



From Instigating Violence to Building Peace: The Changing Role of Women in Darfur Region of Western Sudan

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Abstract

The article sets out to examine the changing role of women vis-à-vis inter-communal conflicts in Darfur region of western Sudan. The region is currently riddled with violent inter-group conflicts. Women are commonly

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accused of being one of the causes of such conflicts and the instigators of violence in general. This rather unfounded perception about women confuses their actual role today with regard to peace and war, and denies women their legitimate demand for participation in public life, including peace building and conflict resolution. The article attempts to separate fact from fancy. It points out that it is true that a small number of women in the region still act as instigators of violence. These are the women who live among nomadic communities and are generally known as *Hakkamas* – which literally means arbiters of man's conduct. The majority of women, however, are found among rural sedentary communities. Many women are also found in the urban centres. Both sedentary and urbanised women are strong advocates of peaceful coexistence among the regional identity groups. The male-dominated social structure impairs their effective participation in conflict prevention, management and resolution. The article is based on information obtained from the women themselves. No attempt is made to put words in their mouths or dictate for them the way they should behave. Findings are considered important for both researchers and decision-makers. It is about time to change the misconception that analysts have about the actual role of women vis-à-vis peace and war in the region. It has been argued that changing the *Hakkama* role would only be possible by changing the entire social milieu in which the *Hakkama* finds herself. The situation calls for enormous developmental projects that lead to conflict transformation. Nomadic communities need to be settled so that women need not preserve the image of the 'warrior-man'. On the other hand, the demands made by the rural sedentary and urbanised women need to be met and women's associations need to be empowered so that women can become actual peace builders rather than violence instigators.

Background

Darfur region in the extreme northwestern Sudan is currently riddled with violent inter-group conflicts, so much so that recently a so-called mechanism for the imposition of law and order and the supremacy of government was established in the region. This mechanism allows extra-legal measures which ensure that inter-group violence comes to an end. Traditionally, when a major violent conflict takes place between groups, a government-sponsored peace-making conference is organised to work out a formula for reconciliation. Recently, however, such conferences have become ineffective. In a press

release, the deputy-governor of Northern Darfur State made the point that around thirty such conferences have been held recently, but without success in ending inter-group conflicts.¹ The phenomenon raises several questions about the nature of such conflicts and the reasons why government-sponsored conferences have failed to put an end to them (Mohamed 2002).

The investigation of the role of women in such conflicts is timely for several reasons. Firstly, being historically a male-dominated community, the region denies women representation in peacemaking conferences. Educated and urbanised women in the region have become increasingly critical about being denied a role in peace building and representation in peacemaking conferences. Secondly, women are generally accused of being the promoters, or at least one of the causes, of inter-group violence. Thirdly, it is true that the *Hakkamas* – literally, the arbiters of man's conduct – can be instigators of violent conflicts among their men-folk. But the *Hakkamas* are only a small segment of the female population in the region. The *Hakkamas* are found only among nomadic communities, which account for less than 17 per cent of the regional population, according to the 1993 population census (Department of Statistics 1994).

The article aims at separating fact from fancy; and demonstrates women's changing role from instigating war to building peace. As the theme has not been adequately researched previously, secondary sources are not available for library data analysis. Instead, data were collected from fieldwork, using in-depth interviewing and focus group discussions as mechanisms for data collection. In most cases women's involvement in making war or peace is presented in the form of storytelling. Stories are presented as episodes. The author made several visits to Southern Darfur State during the period 1998-2002, and interviewed both men and women as individuals or groups. Consulting published materials of course formed the theoretical background. The article is presented in 5 parts: (1) Shame Culture and Gender Roles, (2) Women as Instigators of Violence, (3) Women as Promoters of Peace, (4) Women's Perception of their Role, and (5) Implications for Researchers and Decision-makers.

1 Al-Ayyam Daily No. 7485, October 3, 2002. The deputy-governor is Shareef Mohammadain Adam Sabi.

1. Shame Culture and Gender Roles

Societies at traditional or transitional stages of development are said to be guided by a shame culture. According to Palmer (1980:48), 'The main characteristic of shame cultures, is the situation in which the prime element of social control is the individual's fear of being publicly humiliated or shamed. This over-concern for appearances stresses compliance with an established set of cultural norms designed to prescribe proper behavior for most if not all contingencies'.

In rural Sudan, and particularly among the Bedouin populations, it is extremely shameful for a man not to be courageous, brave and enduring. For instance, it is shameful behaviour to run away from dangerous situations, to not stand by the side of relatives or kin at moments of danger and to fail to demonstrate endurance when undergoing pain. Likewise, it is considered shameful for a man to be stingy and to fail to reciprocate friendly gestures made by other people.

Until quite recently, there has been no central authority to protect people's lives and property; so Sudanese rural communities assigned men the role of protectors for their communities.² Thus the image of the 'warrior-man' evolved among Sudanese rural communities. While men were assigned this role, women were assigned the role of being the arbiters of man's conduct. They see to it that their men-folk demonstrate bravery, courage, endurance and generosity, among other socially desired behaviour patterns. They perform this role by singing songs or displaying deeds that either commend or disapprove of men's conduct.

The nomadic communities are particularly concerned about the need for the courageous man. Until the beginning of the colonial era, they lived in a dangerous country, 'with lions, leopards and hyenas attacking their herds. Men still carry spears wherever they go not only as defense against wild animals but also because of the ever present possibility of vengeance being committed upon their persons' (Cunnison 1963). Among the cattle nomads,

2 Until the colonial government reconquered Sudan (1898), rural Sudan was predominated by inter-group raids and counter-raids. Paul (1954:121) has this to say about the Beja tribesmen over whom he was serving as District Commissioner: 'law and order were in the main observed, and there were growing apprehensions that murder, blood feuds and internal raiding were social crimes, which the government would not tolerate'. Also see Howell (1974) for the control of rural communities in the Sudan.

locally known as Baggara, the personality of the '*Hakkama*' woman emerged. Men fear the *Hakkamas* because they can make or break their reputations. Lampen (1933), who was a District Commissioner for cattle nomads of southern Darfur, wrote:

The women's tongues are greatly feared, for if they sing against a man's courage, he will probably leave the country to be quit of this intolerable nuisance. I have seen a boy almost in despair because the women, quite unjustly, accused him of having run away from robbers and left his brothers to be plundered. I have seen three Nazirs [tribal leaders] give extravagant bribes to one of these *Hakkamas*, who threatened to sing against their meanness.

2. Women as Instigators of Violence

The nomadic communities and their animals are no longer threatened by wild animals, but they are now mostly engaged in inter-group conflicts, either among themselves or between them and the settled farmers (Mohamed 2002, Mohamed & Wadi 1998). In other words, the need for the warrior-man is still felt, which gives importance to the *Hakkama* role. The ensuing discussion depicts some episodes that demonstrate how women in general, and the *Hakkamas* in particular, might be the instigators of violent conflicts among men.

Episode One³

In a field visit (1998) to Daein town, the headquarters for the Rezaigat cattle herders, many stories were told about how women may incite their men-folk to engage into violence. A short time before my arrival to Daein, a *Hakkama* was said to have mocked three young men of her own tribe who, reportedly, allowed robbers to plunder them. The *Hakkama* appeared in the market place, putting a piece of cloth around her head, a cigarette between her lips and a pen at her ear. People gathered around her, inquiring about her unusual

3 The Daein Province Commissioner related these episodes. He was interviewed in his house, December 13, 1998.

behaviour. She told them it was very simple: the piece of cloth around her head was that of Mr. A's turban [and she named him], which he left for the robbers to take away. The cigarette was that of Mr. B [and she also mentioned his name], which he also left for the bandits to take away. And the pen was that of Mr. C, [who was a government official, using the pen in office work]. I was told that the three young men had to leave Daein area, going to unknown destinations. They would probably not dare to come back to Daein until each of them is reputed to have done an exemplary deed of courage.

Episode Two

Not only the *Hakkamas* but all women may assume the role of provoking their men-folk to go to war. They can do this by words or deeds. My arrival in Daein was less than a year after the late Cherubino Kwanyin Bol⁴ attempted to take the town of Wau in Bahr el-Ghazal region of southern Sudan. Having been driven out of the town by government forces, the Cherubino militia attacked Rezaigat herders, who happened to be in the area around Wau, killing some of them and rustling a large number of their cattle. The Rezaigat women got extremely angry that their men-folk did not avenge Cherubino's deeds, and decided to incite them to seek revenge. The Rezaigat young women who sold tea in the town decided not to add milk to their tea if buyers were Rezaigat youths. If a young Rezaigi buyer asked for the reason, the answer came to him readily: 'We have no milk any more. Cherubino's people took away all the milk cows!'

The Daein commissioner told another story. The Rezaigat housewives also decided to mock their husbands for failure to retaliate against Cherubino. When a husband came home, and asked his wife to open the door for him, she would not open the door. On asking her 'Why?' she would answer, 'You can't come in. A Cherubino militiaman is already inside!'

Such acts of mockery on the part of Rezaigat women worked like fire in the Rezaigat men to create feelings of shame. They gathered in thousands – the commissioner added – on horseback or on foot and pursued Cherubino's

4 Cherubino was a leading figure in the Sudanese People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M). In 1991 he defected from SPLA/M mainstream and in 1997 he signed a peace agreement with the Khartoum government, but he later turned on the government and attempted an unsuccessful taking of Wau town in southern Sudan. Cherubino was eventually killed in the bush amidst conflicting reports about his killer.

militia. Many of them got killed, but many of Cherubino's militia were also killed, and some cattle were recovered. The *Hakkamas* then sang songs, praising the bravery of their tribesmen and calling Cherubino and his militia insulting names.

Episode Three

Another example of cattle nomads' women inciting men to engage in fighting comes from the extreme western part of Southern Darfur State. Two Arab tribes, the Taaisha and the Salamat, inhabit the area. Tension had existed between the two tribes for quite a long time over local autonomy demanded by the Salamat, who are regarded as newcomers to the area. In 1980 two Taaisha youths killed a Salami man, and then went to the police station, admitting their deed and placing themselves in the custody of the police. The Salamat tribesmen were surely offended but were not quick enough in retaliating. Their young women were alienated and decided to invoke vengeance on the Taaisha by mocking the Salamat youths.

The women took the opportunity of a big festival in which young men and women of different tribes would dance together in couples. It is the woman who selects a partner to dance with. The Salamat women decided not to select Salami men for dancing. Instead, they would select partners from other tribes. The message was clear enough for the Salamat tribesmen. Their women disapproved of their failure to avenge the Taaisha deed. Consequently, the Salamat tribesmen gathered in large numbers, assaulted Taaisha villages, killing, burning and looting. The Taaisha retaliated in kind. Raids and counter raids by the two parties left hundreds dead and caused considerable loss of property. The Taaisha-Salamat warfare is generally regarded as one of the most deadly wars in the region.⁵

3. Women as Promoters of Peace

Palmer (1980:23) is correct in making the point that 'human behaviour tends to be profoundly shaped by the individual's structural and cultural milieu'.

5 An interview with Yusuf Suleiman Takana, in my office in Khartoum, December 1998. Takana was Minister of Agriculture in the region (1980-81). He acted as chairperson for the conference on peacemaking between the Taaisha and Salamat.

The *Hakkamas* and other nomadic women tend to be violence instigators because they live in social surroundings where the 'warrior-man' image is dictated by the need for communal protection. As society moves from this traditional or semi-traditional level of societal development, individuals' attitudes and behaviour patterns undergo changes (see Palmer 1980, Chap. II). Not all women in Darfur region are still nomadic. Most of them have become sedentary, engaging in agricultural production. Others have become urbanised.⁶ Both the rural sedentary and the urbanised women have been exposed to change-producing agents that made them more modern in attitude and behaviour patterns. The following episodes suggest that rural sedentary and urbanised women are increasingly becoming advocates of peace rather than war.

Episode Four

Fatima Seif ed-Deen ed-Dikhairi is an elementary school teacher, who was brought up in Um Kaddada, a small town in Northern Darfur State. In 1989, with the beginning of the National Salvation government, Mrs. Dikhairi and four other women were appointed members of a grand committee that was man-dominated. The so-called committee was a political organisation, representing almost all major regional identity groups. It was founded by the central government with the aim of building power bases for itself in the region. The committee was on a field trip to inspect the newly installed pipeline that provided el-Fasher, the then capital of the entire region, with fresh water. All of a sudden Mrs. Dikhairi burst upon her men-folk, scolding them for paying attention to less burning issues, such as inspecting water pipelines, when dear blood was being shed in other parts of the region. At that time the bloodiest conflict between Fur, a non-Arab tribe, and a group of Arab tribes was at its climax. She addressed Fur and Arab representatives in the committee, protesting how they had allowed a few deviant individuals among their communities to raise the racist banner of Arab/non-Arab that had torn the regional fabric into pieces! Then she addressed the entire committee again, asking them how they ever regarded themselves as men when they failed to preserve what their ancestors had left for them. They left for them, she added, a region whose people had lived in harmony for generations; but

6 The 1993 population census estimated urban population in the region to be 17%, the nomadic population 13% and sedentary farmers 70% (Department of Statistics 1994).

now individuals won't dare to travel from one place to another because of inter-group violence. She added the question: how would they ever call themselves men when they allow precious blood to be shed between Fur and Arabs in the Jebel Merra massifs! How could they accept to see women being widowed, children being killed or losing their parents, and elderly people being gunned down, killed and left unburied! She repeated the question: 'How dare you consider yourselves men?'

Mrs. Dihairi's words were said to have made everybody burst into tears, and caused the entire committee to decide promptly to end their pipeline inspection and make their way to the areas where Fur and Arabs were fighting. They stayed there until they had brought the fighting to a halt and prepared the ground for a peacemaking conference. As a gesture of honour Mrs. Dikhairi and the four other women were appointed as chairpersons for sub-committees to handle the crisis. The long-lasting, exceptionally devastating ethnic conflict was thus brought to a halt. Mrs. Dikhairi knew very well how to arouse the pangs of shame culture in her men-folk and make them want to be peace builders rather than war mongers.⁷

Episode Five⁸

A government-sponsored peacemaking conference was held in 1989 to resolve the conflict between Fur tribe on the one hand and the group of Arab tribes on the other. In 1990, however, some educated tribal elites in Nyala town felt that the agreement reached in the conference was a 'postponement' rather than a resolution for the conflict. Grassroots reconciliation was needed, if a lasting peace could prevail among the warring factions. The government authorities were notified and their consent was secured, after agreeing to appoint three people to represent the government in the largely non-governmental body. From the start women were represented in the initial steering committee, and then in committees inside Nyala neighbourhoods. The message was clear: grassroots people must leave war traumas behind them and go back to their normal brotherly relations. They must learn to forgive and forget. After having

7 The late Abulgasim Ibrahim Mohamed, the governor of the region (1989-1990), told Mrs. Dikhairi's story. He was interviewed in Khartoum, October 18, 1999.

8 Information comes from Abdalla Ali Massar (interviewed December 9, 1989), Fatima M. El-Hassan (December 9, 1989) and Zakaria Seif ed-Deen (July 23, 2002). The three interviewees were active organisers in the citizen-based reconciliation campaign.

succeeded beyond expectations at the level of Nyala town, the organisers decided to expand their activities to their tribal entities at the village and camp levels. Women were instrumental in disseminating the idea at all levels, particularly within Nyala neighbourhoods.

The initiative was not carried through to its maximum fruition, however, as a change of government brought a new governor to the region, who did not see eye to eye with the organisers of the citizen-based reconciliation. Their invaluable effort was thus brought to a halt, but not before the message was well received by the grassroots populace.⁹ When the so-called ‘Comprehensive Peace Conference’ (CPC) was held (in 1997) for the entire region, Southern Darfur State delegates included a sizable number of women, most of whom were active members of the citizen-based reconciliation initiative.¹⁰

4. Women’s Perception of their Role

The studies of women in connection with war or peace, few as they are, have been done by outsiders, who are mostly men (e.g. Lampen 1933, Cunnison 1963, Hassan 1975). Such studies express the opinions of researchers rather than those of the women themselves. The current study – still carried out by a male researcher – tries to let the women speak for themselves. Women’s opinions were obtained by means of focus group discussions and in-depth interviewing. The author made two field trips to Southern Darfur State (December 1998 and July 2002),¹¹ and carried out the discussions and interviews with women in the state. Southern Darfur State represents, to a large extent, the entire region in that it has representation of the three segments of society that are found in the region today: the urbanised women, the *Hakkamas* and the rural sedentary women.

9 The new governor reportedly viewed organisers as serving the political ends of the opposition.

10 According to Massar (see note 8), the Comprehensive Peace Conference (1997) was itself a citizen-based endeavour, starting as a ‘people’s security conference’, before it was dominated by the government and renamed as CPC.

11 Darfur region is now divided into the three states of Northern Darfur State, Southern Darfur State and Western Darfur State, their headquarters being the towns of el-Fasher, Nyala and el-Gineina, respectively.

The *Hakkamas* and rural sedentary women were met during the first field trip (December 1998). The meeting with the *Hakkamas* took place in Daein town, while meeting with rural sedentary women took place in Um Matariq, a village to the south of Daein. The *Hakkamas* talked about a reorientation program, organised by a Darfur region governor in 1991, in which they were involved.¹² The program aimed at training the *Hakkamas* to create a culture of peace, so that they would sing songs for peace rather than for war, and observe that Islam dictates that they ought to be peace builders rather than war instigators. They claimed they had abandoned singing war songs, alleging that when fighting erupted between their own tribe, the Rezaigat, and the Zaghawa tribe (1996), they sang reconciliatory songs rather than war-inspiring ones. The Zaghawa delegates that were interviewed, however, said the opposite, reciting defamatory songs sung against them during the war. A clearer example of *Hakkamas*' failure to abide by the teachings of the reorientation program is what they did during the Cherubino incident (episode two). The same *Hakkamas*, without sensing any contradiction, cited numerous examples of songs inciting the Rezaigat to retaliate for Cherubino's action and calling him and his militia insulting names. Cunnison (1963) was correct in making the point that the change of women's role is 'perhaps only possible if the society and the economy as a whole change'. Fortunately such changes are already taking place in the region. Most nomadic women are increasingly becoming settled farmers or urban residents, looking forward to communal peaceful co-existence rather than warring factions.

The Um Matariq women are, by far, the most affected by tribal warfare. Their own tribe, the Rezaigat, is the most involved in tribal fights with their Dinka neighbours to the south and with several other neighbours to the east and north. Consequently, many Rezaigat women have become widowed heads of household without prior training to assume such a role. Most widowed heads of household are now living in extremely poor conditions. Um Matariq women, therefore, wish the day would come when their own tribe would live in peace with all its neighbours. They have other suggestions to make such as that the man-dominated society be changed so that women have a say in what affects their lives, that the growing need be addressed for both men and women to be trained in peace culture and conflict prevention, management

12 The group with whom the discussion was held included famous *Hakkamas* such as Haleema A. Mohamed and Hummura M. Abbakar.

and resolution, that literacy campaigns be launched among both men and women, but particularly among women, as the illiteracy rate is higher among women, and that women schoolteachers teach the children to be peace lovers, so that future generations would live in peace.

In Nyala town two groups of women were met: (1) the Women General Union (WGU) and (2) representatives of Dar Bakheita Charity Organisation, a non-governmental organisation (NGO). Although the WGU is a pro-government women's association, its members express independent opinions about the role of women vis-à-vis inter-group conflicts in the region. They reiterated almost all the suggestions that were made by the Um Matariq women, adding that, in fact, the WGU had been quick in responding to any violent conflict that took place in the area. They sent relief supplies to the victims and took the opportunity to engage in awareness raising among the rural women. Their activities, they contended, were greatly appreciated by their 'sisters' in the rural areas. The WGU group demanded full participation in government-sponsored peacemaking conferences, arguing that if men believed women were the cause of conflicts, then women should be given the chance to resolve such conflicts. As most WGU members are schoolteachers, the group asserted that women teachers were already teaching the children about a culture of peace and preparing them to become future peace constituencies.

Dar Bakheita is the only women's NGO to be found in Nyala. It is named after Bakheita, the mother of the organisation's founder, Fatima Mohamed el-Hassan. Fatima is a well-known gender activist at the regional level. She was a leading figure during the May regime (1969-1985) and a key person in mobilising women behind the citizen-based reconciliation campaign (1990). Her NGO is principally a charity organisation, trying its best to help children, the poor and the elderly; but it also concerns itself with issues of peace. Fatima strongly opposes the idea of government-sponsored peacemaking conferences, asking instead for citizen-based reconciliation. Government-sponsored conferences, she contends, tend to serve political ends for the government rather than to address the root causes of conflicts. The citizen-based reconciliation, on the other hand, would go deeper into the root causes and thus put an end to conflicts. She calls for the empowerment of her own NGO and the establishment of similar women's NGOs that put peace as their primary concern. Fatima attributes inter-group conflicts to regional underdevelopment, and calls upon the government to launch development projects in the region to transform the subsistence economy into a market economy. Fatima also opposes government intervention in the selection of

tribal leaders (locally called native administrators). Government selection of such leaders *undermines the traditional leadership selection practices*, which guaranteed the selection of acceptable and effective leaders. Native administrators, she added, should not be politicised. They should be empowered to be able to maintain law and order within their communities. Rabbah (1998) takes the same position, recommending an entire role-change for the central government and native administration.

5. Implications for Researchers and Decision-makers

The role of women in public life in Western Sudan is contradictory. On the one hand, in many respects men subordinate women, but on the other, women have a great influence on the behaviour of men. Cunnison, who studied the Humr community of western Kordofan, reached the conclusion (1963:27) that:

There is a stereotype of women in men's eyes: a woman is stupid and ignorant (for she does not take part in the discussions of tribal affairs); she is obstinate but she is gullible in the face of diplomacy; she is irreligious, she fasts all right, but she does not pray with the regularity of men, and when she does she gets the words mixed up; she is irresponsible. She would rather take all the milk herself than leave it to the starving calves; she has no idea of morals, particularly sexual morals (a matter at which men other than her brothers of course connive); and she is no man!

Such a culture of subordinating women still persists, although the region is experiencing a social transformation. But the shame culture that prevails among tradition-bound communities assigns the same women the role of being the arbiters of man's conduct. They can make or break a man's reputation by singing songs or mocking his deeds. Social analysts tend to perceive such roles as constant. For example, the perception of the role of women with regard to inter-communal conflicts is greatly influenced by this prototype of a woman's traditional role. On the one hand, women are persistently denied any role in conflict prevention, management and resolution. These are considered the domain of men. Furthermore, women are readily labelled as instigators of violence rather than promoters of peace.

The two positions that are held about women, i.e. sub-ordinated but feared, tend to overlook the changing role of women with regard to peace and war in western Sudan. With the exception of the women who live among the nomadic communities, who are quite few in number, the majority of women in Darfur region today are experiencing a change of role. They are increasingly becoming advocates of peace. The women whose tribes are frequently engaged in warfare are the most victimised. Tribal warfare makes most of them destitute, living as internally displaced persons and family supporters, without the benefit of having skills for gainful employment. The Um Matariq group that was interviewed represents, to a large extent, those victimised women who stand strongly against tribal warfare. They dream of the day when their identity group will live in peace with other groups. Indeed, they strongly protest the male-dominated decision-making process that places them in the miserable situation in which they find themselves. They are calling for an effective role for women in matters that affect their life.

Likewise, the urbanised and/or educated women react strongly against the male-dominated society that denies them representation in peacemaking conferences and other peace building processes. It has been indicated that some of these women, utilising the same shame culture, succeed in prompting their men-folk to seek communal peace rather than war. Other women have played a leading role in a citizen-based reconciliation endeavour that was about to mark out a new role for women had it not been for a government intervention that changed the process to a traditional government-sponsored peacemaking.

Although still working under the umbrella of the government, members of the Women General Union in Nyala display independent thinking and stand strongly for an increasing role for women in peace building. They are already playing such a role, utilising their limited resources and degree of freedom. It is regrettable that Darfur region has no women's NGOs that act independently of the government. Dar Bakheita Charity Organisation is the only women's NGO that makes itself partially concerned about peace issues. Its leaders have strong views about the necessity of encouraging citizen-based endeavours for conflict resolution, and for the creation of women's NGOs in the region with peace-making as their uppermost goal. The need grows for domestic and international women's NGOs to establish branches in the region to train women in a peace culture and, more importantly, to empower women to assume a new role in peace building.

Particular attention needs to be given to the *Hakkama* group of women. Their adverse role as instigators of violence has greatly tarnished the image of

women in the region. Attempts to change the *Hakkama* role through preaching and reorientation would, however, probably not succeed in changing their traditional role. As conflicts persist among nomadic identity groups or between them and the settled farmers, the *Hakkamas*, and indeed all women, will continue to perform their traditional role of inciting men to fight. Cunnison (1963) is correct in making the point that changing nomadic women's role is 'perhaps only possible if the society and the economy as a whole change'.

Fatima M. el-Hassan, the Dar Bakheita chairperson, is also correct in relating inter-group conflicts to the underdevelopment that characterises the region. In 1976 an International Labour Organisation (ILO) report described the mode of living in the region as being livestock raising and traditional rain-fed agriculture. To a large extent the same modes of living still persist. With natural resources steadily deteriorating because of climatic changes, competition among identity groups over dwindling natural resources makes inter-group warfare inevitable and therefore the chances for a peace culture become unattainable, not only for women, but also for men.¹³ Programs of socio-economic development are a significant key to conflict transformation.

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13 For details about the steadily deteriorating natural resources, see El-Sammani et al 1987.

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