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The impact of privatisation on the position of Sudanese women

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Abstract

Purpose As indicated in this study, women's position in the Sudanese context is perceived to be subordinate to men as reflected in state policies. This appears in the different institutions, starting with the labour market, society and at household/ family levels. How can we explain their subordination in Sudan?

Methodology There is a growing body of literature by feminist scholars who debate issues of women's subordination by the capitalist system in the form of neo-liberal economics. These entail Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs), as well as privatisation that impacts on women's work, together with the influence of patriarchal systems that operate in the different institutions, including the family, society, the labour market and the state.

Findings The debate in itself is not the only reason for us to closely examine the impact of privatisation. The reviewed literature has demonstrated a gap in our knowledge, as the gender perspective has always been absent when privatisation is studied, especially at the national level, and to some extent at the regional and international levels.

Originality/value This study contributes to the body of knowledge by filling this gap and addressing the impact of privatisation on the position of Sudanese women from a gender perspective.

Keywords Privatisation, Women, Labour market, Subordination, Sudan
Paper type Review

Introduction and background

Sudan was the largest country in Africa before the separation of the southern part in July 2011. It was colonised by Great Britain, and the condominium administration (Egyptian and British) of Sudan gained independence in 1956. Sudan is a country with diverse ethnic, cultural and religious realities, and such diversity, accompanied by economic inequalities, shaped the theme of instability and change in the country's political history (Amina, 2006).

The Sudanese economy witnessed different periods of transformation and change influenced by political instability. These periods can be summarised as follows: the period between 1956 and 1978 witnessed the implementation of an expansionary policy to transform the backward economy. However, these policies resulted in fiscal and monetary imbalances. During 1978–1985, the country achieved economic recovery, and this was the period of the beginning of the involvement of the IMF (International Monetary Fund) in the Sudanese economy. In the 1990s, the situation was aggravated by the IMF declaration of Sudan as a non-cooperative country. Consequently, economic sanctions were imposed on Sudan. In view of this situation, the regime declared its intention to reform the economy as the first priority. Accordingly, a set of measures, including the introduction of liberalisation and privatisation, was announced in the early 1990s as part of the government's Three-Year Programme (1992–95), which is a broader programme for

economic restructuring, liberalisation and public enterprise reform including privatisation. The privatisation process has continued to the present day. In a similar fashion, in most African countries, privatisation has been included as part of a broader programme of public enterprise reform. Objectives have been set collectively for liberalisation, restructuring and privatisation, for example, in Benin, Cameroon, Ghana, Kenya, Nigeria and Tanzania (White and Bhatia, 1998). In other countries, such as Zambia, the privatisation programme is self-standing, and has its own set of objectives.

Another interesting feature is that the experiences of privatisation in West Africa tend not to include references to ownership. Sudan also has the same experience of not mentioning ownership as an objective for its privatisation programme. This is in marked contrast to East and South Africa, where ownership is a sensitive issue and broadening ownership is regarded as a key objective. This makes the experience of Sudan similar to the privatisation in West and East European countries. Privatisation was introduced within an unsuitable environment in Sudan. By this we mean the political and economic sanctions imposed on the country have affected the participation of foreign investors. Similarly, the inherited weaknesses of the domestic private sector have constrained the effective participation of its members in the implementation process. The lack of a financial infrastructure is hindering the

efficient implementation of the programme. These programmes are arguably, on the one hand, designed to create economic efficiency, political liberalisation and better livelihoods for the Sudanese people. Yet on the other hand, they have brought increased unemployment, a rising number of poverty headcounts, and a role-reversal in women's position in the labour market and in general. As announced by the current government, privatisation was initiated in Sudan because of the poor financial performance of Public Enterprises (PEs), and the negative impact on the public purse. Since external debt increased from 1.2 to 8.3 billion US\$ during the period 1975–1984, the Sudanese government was urged to adopt a series of adjustment programmes by the IMF and WB (World Bank). This resulted in the adoption of privatisation in the 1990s. Privatisation in Sudan is home-grown, and neither negotiated with nor supported by the WB or IMF. It is a carbon copy of Structural Adjustment Programmes (SAPs) in other African countries, but with harsher effects (Musa, 2002).

Privatisation concepts and diminutions

In this respect, privatisation constitutes one of the major components of the adjustment programmes introduced by the two Bretton Wood institutions in 1944, i.e. the IMF and the WB. The macro-economic ingredients of such programmes are divided between the twin institutions; the IMF is concerned with stabilisation programmes that are designed to reduce both the balance of payments deficit and inflation through, for example, exchange rates management, devaluation of currency, contraction of aggregates demand, tighter monetary policy, increased budgetary cuts (including cuts to subsidies), and price increases. Meanwhile the WB

attends to the longer-term changes that aim to eliminate structural imbalances in the national economy, which they seek to achieve via structural transformation from non-tradable to tradable, reforming public sector inefficiency, reducing the state's domain, and increasing the role of the private sector through privatisation, and/or liquidation of state-owned enterprises (Jiyed, 2003, p.6).

Although each institution has its own designed programmes, there are areas of overlap between them. For example, in Africa, the IMF and WB have agreed upon a prescription, including SAPs and privatisation policies, to address the economic crises of African countries. Privatisation, as a term, is used to cover several distinct and possible alternative means for changing the role of the relationship between the government and the private sector; it is further defined as selling and transferring at least part of the state's ownership of enterprises to private owners (Pohl et al., 1997).

This trend of changing the roles of government and markets, known as 'neo-liberal economics', is a predominant school of contemporary economic theory (Companion, 1999).

Moreover, privatisation, or sale of assets owned by the state, represented the key economic development defining the last two decades of the 20th century. Three main features of such a process are commonly observed, namely vastness in scale, variation in attempts and differentiated consequences. The rapid spread of privatisation in the 1980s was on a large scale, taking place in many OECD countries, Latin America and many Asian countries (Ramanadham, 1993). The largest in scope was the British initiative under the Conservative Thatcher Government; by the end of the 1980s, the

UK's telecoms, gas, electricity, aviation, steel production and water supply had all become largely private-sector activities. In fact, by 1986, Britain had become a model case for privatisation (Gormley, 1991; Ramanadham, 1993; Young, 1994). During the 1980s and the 1990s, a wave of privatisation swept the developing countries; the number of firms undergoing change now well exceeds 100,000, and the total value of assets has been very large in most of the regions, including Latin America, Asia, the transition region, the Middle East and Sub-Saharan Africa (Birdsall and Nellis, 2006, p.3). Furthermore, privatisation, in general, is regarded as a mechanism to increase productivity, efficiency and outputs, and, arguably, to enable an improvement in social services by passing publicly owned (or state-owned) assets to private owners. For the desperate, poor countries, selling state-owned assets was the means to raise funds for government budgets. Hence, countries of different political systems, or at different stages of development, had encountered different types of problems before attempting privatisation. While the prescription for treatment was the same, i.e. privatisation, it has not resulted in homogenous solutions. Some countries have succeeded and have achieved economic growth through privatisation. Evidence generally shows that privatisation has been among the more successful of the liberalising reforms, in the sense that privatisation has yielded good returns to new private owners, has freed the state from what was often a heavy administrative and unproductive financial burden, and has provided governments in place with a fiscal boost; additionally, it has helped sustain a large process of market-enhancing reforms (Birdsall and Nellis, 2006, p.13). However, other countries have faced failure in their privatisation processes, including many examples in Latin American, African, Middle Eastern

and some transition economies. The causes of failure are possibly linked to missing the opportunity in the process of privatisation to maximise the efficiency of the private sector, improve economic performance, increase competitiveness in their markets, and maximise equity gains. This, on the whole, means the government in place failed to achieve its announced privatisation objectives.

It should be mentioned that privatisation in Sudan was announced in 1992, as part of the three-year economic salvation programme (1990–1993) adopted by the current government, which took power in 1989 through a military coup. This programme was a response to the chronic economic problems faced by the country, which had been inherited from the previous political regimes, as claimed by the government. Sudan was no exception in following privatisation like many other developed and rapidly developing countries responding to the economic crises experienced worldwide during the 1980s and 1990s. However, is it simply that privatisation became a fashion and 'everybody' wanted to do it, as Jiyad (2003) suggested, or were there underlying reasons why the Sudanese government participated in, and launched the process of privatisation? 1) Privatisation in Sudan has been implemented as 'home-grown', with no support from the IMF or the WB, the designers of such programmes under SAPs and liberalisation packages; 2) privatisation has been implemented in an unsuitable political situation caused by the economic sanctions imposed on Sudan by the international community, led by the US, which resulted in weak foreign direct investment (FDI) flows, and lack of foreign private investors to participate in the privatisation process; 3) the current government followed privatisation with very low economic growth, which made the decision of

privatisation questionable in Sudan; 4) lack of public support, as privatisation was implemented at the beginning of the 1990s, in the early days of this regime, which seized power by force; 5) the social impacts of privatisation, especially labour redundancy, has affected the livelihoods of a considerable number of families in the different regions in the country, which made privatisation a sensitive political issue in Sudan; 6) international economic and political sanctions on Sudan extended to the field of research, as Sudan has been excluded from most WB and IMF studies; and 7) the researcher originally came from Sudan, and she realizes the importance of studying privatisation as a sensitive economic and political issue, exploring its socio-economic impacts on women, and reflecting this in academia.

Privatisation by most countries was part of the economic globalisation pushed by the international financial powers represented by the IMF and the WB. The WB and IMF were the main international financial institutions (IFIs) responsible for supporting member states' financial and economic structures on the international level (Shirley, 1997). Since the 1980s and for the next two decades, economic restructuring, including privatisation, became one of the major conditions for new lending, and much aid to developing countries, according to the policies of the IMF and the WB. These conditions were encapsulated in the SAP prescription); the main axes were economic liberalisation and privatisation policies, and political convergence towards a Western democratic model. These institutions succeeded in pushing most of the debt-ridden developing countries to adopt SAPs, including privatisation, in order to improve their economic and political structures, and also be eligible for future lending. Sudan, like many other developing countries, had been

urged to take the IMF and WB prescription.

In this respect, the growing momentum of privatisation in the heavily indebted countries in the 1980s and 1990s attracted the interest of scholars from different disciplines, particularly economists and political scientists. New perspectives for examining the classic theories and practices of privatisation have been established; moreover, the ways privatisation has affected the economy of these poor nations and the people involved came under significant scrutiny. However, most of the scholarly work has its limitations, as it has restricted itself to the macro-economic impact of privatisation, or the ideological justification of privatisation. An example of the micro-studies conducted on the impact of privatisation at household level or on women, was a study about 'the Privatisation Process and Its Impact on Society' by Ddumba-Ssentamu and Adam (2001) at Makerere University Institute of Economics; another study is 'Gender Bias and Family Distress: The Privatisation Experience in Argentina', by Geldstein (1997). Other areas have not been given much attention, such as the relationship between privatisation and the increasing inequalities in ethnicity, gender and regions. Consequently, this knowledge gap has encouraged scholars from other fields, i.e. sociologists, feminists and gender scholars, to make their contribution.

It should be recalled that in Sudan, the debate on privatisation extended to the national level, as Sudanese economists, development researchers, trade unions, student unions and the media joined the debate over this issue. It was apparent that issues related to privatisation are 'sensitive', economically as well as politically (Pohl et al., 1997). In Sudan, the process of privatisation was not fully supported nationally, as

people did not trust the government. The buyers of public assets were mainly foreigners and the large scale of labour redundancy caused a political problem.

Feminists and economic development

It should be noted that privatisation policies have resulted in changing women's position in Sudan. These changes are described as leading to the exploitation and subordination of women. In accounting for the changes occurring in the lives of women in Sudan, there is a need to look to the theoretical literature, which has attempted to conceptualise women's marginalisation in economic development terms, at international, regional and national levels.

Nevertheless, some feminist (e.g. Charles, 1993) and development scholars debated the relation between economic development and the advancement of women in different parts of the world; also the evolution and transformations that have taken place in the gendered division of labour in the different economic and political systems, such as the capitalist and socialist systems, and the Third World (Charles, 1993).

Much of this debate was sparked by Ester Boserup's view on women's role in economic development, which was first published in 1970. Since then, there has been a proliferation of material analysing the situation of women in the Third World, and the impact of colonial rule and development on the gender division of labour. Much of the literature is feminist-inspired, but can be distinguished theoretically in terms of the way in which development is conceptualised. The effect of socio-economic development on women is a hotly debated issue. The viewpoints on

this issue can broadly be summarised under three perspectives, as argued by Charles (1993).

The first approach, adopted by Boserup, maintains a modernisation perspective, which distinguishes between modern and traditional sectors, and argues for a fully fledged industrial society of the European or North American type. For those adopting a modernisation approach, it can be argued that women are disadvantaged, because they are 'left out' of the development process; they therefore need to be integrated into it (Rogers, 1980; Boserup, 1970, 1990). This approach perceives that development increases women's marginality.

Likewise, the second adopted a Marxist or Marxist feminist approach, and argues that the problem is not that women are 'left out' from the development process, but that they are integrated into a transforming gender division of labour, which rests on their continued subordination. The main advocates of this approach are Beneria and Bisnath (1996), Elson and Pearson (1997), Elson (1991a), and Charles (1993). A third approach conceptualises development as a process of different forms of patriarchy, and regards the development of capitalism as the stage of patriarchy which turns women into housewives the world over (Mies et al., 1988). Under these conditions, males are considered as primary members within the family, and all decision-making powers are left to male members. Females are dependent on the male members to carry out any of their tasks. Women work in a subordinated position, which gives males the power to control them. This concept increases the involvement of females in various household activities that turn them into housewives.

Additionally, the three approaches

presented by Charles (1993) described the relationship between women and economic development as follows: women are either marginalised due to modernisation, or integrated in a situation of inequality, which increases their subordination, or are subordinated as a result of influence by patriarchal structures. Other work by Sethi (1999) discusses the effects of economic development on women. She suggested three perspectives, summarised as follows: The first study is the integration study, which holds that development leads to female liberation and sexual equality by involving women more centrally in economic and political life. According to this view, economic development involves women centrally in public life as the expansion of jobs for women in industry and related services integrates them into the modern labour market (Rosen, 1982). This study further argues that modernisation enriches women's opportunities, while helping them acquire skills and aspirations to take full advantage of their options (Hoselitz, 1957; Eistenstadt, 1996). Moreover, the integration study is in line with the modernisation approach. Ester Boserup is one of the popular advocates of this approach, which argued that women are disadvantaged because they are 'left out' of the development process; therefore they need to be integrated into it (Rogers, 1980; Boserup, 1990).

The second study is the marginalisation study, which maintains that capitalist development makes women peripheral to productive roles and resources. This study holds that capitalist development isolates women from production and political control. Men are drawn into the labour force as commodities in exchange for wages, while women are relegated to domestic and subsistence activities within the household; their isolation from production results in economic dependence on men, which

limits their autonomy and access to cash, property and other resources (Abel-Smith and Titmuss, 1975). This study has been criticised by Marxists and proponents of the Marxist feminist approach. Marxist feminist scholars, like Beneria and Bisnath (1996) and Elson (1991b), argue that the problem is not that women are 'left out' of development, but that they are integrated in a transforming gender division of labour, which rests on their continued subordination (Beneria and Bisnath, 1996; Elson and Pearson, 1997; Elson 1991b; Charles, 1993). Further, the third study is the exploitation study that claims modernisation creates a female proletariat supplying low-wage labour for accumulating profit (Sethi, 1999). This study is consistent with Marxist feminists' analysis of women's role in capitalist societies. It assumes that development often makes Third World women more central to industrial production, but that their involvement is more harmful than beneficial (Charles, 1993).

According to this view, women provide cheap and easily expendable labour, because discriminatory hiring practices, sex-segregated labour markets and inadequate preparation weaken their position in the labour market.

The two sets of approaches conceptualise economic development from the feminists' perspective; they are quite similar without identically coinciding, and so are complementary. The first study of integration coincides with the second approach of Boserup, which asserts that development leads to women being 'left out' of the development process, and that women need to be integrated again. This approach was one of the most popular in the 1970s, and was advocated by Women in Development (WID) researchers. However, it has been criticised by the advocates of the marginalisation study, who

claim that women were integrated into transforming conditions that resulted in the continuation of their subordination. The third approach of Marxist feminists, i.e. the exploitation study refers women's exploitation to the capitalist system, while a peculiar and different approach is presented by Mies (1988), who referred to women's exploitation in the patriarchy system.

In this respect, the exponents of the exploitation study perceived that Third World women's liberation and equality require a radical transformation of three interlocking systems: imperialism, which subjugates all Third World people; capitalism, which exploits all workers; and patriarchy, which oppresses all women (Setti, 1999). In addition, the exploitation study, which holds that women's subordination is due to capitalism, coincided with Marxist feminists, who called for reformation of the capitalist system that exploits women workers. This approach is claimed to be relevant for this study in terms of feminist conceptualisation of the causes of women's subordination and exploitation in view of economic development. Mies (1988) has another way of approaching women's subordination, which is rather linked to patriarchy and not merely any economic system such as capitalism; yet she perceives the patriarchal system to be a later stage of capitalism. This conceptualises the theoretical framework of the study: the capitalist system is represented in privatisation as part of the state's policies, while the patriarchal system is structured in the state, labour market and family/household levels in the Sudanese context.

Feminists' theories and women's work

Different feminist schools have tackled the issue of work differently; accordingly we need to highlight the main concern of each school, then to discuss

how each of them deal with the issue of work. The first wave of feminism emerged at the beginning of the last century. Liberal middle class women initiated their movement calling for justice and equality; this first wave of feminism assumed that women suffered injustices because of their sex. In this regard, Liberal feminists organised campaigns for equality, equal pay, equal civil rights, equal access to education, health and welfare and equal access to the democratic political process. First wave feminism created a new political identity for women. They won legal advances and public emancipation, the vote, motherhood protective legislation and women's legal status.

The second wave of feminism is Radical feminism, which emerged during the 1970s. Radical feminists opened new grounds in feminist theory and stimulated new forms of political activities among women. Radical feminists' state that male domination over women could be seen in all societies, claiming universality of women's oppression. They turned race and domestic violence into political issues. They questioned what was taken for granted in the existing understanding of nature and society. They discussed power relations in the family, and hence rejected liberal strategies of acquiring justice within the existing social order (Ramazangolu, 1989). Marxist feminists see women's oppression as tied to forms of capitalist exploitation of labour, and thus women's paid and unpaid work was analysed in relation to its function within the capitalist economy (Stacy, 1993). They questioned the adequacy of Marxist theory and politics since socialism began, and argued that although material conditions of women improved, it did not end women's subordination. Marxist feminism reacted against universalism, which was started by Radical feminists, as they were very conscious

of class divisions among women, but agreed with them in focusing power relations between men and women (Ramazangolu, 1989). Besides the main three classic feminists, there are other feminists groups, such as Socialist feminists, Black feminists, Postmodernists, and others.

Regarding the issue of work, Radical feminists consider the family as the site of women's oppression, as it is dominated by male heads and is the focal point for sexual division of labour. They see men as a group responsible for women's oppression (Stacy, 1993); hence issues of work are discussed within the context of men's control exercised on the productivity of women. Liberal feminists also focus on fitting women into existing social and political structures. Moreover, they want to bring women into the decision-making process of all public institutions on an equal basis with men, so that these bodies will take account of women's issues. They seek to improve women's access to work and education, and to maintain their legal rights in full equality in the work sphere (Ramazangolu, 1989). Therefore women's work is one of the central themes in liberal feminism, and many of the legal rights concerning work were obtained as a result of their struggle. In this study, we are concerned with the importance of work in the lives of women, which was emphasised by liberal feminists.

However, liberal feminists are Marxist in their explanations of history, as explained by Engels, who states that women's subordination emerged in the transition from non-class to class societies, especially as this is linked to the emergence of private property. Following Engels, Marxist feminists looked more closely to the issue of production to understand the mechanisms of women's subordination. They view women's disadvantaged position as being mainly

due to the lack of economic power, i.e. access to economic resources. Marxists gave work and productivity great significance. They also considered patriarchy in their discussion, but did not discuss constraints to work, like the redundancy question, which is a Third World issue. There is thus no literature on this issue specifically, but later in this section, we will look at related literature within feminists' discussion of the state.

It is also clear that access to economic power alone does not remove women's subordination, but we would like to know the extent to which Marxist statements apply to women made redundant, in seeing how far loss of income as an economic power contributes to women's disadvantaged position. After reviewing the main schools of feminism and how feminists perceive the importance of work, we then investigate how patriarchy influences women's mobility and alternatives.

Feminist discourse and patriarchy

Maggie (1995) affirms the difficulty of defining feminism, pointing out that feminists have widely different concerns and analysis. However, she has suggested that all feminists share a woman-centred perspective. Stacey (1993) stated that feminism is a body of knowledge that tries to analyse and explain why women are subordinated in society and have less power than men, and suggested a means to change and challenge this situation.

Today feminism is viewed as a global, political movement organised around women's oppression that addresses more than purely economic issues. The ultimate goal of the present movement is to change the powerlessness of women worldwide, and to define

existing societal structures to honour the integrity of women.

For the purposes of this study, Liberal and Marxist feminists and theories respectively have been considered. Liberal feminists have followed a long tradition of campaigning for improved rights and opportunities for women, without seriously questioning the existing organisation of society (Ramazanaglu, 1989). Their concerns are focused on fitting women into existing social and political structures. Moreover, Liberal feminists wish to bring women into the decision-making processes of all public institutions on an equal basis with men, so that those bodies will take account of women's issues. Furthermore, Liberal feminists are closely associated with the rhetoric and practice of equal opportunities. They seek to improve women's access to work and education, and to codify their legal rights. In addition, their stance on the gender division of labour—the allocation of social and economic tasks by gender—has been described in the ways in which women are disadvantaged compared to men in employment.

Marxist feminists represent a wide variety of scholars, who have attempted to apply a dialectical approach in analysing sources of gender oppression. Marxist feminists locate women's oppression in social class, race and ethnicity. They attempt to separate gender from social class, and consider capitalism, imperialism and sexism as inseparable. Liberation of women is thus linked to liberation of oppressive social class relations (Mannothoko, 1992). However, non-traditional Marxist feminists see women's oppression as part of capitalist exploitation.

There have been different ways of analysing the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism. Depending on the degree and form of their engagement,

there are three main positions. First, they can be considered so closely intertwined that they become not merely symbiotic, but fused into the system. Meanwhile capitalism that patriarchy provides a system of controlled law and order, while capitalism provides a system of economy in the pursuit of profit. Second, patriarchy and capitalism can be regarded as analytically distinct. Writers differ in their mode of separation between patriarchy and capitalism; some allocate a different structure to the different systems, while others do not (Mitchell, 1975; Hartman, 1979). Meanwhile, Mies (1988) takes a midway position on the separation and integration of patriarchy and capitalism. For her, patriarchy and capitalism are seen as very closely connected, but ultimately capitalism is merely another form of patriarchy. Furthermore, Mies uses the term 'capitalist patriarchy' to refer to the current system, which maintains women's oppression, and is the latest stage of capitalism. The second position, which has been adopted by scholars like Mitchell (2003) and Hartman (1982), perceived the two systems of patriarchy and capitalism to be distinct. This coincided with the fact that most Marxist feminists have abandoned a dualist approach, and now conceptualise patriarchy as relatively autonomous yet co-existing with capitalism (Walby, 1996; Mitchell, 2003). This position will be considered as the theoretical basis of this study in using patriarchy as a concept.

According to Walby (1990), patriarchy is composed of six structures: patriarchal relations in the household; patriarchal relations in paid work; patriarchal state; male violence; patriarchal relations in sexuality; and patriarchal relations in cultural institutions. While this model was developed within the context of the last 150 years of UK history, with some modification, the main features are globally relevant (Moghadam,

1996). This would make it applicable to developing countries, including Sudan. Many writers have argued that patriarchy has insuperable problems, because it is inherently essentialist, or has an inability to grasp cultural diversity. This criticism has been levelled, especially, against the use of the concept of patriarchy by radical feminists, particularly those who focused on the issues of reproduction and sexuality. Moreover, there are those who have doubts as to whether patriarchy is an appropriate term to grasp the complexity and diversity of gender relations (Alcoff, 1988; Walby, 1990; Moghadam, 1996). The arguments about the significance of patriarchy in women's lives revolve around whether or not women perceive patriarchy as oppressive. The interest behind much of the literature growing out of the women's movement has been to document women's oppression so that they may recognise exploitation when they experience it in their daily lives.

In order to understand women's oppression and subordination, feminist scholars developed the concept of patriarchy. Literally, the word means 'rule of the father', and can refer to the power of an individual man over a household, which might include one or several women, children, slaves or property, or even the extended family unit (Pateman, 1988); this is the classical definition of the term. However, Walby (1996, 1990) offered another definition, which is much more appealing to contemporary scholars. She states that "patriarchy is a system of social structures and practices, in which men dominate, oppress and exploit women". This means that patriarchy as a conceptual tool makes it possible to argue that domination of women by men is not a personal matter, but a structural problem.

Another contribution was made by a

Third World socialist feminist writer on patriarchy (Bahsin, 1993). The term was originally used more generally to refer to male domination; to power relationships by which men dominate women in different societies, regardless of the status, economic situation or class of women. Bahsin (1993) quoted from Sylvia Walby: "patriarchal control to women's lives exists in two areas, first women's productive labour force outside the house in their paid work and inside the household". Men control women's labour outside the home in several ways. They force them to sell their labour, or they may selectively allow them to work from time to time. In this case, women are excluded from better-paid jobs; they are forced to sell their labour at very low wages, or work within the home in what is called home production. Men also control women's reproductive power, as in deciding how many children they have, and when to have them, whether to use contraceptives or not, and what type to use.

According to Bahsin (1993), patriarchy also appears within areas like religion, depending on the interpretations made, and how the religion is practiced in real life. The legal system in many countries favours men; family laws also express this patriarchal control. Regarding the economic system and economic institutions, most property and direct economic activity, and those who determine the economic value of different productive activities are men. Most of the productive work done by women is neither recognised nor paid, and household work is not evaluated at all. The political systems and institutions are male-dominated (Bahsin, 1993).

This is the general situation of women in the context of developing countries, as Kamla Bahsin perceives it. Women who have succeeded in getting paid jobs are among the few lucky women who have succeeded in breaking a lot

of barriers to attain such status; redundancy ends or obstructs these success stories.

Mitchell (2003), a Marxist feminist, advocated the co-existence approach to patriarchy and capitalism, and argued that the association of women with the private, and men with the public had hardened into a truism and ideology. Men had been associated with workplace, politics and religion in their institutional forms, intellectual and cultural life in general, and the exercise of power and authority. Women were associated with the private, i.e. home, children and domestic life. The roles assigned to men were given greater significance and importance. The question within this study will be: after redundancy, did women return to their former private domain?

Feminists and the state

The state is an abstraction that refers to a set of relations, practices and institutions. A state is not monolithic, uniform or unitary. Each state consists of a variety of sites, institutions, operations and functions. States claim a monopoly on legitimate use of force, and the power to determine what force is legitimate. States have been described as protection rackets, assuming rights, control and reward for protecting citizens, while their own behaviour is often what most threatens those it supposedly protects (Pettman, 1989).

Feminists' analysis reveals that the state is in almost all cases male-dominated, and is in different ways a masculine construct. It is simply not possible to explain state power without explaining women's systematic exclusion from it. Different feminists deal with the state differently. Liberal feminists seek to end state-directed discrimination against women, and urge action for equal rights for women

through the state. Socialist feminists see the state as transmitting dominant class interests, as well as gender interests, and often race and ethnic interests too. While seeking state transformation, many also recognise the need to engage with the state in defence of women's practical gender interests. Radical feminists see the male state as part of the oppression faced by women. They are often unfriendly to any further interference of the state into women's lives, yet many also urge state action in defence of women's rights (Pettman, 1989).

State identification of women as mothers, and the provision of a particular kind of support to women in welfare states have been characterised as a shift from private to public patriarchy. Women in the UK and the US have been described as client citizens, in a dichotomy that sees men treated as workers and women as mothers, despite the large numbers of women who are both. In Scandinavian countries, women are construed more as citizen workers. Socialist states were committed to equality for women and men, and treated both as workers. Third World states have become increasingly centralised and bureaucratised since independence. In Third World countries, the state plays a major role in the formulation of social policies, development strategies, and legislation that shapes opportunities for women, such as family law, working mothers' legislation, and education, health and population, which certainly affects women's status and gender arrangements. Strong states with the capacity to enforce laws may undermine customary discrimination and patriarchal structures or, on the contrary, may reinforce them (Moghadam, 1993). The active role of some Third World governments in national development, and in sponsoring education and offering jobs in the expanding government sector,

mean that women no longer rely on a male guardian for their survival, but rather look to the state. Women face a lot of problems after the state deserts its responsibilities towards education and employing citizens. Most states still translate women's issues into welfare issues, and contain women in the category of a special-needs group, rather than analysing the gender impact of state policies, and the impact of gender power on people's lives.

Aside from the state having biases against women, there is also a male bias to be faced in the labour market. Macro-economic policies ignore the fact that some kinds of work are socially divided as women's or men's work, so changes in demand for labour will not result in a smooth reallocation of labour from one activity to another, according to the labour market mechanism in facing the barrier of the sexual division of labour (Elson, 1991a).

Women's secondary status in the labour market, as shown in the literature, is reflected in the lower pay of women compared with men doing the same jobs. Women also form a reserve army of labour, which is easily fired when firms want to cut back on their labour force, and easily re-hired when firms want to expand again. Women are never as free as men to work as labourers. This situation is understood to occur as a result of women's socially constructed roles in the family and society (Elson and Pearson, 1997). Issues investigated by this study include labour redundancy and its implications on women's employment, economic and social positions performed within a gender perspective in a society characterised by male dominance and institutionalised gender differences. This necessitates viewing feminists' ideas on work and debates on gender roles, and may help in developing a conceptual framework.

Women in the Sudanese context

This section provides an overview of women's position in the Sudanese labour market in the last two decades. This description is of the overall background employment context within which the study respondents worked and lived out their family lives. During the last two decades, women's participation in the labour force in the developed and developing countries has tended to follow changing patterns and trends accompanying the global economic restructuring, which has led to an increase in women's participation in the manufacturing sector (particularly, the export-led industries). However, with worsened work conditions and falling wages, a large number of women entered the informal sector (this sector also grew after the introduction of SAPs and privatisation), as documented by feminist researchers, such as Moghadam (1998), where Sudan was part of this global order. Although Sudanese women were increasingly taking up paid employment for quite a long time, this was characterised by 'four' key elements.

Firstly, women were more likely to be attached to the labour force in rural areas than urban areas. Women were employed in large numbers in comparison to men in the traditional/agriculture sector of the economy. Secondly, because of the male dominant culture in society and the labour market, women were generally employed in what had been defined as 'women's' jobs; this gave rise to what has been termed the horizontal segregation of the workforce. Thirdly, they were typically found in the lower grades of employment hierarchies, while men dominated the higher levels—also described as vertical segregation. Fourthly, the deterioration in economic conditions, rising poverty and the increased rates of unemployment forced a growing number of

women into the informal sector, as one of their strategies for survival.

The share of women in the labour force is considered to be a crude measure of their contribution to production. The percentages of women's share in the labour force went up from 22% in 1993 to 28% in 1996; although it is increasing, it is less than the average rate of increase in women's participation in the labour force in sub-Saharan African countries, which is estimated at 39%. Women's economic activities take three main forms of participation: the formal sector, the traditional (agricultural) sector, and the informal sector. The formal sector is divided into sub-sectors, which include the civil service, public sector enterprises and the private sector.

With respect to women in Sudan, they work in low-paid jobs with poor working conditions; 88% of working women are under the poverty line (Gender Indicators Survey, 2004). Moreover, poverty rates in Sudan rose to 49% of the population (National Population Census, 2008) with an increase in women-headed households to 25% in 2002, and increased to 73% in 2008 (National Population Census, 2008). Moreover, the informal sector has become feminised, as the number of female labourers in this sector reached 26.8% in 2008. In view of this situation, women are expected to be more vulnerable than men to the influence of privatisation, and are expected to have the same experiences as women in other developing countries.

In this respect Fatma (2011) investigates the role of women in achieving household food security in the Western Region of Sudan. This area has been affected by drought and civil conflicts. Her study is based on a quantitative survey and qualitative focus group discussions, supported by personal

observations made during fieldwork. Furthermore, the study draws upon secondary data that is publicly available. The results of this demonstrate that women play an important role in producing and providing food for their households in this high-risk climate and conflict area, whereas, men are more likely to migrate seasonally and disappear for long periods, or even permanently. In addition, women are responsible for food preparation, processing and food preservation and are wholly responsible for attending to household garden plots. They therefore contribute more to household food security than men, though this contribution is not recognised in official statistics.

In this respect, widespread privatisation drew the attention of scholars from different disciplines, who analysed and studied its various aspects. In addition, the increasing participation of women in all aspects of economic, social and political life has also led to growing attention from international and national institutions and agencies, as well as development researchers and gender scholars lobbying, working and producing research in order to achieve the ultimate goal of women's empowerment and gender equality. This long history of the women's movement and gender scholars moved the researcher to seek to make a modest contribution towards these cumulative efforts by studying the impact of state privatisation on women in the Sudanese context. This, together with the knowledge gap identified when reviewing the literature written about privatisation, especially at the national level, informed this study.

Specifically, the study of privatisation and its socio-economic impacts on women made redundant from banking and manufacturing sectors in Sudan leads to a revisit of the social mitigating programmes that should be in place

to reduce the negative shock caused by privatisation.

It should be recalled that the government followed privatisation and aimed to increase government revenue and the reduction of government expenditure by selling state-owned enterprises, attracting more domestic and foreign investors, thus reducing the balance of payment deficit, and providing more employment opportunities (Elbeely, 2011).

Some Sudanese economists (e.g. Awad, 2002, p.23) have argued that privatisation was not the best solution for Sudan's economic problems, while others have commented on the implementation process and the motives behind the use of privatisation policies. Awad (2002) argued that the "Sudanese economy is known as an agricultural economy where privatisation is more applicable to more industrialised or modernised economies". Others, like Suliman (2007), argued that: "Motives behind privatisation are complex and controversial, the ruling regime in Sudan expediently used privatisation of state-owned enterprises to acquire more economic and political power for its followers/affiliates".

Others regarded it as politically motivated, but at the international relations level; Elbeely (2011) "perceived that the government of Sudan has implemented privatisation to find acceptability in the eyes of international [sic] community". Meanwhile, Musa (2002) argued that: "the motives are merely economic ones but the implementation was really problematic".

While economists debate the suitability of privatisation given the nature of the Sudanese economy and the applicability of privatisation to economic structures, or the motives behind it, seeking an answer for these questions

has remained important. Regardless of whether the goals of this programme were primarily economic or political, what are the socio-economic impacts of privatisation on women made redundant from the public sector enterprises (i.e. banking and manufacturing)? It should be mentioned that the impact of privatisation on women in Sudan has not been researched before; this is why there is a paucity of information about it. This study has tackled the issue of privatisation and its impacts on women in Sudan, asking whether privatisation changes women's employment status, and how this in turn influences women's economic and social positions at family and societal levels. In the case of Sudan, surprisingly, very few studies of the privatisation experience have been carried out by international financial institutions, perhaps owing to the country's isolation during the early 1990s. It is worth mentioning that a number of theoretical studies were done on the economic effect of privatisation in Sudan (Awad, 2002; Abu Affan, 1992), together with other empirical research on the economic and management efficiency of privatisation in certain public sector enterprises, such as the Abuna'ama agricultural project, Sudanese Communication Company, SATA company, and Gezira agricultural scheme (Hamad 2001). Meanwhile, no empirical research has been done on the socio-economic consequences of privatisation in terms of total numbers of workers, lost income, and possibilities of re-employment for redundant employees. The bulk of studies on privatisation have concentrated on the impact of privatisation on the efficiency of the economy. This emphasis is understandable in view of the pressing need to sell privatisation as 'good' economics. The other side of the story, namely, the socio-economic consequences for redundant labour, were the least investigated aspects (Musa, 2002, p.9). As the socio-economic cost

of privatisation has not been given wide attention, the gender dimension of these policies has not been highlighted, or taken into account in any of the studies done by Sudanese researchers and economists.

The present privatisation policy in Sudan acted as a setback to so many efforts which attempted to liberate women, changing their social and economic status.

Women in the study have also been exposed to another complex situation, which is the restriction of their mobility. Women workers have mostly suffered from this problem due to their location in low-income families, living in poor neighbourhoods. Women are greatly affected due to the declining space within which women are able to manoeuvre, particularly as women's mobility is generally linked to family law and religious interpretations (Olmsted, 1999). These are patriarchal controls that aim to control and isolate women, as structured obstacles to gender equality and the ideology of separate spheres maintain patriarchal gender ideologies (Walby, 1996). This implies that ideological, as well as patriarchal control over women's lives appear again, but in different forms, as women are made redundant, and lose their source of social recognition and independence.

According to the patriarchal perception, male family members, brothers and fathers claim that they have authority to protect their sisters and daughters from the threats of the outside world. They perceive that women do not need to go outside the home, unless they have a genuine reason to do so. This practice is greatly relevant to working-class women, particularly the unmarried. These discussions explain a persistent patriarchal pattern that still prevails in Sudanese society, which

influences women's roles and positions within the household and at societal level as well. Privatisation has mainly been focused on fiscal and monetary terms, and neglected other social aspects of human life and well-being. The diminishing role of women's social networks has resulted from the situation of redundancy. Women have tended to lose one of their social treasures, which are the social relations with colleagues with whom they had established long-time relationships through the accumulating years of employment. Social capital theorists perceived social networks as a cause of empowerment for disadvantaged people, as they can improve their positions in society. Working women are most likely to be affected by the weakening of social relations, as it constitutes part of their social recognition, and improves their self-esteem. Consequently, the absence of these social relations is likely to have led to the social exclusion of women. Women professionals tended to compensate for the absence of social networks by getting involved in the community organisation activities. Women in this context resorted to this strategy as a coping mechanism to difficulties related to the new circumstances created by redundancy.

Discussion and Conclusion

Sudan, like many other African countries, suffered from chronic problems that hindered the process of economic growth; among these factors are political instability and the dominance of totalitarian regimes, along with the prolonged civil wars and internal conflicts, which have led to the backward situation in this country. On the other hand, women were part of this situation, as women's progress in the Sudanese context was faced with major constraints. The lack of access to social services, economic resources, in addition to the unequal participation in the labour market, especially at decision-making levels, left women in an inferior position in society. And that increased their vulnerabilities to the risks of implementation of privatisation policies, which were launched in the early 1990s.

The conceptual framework which governs the analysis of this study rests on feminists' premises of gender-based cultural, social and economic differences and gender inequalities. Males and females may both face the risks of structural adjustment and privatisation as part of the neo-liberal economy, which represents the new capitalist order spread all over the globe. However, women may also be faced with gender inequalities in the labour market, and may be challenged with institutionalised patriarchy in the family, society, and above all at state level.

Finally, the impact of privatisation on women in Sudan has not been researched before; this is why there is a paucity of information about it. This study has tackled the issue of privatisation and its impacts on women in Sudan, asking whether privatisation changes women's employment status, and how this in turn influences women's economic and social positions at family and societal levels.

The debate, in itself, is not the whole reason for this study to examine the impact of privatisation closely; the literature reviewed has demonstrated a gap in our knowledge, as the gender perspective has always been absent when privatisation is studied, especially at the national level, and to some extent at the regional and international levels. This is despite the fact that the issue of integrating women in development has emerged as a central concern for development and gender scholars, and has been envisaged as a prerequisite of ensuring social justice and equity. In the last twenty years, and in response to the demands of women's movements and the UN mandate, national governments and international development agencies have adopted special policy measures to promote women's advancement.

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