. Fourthly, while I acknowledge
that different groups have different struggles in their specific social, cultural, political and economic locations, my vision for feminism goes beyond a common agenda, nationalist and nation-state boundaries. It envisions solidarity across the local, the national and the global, in which the lives of the most marginalized groups are central for social justice solidarity actions across borders. For me this vision is only realised through intersectional feminism that is anti-racial, anti-capital and anti-imperialist. This kind of feminism, I believe, presents a potential transformative governance model in Africa context and beyond.
Chapter 8: Complexity of Silence: Conclusions, contributions and implications

If the jargon of our times—postmodernity, postcoloniality, postfeminism—has any meaning at all, it does not lie in the popular use of the 'post' to indicate sequentiality—after feminism; or polarity—anti-modernism. These terms that insistently gesture to the beyond, only embody its restless and revisionary energy if they transform the present into an expanded and ex-centric site of experience and empowerment. (Bhabha, 1994, p. 4)

In the quote above, Bhabha contests the sequentiality of the ‘post’ in contemporary theorization of social justice. In Africa, our experience of violence associated with post-colonial nationalism is shaped fundamentally by the patriarchal processes of state formation and the making of subjects, as well as the political economy of global capitalism. Both processes are fundamentally based on gender and race differences, among other axes of power differentials, including religion and sexuality. Different people therefore embody violence differently, while women, whose gender identities intersect with race, religion and geography, bear the hardship of this violence.

This research engages with feminist postcolonial theory to investigate the relationship between feminism, nationalism and violence in post-colonial Africa, specifically in Sudan. By using the term ‘postcolonial’ feminism, we do not limit our understanding of it to the historical event and time of independence, the ending of colonial rule. Postcolonial feminism demands that we also interrogate the prevailing economic, political and power relations nationally and globally. Accordingly, I use postcolonial as a concept that dictates the way we see the world and its actors, as well as how we envision possible changes (Laurie and Calla, 2004). In seeking to inform social transformation, I have centered my analysis on the lives of indigenous Nuba women. My hope is that this research engenders challenges to multiple systems of power.

I engaged with case studies of three different women/feminist organizations that operate at the local (NuWEDA), national (SWU) and international (UN Women) levels in Sudan. I
examined how each organization conceptualizes and addresses violence. Using postcolonial feminist theory, as well as decolonizing critical race feminist methodologies, I examined four sets of questions. I responded to the first questions by engaging with related literature, while the subsequent questions were addressed by analyzing empirical data from the three case studies, supported by some relevant literature. The research questions are:

1. How has nationalism been defined in post-colonial Sudan and how is it implicated in gendered and racialized violence?
2. How do the three organizations conceptualize violence against women in Sudan?
3. How are gender politics in Sudan negotiated by the three organizations?
4. What does being feminist mean for the three organizations?

These questions were addressed through a literature review, semi-structured interviews and an examination of the organizational documents, of three organizations (NuWEDA, SWU, and UN Women). I interviewed 22 participants (18 women and four men). Nineteen participants worked in different capacities with the national and indigenous organizations, two with the international organization and one public feminist figure. In Chapter 2, I discussed how nation and nationalism are theorized and why nationalism turned violent in postcolonial African states. Whether primordial or modern, the idea of the nation as an “imagined community” needs homogenous national identity. To aid its construction, narratives about a common past or common future are created to make it real in the minds of citizens. Institutions, politics, cultural ceremonies, education, and the media were all involved in this process of construction. The limitation of imagined nations and nationalisms is that they depend on the exclusion of those who do not fit the master narrative. In order to pursue a unitary nation, states centralize power in the form of a nation-state, and legitimize the use of violent necro-politics to dictate citizens, and defend state sovereignty and ‘national security’. The processes of consolidating a unitary nation (and state) within a singular notion of ethnicity, language or race (depending on the context),
generates gendered and racial violence in many African post-colonial states, including in the Nuba mountains in Sudan. I discussed how colonialism is implicated in the violence of today. I agree with Chatterjee (1993), who argues that nationalism is inherently an imperial project and, therefore, the construction of nationalist discourses by Third World leaders will be “forever colonized.” As rightly described by Fanon (2004), civil wars in Africa have only benefitted national leaders and their international allies.

Further, I disentangled the relationship between nationalism and violence by illustrating how gendered and racialized violence go unchallenged. I suggest how gendered and racialized violence are often seen as inevitable conditions that characterize the post-colonial state in some African countries. Despite the role women in African countries played in anti-colonialism and liberation struggles, upon independence women’s agency did not qualify them for liberation. The imagining of a difference from colonizers was key to the construction of anticolonial nationalism in Africa, and women were called upon to enforce this difference by embodying it (both during colonization and post-colonial eras). Women were used as national cultural signifiers by the nationalist anti-colonial struggle during colonial times and, after independence, as central to the anti-imperialist struggle by the post-colonial state, as symbolic signifiers of the nation.

I then examined the gendered nature of nationalism and how the nation and post-colonial nationalism require certain ideals not only limited to gender, but also race, religion and sexual orientation. I elaborated on how the combination of primordial and modern nationalism discourses (civic and ethnic/cultural nationalisms) in some countries in Africa and the Middle East, including Sudan, espouse their own contradictory ideas about women’s citizenship rights, leading to ambiguity on women’s rights as citizens of the state.
In Africa, even though nationalism has historically functioned as one of the most powerful weapons for resisting colonialism, as well as the development of a liberatory post-colonial nationalism, it failed to create peace and stability in Africa in general, and in Sudan in particular. To the contrary, it resulted in politics characterized by ethnic, religious and natural resource-based conflicts. The Sudanese elite of the national middle class, who mostly have an Arabic/Muslim background, failed to deploy a nationalist discourse that generated stability and embraced the diversity of the nation. Instead, these elites used a narrow, homogenized ethnocultural (Arabic/Islamic) nationalism, which divided the nation and led to the longest civil war in Africa, resulting in extensive gendered and racialized violence. Francis Deng (2009) argues that this narrow conceptualization of national identity in post-colonial Sudan led to the humanitarian crises we see today.

Racialized violence in Africa results not only from patriarchal state formation and post-colonial nationalism, but is also connected to capitalism and neoliberal economic policies, all of which converge to shape women’s experiences of violence in Sudan, and in Africa more generally. This is especially true for women whose identities are situated at the intersection of race, class and religion. Describing humanitarian crises and violence experienced by indigenous women in Sudan as internal, merely caused and perpetuated by the Sudanese nation-state, is misleading. Global economic order and political inequalities are equally to blame. The economic Structural Adjustment Program, introduced to African countries upon independence, shifted the responsibilities and power of the state to aid and development agencies, referred to as a “shadow state” (Wolch, 1990). It should come as no surprise that these organizations have taken over the responsibilities of weak states in Africa.
In Chapter 4 on the formation of the Sudanese state, I illustrated how the transition from a colonial to post-colonial state made little difference for women in Africa and Sudan, particularly for women from the Nuba Mountains. I explained how the process of nationalist state formation in Sudan has been characterized by overt exclusions on the basis of gender, race and religion. Although independence brought certain levels of freedom and emancipation, the post-colonial state retained some of the colonial relations of power. I showed how Sudan’s current nationalist project has resulted in gendered and racialized violence and that the post-colonial state has fundamentally maintained some of its colonial aspects in relation to some groups, especially those whose identities intersect with gender, race and religion.

I explored the positions of the three organizations within their different historical, cultural and political contexts. Their distinct positions among prevalent power structures have determined and influenced the ways in which each organization conceptualizes violence and builds strategies to address it. The SWU has historically been associated with the struggle for liberation from colonialism and efforts to build a civil state in which women’s rights are integral to national liberation process. After Sudanese independence in 1956, the SWU fought against dictatorship regimes in the country, believing that the liberation of women largely depends on fighting capitalism through the successful struggle for a democratic system of government. NuWEDA emerged in the context of civil war in the Nuba Mountains, initially focused on addressing violence against Nuba women. Currently, its mandate has extended to include all displaced women. NuWEDA’s efforts centre on addressing issues of racism and patriarchy. In dealing with violence against women and while challenging structural racism, NuWEDA also responds to the immediate material needs of its targeted groups. Also, as clearly indicated by its name “Nuba Women for Education and Development”, NuWEDA emphasizes the importance of identifying
the ethnicity of the Nuba in the name of the organization, which it does for two reasons. First, it is a way to maintain Nuba’s dignity and ethnicity. Second, keeping Nuba in the name of the organization resists the ethno-cultural nationalism of the Sudanese state. NuWEDA’s activism is a contestation of the multiple forms of violence experienced by the Nuba because of their social and political struggle against the racism imbedded in the Sudanese post-colonial state nationalism project. UN Women, on the other hand, has only recently emerged (2010). It came into existence because of international advocacy of women’s groups from UN member states to strengthen the UN’s role in advancing women’s empowerment and gender equality. UN Women focuses on addressing patriarchy and promoting gender equality and women’s empowerment at both the global and local levels.

In discussing how each of the three organizations conceptualize and contest violence and negotiate political and civic space for engagement, we have to recognize that each organization has strengths and weakness in their analysis of violence. There are also points of overlap and tension between the three organizations. Interviews revealed that the organizations’ differences concerning their feminist approaches to gendered violence lie along the axes of a macro versus micro level analysis. While both SWU and UN Women embrace macro level analysis of violence, NuWEDA embraces a micro level one. Furthermore, NuWEDA emphasizes the centrality of ethnicity and race and how they intersect with gender at the national level. SWU, on the other hand, while twining gender and class, currently focuses on class struggle (capitalism). Meanwhile, the international entity, UN Women, emphasizes that gender relations (patriarchy) are at the core of power relations shaping violence against women in Sudan. Through these variant conceptualizations and the general neglect of the centrality of race in their analysis, the national and international feminist/women’s organizations (SWU and UN Women) reproduce the
erasure of the intersectional forms of violence against Nuba women, as a racialized ethnic minority in Sudan.

National movements are largely silent on the issue of violence in war zones in Sudan (particularly in the Nuba Mountains) and there is notable hesitation from these movements to form alliances with local organizations in an effort to address violence. According to some participants, such disengagement by national movements is a result of the commonly held suspicion that local organizations maintain secret connections with liberation movements, such as SPLA/M in the case of the Nuba Mountains. Some participants from NuWEDA reported that the government similarly alleges that people and civil society activists from the Nuba Mountains are connected to the rebel group fighting the state. The message, according to these participants, is clear: the Nuba people have to fight alone for their cause. Nevertheless, participants from all three organizations acknowledged the strategic importance of forming alliances at local, national and international levels of women/feminist organizing to address violence against Nuba women and other women from war-affected regions in Sudan.

The relationship between feminism and nationalism in Sudan is complex. As each of the three organizations contest violence and negotiate civic and political space with the state, they attempt to hold the state accountable to respond to violence against women and promote women’s citizenship rights. My analysis of the organizations reveals that they are positioned differently in their respective relationships with the state. The state in Sudan provides restricted civic space for civil society organizations that are interested in political, civil and human rights issues. Alternatively, the state provides more civic space for organizations that limit their activities to social and economic issues. By challenging the current government in Sudan and viewing it as corrupt, the SWU severs any possible relation with the state. On the contrary,
NuWEDA has managed to maintain relations while taking a tough stand with the state. Accordingly, NuWEDA challenges state authority with regard to certain issues, while at the same time it maintains a degree of collaboration with the state when necessary; this requires very delicate negotiation. UN Women on the other hand, works in close collaboration with the state and provides expertise to enable the development and implementation of state policies that promote gender equality.

Participants noted that international donor funds are mostly tied to engagement with civil, political and human rights, reflecting the particular interests of the donors. Whereas the international donors’ agendas also emphasize protecting human rights defenders and law reforms, the agendas of local organizations address social, economic inequality as well as civil and political rights. Attempts by the civil society organization to use their funded projects to hold the state accountable for protecting civil and political rights tend to create tension between them and the government, quite often exposing civil society activists to varying degree of violence from state national security authorities. Due to the fact that they are embedded in different power structures, each of the three organizations reveal different fears of violence because their activism is perceived by the government as threatening ‘national security’ in different ways. As its activism is linked to anti-racism, NuWEDA faces multiple challenges and threats. Participants from NuWEDA and the SWU described tension between international donors’ agendas and their own. They revealed how hard they had to try to reconcile these different agendas to access both the funding they need and whatever space the government offers.

The three organizations are situated differently in relation to the interests of both the state’s nationalist agenda and the North-South donors’ desires for ‘modernization’ and ‘development’. Their efforts to reconcile the competing agendas of the state and international
donors ultimately create a divergence between theory and practice, as their activism is continuously negotiated and compromised. This, in turn, diminishes the autonomy of the feminist/women’s movements in Sudan. The whole situation raises several questions: what does feminism mean in Africa in general, and in Sudan in particular when patriarchal state formation and ethno-centric cultural nationalism (which offers limited civic space and almost no state funding) operate alongside international donors (whose funds give them the power to define the agenda for ‘development’)? What, then, does ‘postcoloniality’ mean for feminists in Africa and Sudan? And what constitutes an organization’s agenda as feminist?

Participants opposed the idea of defining their respective organization as feminist, revealing how controversial the concept of feminism is in Sudan, and in Africa more generally. The term feminism is often viewed as a Western concept, only concerned about patriarchy and linked to sexual rights, especially for homosexuals. African feminism differs from Western feminism in that it is rooted in African women’s resistance to Western hegemonic power, is based on heterosexual norms and thus values the family and society and involves men as partners in the struggle. Apart from one participant, no participants saw sexuality as relevant to their activism or to their organization.

To reflect issues of concern to women in Sudan, participants suggested that the term feminism, and the notion behind it, must be constantly revisited and its meaning negotiated. Most participants reported that semantically, the concept of feminism needs to be replaced with a term derived from local languages. Other participants argued that the term feminism adds no value and the struggle and focus should be on the actual work instead of a term. Other participants argued that the priority in the Sudanese context should be given to the current economic, social and political issues and not to sexuality and sexual rights. This disengagement
with sexual rights is not unique to Sudan, but to most feminists in Africa since most women’s movements in Africa retain a heteronormative character and generally avoid engagement with sexuality. For Amina Mama, this aversion to issues of sexuality and sexual rights prevents “the emergence of more radically transformative politics” (2012, p.1).

8.1 Theoretical contribution

Particularly in the Middle East, where postcolonial discourse grounds its arguments in geographies and cultural imperialist “orientalism” (as one geography/class) against the global political economy, I argue that, while important, dominant feminist postcolonial discourse fails to adequately address and speak to differences within Third World nations, especially across race/ethnicity and histories of slavery. Using the case of Sudan, I demonstrate how not attending adequately to differences across race/ethnicity within the “subaltern” histories of slavery in Third World countries (the Sub-Saharan slavery trade, specifically) or to the historical material conditions associated with it, dominant feminist postcolonial theory fails to account for racialized gendered violence by the post-colonial nation-states who claim to defend nationalism, “national security” and national sovereignty. We therefore need to ask: Whose ‘post’ is in post-colonial?

Mohanty (1998, 2003) and Collins (1993, 2000, 2004) provide important contributions to understanding intersectionality, both as a concept and a theory. This thesis reveals that, in the Sudanese context, it remains crucial to attend to the silences around gendered racialized violence experienced by women from war zones and in the Nuba Mountains in particular. These women’s lives are embedded in a history of slavery within Sudan and the Middle East. Attending to this silence enables us to understand the complexity of this violence and, accordingly, ways to address its multiple forms (physical, psychological and material) as experienced by subaltern
women from war zones in Sudan. This requires that we address the “intersecting inequalities” in addition to the intersectionality of their experiences.

The concept of intersecting inequality is used by Niala Kabeer (2016). Like Mohanty, Kabeer’s conceptualization of the intersectional goes beyond common use of the concept which refers to identity politics and power relations within the group. She differentiates between three different types of inequalities; “vertical inequalities”, which are based on economic income and wealth, “horizontal inequalities” which emphasize social discrimination based on gender, race, ethnicity and caste and “spatial inequalities” referring in particular to rural areas or slums in urban areas characterized by physical isolation, poor infrastructure and prevalence of structural violence (war and criminal activities). For Kabeer, the intersection of these inequalities produces poverty and the material reality that impact the lives of women from marginalized racial groups. It is this material reality that I want to emphasize and, in particular, how it acts to render women from the Nuba Mountains more vulnerable to structural violence.

Intersectionality largely refers to identity politics and the intersecting power relations involved in the physical and economic violence that manifests in racial/ethnic and gendered forms. We need to attend to not only power and representation in national Sudanese women movements, but also to the intersecting inequalities and material realities to effectively address the daily violence experienced by women from the Nuba Mountains. If feminism means “leaving no one behind” as reflected by Niala Kabeer (2016), then feminist efforts must address the material and political threats resulting from both local and global systems of power by centering feminist solidarity on the lives of the most marginalized sections of society, “it is not the centre that determines the periphery, but the periphery that, in its boundedness, determines the centre” (Mohanty, 2003, p.69). In this context, feminism is expected to provide a new vision of an
inclusive model of governance. To achieve this, it is necessary for transnational feminism to build interlinkages to break down local-global dichotomies. It must also interrogate the normative social and political structures that reproduce sexism, racism, and classism, while also attending to the material conditions of the most disadvantaged groups.

There has been an ongoing debate about the distinction between feminist organizations and women’s organizations in Africa. Women’s organizations are defined as those which address immediate practical/short terms needs. Feminist organizations, on the other hand, are defined as those which engage in addressing structural causes of violence and discrimination. The latter’s methods are often referred to as employing a transformative approach to violence. Accordingly,

Some believe that it is crucial to concentrate only on social and economic development issues as priorities without challenging cultural values [while] [o]thers consider that no substantial change in women’s positioning and development can be achieved without addressing the structural root causes of women’s subordination. (Badri and Tripp, 2017, p. 234)

Discussions with participants revealed that there is no such a thing as an African feminism or Sudanese feminism, only heterogeneous movements with different agendas. As stated earlier there is no single “Sudanese women’s movement”, but diverse women’s activism across identity politics of race, class, religion, political ideologies, geography and age. SWU and NuWEDA represent only part of this diversity. Across Africa, struggles for liberation took different forms to suit the conditions of each country or region. Women’s organizations, therefore, tend to be distinguishable from each other, depending on their nation or region’s history of slavery, race/ethnic makeup and geography. While some organizations maintain or reproduce nationalist discourse, others challenge it. Moreover, post-colonial nationalist projects and racialized gender violence, especially in Sudan, have impacted the lives of women across Sudan differently. Women from war-affected areas in Sudan and in the Nuba Mountains, in particular, bear the

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consequences of this violence on a daily basis. Therefore, in order to analyze the multi-layered, historically and materially grounded realities of women from such regions in Sudan, and particularly women from the Nuba Mountains, we need to attend to the distinct material and immediate needs associated with violence while also addressing its structural causes.

Some feminists place autonomy from a specific system as fundamentally key to any feminist politics and action. However, this research raises the question about what autonomy means for feminist organizations in a context like Sudan. I have described the multiple forms of African feminism and how feminist politics vary across different ideologies and developmental power relations. What is key in this discussion is how autonomously women’s or feminist organizations are able to function in a context such as Sudan, where the authoritarian state does not provide funding for social justice movements. This is of particular concern for those challenging state hegemonic nationalism, and in situations in which international donors redirect the focus of social justice movements toward their own agendas. In a context like Sudan, feminist/women’s movements are never autonomous in setting their agendas while occupying the intersecting point of two neoliberal structures: the state and international development donors.

8.2 Insider/Outsider positionality

As an African Muslim woman, I am affected by many forms of nationalist cultural violence and I bear the consequences of violence from the post-colonial nation-state’s laws, which have rendered me less as a citizen and more as a subject of the state. I am, however, privileged to study at a Western university in Canada. These two positions place me as an insider/outsider, both in Sudan and in Canada, in relation to feminist postcolonial discourses regarding gendered nation-state violence. This dual position has required me to reflect on the intersection of my two
locations, power and privilege, as well as the vulnerability that comes with each. However, this sort of insider/outsider positioning also contributes to the multiplicity of voices and consequently to greater objectivity in knowledge production (Collins, 1999; Witcher, 2010).

While here in the West (Canada), I have closely observed and reflected upon how the discourses of some post-colonial Third World “radical” feminists are packed with nationalist concerns and nostalgia and tend to stay silent about the gendered violence sanctioned by some Third World nation-states. I was struck by the lengths some of these “radical” Third World feminists in the West are willing to go in order to defend images and displays of their “home” countries’ cultures/practices of violence to their global/Western counterparts. This defensive stance is based on a worry that displaying Third World women as victims of violence perpetuated by and within the nation-state can be manipulated and used by some Western feminists to justify imperialism and war under the claim of ‘saving women’. This defense is undertaken despite the fact that many of us living in African countries continue to suffer from multiple forms of gendered violence waged by the very nation-states some diasporic postcolonial Third World/African feminists defend. As a result, I found myself stuck between two feminist discourses that seem to contradict each other. All of my feminist activism in Sudan, as well as most of the feminist/women’s movements’ activism in general in Sudan, have focused on challenging violence perpetuated and/or sanctioned by the state based on the nationalist ideals Sudanese women are required to embody. Postcolonial African feminists living in the diaspora pay much attention to power at a global level, while national feminists pay more attention to power at the nation-state level. Each of these positions appear to be informed by the specific geographical location of lived experience so that each of these analyses is incomplete. One problem is confusing the distinction between nationalism and nation-state, sometimes with commentators using the
terms interchangeably. Importantly, each of these discussions enforce the binary local-global. My position disputes the binary local-global, instead view it as a continuum.

Third World postcolonial feminism in the West focuses on defending the nation-state in terms of political independence, territory and state sovereignty as a way to resist imperialism. My stand (along with some other feminists in Sudan) is increasingly focused on contesting nationalism and the violence sanctioned and perpetuated in the name of post-colonial national identity. One question remains important for me is to answer: What does nationalism mean for women living in the Sudan nation-state? More specifically, what does Sudanese post-colonial nationalism mean for women from the war zone of the Nuba Mountains? The answers to these questions require that we revisit and examine how the nation-state constructed post-colonial nationalism in gendered and racial terms and attend to the question of whether ‘post’ in the post-colonial has made any real transformative change in the lives of everyone in the country. Only then can we speak of post-colonial nationalism in feminist terms, referring to a feminism that challenges and resists global power and imperialism, while also challenging the power of the nation-state and the constructed gendered and racial character of post-colonial nationalism. After all, both systems of power (national and global) are implicated in producing gendered violence in Sudan.

I am aware that the production of certain gendered cultural knowledge enables and legitimates the deployment of orientalist discourses and Western power in African countries (Smith, 1999; Mohanty, 2003). While I am not criticizing all parts of nationalist culture as violent, since not all aspects of the culture are harmful, I argue that African feminist analyses will remain incomplete until the violent aspects of nationalist culture are debated and eliminated. We have to remind ourselves that, as women in these countries, we have been forced to accept this “authentic” nationalist culture against our will. Furthermore, we must also remember that these conceptions of
nationalist culture have been created during anti-colonial nationalist struggles for liberation. This matters because in post-colonial times, women continue to be used as symbolic cultural signifiers in anti-imperialist struggles, which is a legacy of anti-colonial nationalism. Our bodies are used as sites for these cultural practices and as sites of violence by our own “post-colonial” nation states, which on social and economic matters ally with capitalism (Amin, 2007).

When I returned to Sudan, I began to reflect on my prior activism, particularly my activism around patriarchal state violence and nationalist cultural violence. I saw that my earlier activism was incomplete, and I became concerned about the activism of some nationalist feminist organizations in Sudan, especially middle-class urban-based feminists who were heavily involved with issues considered high-profile for transnational feminist organizations, while not focusing enough on global inequality politics. For example, the Islamic dress defined by Public Order Law has become the dominant agenda of activism for many of these organizations. Their agenda seems to be much more driven by the interests of international donors because it is easy to be funded for this agenda, rather one based on the most pressing issues for Sudanese women.

In conclusion, I argue that African postcolonial feminists need to revisit the temporality of postcoloniality and the entanglements of gender, class and race, and consider who has gained and lost in the post-colonial state. I call for an analysis that attends to the intersection of multiple systems of oppression including gender, race, class, religion and sexuality, while simultaneously placing race in the center of the analysis of the situation in Sudan. I also argue that only through feminist solidarity among local, national and international feminist/women’s social justice organizations will we be able to dismantle these multiple and interconnected systems of oppression.
While this research offers unique and valuable theoretical and empirical contributions, I must acknowledge some methodological limitations. The lack of more interviews with UN Women, for example, is a limitation of my research. I was not able to record all the interviews, and for the interviews I could not record, I had to rely on field notes that were not as detailed and rich as the transcripts of recorded conversations. The inability to do all interviews face-to-face was also a limitation of this research, since the quality of data was not as rich as the interviews done face to face. Another notable limitation with this research is that national and local organizations in Sudan have real security concerns over sharing written material. This concern constrained my access to key organizational documents like annual reports, project documents and meetings reports. Organizations were not able to tell me information in relation to funding due to sensitivity surrounding funding details. The reason given was that security officers in Sudan continuously raid civil society organizations, taking all the organizations’ written documents that could later be used as evidence of working against the state. Therefore, much of the information related to the organization’s programs was generated during the interviews rather than documented in writing.

8.3 Implications

While class is a key category of analysis of oppression in Africa and Third World countries in general, by privileging class as the main and only category of analysis, the dominant Third World feminist postcolonial discourse succeeds in advancing economic justice, but runs the risk of ultimately being incapable of addressing gendered racial violence in the name of nationalism within Africa nation-states; these multiple forms of violence are due to interlocking systems of oppressions experienced by those whose lives are at the intersection between gender, race and embedded in the history of the Sub-Saharan slavery trade. This requires re-thinking
feminist postcoloniality and its politics in regard to capitalism and patriarchy and questioning the power relations between class and gender and racial oppression. I argue, along with Heidi I Hartmann (1979), that there is a need to attend to the intersection of class with gender and race as interlinked categories of analysis, “a materialist analysis [which] demonstrates that patriarchy is not simply a psychic.” (p.2).

Though transnational feminism offers a valuable approach to address violence in war zones in Sudan, particularly in the Nuba Mountains, we need to be aware of and attend to feminist postcolonial scholars’ skepticism about transnational feminism (McFadden, 2008; Mohanty, 1988; Briggs, 2003). Particularly noteworthy are their concerns about its de-politicization. The ongoing destruction caused by American and global interventions in Iraq and Afghanistan, for example, and the associated deployment of a narrative claiming that the liberation of women is fundamental to democracy (which has resulted in massive human rights violations against both women and men) pose a great challenge to transnational feminist organizations. These highlight the need for new approaches to theoretical analyses to address the complex economic, political, and gender injustices experienced by people living in post-colonial contexts. Challenging both the systematic violence experienced by women from war zones in Sudan and the Nuba Mountains, in particular, and the national and international silence around it requires strategic efforts that dispute the local-global binary. Challenges involve breaking down the silence, while also addressing the complex systems of neoliberal power that work at both the Sudanese nation-state level and the international level through the global economy that perpetuate such violence. Challenging neoliberal structures is unavoidable and necessary if the aim is to end violence against women in the Nuba Mountains. However, I argue, there is a need to work within an anti-racist and anti-imperialist framework.
We also need to differentiate between nationalism and the nation-state. Most postcolonial feminist concerns about transnational feminism are directed toward critiques by transnational feminists of the nation-state in the Third World as patriarchal and oppressive to women. Postcolonial feminist discourse, therefore, criticizes transnational feminists as perpetuating hegemonic masculine power and legitimizing war against independent nation-states. Participants suggested, however, there should be clear agreement on a common agenda among women’s organizations across all levels of engagement (local, national and international) centered on the lives of the most disadvantaged groups such as Nuba women. As well, participants stress the importance of identifying and addressing the national and global power dynamics and inequalities affecting the violence experienced by women in war zones. We need to be careful that our class analysis of violence in Africa does not overshadow our gender analysis; that our critiques of political economy and resistance to capitalism and imperialism does not silence our critique of patriarchy both at local and global levels, and how it affects the daily lives of African women. We also need to be clear that we are specifically addressing violence perpetuated under the name of nationalism and national security of the nation-state. This research challenges and reconstructs the concept of “national security” in Sudan, which is connected to security of the nation-state by arguing that human security is equally matters.
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