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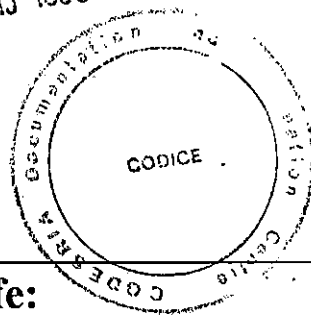
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**Women in public life: the experience of al-akhwat al
muslimat (muslim sisters) case from Sudan**

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**Women in Public Life:
The Experience of *Al-Akhwat
al-Muslimat* (Muslim Sisters)
A case from Sudan**

By
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A Thesis Submitted for M.Sc Degree (Political Science)

**Department of Political Science
Faculty of Economic and Social Studies
University of Khartoum
Aug.1996**

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DEDICATION

***TO MY FATHER,
who always gives and never complains.....***

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Abstract

This research deals with *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* (Muslim Sisters), a group that was organized by the Islamist movement in the Sudan, to encounter among other things, the communist influence among the Sudanese women's associations. The study attempted to draw attention to on-going debates on the participation of Muslim women in public life, why Sudanese women were secluded from public life; and why the Islamist movement's attitude towards participation of Sudanese women in public life changes from conventional, retractive perspective to a liberal one. Data for this research was collected through different methods. Personal interviews, life histories and archival records were the main sources of information. Interviews with key informants from *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* had been helpful on the early history of their movement. In order to verify the accuracy of information which was provided by *al-Akhwat*, interviews with samples outside the movement was, also, used.

To reflect the perspective of *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat*, purposive samples were chosen from those Muslim Sisters who hold leading position on institutions or organizations. The analysis of the data rested on cross-checking the various views of the interviewees and then conclusion was drawn.

Integrating the concept of Patriarchal Islam with other concepts helped to furnish a framework of analysis that proved to be useful in interpreting the data on the history and politics of *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat*. An important conclusion is drawn from the study is that *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* as Islamic activists developed their own perspectives on their participation in public life which varies more or less from one generation to another. Their perspectives reflect *al-Akhwat* pragmatism and tendency to encourage a more or less gender-sensitive interpretation of Islam.

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Chapter One

INTRODUCTION

The ideological and political dimensions of the role of Muslim women in public life formed an important area for research in the Islamic World only recently, namely after evolution of western and leftist feminist movements that called for women liberation. Many social, political and economic changes helped in enriching the debate on women's question. However, in the Arab World (Egypt) the debate on women's question emerged earlier in late nineteenth century and since then it has been dominated by the conservatives and modernists thinking, the latter includes both Islamists and secular brand of thought. Sudan is not an exception, questions and debates over women's participation in public life were raised during the nationalists struggle against colonialism. Later, the emergence of Muslim Sisters' movement reflected the concern of Islamists with women's question, at least with intention of not being left behind.

1.1. Research Problem:

Women and politics have been defined by Vicky Randall, as mutually exclusive events occupying different spheres. Politics is understood as a public activity controlled by men an activity which is broad and expansive while women are identified with the private world of the family and domestic life which is narrow and restricted. In Europe, this point of view was challenged by the feminist movement which argued against exclusion of women from public life. The Feminists rationalized the above exclusion as follows: it is not in the

interest of men to increase women's autonomy, as it threatens them by increasing competition and decline the support and services expected from women in their families.

The situation is different in Muslim society in general, and in Sudan in particular where the question of women's participation in public life, specifically the political life wavers between two point of views. The first one is adopted by the traditional Islamic school such as *Ansar al-Sunna* which confines the life of Muslim women in society to domestic roles. The advocates of this group derives their argument from Quranic verses and Hadith (prophet's saying) such as:

Allah states" *And stay quietly in your houses and make not a dazzling display like that of the former times of ignorance*" al-Ahzab:33.

The prophet (pbuh): " *Those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity* ."

The second view is adopted by Islamic modernist school represented here the National Islamic Front (NIF). The advocates of NIF called for women's liberation and emphasized the importance of their incorporation in public life. Their arguments in this respect are that a woman who was isolated from the public life would not raise a child that would be beneficial for his society. Here al-Turabi, the political and intellectual leader of the NIF, explained that if the movement had stagnated on women's issue at the stage of *Al-figh Al-Aatizari* (apologetic legislation), this would have given their opponents (the leftists and secularists) the chance to accommodate and win the support of Muslim women .

In response to the arguments of the latter school there emerged a group called *Harakat al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* (Muslim Sisters Movement), as an active group in

Sudanese public life. The significance of studying and investigating the activities of this group stems from the debates over the participation of Muslim women in public domain. Therefore in order to carry this study, certain questions were raised such as: On what ground did the NIF advocates build up their claim for participation of women in public life and to what extent were they able to achieve this purpose?; Did NIF's attitude towards women change through time and as circumstances demand, or once it was established, it did not change ?; Did the NIF's advocates tend to revise their attitudes towards women lest that the other competitors (the communists) may attract the Muslim women ?; Did NIF's advocates push *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* into public life, and only later search for Islamic provisions which support their attitudes ?; Choosing samples from *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* the study attempts to investigate , how do they view their enrolment into public life ?; Did they produce and present a basis for a new role for Muslim women ?; And finally did they hold attitudes and perspectives towards women's question that were different from one generation to another?

1.2. The Hypothesis of the Study:

The study intended to investigate the following propositions: (a) the National Islamic Front adopts a pragmatic attitude towards the enrolment of Muslim women in public life. (b) The National Islamic Front adopts attitudes towards women's participation in public life differ from that provoked by conservative Islamists (Ansar al-Sunna). (c) *Al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* attitudes differ from one generation to another. Then (d) The Present

generation of *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* consciously or unconsciously adopts feminist perspective that attempts to develop a "liberation theology" in Islam in favour of women.

1.3 The objective of the study:

The study aims firstly at examining and evaluating the role of *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* in public life. Secondly to contribute to the debate in this area, taking into consideration the fact that this field has not yet been a subject of any empirical and sociological research . Thirdly, to explore the perspective of modern Islamists concerning the women's question by undertaking an indepth research in the history and politics of *Harakat al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* in Sudan.

1.4 Fieldwork Experience: Methodology and limitations

A number of research methods were used in order to collect the relevant data for verification of the research hypothesis. These triangular methods encompassed fieldwork, interviews and archival work. Fieldwork roles vary according to the degree of the researcher's involvement in the situation. There are two types of fieldwork one is pure or complete observation, the other is pure or complete participation. In between there are observant-as-participant (interview situation), and participant-as-observer (fieldwork situation).

Therefore, the researcher has chosen to be observant-as- participant since she conducted personal interviews with 14 persons who are members in *Harakat al-Akhwat al-Muslimat*. Those members do not constitute a random sample as they represent the most

active members who have been playing an important role in the establishment and the activities of al-Akhwat Movement.

This method is similar to **purposive samples** in which the data is obtained from preselected individuals or group or organization; and the skill and judgement of selectors is deliberately utilized.

The researcher has, also, opted to use life histories technique, because it involves obtaining information about change over time directly from respondents. Here non-directive interviews were carried out because the researcher, first needed to get information about *al-Akhwat's* movement through life biographies and second she would like to reflect the experience of the respondents.

Key informants had been a very important source of information on the early history of the movement. Those key informants were from *al-Akhwat's* pioneers. The researcher also relied on interviewed samples outside the movement who was coeval to the key informants so as to verify the accuracy of information. Also any information offered by a respondent which was contradicted by another respondent was discarded. Thus the researcher retained for analysis only these information which are consistent and reliable.

Purposive samples were classified by the researcher into generations in order to reflect their own point of views. Generations were classified according to the affiliation of the samples to the movement. Here structured interview was adopted by the researcher because, through standardization, it permitted her to compare between different generation and it, also, facilitated analysis of change within these generation overtime.

From my experience some interviewed samples were reactive in their responses because they were aware that the researcher is an outsider (i.e not a member of the movement) and they suspected that she might be a communist or a spy, some told her that they would never release any information before looking at her study's proposal and inquiring about her supervisor. Another respondent threatened the researcher that she would sue her if the researcher misinformed her responses.

However the researcher's experience proved that this situation have a bit changed after many informal visits and talks conducted with the samples. In each visit I used to explain that I have no political affiliation and I am only a research student who is interested in their experience as they reflect it. Sometimes I attended conferences and workshops in which *Al-akhwat* participated . These informal contact with interviewed samples helped me firstly to conduct my interviews with samples at ease and with some confidence; secondly to generalize and draw some observations regarding the behaviour and attitudes of the respondents across generations.

But my involvement with *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* so as to get their confidence and then the information have led to the problem of identifying my own political stand. This was when I was identified by other as *Akhut Muslima* (a Muslim Sister), still other were suspicious, while some Muslim sisters thought that I could be recruited by them as a new cadre for the movement.

Towards the end of the fieldwork, I conducted an interview with al-Turabi the leader of the dissolved National Islamic Front. The objective of this interview was to

investigate whether al-Turabi's perspective towards Muslim women's questions was similar to that of the present generation of *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat*.

The other sources of information used were Archives, published and unpublished materials. But I have found difficulties in obtaining some documents concerning the activities of *Harakat al-Akhwat* so I had to depend partially on information provided by the interviewed samples.

Apart from these difficulties the research turned to be fruitful at the end. It materialized the researcher's dream of stimulating discussion on Muslim women's question to which a wide circle of men and women were attracted. This has been manifested when the researcher held round table discussion and seminar at Friedrich Ebert Foundation under the title of "Woman and Islam" which was attended by many women and men who were interested in the issue. However, despite the difficulties I met while conducting my study, I believe that I was able to assemble sufficient and relevant data.

1.5. Structure of the Study:

The general theme of this study is to research on Sudanese women's movement with special reference to *Harakat al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* (Muslim sisters movement). The study rely on *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* as a source of information since there is few literature on this area. Also the study attempts to find answers for such inquiries: how do *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* view themselves and their involvement in public life, how do they reflect their experience within engendered-structure Sudanese society? and do they hold the same

attitudes towards women's participation in public life? Therefore the study developed logically to find out answers to these questions.

Chapter Two considers the Western feminists and Islamists perspectives on the participation of women in public life. Examining the Western Feminist perspective, this chapter discussed the arguments of the Marxist, radical, liberal and postmodern feminism. While Islamists perspective is reflected by the conservative Islamist, who argue against women's participation in public life using al-Hadith and Qura'n to support their arguments. Liberal group used the same tools (Qura'n and Hadith) to adhere the participation of Muslim women in public life. Another group developed a radical interpretation within these tools. They even, call for gender-sensitive perspectives within Qura'n and Hadith. However this chapter concluded that Muslim women's question should be discussed within the context of Islamic tradition that pertains a patriarchal interpretation and thereby strategy for Muslim women's emancipation should be addressed through such Islamic tradition.

Chapter Three examines the status of Sudanese women within a patriarchal structured society, how it developed through different eras and how women organized themselves into associations, and what are the main gains had been achieved by those women's organizations. This historical review is significant since *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* had contributed indirectly to the Sudanese women's movement through their participation in the activities of some Sudanese women's associations or directly through establishing their own organizations such as National Women's Front.

Chapter Four deals with *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* 's movement, and gives a rigorous account of the history of this movement. It highlights the development of this movement

through different eras with reference to the changes in the attitudes of Sudanese Islamist movement towards the participation of *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* into public life.

Chapter Five aims to investigate, through purposive samples, the attitudes of *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* towards their involvement in public life. The study infers that *al-Akhwat's* attitudes are not identical since some hold conservative perspectives, others adopt either liberal or radical ones. This chapter suggests that these variations in the attitudes might be attributed to two variables: time factor i.e. generational factor, and differences in personal characteristics.

However, the study concludes that the development in the attitude of Islamist movement and likewise *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* towards women's participation in public life stems first from a pragmatic attitude then the attempts to develop authentic and gender-sensitive movement within the Islamic tradition that support this participation, were sought.

Chapter Two

Women in Public Life: Western Feminist and Islamist Perspectives

Generally politics is understood as abroad, expansive, public activity associated with men while women are identified with private world of the family and domestic life which is narrow and restricted¹. Other argued that women know less about politics, less interested and less psychologically involved in it than men, given that there are so few women in decision making positions. But what reasons behind this situation of public, private sphere; The feminists attempt to find out these reasons and bring out alternative suggestions to eliminate this dichotomy.

The term "Feminist" refers to those women who support efforts to ameliorate the conditions of women through publicly organized activity to achieve reforms of the political, economic and social institutions which discriminated against women. This chapter is intended to discuss the western feminist perspective and Islamist perspective on women's participation in public life so as to reach a sound theoretical framework within which one can tackle the question of muslim women.

2.1. Western Feminist Perspectives

Feminist writings are found at least as far back as medieval France and seventeenth century England. But feminism as a self-conscious movement with some elements of organization emerged in 1840s in U.S and Britain. It was 1960s that witnessed a dramatic revival of more militant feminist. Chronologically this began in America in the Mid-1960s.

This era witnessed the emergence of marxist, radical and liberal feminist while the 1980s witnessed the emergence of postmodern feminism.

2.1.1 Marxist Feminism:

Marxist feminism has started from marxist premises and sought to identify private property as a cause of women oppression. This group argued that with the rise of private property societies encountered strict division of labour whereby women are relegated to house-work. To destroy this sexual division of labour, they continued, women should participate in labour force because through this participation in the labour force they would become economically independent and would participate with their comrades to bring about the proletarian revolution. They argued that under socialism housework would be collectivized and women would be released from their double burden i.e. housework and public work.²

Marxist approach has been criticized because it failed to focus on the social differences between women and men under capitalism i.e. gender differential. Also Marxists related women's liberation to their participation in factory work. However, by the mid 1970s Marxist Feminism approach appeared to be losing ground to radical feminism within the movement, though Marxists Feminists continued to produce much of the best theoretical analysis.

2.1.2 Radical Feminism :

Radical Feminism is defined by its insistence that sex is the fundamental division in society to which all other differences such as social class or race are merely secondary.

The early radical feminist like Millet rejects biological explanation for male dominance. She argues that there is insufficient evidence that women's oppression originated in biology, "biological differences between the two sexes are probably irrelevant to male dominance today and that to emphasize them is to play into men's hand"³, she argued. Some African and Asian societies provide sufficient evidence that no exclusively female role, and biological characteristic do not bar women from particular jobs.

But other radical feminists accord biology much weight. A pioneering analysis that locates male dominance in biological differences between men and women is provided by Shulamith Firestone in "**The Dialectic of Sex**". Applying an analytical method, dialectical materialism, Firestone elaborates a materialist theory of history based on relations not of production but of reproduction. In fact she argues that women have been made dependent upon their men folk through their biological vulnerability associated with menstruation, the menopause and other "Female ills", constant painful childbirth, and care of infant. Then, since human infant takes so long to grow up, their dependence upon adults is prolonged. In particular there develops an intense mother-child interdependency, which in turn helps to shape female psychology and finally these reproductive differences have underlain the sexual division of labour and power.⁴ Now although man is increasingly capable of freeing himself from biological conditions that created tyranny over women and children as its beneficiary "he has little reason to want give this Tyranny up."⁵ Radical feminists like Firestone and De Bouvior call for technological solutions to reproduction so that the very roots of biological differences might be negated.⁶

However, Firestone does not conclude either that men are superior or that male dominance is inevitable or right. On the contrary she approvingly quotes De Beauvoir as saying "Human society is antiphysis- in a sense it is against nature; it does not passively submit to the presence of nature but rather takes over the control of nature on its own behalf."⁷

Radical feminists had been criticized on the ground that there was some doubt about whether physical or social factors that might best explain the differences between sexes.

Also radical feminists their political strategy towards emancipation (i.e. their insistence on a separate sexuality and pro-women orientation), have led some women to concentrate on creating their own subculture or space whether in terms of life style or theoretical inquiry.⁸

2.1.3 Liberal Feminism:

In the United States, there emerged the "Capital and Patriarchy" school whose work is best represented by Heidi Hartman's "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism" (1981). This school focuses on dualism starting from the point that Marxism is sufficient for analysing production, but unable to explain women's problem within the capitalist labour process. According to Hartman both Capitalism and Patriarchy interact together to create a "vicious circle" in which women are trapped. Therefore, mere understanding of new existing relations between patriarchy and capitalism is needed. The advocates of this school criticize the radical feminists for being Isolationist in treating women's problem separate from socio-economic, political and historical context in which

they exist. The Capital and Patriarchy school, though having criticized the radical Feminists for bringing out these dichotomies, themselves fell into the same trap by bringing another dichotomy, namely that of Patriarchy and Capital.

In opposition to above mentioned school emerged the school of Gender Subordination. The core work of this school is identified in the introduction of the book edited by Kate Young, entitled **"Of Marriage and the Market"** (1979). The main argument presented in this book states that the economic categories of Marxism are inadequate to explain the different forms of oppression including gender relations.

Advocates of this school maintain that the relationship between men and women in the society is socially not biologically determined and therefore is subject to change. The social relations of gender or "gender relations" as they put it emerged in a definite historical context and should be studied within that context. They criticize the term patriarchy for being static and biologically determined. This school differs from other schools in the use of the term "gender" as opposed to "sex". In this sense gender refers to social relations that determine the relations between sexes. In other words, women problem is not seen through the struggle between men and women as separate categories, but through the "engendered structures" of masculinity and femineity which have nothing to do with biological differences between men and women.

Another important differences stressed by this school is their use of the term "subordination" instead of "exploitation" to refer to women's situation in the society. They see the word "exploitation" as suitable term in the capitalist relations of production.

The main critique against this school is that in their escape from discussing the question of biology they had come across the question of women's control of their bodies and their sexuality, what they called "Body Politics". Also in their attempt to escape the questions of nature they ignore the question of the origin of women's subordination which is the main concern of the women's movement.

It is worth noting, also, to mention the role of "Socialization" in the continuation of division of labour. Indeed, since children spend more time with their mothers than their fathers, the ironic fact may be that mothers are the single most powerful agents of their daughters acquisition of gender. In this respect Vicky Randall poses a question: Is Socialization the main explanation for male dominance and then for division of labour? She explains that though women are socially oppressed but they are not necessarily irrational to this situation. To quote her words she argues:

*"Many women staunchly Champion the family and their children and their traditional role within it, because these form the context of their painstaking acquired skills, power and self-esteem. To enter masculine's world is to risk losing these hard earned benefits without guarantee of compensating status or success in the other World's term."*¹⁹

In modern societies a second important socialization agent is school education. Numerous studies document the sexism inherent in educational policy, the range of subjects open to girls and the content of text books. As an example I have come across some lessons in the preliminary school, Six grade's text book, which is still being studied in school since 1972. These lessons manifested a unibolar discourse that emphasized, the importance of work to man and hence related the work to the manhood. Also a reader text book

stressed a division of labour as it defined women's role as a house keeper and a man as a breadwinner. A good example can be exerted from the below text:

"Mother is a housekeeper, she is able to spread love among family's individuals because of her good manner and perception; and as the man (the father) works the whole day at his office or on the market, the woman (the mother) is a good housekeeper who knows well how to treat her husband and to look after her children."¹⁰

However, these features of official and "hidden" curricula independently affect pupils' gender identity.

2.1.4. Postmodernism and Feminism:

Feminist movement during the 1980s has been influenced by Postmodernist thoughts. By Postmodernists we refer to those who see the postmodern world as too global yet fractured, too diverse and mobile, its technology too inconceivable, for grand explanatory schema or "cognitive mapping". They believe that postmodern can no longer support the meta theories (Patriarchy), group identities ("all women" versus "all men") and visions (women's liberation) that would sustain an emancipatory politics or grand narrative.¹¹

Postmodernism raises certain questions regarding Feminism such as: Whether Feminism as it has understood itself within modernity can survive and if not, whether a politics that is either specific to (some) women or one that would benefit women disproportionately, can yet be constructed.

But there is a need for Feminist Social theory within postmodernity. Responding to this need, Nancy Fraser and Linda Nicholson have suggested that a postmodern feminist

theory might be explicitly historical, attuned to cultural specificity of different periods and societies and sub-groups within them. It would be comparative not universalizing. Instead of a subject of history and unitary notions of women and feminine gender identity, it would speak of plural, complex, constructed social identities, where race, class, age and so on would also be significant. It also would present itself as pragmatic and fallible.¹²

According to Diana Coole, to insist on equality is, then, to acknowledge differences, to ask about the relative weighting of the two and to specify which differences are significant and when. For egalitarians difference is an avoidable question, e.g. women have found that certain kinds of legislation specific to them, such as maternity leave can not be couched in gender-neutral terms; that in these cases women's difference is relevant and treating every one the same yields unequal or absurd results. Furthermore, Coole argued, because women have largely failed to insist on an aggregate gender-specific interest, in order to pursue their political representation, political debates are still fought out according to quite other kinds of discourse (left/right) in which gender divisions are marginalized.¹³

Iris Marion Young is, also, more sympathetic to postmodernism approach. In her book "**Justice and Politics of Difference**" (1990), she advises a politics of difference, where group identities and perspectives might be positively affirmed against the imperialism of privileged centre (the familiar white, western, heterosexual, men of reasons, etc). She criticizes binary difference. To counteract the cultural imperialism- which relies on oppressive, binary difference- Young proposes a variety of strategies: First, a cultural revolution whereby identities are constructed and affirmed by different groups and where consciousness-raising, coupled with an appreciation of our own inner strangeness, make us

more open, less paranoid. Second, a political solution: a public voice for differences in a sort of radically democratic renegotiation of the social contract, i.e. "Heterogenous public, in which persons stand forth with their differences acknowledged and respected, though perhaps not completely understood by others."¹⁴

commenting on Postmodern Feminists, Coole stated that, postmodern strategies can not be adequate alone for Feminists because these strategies lack a direct way, or explicit discourse, for intervening in political or economic inequalities at the level of rights or resources. For postmodernists empowerment means little without an accompany of material one and their understandings of powers (with exception of Foucault) remains too abstract and idealist.¹⁵

However, the question of politics as a power has not deeply been questioned by the western feminists except the radical ones. They recognized politics as an important issue for feminism and stimulated new thinking about it within the wider women's movement. Radical feminism rejects the definition of politics as "an activity". The pioneer in this respect was Kate Millet. In her book "**Sexual politics**"(1972) , she refers to politics as "power structured relationships, arrangements whereby, one group of persons is controlled by another."¹⁶ M. Stacey, also, argues that the question of women and power can not be addressed from the public domain alone; it is a question of the relationship of that domain and private domain of family between which for many years men were the mediators.¹⁷ She explained, in the first phase feminists had to fight for political rights and legal reforms through men for they had no public position of their own. Apart from the family, they had no power bases from which to proceed in their attempt to enter the public domain. But

when they called for right of suffragist, Stacey continued, they assured that women should be treated as individuals, and have similar rights as the men. In this respect Rowbotham argues "if women could vote they could change man-made laws".¹⁸

To conclude the strategy of empowerment, suggested by radical feminists, asserts that women's lack of power is the reason behind the roles they play, the exploitation they face and the low status they have. So I do agree with the radical feminists that women empowerment should be addressed through change of laws which are patriarchally defined.

2.2. Islamist Perspectives:

The Islamist perspective pertain those groups who use Islamic tradition such as Qura'n, Ahdith (the prophet's saying) and *al-Seerat al-Nabawyia* (the practice current in the prophet's own time) as a main source of their arguments and legislation. The advocates of this perspective- as activists- began to work at discovering legal solution (*Ijtihad*) to Muslim women's question. *Ijtihad* was a cause for expanding legal provisions to compromise new cases as well as strong factor in the development of Islamic jurisprudence according to the needs of different countries and the condition of changing times.¹⁹

However, various writings of Islamist thinkers on women's question have produced rich records albeit with tensions and contradictions in their perspective on muslim women. Each thinker or work differs partially or completely from others. Differences have been reflected either in their discourse and/or on their interpretation. According to their stand on the question of women and women emancipation I have divided these perspectives into, conservative, liberal and radical ones.

2.2.1. Conservative Islamist perspective:

This perspective is held by those who are against women's participation in public life. Their arguments are as follows: firstly they advocate men guardianship over women under what is known *al-Qawwama* thesis. Linguistically, the word *qawwamun* comes from *qawwama*, means "breadwinners" or "those who provide a means of support or livelihood". But the advocates of this perspective cited surah An-Nissa:34, and surah: Al-Baqarah:228, to support the contention that women are not equal to men and men have a "degree of advantage" over women. For example let's examine Abu al-a' al Maududi translation of Arabic text of surah An-Nissa:34.

*"Men are the managers of the Affairs of women because Allah has made the one superior to the other and because men spend their wealth on women. Virtuous women are, therefore obedient; they guard their absence under the care and watch of Allah. As for those women whose defiance you have cause to fear, admonish them and keep them from your beds and beat them then, if they submit to you, do not look for excuses to punish them: note it well that there is Allah, above you, who is Supreme and Great."*²⁰

In fact the translation of al-Maududi of *al-rijal- O qawwamun- a 'ala an-nissa-* that men are "managers" of women's affairs- and has a right to rule over them and beat them, Riffat Hassan²¹ argues, ends any attempt to discuss the issue of women equality with men in the Islamic Umma.

Superiority of men over women was, also, discussed by al-Imam al-Razi, to quote his words "Superiority among human beings determined by two things: Knowledge and ability".²² After carrying out many researches, he argued, we found that men are much

knowledgable than women for he derived this knowledge either through power or through action.

The second argument based on the verse of "Women should stay at home", Surah al-Ahzab:33 al-Sharawi like al-Maududi believes that women's place is at home. She might get outside only if there is an urgent necessity. Al-Sharawi²³ has restricted this necessity to the conditions which have been stated, according to him, on al-Qasus:verse 23. These conditions are: first, women can go outside home to work if there is no male prop in the family ;second women should not compete with men in their work and finally the society should help women that have been forced to go out to work so as to be able to return soon to their home, their natural place.

The third argument was derived from the two Hadiths: The prophet (Pbuh) said "Those who entrust their affairs to women will never know prosperity"; Also he said "If your Amara (Princes) are the evils and your rich men are the misers, and your public affairs are delegated to women, hence it is better for you to be inside the earth than on its surfaces."²⁴

The fourth argument based on the biological differences. The advocates of this perspective like radical feminists gave the biological differences a great weight. The reproductive role, they argue makes women vulnerable to certain problems associated with menstruation, the menopause and other "female ills", constant painful childbirth, well nursing and care of infant. This biological vulnerability and motherhood role, the conservative continued, weakened women's mental power (her rationality) and became more emotional and therefore less determinant in decisions.

Accordingly, this group argued, if natural differences affected her rationality therefore this woman, by definition, should be excluded from what is related to politics. The head of the Muslim State (*al-Khalifa*) is not merely figure head. He leads people in the prayers, especially on Fridays and Festivities; he is continuously engaged in the process of decision making pertaining to security and well being of his people. These duties are inconsistent with physiological and psychological make up of the women.²⁵

An other advocate of this perspective is Sa'id al-Afghani, who spent ten years on research on A'isah (the prophet's wife) in order, according to him, to clarify for Muslims a question that has become pressing since modernization; the relationship of women and politics. His conclusion, however, is that it is absolutely necessary to keep women out of politics. His argument in this is that A'isha in the battle of Camel proves that "women was not created poking her nose into politics"²⁶. According to him the blood of the Muslims was split, all because of A'isha's intervention into politics. He further argues, Allah wanted to use the experience of Aisha to teach the Muslims that the role of women in society is restricted to reproduce children and bring up future generations, and be in charge of households. Allah wanted to teach us a practical lesson that we can not forget, al-Faghni emphasized.²⁷

Here, al-Afaghani exaggerated the results of the Battle of Camel while he ignored intentionally the consequences of Battle of *al-Safyeen* (between Maawia and Ali) in which about 70,000 Muslim men were killed; and the real split among Muslims into *ahl Shaa'ia* and *Ahl al-Sunna* was happened.

It is important to mention that a conservative thinker like al-Sharawi²⁸ differentiates between the term "gender" and "sex". He states that if women's role in society is to be understood, it must be done on the basis of gender and sex. After he reads surah al-Tahreem:10-11, An-Nissa:32, al-Room:21 and Taha:117, he comes to a conclusion that, as sex woman must be viewed as human element that has equal opportunity in life with men in belief aspect; where as gender she is physically different from man and therefore men are preferred to women. In gender sense, he continued, each person has his own sphere of action in which he is always successful women are better than men in the sphere of pregnancy and child delivery and child rearing i.e. reproductive role; while men are better than women in performing difficult jobs that require physical strength.

Hence the division of labour, in case of muslim women, is emphasized through the foregoing quara'nic interpretation which relegated Muslim women role only to reproductive one.

2.2.2. Liberal Islamist Perspective:

This perspective is based on the argument that firstly, the Qura'n states the absolute guardianship (Welaia) for both men and women. They derived this understanding from the Quranic verse:

"And the believers, men and women, are allies, of each other, enjoying the right and forbidding the wrong, establishing prayer, giving alms and obeying God and his messenger. As for these God will have mercy on them, God is Mighty and Wise". Tawba:71).

According to this group, this verse states two principles of Welaia: one is the cooperation of men and women to promote Fraternity, friendship and goodness; and the other to

discourage doing evil things i.e *al-Amr bil al-Maaroof wa al-Nahi un al-Munkr*. The latter principle includes social, and political reforms. In this respect M. Qutb (an Egyptian Muslim Brother) explained that during the early Islamic era the political right was not known and those who permitted the political participation of Muslim women provided this right within the concept of *al-Welaia* which is mentioned in surah al-Tawba:71.²⁹

Secondly, with regard to *al-Qawwama* verse, this group argues that man has been preferred to women for biological differences and economic reasons but this did not necessarily mean that women should be oppressed and deprived of political rights. The right to vote- they argue- means that one should select representatives in legislative and judiciary powers. Women in Islam are not deprived from delegating this power to others. In respect to legislative power, legislation, according to this group, necessitates education and knowledge; and since Islam does not deprive women from education's right, therefore women should have an access to legislative power.³⁰

Among the most influential thinkers on reforms with respect to women was Mohammed Abdu. Like his teacher Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, he argued for acquisition of "modern" science and for modernization so as to reform intellectual and social fields for elevation of women's status; and he emphasized the need to throw off ignorance and misinterpretations of Islam. Abdu argued that the Quranic verse on the equal rewards of labour showed that "men and women are equal before God in the matter of rewards, when they are equal in their works..., there is therefore no difference between them in regard to humanity, and no superiority of one over the other in works."³¹ The regulation affecting women, Abdu argued, such as those concerning polygamy and divorce, like often backward

and degraded custom has its source not in Islam but in misinterpretation of Islam. Polygamy for example was only permitted "because of the conditions of the day, although monogamy was clearly Qura'nic ideal."³² However, Abdu called for legal and political reforms so as to promote the role of women in society.

Another prominent Islamic reformist is H. Abd allah al-Turabi. He is, also, influenced by modernism. He claims that a revolution against the condition of women in traditional Muslim societies is inevitable; and this revolution is better to be carried out by Islamists lest that the advocates of westernization take the initiative and deform the Islamic traditions.

al-Turabi attributed the present situation of Muslim women to firstly: weak commitment to religion tends to cultivate unjust and hostile treatment of women. Performance of the natural function keeps her away from the toughening experience of every day public life, hence man uncultured by religion, tends to oppress her. Secondly: male jealousy is another aspect; men use that fantasy as an excuse to ban women from active participation in public life and deprive them of experience and training—thereby "devaluing and debasing them in fact, and finding reason for further ill-treatment and prejudice."³³ Thirdly *sa'ad al-zara'ia* (i.e the juristic principle that means and preliminaries assume the value of their ends and results)³⁴ is the most popular antifeminist argument raised by conservative Islamists. They argue that the freedom of women would degenerate into licentious promiscuity.³⁵ In contrast al-Turabi argues in the absence of an express provision, the proper jurisprudential judgement is not *sa'ad al-zara'ia* but it is to balance in consideration the risks of temptation with positive merits of the integration of men and women in Muslim society. Finally al-

protect a women from temptation, but essentially deprives her the benefits of the communal life of Muslims. It denies and abrogates her legitimate role in the social process of cooperation in the promotion of knowledge and good work, in the mutual counselling of Muslims to do all that is beneficial and avoid all that is objectionable, in their solidarity for maintenance of their wellbeing and defence of their establishment.³⁷

The advocates of this perspective were compelled to liberate their attitudes towards Muslim women because Islam was accused (by some) of harbouring reactionary views which devalued the status of women. Therefore, affecting with their western cultural and educational background, this group embarks the foregoing reading of Islamic Tradition with regards to Muslim women's question. Yet they haven't carried out feminist reading within Qura'n and Hadith as has been done by the coming radical perspective.

2.2.3. Radical Islamist Perspective:

This perspective in muslim world might be classified under different currents. First there are those feminists who called on women to re-read and re-interpret Islamic tradition mainly the Qura'n and Hadith, searching for Islamic rights in favour of women that have been violated by the male interpretation. They establish the basis for a women's liberation movement rooted in religion, while maintaining links with women from other religions, in the hope of developing a liberation theology in Islam. Marie Aime'e and Helie Lucas gave the term "internationalist" to those feminists. By "internationalist" they mean "feminist who deliberately seek information and alliance beyond the frontiers of race, nation and religions."³⁸

Taking example of this category the writings of Riffat Hassan, a Pakistani feminist theologian, stress that the verses most often used against women are either remnants of anti-discriminatory practices, or erroneous interpretations which should be criticized from historical point of view.³⁹ For her and Fatima Mernissi (a Moroccan feminist) feminists should learn the holy texts and their interpretation so that they could re-establish the "truth of revealed texts", while denouncing the human and historical inputs.⁴⁰

Riffat Hassan has some contribution in this, she believes that Muslim women's life and their participation in public life are affected by the belief that derived from Qura'nic verse such as women are not equal to men "*al-Qawwama* " or men are "above" women or have a "degree of advantage" over them. She interpreted the "degree of advantage" men have over women in Surah Al-Bagarah:228 as follows:

"The "advantage" that men have over women in this context is that women must observe a three-month period called Iddat before remarriage, but men are exempted from this requirement. The main reason why women are subjected to this restriction is because at the time of divorce a women may be pregnant and this fact may not be known for sometime. As men can not become pregnant, they are allowed to remarry without a waiting period."⁴¹

In this context Riffat Hassan attempts to develop gender-sensitive interpretation within Qura'n different from that raised by conservative Islamists who view a degree of advantage as an implication of superiority of men over women . While Riffat confines this advantage to the term of transition (*Iddat*) which applies upon women for biological reason but this does not necessitate that men are superior to women.

Also Mernissi has her own contribution for example she argues that the Hadith "**those who entrusted their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity**" is sledge

hammer argument used by those who want to exclude women from politics. She argued further that Abu Bakara who mentioned this Hadith (*al-Raa'wi*), had firstly mentioned it when he opted for non-participation in the Battle of Camel.⁴² Abd al-Hameed al Shwarbi, also, argued that this Hadith is considered as one of *A Hadith al-Ahad* (those were mentioned by one person or Rawii) which might be doubtful. Therefore, he argued, we could not consider them as a reference or recourse to them in constitutional law.⁴³

An other contributor to this debate is Sheikh Mohamed al-Ghazali. He states the Qura'n is superior to Hadith, therefore any contradiction between the two is resolved by giving the upper hand to Divine. He cuts down any debate over women's right to hold public office, when he established his argument on Surah "The Ant" verse:23; **"Io, I found a woman ruling over them, and she had been given (abundance) of all things, and hers a mighty throne"**⁴⁴. al-Ghazali argues that the prophet (Pbuh) recited this Surah to the people who had gathered in Mecca. In this respect he told them the story of the Queen of Sheba, how she, in her wisdom, set her people on the right path, to the right faith and to success and prosperity. It is therefore impossible, al-Ghazali continued, to consider-wise a hadith which runs against the logic of the revelation.⁴⁵

The second current of Islamist feminists represents the group that raised criticism against the former current. They argue some Muslim Feminists emphasize the positive aspects of *Shari'a* while over looking the negative aspects; others restricted their analysis to Qura'n and selected only verses favouring the status of women while over looking others without taking into consideration that Sharia is a complex and integrated whole and must be perceived as such.⁴⁶

This group suggests an Islamic reform which should be based on Qura'n and Sunna. The leader of this group is Ustadh Mohamed M. Taha, the Sudanese Muslim reformer and the leader of *Jamat al-Jamhoriyreen* (The Republican Brotherhood). His argument is that: "The sharia reflects a historically-conditioned interpretation of Islamic scriptures in the sense that the founding jurists had to understand those sources in accordance with their own social, economic and political circumstances.⁴⁷ M. Taha argued in favour of individualism as it applies for both male and female, and it is in Islam the determinant of *Takleef* (responsibility). He cites some verses from Qura'n to support this argument:

"And behold! Ye come to use bare and alone, as we created you for the first time" (Surah Ina'am:94).

Also Qura'n states: "***Every soul will be (held) in pledge for its deeds.***" (Surah al Mudathir:38).⁴⁸

Furthermore this group called for "gradual implementation of Shariah", in case of woman, they argue, at advent of Islam women were provided rights and fair treatment within the system of injustice they encountered in the seventh century, such as unlimited practice of polygamy, having no right of inheritance and burying new born female child. But women at nineteenth century encountered other type of injustice, consequently the shariah which would be claimed for women, should be within the new rights they called for and according to new responsibility they held and to the awareness they acquired. According to *al-Qawwa'ma* verse emancipation for Muslim women could not be obtained. Therefore we should recourse to Meccain verses which they consider as a principal verses (*Aia'at al-Esool*) that maintain equality among human beings and call for their freedom.⁴⁹

More elaborately, *al-Jamhoriyeen* argued that the *Shariah* (Islamic traditions) does not equate women with men according to *al-Qawwama* thesis, Surah an-Nissa:34, which is *Aiaat al-frooa* (subsidiary verses). Apart from this verse, they continued, the following legislations were derived : firstly law of inheritance, here women's portion is half of the man; secondly the right of testimony, here one male witness is equal to two females; thirdly right of divorce, here only man has the right of divorce and finally punishment; here man has the right to punish his wife. Complete emancipation for Muslim women, the *al-Jamhoriyeen* stresses, could be obtained only if *al-Gawwama* verse is abrogated by Meccian verses which emphasize a complete equality of women with men.

2.3. Towards A Theoretical Framework:

The theoretical framework we present here attempts to deal with Marxists analysis which interpreted women's problem in relation to the system of production did not take into consideration other variable such as religious and ideology as the case in Muslim women 's situation. Also radical feminists' suggestion to solve the problem of reproductive role- which they consider as the main reason behind the division of labour- is not acceptable by various women's movement in Muslim societies. For instance the Sudanese Women's Union's leaders ⁵⁰ refused to relate their movement to the western feminist movements, because they believe that these movements have raised marginal issues which would have generated enmity between men and women.⁵¹ Here it is clear that S.W.U's leaders' conception about the feminist movements is restricted to radical feminists who call for

separate sexual relations, because they consider heterosexual relations are one reason behind women's oppression.

Liberal feminists' explanation of "gender relations" contributes to our theoretical framework because it suggests socialization as the main agent that determined the status of men and women in society. In case of Muslim women this socialization process is exercised through religious concepts in which conservative Islamists differentiated between sex and gender. They emphasized equality between men and women as a sex in their faith and in their belief of God, while as a gender this equality is not asserted since men are physically different from women and corollary they are preferred to women.

Although postmodern feminist has not developed explicit discourse for elevating the status of women in society, it coincides with the framework this study suggested in the aspect that it understands and realizes the variety of women's movements around the world and the diversity of their situation and of their demands and tools for liberation. In this respect Diana Coole, states, Feminists should resist being forced into sort of either/or choice (of modern or postmodern politics) in which earlier liberal or Marxist versus radical feminist debates were couched.⁵¹ Postmodern Feminism with its different strategies, recognizes the paradoxes and tensions within a fragmented, and phallogentric world. For women, especially occupying a variety of world, traditional (as wives and mothers), modern (as workers and citizens) and postmodern (as consumer and participants in contemporary culture)- each has its own oppression and politics.

Generally speaking the explanation of western feminists of exclusion of women from public life rests upon the assumption that women are weak and inferior sex. While

conservative Islamists's explanation derived from their fear that women 's sexual power is dangerous which in turn means that women are powerful and hence they should be excluded from public domain to protect men from their temptation. Therefore social order would have been saved from chaos, if societies preserve the separation of private and public domains.

Here the dominance of men over women is legitimized and justified by the role of ideology. *"If the dominance of one human being by another is to succeed, it must be justified, and legitimized that is the function and raison d'etre of ideology."*⁵². In Muslim women's societies "**Patriarchal Islam**"⁵³ had affected obviously in defining the role of women in society. By "Patriarchal Islam" we mean that for long centuries, Islamic traditions (mainly the Qura'n and Hadith) have been interpreted only by Muslim men- who were not "gender sensitive"- in the context that women are not equal to men, and men are "above" women or have a "degree of advantage" over them. This belief affected women's life and role because it is a male ideology which reproduces the notions and ideas; and interpreted the Qura'n and hadith so as to prepare the Female, psychologically to play the role assigned to her by the male.

In fact some Arab feminists like Gassim Amin and Huda al-Sharawi see in unveiling and pursuing a western style of life a direct way to women's liberation. But I think western feminist agenda does not explain the situation of Muslim women; their perspective has no universal validity. I do agree with Leila Ahmed, in her argument that:

"The feminist agenda for Muslim women as set by European,..., was incorrect and irrelevant. It was incorrect in its broad assumption that Muslim women needed to abandon native ways and adopt those of the west to improve their status. Obviously, Arab and Muslim women need to reject

*(just as western women have been Trying to do) the androcentrism and misogyny of whatever culture and tradition they find themselves in, but that is not all the same as saying they have to adopt western culture or reject Arab culture and Islam comprehensively.*⁵⁴

Uma Narayan, an Indian feminist, called for a project of "non-western feminist" perspective. She emphasizes that those non-western feminists must think and function within the context of a powerful tradition that, although it systematically oppresses women, it also contains within itself a discourse that confers high values on women's place in the general schema of things.⁵⁵ She argued further that non-western feminists have a double struggle in trying to find their own voice: They have to learn to articulate their differences, not only from their own traditional context but also from western feminism.⁵⁶

Within our Islamic traditions one found that there were many positive examples and incidence narrated in *al-seerat al-Nabawiyah* that there were women who are gender-aware for example Umm Salama, prophet's wife, was interested in understanding the role of women in Islam. To cite an example she raised political questions that why she asked the prophet one day, "all men mentioned in the Qura'n and why we are not?". As a consequence, al-Ahzab verses were revealed.⁵⁷

Hence, the framework advocated here attempts to suggest the "**Patriarchal Islam**" as a paradigm of culture that explains some reasons behind the exclusion of Sudanese women from public life during different eras. This is not to ignore other cultures and social institutions that affirmed this exclusion . It, also, suggested that Muslim women who were socialized through patriarchal interpretation of the Qura'n and Hadith should seek new approach that emphasize their equality with men and to emphasize their fundamental rights

in order to actualize the human potential that they share equally with men. This approach calls for a " **liberation theology** " within Islam in favour of women.

Islam came in order to establish justice and equality; and attempt to sweep away any kind of social injustice. In Qura'n there are verses that not only call for stopping injustice and oppression, but call for a constant struggle in the cause of all the oppressed, is an avoidable duty of all Muslims. Allah say in Surah An-Nissa:75.

"And what is matter with you that you fight not in the cause of Allah and on the weak men and women and children who say, our lord, take us out of this town, whose people are oppressors, and make for us from they- self some helper."⁶⁸

Therefore, Muslim women issue should not be conceived of as entailing conflict or enmity to male but rather an issue of justice and wellbeing to all and for a better human society.

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they gave the Term "entryism" to those both feminist believers who are deeply involved int eh study of the Qura'n in order to reinvent a new

theology which they think to closer to "divine truth", as well as those who stay within the frame of religion for tactical reasons either religious or sociological arguing that it is necessary to struggle from within the community. See Marie' Ibid. p. 218.

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Chapter Three

Sudanese Women's Movement: Its Development and Achievements

This chapter surveys the socio-political status of Sudanese women during different eras and investigates how this status was affected by the patriarchal structure of Sudanese society. Moreover this chapter reviews the reasons behind the development of Sudanese women's movement and examines its achievements within the "engendered structure" of the Muslim society.

3.1 Sudanese Women's Status in Pre-independence Periods:

During the times of Funj Sultanate 1505 A.D., in which the feudal system prevailed, Sudanese women lived two types of life: one as slaves who worked with male slaves in agricultural, marketing and pastoral activities. Besides they participated in invasions and wars. The other life as a lady who had no economic activities and she was imprisoned in her own house.

During the Turkish rule (1821-1881) no change took place in the social or political status of Sudanese women. They have no right to participate in socio-economic activities. According to the "Harem System"-which prevailed in Ottoman Islamic states-women imprisoned in their house, their role was only to look after their husband and children. Though the Harem System is not completely applied in Sudan especially in the western and southern parts where women participated in agricultural and pastoral activities.

However, the traditional domestic duties were emphasized as a primary women's responsibility.

The Sudanese women's status during Mahdist state (1880-1889) had been defined through Mahdi's social programme. He issued various legislations concerning women. These legislations came at a time where chaos and moral corruption were predominant. One of these was women's seclusion from public life which was issued on 16 March 1884. According to this legislation women were forbidden to appear in public places and those who violated these laws should be slashed or beaten.¹ Al-Mahdi argued that this seclusion (*al-Hajab*) was necessary since he intended to follow prophet Mohamed's Teachings. Al-Mahdi's philosophy of *al-Hijab* (the seclusion) was derived from the fear of women seductiveness i.e *al-Fitna*. Al-Mahdi derived his authority in legislation from his belief that he was the righteous Mahdi and any one who disbelieved him would be considered as an infidel. Therefore any legislations concerning women had been enforced according to such sacred and patriarchal authority.

Still, some women were exceptions to this rule; such women for instance participated in al-Mahdist wars. In this respect G.A Henty in his book "The Dash for Khartoum" gives us a clear picture of this participation: "The Mahdist women spies, who pretend to be poor and needy stolecut at night to tell their husbands the secret of the defence... the fort of Omdurman on which Godron relied so much for safety of Khartoum was in terrible need of both grain and ammunition, two steamers, laden with provisions and ammunition were sent across the river, but a Sudanese women spy saw them and the

steamers found the Mahdist army drawn up to receive them, this fort which counted for so much surrendered and Khartoum was naked of defence."²

However, a Sudanese historian classified women (during the Mahdist state) into three categories, according to their socio-economic status: The first group was secluded completely from the public life and those were Mahdi's wives. The second, were the women from the middle class; those were secluded but they were permitted to go outside in the evening to perform social duties such as participating in marriage's and circumcision's ceremonies . But the third group was permitted to go outside to work for selfsupport or for the support of other dependants. This group includes old women and *al-jawari* (maids) . For this group al-Mahdi established special market known as " women's market" separated from men's market, in which women sold different commodities such as oil, dura, dates and water.³

Yet there were some prominent women appeared in the above mentioned era as Shughba El-Marghobia who led the Khalwa tribe in the Butana land. Also there were women fighters who defended their tribes such as Bikra Bint Mukabir El-Gaaliya who was a fierce fighter. She got married and had a son called "Ali" the area of her heroism is still known as "Jebel Um Ali" in the Nile Province.⁴

But those women represented individual cases and this still does not entail any progress in the status of Sudanese women, as they held those position as a result of kinship rather than development in their situation or of social transformation in the role of Sudanese women. This is attributed to the patriarchal structure which dominated the Sudanese

society. This structure had been emphasized during the pre-independence period through the Turkish practices and al-Mahdi's teachings.

During the Anglo- Egyptian rule (1898-1954) Sudanese women's status was not better than during the previous eras. The colonizers kept women uneducated and hence ignorant and unproductive. Initiatives of women's education embarked by popular efforts in 1907, while regular education for boys started by English rulers in 1853. This negligence by colonizers attributed to their fear of disturbing the existing social structure which was based, allegedly, on Islamic teachings. However, the genuine efforts for women's education were done by nationalists after the First World War as will be reviewed in the following section.

3.2. Sudanese women's status during the post-independence period:

In the wake of the nationalist movement some attention had been drawn to Sudanese women. The nationalists understood the role of women in the liberation of the country. Therefore they took part in the activities for women's education. They highlighted it in plays, in their writings and in verses which used to be recited in the literacy evenings held by the Graduates Club.⁵

Yet, this relationship, in 1954, was by no means as harmonious and positive as it may appear at first glance. During the first Democratic experience, when nationalist pressures emerged in the wake of the campaign of the constitution for the Sudan, women's political right was constrained. Some nationalists among them Mohamed A. al-Mahjoub, called for restricting women's right of election to those only who were graduated from

intermediate school "on ground that most Sudanese women were ignorant."⁶ Whereas this restriction was not applied to ignorant men.

Within such established pattern of seclusion and patriarchal structure of Sudanese society, women 's status did not develop overnight. Sudanese women became aware of this situation (i.e the seclusion) and came to participate in public life, through organizing themselves in associations that led radical changes, induced by many factors working together through times. These factors might be classified under the below subsection.

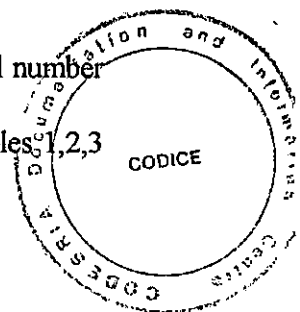
3.2.1. Sudanese Women and Education:

The pre-twentieth century Sudan had not known regular educational institutions for women except the Khalwas. It was noteworthy that Khalwas in Western Sudan were mixed because this part of Sudan did not know sex segregation. Also in Eastern Sudan woman was not only the learner in the Khalwa but also the director. Yet regular education was started when a " Training College For Girls" was opened in Omdurman in 1922. Prior to this some endeavour, were exerted by Skeikh Babiker Badri- the pioneer of woman's education in Sudan- when he established the first formal school for girls in Rufaa in 1907. It was regarded as starting point of national education for girls in Sudan.

Woman's education at first faced opposition from religious and conservative elements who had the impression that education might lead women astray and make them irresponsible and way ward. It was feared that they would forget the traditions; and the moral of the society would be adversely affected.⁷ The opponents, were, however, satisfied when the pioneering women (most of them became leaders of women's organization)

showed in practice that they did not only retained respect for social traditions but also for their uneducated sisters. As a result, woman education continued to flourish.

After independence girls education expanded greatly for instance, the total number of girls primary school increased from 19% in 1956 to 31% in 1969. (see the tables 1,2,3 below).



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Table (1) Government Primary Schooling

Year	Total NO. of Schools	Boys	Girls	%	Total NO. of Students	Boys	Girls	%
1956	1778	284	1494	19	208689	38400	170289	18
1960	2372	559	1813	23	317680	87342	230338	27
1964	3034	881	2153	29	453270	142080	310290	31
1968	3120	957	2163	30	572623	184074	388549	32
1969	3449	1086	2363	31	610798	200775	410023	32

Table (2) Intermediate Schooling

Years	Total NO. of Schools	Girls	Boys	%	Total NO. of Students	Girls	Boys	%
1950	108	27	81	25	17629	2997	14632	17
1960	240	75	165	31	43210	9226	33984	21
1964	427	114	313	26	60346	14603	45743	24
1968	812	227	585	27	120700	31066	89634	25
1969	887	268	619	30	134385	37757	96628	29

Table (3) Government Secondary Schooling

Year	Total NO. of Schools	Girls	Boys	%	Total NO. of Students	Girls	Boys	%
1956	49	11	38	22	6187	764	5423	12
1960	56	24	32	42	13369	1995	11364	14
1964	86	31	55	36	21120	3869	17251	18
1968	130	40	90	30	32065	6345	25720	19
1969	141	52	89	36	37622	8112	29510	21

Tables 1, 2 and 3

Source: Sudan Facts and Figures, Ministry of Culture, Khartoum Nov. 1974, p.48.

The Sudanese woman found her way to higher education in 1945 when the first Sudanese student Khalda Zahir was admitted to Gordon College. The number increased to 22 in 1955/56, until it reached 8025 students in an academic year 1977/78 with incremental ratio of 41.9%.⁸

Hence, the start date of women's education can not be considered as the date of birth of Sudanese women's movement. Yet, it was considered as a reason for the initiation of such movement. This because women's education is a means for cultural awareness which in turn moves women towards solidarity and organized activities. However, The initial association emerged in 1947 when a group of educated women organized a league called "**Rabitat al-Mara al-Soudania**" which was considered to be the nucleus of the organized women's movement in the Sudan.

3.2.2. Sudanese Women as a labour force:

Since ancient times, the Sudanese women participated in various types of work. Women in rural areas such as in Western Sudan carried out most of agricultural and pastoral activities, they even participated in building houses and in commerce. Unlike rural area, the employment in Urban area started a bit late. It was connected with education which began in twentieth century. The Sudanese community felt the need to let women work in teaching. So the school mistress became trustworthy because she showed great concern for her sex and helped them in leisure time by giving them evening lessons.

School mistress played a prominent role in the national movement in general and in the Sudanese women's movement in particular. This role will be reviewed later on in the section of women's organizations in this chapter.

In 1927 Sudanese woman entered, also, another area of employment that was nursing, when the first batch of nurses graduated from the Nursing College of Omdurman. The Sudanese accepted the idea of letting woman to work as nurse then as a health inspector as they well-respected the role of the midwife which resembles to the role of nurse. Those working in health field (such as Khalda Zahir) were active members of women's organizations dealing mostly with politics.

Women's employment in office work was not discussed until 1949, when there was a debate in the legislative assembly about the employment of Sudanese girls in clerical jobs in place of foreign women. Some were of the opinion that the foreign woman should be replaced by the Sudanese man. A small group led by Mr. Benjamin Lockay supported the employment of Sudanese women. Mr Lockay said, "*Since we are able to train nurses, it is easy to train clerks and I hope that the government arranges for training girls because they are the complement of the society.*"⁹

The press played, also, considerable role to push woman's employment forward. For instance el-Sarah abi-weekly newspaper was one to encourage the work of woman in public offices and explain the importance of her work; arguing that it is time for women to participate on all fields of work. The discussion was carried out by *Dar al-thagafa* on the participation of Sudanese women on public life. Al-Saraha cited this discussion and concluded with the call for all female and male writers to participate on it.¹⁰ Consequently,

special column on al-Sarah under the supervision of Haga Kashif and others, was devoted to discuss logically, the employment of woman and other related problems.

However, between the sixties and seventies the women's movement for employment increased rapidly as a result of the quick growth of economy which was seen clearly in industrialization, establishment of development schemes and improvement of services sector. Woman's participation in public life open chances for them to associate with women's organization such as Sudanese Women's Union in order to call for equal wage for equal work and right of pension.

It is, also, important here to mention the role of Trade Union in preparing the public atmosphere for the establishment of women's associations. This role had been played by the Trade Union of the Ministry of Health which gave a chance in its membership for both women and men. Women became politically active through this Trade Union. They participated in demonstration and strike against the British colonizers , e.g. the Nurse Trade Union, women's membership, took out in 1951 procession against colonization. This happened at a time when Egyptian woman went out in a big procession calling for their political rights before the Egyptian Parliament.¹¹

3.3. Sudanese Women's Organizations:

As a result of the former socio-educational forces , many women associations and organizations emerged, some were concerned with philanthropic or social activities, the other involved in political ones.¹² In this chapter I am interested in dealing with the

activities of those formal organization which carried out radical changes on the social, economic and political status of Sudanese woman.

No women's organization came into existence up to 1947. In that year, a group of educated women such as Khalda Zahir, Aziza Maki, Fatima Talib and others* decided to establish a league for educated girls in Omdurman called *Rabitat al-Mara al-Soudania*, to render advice and help women who were not educated through opening an evening schools and kindergarten so as to ameliorate conditions that restricted women's participation in public life. Its membership was restricted to literate women. The biggest achievement of the league was *al-Sauq al-khieri*(the charity market) which was held in 1948. It was very successful and came to be known even outside the Sudan.

Although the league vanished in 1949 due to the disagreement among the leaders, it was considered as a nucleus and important women's association which laid the foundation of the Sudanese women's movement.

A woman from al-Mahdi House (the mother of al Sadig al-Mahdi) established *Jamiyat Tatwer al-Mara* (Association for Women's Promotion) in 1949, so as to absorb those who withdrew from the league of educated girls such as Fatima Talib, and then *Tatwer al-Mara* Association became a rival to the league. Its membership was mainly from women of al-Mahdi's family. The objectives of this association was no different from its predecessors it commenced its work with similar activities pursued by other societies such as literacy evening classes, needle work and home economic lessons.

The Association of Women's Promotion ceased functioning in 1950 because its membership was decreasing, but the Mahdist reactivate it in 1952 under the name of

Jamiyat Nahdat al-Mara (Women's Cultural Revival Society). Its aims as stated in its constitution were only "to improve the standard of women culturally, socially then politically according to the doctrine of Islam and its traditions".¹² This society was dissolved in 1959 but it resumed its activities after 1964.¹³

During the 1950s also female Trade Unions were established, for instance in 1949 Trade Union for School Teachers was formed. One of its achievements was the memorandum submitted to the Director of Education on November 1952 including 24 demand items e.g. Job's Scales for women teachers and equality with male Teachers in all aspects of promotion, pension and after services rewards. They, also, demanded more opportunities for women to go abroad for studies. Finally they included some political demands such as the demand to scrap emergency law which restricted the freedom of Trade Unions.¹⁴

The members of this Union faced harsh treatment from the authorities at that time. Some were not promoted other were transferred to remote areas away from their families. But this harsh treatment did not weaken the union, its activities continued until it was liquidated like other organizations in 1959. After October Revolution the female Teachers' Trade Union joined the male Teacher's Trade Union and became one body which helped in solving many problems.

In 1950 Nurse Trade Union was, also, founded. It included both men and women in its membership. In 1955 one of the female nurses even won a seat on the union executive committee.¹⁵ The political activity of this Union was well organized. They participated actively in many strikes and demonstrations as mentioned before in this chapter.

Association activities among women, during the 1950s, in rural areas were confined only to philanthropic activities. For instance in 1951 the first charity society, was established in El-Obeid by some educated women. Among its aims besides charity work was to raise the standard of women culturally and socially through literacy campaigns and lectures about health and child care were presented. It faced opposition from conservatives who saw it as a threat to traditions and customs. The society held exhibitions reflecting women's activities in Kordofan, also it contributed financially to the Students's activities and their celebration in Kordofan and organized charity exhibitions.¹⁶

However, the most important organizations, which played a significant role in the development of Sudanese women's movement either through giving special emphasis to women's political rights, or by being a catalyst for the emergence of other women's organizations, was the Sudanese Women's Union which established in 17th January, 1952.

As many nationalist movements in the Third World countries, which had been influenced by the socialist idea that paved way for the liberation of these countries, some prominent leaders of Sudanese woman organizations in Sudan related their claim for women's liberation to socialist and communist perspective. For instance, Fatima A. Ibrahim, the leader of Sudanese Women's Union(S.W.U) reflected this perspective in her writings.¹⁷ About this type of relationship Sandra Hale stated that, though theoretically and constitutionally there is no linkage between the Sudanese Women's Union and Sudanese Communist Party but in realities the S.W.U was organized on the principles of S.C.P.; a Central committee, local regional cells and little autonomy. A large proportion of S.W.U. membership and relatives, spouses and women's friend of male are S.C.P members.¹⁸

The aim of the Sudanese Women's Union was to fulfil many objectives. First, to raise the general standard of Sudanese women through fighting illiteracy. Second, to promote social, economic and political status of Sudanese women. Third, to raise national consciousness and finally to build up good relations with women's organizations in Africa, Asia and Europe.

These well-defined and articulated objectives had threaten the traditional patriarchal structure of Sudanese society; and had created conditions for the emergence and support for ideologies that would negate women's traditional roles. Therefore two groups were agitated and raised their opposition against S.W.U. The first, is the religious group who regarded this as a deviation from the dictates of Islam that is women's natural place is home. The second, is the group that thought S.W.U formation was contrary to customs and traditions and against morals. Both groups put up a severe opposition against the union, for instance the chief of Khartoum Mosque Sheikh Hassan Tanon, criticized the union during Friday speech. Also Muslim Brothers under the leadership of Babiker Karar and Mirghani el-Nasri who tried to forbid women from participation in any activities related with S.W.U.¹⁹ However, the Union asserted its presence, and drew support from Unions of Students, Teachers, Leftists, labour organization and press like al-Sarah a newspaper which published special issue on Women's Union on the first of August 1952.

The union began with 500 members in Omdurman and its charter initially specified literacy as a condition for the membership but later on the union dropped this condition as it was thought it would limit its membership. The union set-up branches outside Omdurman in Wad Madeni, Kosti, El-Obeid, Atbara and Port Sudan. These branches headed by

Teachers of primary schools, most of whom were unmarried with plenty of time on their hands. In the South branches were, also, established by Northern women in the principal towns of Malakal, Wau and Juba.²⁰ These branches had been extended in 1968, after the severe criticism raised against the union's plan of action which concentrated only on Omdurman. Therefore S.W.U attempted to change its criterion and reform its organizational structure so as to draw support of women from different sectors whether in the urban or rural areas.²¹

Fulfilling the first objective, the union participated actively in literacy campaigns among women. It opened Kindergartens, primary and intermediate schools, and evening classes for adult women. The total number of evening schools opened in 1955 by the union in different parts of Sudan was 22 schools.²² In this respect, also, the union in collaboration with international organizations (International Labour Trade Union, International Democratic Youth Union and International Youth Union), convened a Seminar on Adult Literacy program in February, 1970.

The main objectives of the Seminar were to call for assistance so as to fight illiteracy and to exchange experiences- in the field of adult literacy- with various international women' s organizations either through direct contact or through women' s International Democratic Federation (WIDF).

The union also, played a significant role in raising women' s awareness through the progressive magazine *Saut al-Mara* (Women's Voice), which was first published on July 1st, 1955. The magazine took forceful stands on a variety of issues, ranging from the question of neo-colonialism in Sudan and Africa to articles which attempted to educate its

female readership away from certain traditional practices and beliefs such as female circumcision and *Za'ar*. However the general trend of the magazine was leftist which was clearly manifested in 1960s.

On the political arena the Union took important stands on national issues: e.g., the Union supported the principle of self-determinant and regional autonomy within a united Sudan as a solution. This stand was taken more than a decade before this became an official government policy in 1970s.²³

The union, also, submitted in January 1957, a controversial memorandum²⁴ to the Constitutional Committee for providing women who completed their primary education the right of suffrage and candidacy. However, this right had not been fulfilled until the transitional government of Sir al-Khatim al-Khalifa had amended the laws of elections on April 1965, and according to article 2-4-1 women were granted the right to vote.²⁵

Successive Sudanese governments inherited from the British the rules of public service, for instance the salary of working woman is four-fifths that of the man doing the same job and having the same qualification; also, the working woman could not obtain her right of full pension. Regarding these problems the Union was the only organization that took up the fight for "equal pay for equal work" for urban working women. It adopted this Motto in its action plan and followed it, until it was realized in 1968.

The union, also, criticized the allegedly selective aspects of the Sharia law, especially the divorce and *Beit el-Ta'a* (i.e an obedience law which is enacted upon a wife who left her husband's house for divorce). The S.W.U claimed that these laws so heavily favoured men. According to Muslim Family laws *Biet el-Ta'a* law would be executed if the

husband has fulfilled certain conditions such as that the husband should have paid part of the wife's dowry and prepared for her a suitable accommodation. During the 1950s and 1960s this law was executed by policeman. Further with divorce affirmed as a unilateral right of a man, the union complained that woman did not receive adequate support in the aftermath of divorce. The union again began to campaign against polygamy.²⁶

However, no reforms in Personal Family Law were made by S.W.U because such reforms- as suggested by Sudanese women scholar-need a revolutionary system that venture to make changes which some consider tempering with divine text. Also the law-maker being a man, he would find it difficult to give women rights that affect his rights, authority and dominance²⁷

To realize the fourth objective, the Women's Union made contacts abroad and built good relations with women's organizations in Africa, Asia and Europe. It became a member of some international women's organizations such as Women's International Democratic Federation (WIDF),²⁸ which had established a permanent centre in the Sudan so as to train cadres in fighting illiteracy.²⁹ The relations between the W.U and WIDF was assured by Fatima A. Ibrahim , as she said "Our affiliation was not a symbolic one, it is in fact we had been among its powerful and active element."³⁰

The union continued its activities until it was banned in 1959, however , *Saut al-Mara* magazine which was not registered under the name of the union, continued with high record sales. It became a S.W.U's instrument for mobilization through adopting a radical line in criticizing Aboud's regime. This resulted in the magazine being shut down in June 1962, but it resumed publication in August 1963.

Some members of the dissolved S.W.U supported-through *Saut al-Mara Magazine*³¹ the idea of forming a new women's organization under the name of *Hayat Nissa al-Sudan al-Shaa'bia* (Sudan Women's People Association). Its objectives were the same of that of the Women's Union with less concentration on political issues, so as to avoid any confrontation with Aboud's regime. Eight out of ten members of S.W.U has been nominated and then selected in the executive committee of *Hiat Nissa al-Soudan al-Shaa'bia* through free election. Under the umbrella of this committee S.W.U reactivated and reorganized its membership and branches.³² But Aboud's regime, soon, dissolved this committee and established another one via appointment which became loyal to Aboud's regime.

The dissolved Sudanese Women's Union during Aboud's regime took important stands on the opposition side. Large numbers of women mobilized by S.W.U. came into street and participated with men in political demonstration against the military regime. During the days of October 1964 the only woman to be killed was the member of S.W.U, Bakheita al-Hafiyah and another one was injured, Mahasin Abd-el-Aa'l, the Women's Voice magazine reporter.³³

The events of October 1964, as Carolyn argued, brought about a sudden and dramatic collapse of a number of myths regarding women in Sudan: first, women were shown to be a political force capable of organizing and participating in actions having national, political significance. Second, women joined men in the activities which brought down the Aboud regime and showed themselves to be courageous, patriots like men, consequently, the necessity of the segregation of the sexes came to be questioned.

However, the major gains for the Sudanese women's movement after the 1964 October revolution were: first, the Sudanese Women's Union resumed its activities; and Sudanese women achieved the right to vote. Also for the first time women were elected to legislative bodies. In 1965 Fatima A. Ibrahim (S.W.U's president) was elected for National Assembly. Mariam al-Balal (S.W.U's president, Port Sudan branch) was the first woman to be elected as a member of local council of Port Sudan. Also one of the leading members of the S.W.U., Thuriya al-Dirdiri, was chosen as a women's representative in a constitutional committee, which was formed in 1968 in order to lay the draft of the country permanent constitution.³⁴

Second, all political parties after October 1964 tried to attract women, as they constituted a voting force which could swing the elections result. So women's associations affiliated to the political parties were formed. This in turns helped women to develop intellectual and political talent. Third, intellectual instead of personal competition over monopolizing the Sudanese women's movement had developed among the leaders of these movements. This was manifested when *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* (Muslim sisterhood) group formed "**The Women's National Front**". Under the leadership of Suad al-Fatih as a rival to the Women's Union. The activities of this group will, intensively, be reviewed in the coming chapter.

Finally, after October 1964, the Southern Women, for the first time, established a political organization in 1965 called "**Southern Women's League**". Its membership was composed of women from the south who knew well their problem and knew appropriate solution for them. The league played a very important political role; that is rehabilitation.³⁵

In May 1969 Nimeiri came to power in a military coup with backing from progressive forces including the Sudanese Women's Union. The Union's continuity of supporting the regime was conditioned by fulfilling many demands such as: suspending the temporary employment ordinance for married women "*Gamun al-Mushahra*," enforcing equal pay for equal work for all working women, amending laws concerning alimony so that up to half of the husband income can be deducted to support children and wives in cases of divorce and paid maternity leave besides amending family and personal status laws.³⁶

Unfortunately, conflict between the May regime and Communists led Nimeiri's government to retreat from its former progressive policies in general and those concerned with women in particular. This tension was reflected on S.W.U when the government dissolved it in May 1971. This also, followed by wide arrests among the leaders of S.W.U other were dismissed from their jobs. During the period May 1971- April 1985, the S.W.U was not politically active, but it continued its activities as an under ground organization through informal organizations such as housewives societies. The S.W.U had been instrumental through these societies as it had kept in touch with its membership at the grassroots and had continued to recruit new members.

To fill the vacuum of the dissolved S.W.U Nimeiri's government installed *Itihad Nissa al-Soudan* (the Sudan Women's Union (SWU)) under the auspices of the Sudanese Socialist Union (S.S.U) in November 1971. In an interview with the president of SWU, Nifissa A. al-Amin, she criticised the S.W.U and described it as being too politicized and as a shadow of the Sudanese communist party.³⁷

The SWU adopted a programme which was similar to that of the S.W.U-which had been dissolved for political reasons by May regime- with emphasis on equal education opportunities, mother care and changing discriminating labour laws. Constitutionally, its membership was open to Sudanese women over 16 years old. Its structure was the same as that of the previous Union, as it began with the basic units in the villages, then the divisions, districts and last the province. At the top of this structure, there was the central committee and executive office.³⁸ The SWU held every three years a national congress which was attended by members of the central committee from each of the provinces, which meet to report on the activities of the previous three years, hold elections and plan for the future.

More than twenty years of political action and education led by the Sudanese Women's Union and other Sudanese women's organizations culminated (in the 1970s) in the enactment of number of reforms introduced by Nimeiri's government. Those reforms reflected on: first, the public services ordinance of 1973 under which the Sudanese women became entitled to full equity with men as regards wages, pensionable services, inheritable pensions and all other post-service benefits. Second working women were entitled to a four-years leave without pay when accompanying the husband abroad or on a national mission. Third, a maternity leave of two months with full payment was provided to all working women. Fourth, one hour per day for baby care to working women.³⁹ Finally *Biet al-Ta'a*, the Sharia legal principle which could force the return of a woman to her husband using police if necessary, was abolished. Also the right to choose the spouse was gained.⁴⁰ But still an adult woman no matter of age can conclude her own marriage without *Wali* (guardian). Her guardian, usually male either a relative or a friend of her father must

conclude the contract on her behalf. Though some Islamist scholars like Abu Hanifa states that an adult woman could get married without Wali, Sudanese law-makers render to the most conservative Islamist legislation or *Mazhb* (approach) so as to foster the patriarchal authority.

These reforms would not have been enacted, unless the Sudanese women had been represented in National Assembly in 1973.⁴¹ This Assembly was assigned the task of drafting a permanent constitution for the Sudan. The significance of the women's participation in this Assembly came from the fact that, in their participation, they shed light on some of the women specific rights and their promulgation as texts, laws and constitutional legislation. Accordingly Act 38 of Sudan Constitution prescribes the equality of women with men in all aspects.

Though women's participation in legislative bodies, during Nimeiri's regime was not made through direct election, women were highly represented in the national and regional people assemblies, in the seat allocated for SWU at provincial level. Also they gained the right to stand as candidates for elections in the geographic constituencies, in the seats of other Popular Alliances Force and in the National People's Assembly. Accordingly 20 women were appointed in 1979; 18 members of them represented the SWU, the other two represented the administrative constituencies on the level of the provinces, and the Teachers' and Parents' Council union on the national level.⁴²

However, the SWU failed to draw genuine support of Sudanese women especially among other women's organizations and academicians. Though it was founded in 1971, with about 700,000 members, the activities of these members went no further than a

signature. Ms Nifissa Kamil, National Assistance Secretary of SWU, attributed this lack of enthusiasm to political reasons. She said "Political commitment to the May Revolution is a condition for joining the Union and every member must commit herself in writing to S.S.U".⁴³ However, SWU was dissolved in 1985 with the overthrow of Nimeiri's regime.

Examining the above mentioned Sudanese Women's organizations, one might say that the rise and fall of these organizations is probably attributable to many reasons among which are: firstly, most of them did not understand fully the Sudanese women's position and real causes and dynamics of that position. Therefore, their programmes did not address the majority of women especially those of agricultural sector and women in the informal sector to whom, improving working conditions, maternity leave and other acquired rights mean nothing. The problems of this sector were reflected for instance on lack of skill, access to land and credit. It is worth noting that Agricultural bank loans though don't deter woman from applying to credit, they still require a guarantee of a male relative or sponsor even if the property which may be used as a collateral is in the name of the woman.

Furthermore, Sudanese women's organizations did not understand the dynamic of patriarchal structure of Sudanese society that hindered the development of women's status. On the contrary most of these organizations, with the government, carried out an educational policy that differentiated between male and female and relegated women's role in society only to domestic domain.

Secondly, they failed to maintain regular and active members because they could not find solutions for working women-specific problems such as house keeping and child rearing. Consequently many active members left these organizations, for instance a SWU's

member said that "I have left the Union many times because of my responsibilities at work and at home."⁴⁴

Thirdly, most women's organization failed to rejuvenate leadership from the grassroots. Reforms for the most part emphasized structural changes rather than ones of personnel. Even those permanent leaders, being either working women or students had no full-time release to exercise their leadership duties.

Fourthly, some of those organizations restricted their membership to educated women at a time when 90% of the Sudanese women population were illiterate.

Fifthly, the activities of most of these organization concentrated on urban areas and they failed to draw the support of women in rural areas.

Sixthly, though the ideological differences between the leaders indicated political maturity but these differences created a gap between the leaders and the membership which had no political affiliation, hence it was politically unmotivated. This in turn resulted either in the split or disappearance of these organizations. Seventhly, the formation of what was called "women associations" affiliated to political parties, was again attributed to the split of Sudanese women's movement. Also these associations were completely devoted to the programmes of the political parties which were male dominated and therefore were not concern with women's problems. Moreover during military regimes the Sudanese women lost the capacity and right to organize autonomously without being manipulated by the state or political leadership in charge.

Finally, in pursuing their demands and activities, the leadership of these organizations especially during Military's regimes, had only two courses of action from which it had to

choose and to follow: "Either it dissolves and die or the leadership burns in the fire game of politics."⁴⁵ In other words these organizations became much involved in political disputes with existing regimes, neglecting their main concern of maintaining a good life chance for Sudanese women in the social, political and economic domains.

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Endnotes

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Chapter Four

Islamist Women's Movement:

Harakat al-Akhwat al-Muslimat

In this chapter we are going to dwell on the history of *Harakat al-Akhwat al-Muslimat*, how and when the movement came into existence ; and how it developed within a patriarchal-structured Sudanese society . Here it is important to state that the movement of *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* can not be considered as a separate organization that has its own constitution, identity and programmes different from that of the Islamist movement. On the contrary *al-Akhwat* movement, as will be shown in this chapter, is apart and parcel of the Islamist movement and is affected by its development and gains.

4.1 Towards a Periodization Schema of Islamist Movement:

the development of the Sudanese Islamist movement's attitude towards women was summed up by al-Turabi into three elements. The first was conventional, that the movement consciously or unconsciously regarded religion as a discourse to men, and *da'wa* (mission) and *jihad* for its sake as an exclusively male activity. In addition, it thought that society reform was the duty of men solely; and that a woman place was home. The movement , Thus, it was negligent of any significance of women's piety; it turned away from a reformatory role by them, and was cautious to make any contact with them.¹

The second element was retractive, which began in the wake of 1964 October Revolution. This retraction resulted from provocation and external challenge, not from a doctrinal consideration by the movement. In this context, al-Turabi said "Islamists were

sorry that they left women that way, for fear from incurring sins through contacting them and they were thoughtful when they considered their vote gain in elections, and found that what stood in their way was loss of women's votes."² The movement was compelled to change its first attitude, due to proliferation of career women in governmental departments, and to their participation in public life. This had been a signal for the movement, that women were about to have a room in society, and that the degradation and reform of society al-Turabi stated could not take place without the participation of women. Hence, the movement adopted a programme for allowing women to participate in public life namely the political one.

The third element was the movement doctrinal reconsideration of its attitude towards women. That in the 1970's when the movement was able to enhance its gains, and a thought criticizing traditional attitude towards women prevailed among its members. Then, The movement's discourse has been "To inspire women with a goalful spirit in life". That is, the utmost goal of women should not be to get rid of men 's oppression, or of house captivity, or of the injustice of social institutions or they should achieve their just freedom and rights, as stated by the western feminist schools."But they should seek a significance for their lives, and a role satisfying themselves and their aspirations as a human."³ al-Turabi explained. Further more he emphasized that had the movement been at the stage of *al-figh al A'atzari* (apologetic doctrine that Islam maintains rights of women), and the initiative been left to some agent other than the movement in order to lead the liberation movement, women would have not been extricated from non-religious distress, or that liberation would have been delayed. It is noticed that the attitude of the movement

here, resembles that of retraction, and emanated from reactive motivations, not from authentic self-attitude as Al-Turabi argued.

Generally speaking, the Islamist Movement doctrine is based on the strategies of importance of the stages i.e. the movement has a strategy for every era, that conforms to the needs of a stage, and stops functioning with the end of the stage, or modifies and develops according to what is needed for new-stages and/or strategies. The movement, therefore, alleges that it is a movement of change and modernization. However the experience of *Harakat al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* (Muslim Sisters' movement) has been affected by the stages of the mother movement (i.e. the Islamic movement) by its development, its gains and approach. Therefore I will depend in reviewing the establishment and the activities of the Muslim Sisters movement, on the transitory division of the Islamist movement set by al-Turabi in his book: **"The Islamist Movement in Sudan: Development, Gain, and Approach."**

4.2. The Movement Formation Era 1949-1955:

During the struggle for independence the Islamist movement grew up among the students of Khartoum University and secondary schools. It took its ideological and organizational supply from the books of Hasan Al-Banna, and the writings of Al-Maududi. It was, also, affected by the communist movement which was prevalent among students. It made use of its experience in building secret cells, and in expanding the movement membership.

The major functions of the movement were the selection and recruitment of its elements. The recruitment in this period was conducted so cautiously, that meticulous

selection was carried out. It was often done among intimate friends and families. In this period, spreading the *da'wa* was not planned, and its approach was not systematic. The recruitment was conducted more among male students than among female ones. Islamist movement during this era had not developed its discourse towards women.

However, the nucleus of the Muslim Sister's movement was formed during this period, when (in 1951) Babikir Karar and Muhammad Yusuf invited Fatima Talib, 'Amina Umbabi, Thuraiya Umbabi, and 'Su'ad Al-Fatih to embrace the Islamist movement.⁴ In an interview, Su'ad Al-Fatih said: "I agreed to join the Movement, since I had been seeking an entity through which I could serve Islam."⁵

At the first general conference of the Sudanese Muslim Brothers held in 1952 at Omdurman Cultural Club, the Muslim Brother's executive office was established. The office assigned three of its members to embark on forming a counterpart office for women to be named as the "Third Commission", in order to set a general framework for the plan of seeking a women group, to function as a nucleus for the women's office. Thus, selection fell on Fatima Talib, Su'ad Al-Fatih, Thuraiya Umbabi, Zakiya Makki, Buthaina Al-Qusi, Um-Kulthum Umar, and 'Awatif al-Sheikh. The meetings of this nucleus were held in the house of Isa Makki (Muslim Brother) at Al-halfaya quarter.⁶

There was a unanimity that invitation to the new movement, should be conducted among the milieu of sisters. Growing up recruits, however, was actuated through the so called *al-Usra* which literally means family, but according to Islamists it denotes a secret organizations conforming to the secret cells of the Communist Party. Each *Usra* was composed of not more than 10 persons. The one who was in charge of *al-Usra* was called

Amir. This *Amir* ought to be obeyed, and confidence in his/her leadership be assured. But no single Muslim Sister came to the degree of *Amir*.⁷

Programmes of these *Usaar* (plural of *Usra*) focused on reciting and memorizing the Holy Quran, discussing al-Hadith, voluntary fasting, performing night prayers, and handling some books attacking Islam.

Al-Usra enclosure was assured in order to detach new Islamist members of their old relations, and to security precaution which had saved the integrity of al-Usra against the external society which was hostile to this group.⁸

During this period, Muslim Sisters diffused its *da'wa* (mission) through An-Nur Magazine, which was a handwritten bulletin circulated among Muslim Brother and Sisters, and among their closest people in terms of thought and position. The magazine comprised religious, social, and ideological materials. The Women's Office distributed it among schools in different regions, through teachers who were genuine adherents to the movement. Some male and female students took fancy to the magazine. One of its correspondents was Mudathir Abd-Ar-Rahim (a Muslim brother) who wrote the following poetical lines:

What a glowing light which has sprung up in boudoirs!

That irradiates with Truth.

It is Islam, O sisters of purity;

What a dress they fabricated of it!

It is sisters who abide by symmetry and religion.⁹

However, the participation of *al-akhwat* in this stage was very limited. It was then, as Su'ad Al-Fatih said, a stage of psychological build-up and educational preparation for the leaders of Muslim Sister's movement.¹⁰ They, therefore, did not participate in the 1954 Conference of the Islamist movement, that came out with important and decisive decisions, such as independence of the movement and its name: "Muslim Brothers Group", and determining the purpose and objectives of the group. *al-Akhwat* movement, in this period, were not versed in organizational and political work. Muslim sisters failed in the 1953-1954 election of the Sudanese Women Union's Executive Committee; this is because they did not enrol in such stales as the Monshevik (the moderate group in S.W.U) led by Hajja Kashif, and the Bolshevik (the radical group in S.W.U) led by Fatima Ahmad Ibrahim.

The system of *al-Usra* (secret cells) and elites education made the members of the movement at that time shun and look down upon society, a thing which affected its membership among the sector of ordinary Sudanese women. This in turn created a gap between Muslim Sudanese women who belonged to the movement, and those who did not. A situation that made many of the Sudanese people eschew and disincline to the movement.

4.3. Era of Early Emergence 1956-1959:

This was post-independence age. With the advent of independence, leaders of the movement graduated from the university¹¹, and invitation to join the movement was made through newspapers and in public discourse. Due to the success of *Al-Nur* newspaper, the Women's office issued in 1959 the monthly magazine *Al-Manar*, through which it addressed the whole Sudanese society, defended its membership, and conveyed to society its objectives. The editor-in-chief of *Al-Manar* magazine was Su'ad Al-Fatih (she was then a

student at the university), and the editing secretary was Thuraiya Umbabi. Most of the writers of Al-Manar articles were males. The contributors were Prof. Abd-al-Allah Al-taiib, Abd-al-Majid Abdin, and Makki Shibeika. They all participated in the bringing out of Al-Manar first issue. The magazine was financially supported by Prof. Ihsan Abbas. It lasted till 1958, and stopped later for financial reasons.¹² Su'ad Al-Fatih and Thuraiya Umbabi, on the other hand, contributed with their writings to such daily newspapers as Arai Al-am and As-Sudan Aj-jadid. Su'ad Al-Fatih also presented at this stage a TV programme titled: "Test Your Information."¹³

Beside the function of student's recruitment and socialization carried out by the Islamist movement, mobilization and pressure group was established during(1956-1959). It assumed an alliance form, hence the movement built up *al-Gabha al-Islamia li-al-Dastoor* (The Constitution Islamist Front) so as to extend its effect, and promoted its da'wa.¹⁴

The Muslim Sisters' movement took up the same approach, when Su'ad Al-Fatih and Thuraiya Umbabi had joined the *Jam'iyat Nahdat al-Mara* (Women's Cultural Revival Society), after they separated from the Sudanese Women's Union in 1955. The reason for their separation,¹⁵ as they claimed, was the complete control of the Communist Party over activities of the Union. In this connection, Thuraiya Umbabi said:

"The Islamist movement had a passive role in the Sudanese Women's Union, because it was premature and had no experience in the political and organizational domain . The concern of the movement was mainly educational, meanwhile communists tightened their grip on all other activities of the Union. Of these communists were Ali Al-tom and Salah Ahmad Ibrahim, who often assisted the Union to conduct its different activities such as, preparing its meetings, and forming its structures."¹⁶

However, *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* during the 1950s played an active role through *Jamyyiat Nahdat al-Mara*, and Saud al-Fatih was the secretary of Al-Jamyyiat at that time. The secretary office according to her, was more vibrant and influential than that of the chairman (who was Rahma Abd-al-Allah, the mother of Mr. As-Sadig Al-Mahdi). The activity of the Muslim sisters was carried on under the sponsorship of this society,¹⁷ till its dissolution in 1959.

According to ex-Muslim Brother during this period many of those (be men or women) who joined the Islamist movement, neither out of conviction and belief that their action was undertaken, nor for the sake of spreading Islam and establishing its rules, but out of combating and curbing the communist tide that overrode the Sudanese society.¹⁸

Generally, the Islamist movement during the 1950s did not initiate an important programme towards women, its discourse was conventional, affected by traditional and Patriarchal structures that dominated the Sudanese society.

4.4 Era of Inaction 1959-1964:

This was the military rule period led by lieutenant General Aboud. The Islamist movement was stunned to know what happened to the Muslim Brothers' movement in Egypt, and thought of the distress that might afflict it too. Hence, the movement became latent at the beginning of this era. It conducted the Da'wa under a cultural pretext, in order to divert attention of the ruling junta away from its political activities .

Work was effectively begun since 1962 Conference, which was held at Omdurman during *Id-al-Adha* (Greater Bairam). Two of the decisions of the Conference were:

concentrating the activities of the movement on the society of secondary school male and female students, and requiring teachers and Muslim Brothers to spread the da'wa among student sectors.¹⁹

One of the Muslim Sisters who joined the movement in 1960, assured that the activity of the Islamist movement at Kasala secondary school, was conspicuous at that time. She declared that senior Muslim Sisters used to come to the school, to introduce themselves to those who were interested in joining the movement, and to matronize them. She added that activities were carried out secretly inside *al-Usra* lectures were delivered in especial rooms (stores at the school hostel taken over by the Muslim Sisters' Lobby) from 5 to 8 O'clock. She proceeded to say they were used to observe performance of Salat Al-Muqrib (prayers done immediately after sunset) in group, for the purpose of encouraging those among students and even teachers who were lazy to do their prayers. The activity of Muslim Sisters at Kassala school, was based on reciting the Holy Qūran, discussing matters of common interest, and delivering lectures on ethical integrity. All that was done without tackling political topics.²⁰

When the policy of lieutenant general Abud turned out to be moderate and conservative, the Muslim Sisters affiliated themselves with what was then called *Haiat Nissa al-Soudan al-Shaabia* (Sudan Women's People Association) which was established under efforts of the Minister of Information and Social Affairs at that time. All the woman organizations (be they Islamist, communist, or independent) took their part in this institution, as has been reviewed in chapter three in this research.

4.5 Era of Full Emergence 1964-1969:

This was the period of 1964 October Revolution, during which political freedom was prevalent, multi-party system was realized, that one could find traditional sectarian, rightist, or communist parties. In this period, the movement got out of its stagnancy, developed or, rather, changed its da'wa approach and set up "The Islamist Charter Front", as an organization at which the loyalty of its members converged, and as a vehicle for serving political purposes of the movement. By the same token, "National Women's Front" was established. In this context, Dr. Al-turabi emphasized that the Islamist movement in this period, dispensed with the public spread of da'wa through assimilating members by public or private discourse. Instead it managed most of its popular and political activities through such organizations as "the Islamist Charter Front", and Youth, Women, and National associations, just to satisfy itself with the membership loyalty of these organizations.²¹

In this period, the attitude of the movement towards women, as has been mentioned in the introduction of this chapter, sprang from reconsidering the conventional attitude. Dr. Al-turabi in this connection said that the Islamist group was made to turn away from its conventional attitude, under pressure of challenge, and charged a group of Muslim Sisters to form what was called "National Women's Front". This Front, as Al-turabi stated, was thus named because relating its name to Islam, might stir denial by the traditionalists and disinclination by the modernists.²²

Pragmatism of the movement was evident here in the development of its attitude towards women. That is, the establishment of the National Women's Front was reactive to

the communist-party containment of the Sudanese women's movement incorporated in the Sudanese Women's Union. The Islamist movement, therefore, began reviewing its conventional attitude. The pragmatism was also apparent in excluding any 'Islamic' term defining the Front. This exclusion was done to avert anger by the traditionalists, and loss of loyalty by the hesitant ones who did not want to belong to what could relate them to the Muslim Brothers' movement. In effect, Sudanese women who did not belong to Muslim Sisters' movement, participated in the activities of the Front, such as those done in evening schools and in sewing workshop, in addition to other activities.

The National Women's Front (N.W.F) was formed in October 14, 1964 namely, a week before the October-21 Revolution. The Front's executive office was composed of 10 members of the Muslim Sisters: Thuraiya Umbabi, Su'ad Al-Fatih, Wisal Al-Mahdi, Ihsan Amil, 'Awatif al-Sheikh, Hishmat Hasan Sid Ahmad, Rashida Abd-al-Muttlib, Amira Abd-al-Muttlib, Hikmat Hasan Sid Ahmad, and Safiya An-Nur (see constitution, appendix 1). The Women's Front set down its constitution and regulations, and published at Al-Manar Magazine (see appendix 1). The constitution included many objectives some of which were: access to the Muslim individuals who genuinely believed in Allah and observed their orders in all their deeds, administering social justice, notably in matters relating to women: laws that hampered women's progress should be abolished, conferring women the rights of suffrage and candidacy, in order to fully participate in national duty, and combating all the damaging customs and traditions. The constitution, too, comprised many means to materialize those objectives. Some of these means were: establishing educational and social institution, such as schools, issuing a magazine as an organ for the Front, teaching the Front

members the Islamic principles, and enhancing in them the spirit of practical piety. (For more detail see appendix 1).

The objectives of N.W.F were based mainly on raising Islamic consciousness among its members besides maintaining women's political right. This reflected firstly, the Islamists tendency to use N.W.F as an agent of spreading its da'wa among women. And secondly its attitude to cope with what other Sudanese women's organization (e.g S.W.U) called for.

In The course of expanding its activities, the front established many branches in different regions particularly in urban centre of Al-Obied and Port Sudan. More important however, this had reflected the urban nature of the movement, instead of branching out to rural area the movement, true to its nature sought urban, middle class strata to recruit membership. In Al-Obied in 1969, a clinic bearing the name of the N.W.F acted as a platform for the Front membership.²³

The activity of the National Women's Front was effectively carried out after October 1964. The Front staged in the first week of November 1964 a march from Khartoum Scouts' Club to the Council of Ministers, supporting the October government. The march organizers gave Mr. Mohammed Ahmad al-Mahjoub, who received the march, a memorandum signed by the Women's Front and by the Women's Cultural Revival Society. The memorandum included the following items: demand to give women the full right of vote, equality in wages, woman participation in pension service, marriage leave for one week, childbirth leave for 40 days, and motherhood leave for 6 months. The Council of

Ministers approved the women's political right , but the other demands were relegated for approval to the Constituent Assembly.

The Women's Front during the 1960s demanded the application of the Islamic Sharia laws, and the drafting of Islamic constitution. This took place when the Front Leader, Su'ad Al-Fatih, and the head of Information Office, Thuraiya Umbabi, met with the premier Mohammed Ahmad al-Mahgoub, to discuss with him the application of Sharia and its positive effects on society in general and on women in particular. The premier was surprised, as Thuraiya Umbabi said, to hear women claiming the application of Sharia, despite that sharia allowed marriage to four wives at the same time and women dislike polygamy. However, the meeting, as Thuraiya said, came to the agreement that the practise of polygamy had nothing to do with Sharia, and the meaning of that was misunderstood. On the contrary, she went to say, the application of the Sharia qualified the lawfulness of 'polygamy.'²⁴

As for the social services , the constitution of the National Women's Front provided the establishment of educational, social, and humanitarian institutions such as day and night school at their different levels. In this context, the Front was able to establish al-Zuhur Intermediate School which was expropriated by May-1969 government. As for al-Arda Intermediate School constraints stood in its way with the coming of May government, but Thuraiya Umbabi took pains in keeping the establishment process to continue: she sold her jewellery for that purpose. The school thus became her own, and she worked in it as a headmistress.²⁵

The Women's Front participated in the June 1965 election campaign. It conducted symposiums, general lectures, and especial lectures for woman. Thuraiya Umbabi, representing the National Women's Front, and was nominated in Graduate Constituency. The election programme of the Women's Front (see appendix 2) dealt with such issues as: familial and female civil-servant problems, rights of career women, and the problems of rural and southern-Sudanese women.

However, the Front Candidate (Thuraiya Umbabi) though she won 2,944 votes, failed to enter the Parliament. While the Communist Party candidate (Fatima Ahmad Ibrahim) who secured 5,918 votes succeeded to enter it.²⁶ Thuraiya Umbabi ascribed her failure firstly to poor information and propaganda campaigns to the extent that her brother who was then in America knew nothing of her candidacy, he thus voted in favour of Fatima. And secondly to that some Muslim Brothers who were hesitant to nominate and give their votes to her.²⁷ However many Muslim Brothers were against candidature of women. In this respect, Mr. Mohammed Sadiq Al-Karuri called for denying women their rights of vote and candidacy, on the ground that women were like bottles, and a bottle would break if it underwent friction or collision, therefore women should stay at home to assume their duties of maternity, nursing, and family care.²⁸

In this era, Muslim Sisters' participation was extended to involve such other areas as the University of Khartoum Students' Union. For the first time, the Islamist movement nominated the student 'Amira Abd-al-Muttlib (a Muslim sister) to the 40-executive council of the Union in 1964 and later named Amira Bashra to the same post.²⁹ The number of Muslim sisters that joined the University of Khartoum increased: in the student class of

1957-1966, for instance, 33 Muslim Sisters out of 57 female students entered the University in this year.³⁰

Due to the increasing number of secondary schools³¹ and university students who joined the Muslim movement, an office for Muslim Sisters (which was sponsored by Muslim Brothers) was established so that it could enable the student to practise activities by themselves. The organizational structure was composed of: First, the Consultative Council. This involved competent Muslim Sisters who were selected on regular basis . Its function was only advisory, met when necessary, and was made use of in conducting studies on different woman's problems such as family, marriage, and employment. Second, the Executive Office, its members were selected by free vote through Sisters Shura council. Its membership was composed of ten sisters. It included five units, each unit had a head with an assistant. These units were: office of Muslim Sisters, office of National Women's Front, Office for co-ordinating female students affairs, office of finance, office of information and culture. Thirdly, Sisters' Shura Council. Its function was to appoint the Executive Office members. The Executive Office was responsible to it. It held bimonthly meetings, and could conclude extra meetings if the Executive Office demanded.³²

In this era, the issuance of Al-Manar magazine was resumed, in October 1964. Its editor-in-chief was Thuraiya Umbabi. Its articles ranged between criticizing communism and relating it to the Sudanese Women's Union through written items and caricatures, to attempts of adopting a moderate means to call for al-Dawa'a, to the art of discussion on the account that Islam denies al-Taasub (biasness). In its January-1965 issue, al-Manar magazine attempted to defend political rights of women from an Islamic perspective. In this

context, the magazine explained in several points quoting Quranic verses and Hadiths, that permitting good deeds and forbidding evil ones mentioned in al-Tuba verse:71, included worldly and hereafter matters, as well as the practice of political affairs i.e. the duty of the governed towards the governor that implies upon both women and men. The magazine in its November-1964 issue also tried to match Saut al-Mara magazine in its levelling an anti-campaign at "*Biet al-Ta'a*", through interviews and caricatures. It continued to be issued till the advent of May-1969 government.

Muslim Sisters effectively contributed to the political pressure and mobilization that resulted in isolating and dissolving the Communist Party in 1966. This when a communist student named Mohammed Shawgi was reported to have fabricated a lie on the Prophetic House in August 1965. Consequently, the Muslim Sisters flared up and mobilized the Sudanese people against the communists, and thus the Communist Party was dissolved and dismissed from the Constituent Assembly.³³

As for its support for Arab causes, the Islamist Women's Front organized a protest demonstration up to the Egyptian Embassy in Khartoum, against the assassination of Saïid Qutb and other Muslim Brothers by President Jamal Abd-al-Nasir. It also staged, jointly with other woman organizations as the Cultural Society for Women's Revival and the Association of University Female Graduates, a march following the June 1967 Arab defeat by Isreal. The march participants called for keeping youth conscription open, continuing war against Israel, and that Arabs should follow the policy of non-surrender. At that time Arab Presidents and kings were holding a meeting in Khartoum. The march was then received by Yasir Arafat, Ismail Al-Azhari, Minister of Information and Culture Abd-al-

Majid Abu-Hasabu. The Minister Abd Al-Majid tried to make out of this march, a Sudanese woman grouping reflecting the point of view of Sudanese women organizations on the Middle East cause. This grouping was only being effective in September 1967 under the leadership of Badriya Az-Zein and the secretary Su'ad Al-Fatih. Although this grouping was established as a result of suggestion and initiative by the Islamist women's Front, its leadership was given to Badriya Az-Zein, so that nothing relating to al-Khwat al-Muslimat movement should appear in public.³⁴ The grouping had no achievement other than addressing Arab Presidents and Kings in Khartoum in 1967 and its activities were suspended in 1970.

It is worthy of noting that Muslim Sisters, during this era had no idea about the Muslim Woman dress. They did not even adhere to *al-Zai al-Islami* (an Islamic dress) , and thought that the Sudanese *Tobe* was enough. The idea of wearing *hijab* (veil worn by Muslim women, with Islamic specifications) was only discussed at the student conference held in 1967 when prof. Malik Badri specified Islamic dress in the form of trousers and a dress past the knees or a long loose garment. No woman did stick to that dress except Halima Muhammad Ibrahim and the late Alawiya Abnaof.³⁵ However, there had been an explicit rejection of that dress, as Ibtisam Hasan said, by the Sudanese society, and by the few Muslim Sisters who first either wore the hijab without covering their heads, or wore a long dress without sleeves. Those few who wore this type of *al-hajab* had suffered from difficulty and faced opposition from society.³⁶ This attitude implies that *al-Zai al-Islami* in the 1960s was peculiar to Sudanese culture and traditions.

The Muslim Sisters' movement during this period, acquired organizational awareness, experience, and knowledge. That was due to the experience they acquired from their participation in such women's organizations as the Sudanese Women's Union, and the Cultural Society for Women's Revival. They conveyed this experience to their new separate organization, the National Women's Front which appeared as a rival to the S.W.U that kept since 1950s manipulating the Sudanese women's movement.

4.6. Era of Strife and Growth 1969-1977:

In its first 'socialist' phase, May regime adopted a number of measures to undermine the potential and the actual opposition activities. These measures included banning political parties and Trade Unions firstly and then the members belonging to the these parties were layed-off from public sector jobs on political grounds. The Islamists were among the political groups that were severely effected by these measures, women supporters of the Islamists were not spared. For instance, three University of Khartoum female students were expelled 'Alawiya 'Abnaof (Faculty of Pharmacology Fourth year), Nafisa 'Abd-al-Rahman (wife of Mr. As-Sadig Abd-allah Abd-al-Majid, Faculty of Arts, third year) and another one.³⁷ Moreover, Su'ad Al-Fatih was arrested while taking part in a demonstration organized against the government and the Communist Party but she was released, then emigrated to Suadia Arabia, stayed there after she had found a profession, and came back home following the National Peace.³⁸ In this connection, Sumaiya Abu Kashauwa who was a member of the University of Khartoum Union's Executive Office (for the 1973 term), said that she suffered from troubles by security men and by the University student Deanship,

because of her belonging to the Islamist movement.³⁹ Furthermore, Mrs. Wisal As-Sidiq Al-Mahdi said that she was arrested in July 1976 for nine and a half months.⁴⁰

Owing to those heavy political pressures by the Nimeiri's government, the Islamist Movement reverted to underground activities and communication among its members was conducted with top secrecy through *al-Usaar*. Thus, the schedule of al-Usra meetings, as Ibtisam Hasan explained, was arranged an hour before the meeting real time, for security reasons. *Al-Usra* topics, however, were not political, but were focused on Quran reciting, *tajwid* (correct reciting of Quran), and religious awakening. In 1970s, Ibtisam proceeded, the interest of the movement was based on authentic and religious education, unlike its interest in 1960s which was focused on politics. She attributed that to the lack of efficient political elements in the Islamist movement during the 1960s. Thereby, the movement intended to catch up other potential and competent political forces (referring to the communists).⁴¹

In this period of strife and growth, the Islamist movement initiated an authentic movement i.e it began to support its arguments and activities with religious provisions, and restore any actions or belief to the origin of Islam. Corollary the authentic movement in aspect of *al-Da'wa* proliferation and women's question was embarked on.⁴²

With regard to the question of woman al-Turabi produced a book entitled "**Women in Islam and Muslim Society**" which appeared first in 1973 as a semi-anonymous document for internal circulation and after it had been discussed within the ranks of the movement, it was officially published under Dr. al-Turabi's name. Before the booklet appeared, el-Affendi (ex-Muslim Brother) states, the Islamists response to the

challenges such as that the female students in the university were very hostile to them and very sympathetic to the communists because the latter support the rights of women-was some tentative and piece meal strategy and solution. For instance they set several organizations (e.g. National Women's Front), but this strategy lacked coherence and clear theoretical Foundations. The Islamists, were mainly reactionists to communists and secularist success and propaganda.⁴³

The movement in the 1970 entered into a new experience, when it formed a national front with May-regime opponents and gathered in Al-jazira Aba to oppose the May-regime. The Islamist movement played a major role in this front, it managed the weapon-smuggling process up to the region of Al-jazira, training guard, monitoring, and organization.⁴⁴ The Muslim Sisters' movement, on the other hand, took part in those activities that the dissolved National Women's Front instituted a resistance movement inside and outside Sudan , and set up an office in Sudan holding its secret meetings, sometimes, at the stable quarter in Khartoum. The members of this office were Thuraiya Umbabi, Su'ad Al-Fatih, Wisal As-Siddiq, Amira Abd-al-Muttlib, Sarra Fadil, (the wife of al-Sadiq al-Mahdi), and Ruqaiya Abd-allah al-Fadil. Mrs. Wisal als-Siddiq and Ustaza Amira Abd-al-Muttlib were the two who had been delivering messages from Khartoum to Al-jazira Aba in which the Muslim Brother Mohammad Salih Umar, Mohammad As-Saddiq Al-Karuri, Mahdi Ibrahim stayed with Imam Al-Hadi Al-Mahdi.⁴⁵

4.7. Era of Peace and Development 1977-1984:

During this era the Islamist movement signed peace agreement with May government in 1977. Dr. al-Turabi ascribed the experience of "National Reconciliation" to the need of the movement for a new situation, in which it could make major changes required by a comprehensive strategy for its future activities and its empowerment in the Sudan.⁴⁶ The movement since the peace took place, demanded the application of Islamic Sharia, administration of justice, amendment of the constitution, and the abolishment of freedom-restricting provisions.⁴⁷

To implement the strategy of comprehensive empowerment (*Stratigiat al-Tamakin al-Shamil*) in the society, the movement went far beyond its approach of selection and individual recruitment, to that of tribes, sects and groups who were loyal to Sufi cults and could join the Islamist movement.⁴⁸

The main concern of the movement in this period was to sprawl, and form a broad popular base, so as to provide it with an established position, and a buffer to be used when necessary. In the wake of the National Reconciliation, the Islamist movement enjoyed large freedom of action especially with regard to al-Usra activities. Therefore, the Muslim Sisters became active and well-versed when they were given the chance to manage al-Usra. In this respect, Amira al-Sir was the first to be in charge of female students (i.e *Amir*) in Kosti Secondary School. Al-Usra, during this era, attached great importance to religious education, along with practical training of Muslim Sisters on financial management, as well as identifying cultural and other programmes concerning with *al-Usra*. Furthermore

training was then based on preparing the Islamist's members to be ready to co-operate with May regime so as to participate in the process of replacing "secular social structures" with those based on a "theocratic foundation". Muslim Sisters had been told during the 1980s that the Islamist movement would one day be a substitute for the May regime.⁴⁹

The movement also took up on its shoulders, through al-Usra units, the duty of advocating the movement's political position on such a matter as 'September laws' and of appealing to female members to join the "Society for Permitting Good Deeds and Forbidding Bad Ones" so as to be able to make changes in society.⁵⁰

According to the strategy of *al-Tamakun al-Shamil* (comprehensive empowerment) social activity has its political targets: its purpose was to interact with society. Hence, the movement was enhanced to bridge the increasing gap between the modern elite and traditional popular sectors, manipulate society and reform not only through *Sultian* (governing) but also directly through the movement's practical approach of social interaction.⁵¹ In response to this strategy, and to stem the flow of Western voluntary organizations which increased as a result of famine and refugees, a new society was established in 1979 "*Jamiyyat Raidat El-Nahda*" (Women Renaissance Pioneers Society). It was established to gather women's efforts in order to achieve human and economic development according to Islamic behaviour, ideology and procedures and accomplish its objective and serve the community accordingly. However, the Islamic Renaissance Pioneers society's objectives: were to spread and deepen Islamic laws in the society, particularly among women, to fight against bad and defective traditions, to spread virtue and encourage man and woman to attach to Islamic laws, to try to improve women's economic and social

status. Other objectives of al-Raidat society were to cooperate with specialized agencies to spread the awareness among female students and direct their attention to social good - here social goods according to al-Raidat means to follow an Islamic pattern of life - to observe and take care of the disabled and handicapped, to fight illiteracy and all aspects of alien culture that contradict Islamic principles, and finally to give help to those having natural crises (famine) irrespective of race or religion.⁵² The society organizational structure consisted of the central committee, which in turn was composed of President, Secretary General, National Capital and Region's Secretary, Secretary of Social Affairs, Secretary of Finance, Secretary of Information, Secretary of Society Building Affairs, and Secretary of Public Relations and communication. The society of *Raidat al-Nahda* established branches all over the Sudan regions.

The achievements of the *al-Raidat* society were reflected in certain activities such as firstly, conducting fair for Islamic books and dress. Secondly, establishing centres for making Islamic dress. Thirdly, making camps for refugees. In this context, each of the following Muslim Sisters Halima Ahmad Ibrahim, Lubaba Al-Fadl, and Amal Al-Raiyah set up camps in the areas of al-Muweilih and al-Sheikh Abu zeid when those areas were hit by drought and desertification. These Sisters during that plight provided, jointly with Islamic Da'wa organization and Islamic African Relief Agency, food and clothes. The female leaders of this society conducted, in this respect, a statistical survey for those who were affected by the drought in these area. according to this survey *al-Raidat* society provided its humanitarian assistance to the displaced people ⁵³ Finally, mass marriage, the society worked in coordination with Shabab Al-Watan organization, and formed a committee for

materializing the project of collective marriage, which was actually carried out in June 1989.

The out growth and enhancement of the power and activities of *al-Raidat* society gave birth to a struggle between the society and the Sudan Women's Union. The latter tried to halt the former's activities carried out in the union's central committee and in the national and regional conferences of the Socialist Union. The Sudan Women's Union justified its combat against the society as that the society sought to compete with the union and replace it.⁵⁴

In the political arena, *Al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* (Muslim's Sisters) also succeeded to enter the Third People's Council (1980), when the late Zakiya Abd-al-Rahman (from Western Sudan) and Ruqaiya Raajab Allah (from Southern Sudan) won two seats in the geographical constituency election.⁵⁵ This political participation is a part of the movement's strategy to integrate with May regime so as to Islamize the state.

Also during this period, the Omdurman Islamic University's Union of female students, which was controlled by female students of the Islamic movement,⁵⁶ had been working hard in order to spread the Islamic *da'wa* and *al-Zai al-Islami* (an Islamic dress), through conducting fairs and symposiums. This union, however, actuated, in co-ordination with the same University Male Students' Union, the first Islamic camp in 1978, the second in 1979, and the third in 1980. Islamist activists and thinkers from inside and outside Sudan, such as Zeinab Al-Ghazali and Rashdi Al-Ghanushi, participated in these camps.⁵⁷

The Muslim Sisters' movement was able during (1977-1984) to strengthen and enlarge its membership through its social institutions. It worked freely without political

constraints, and in the absence of other rival woman organizations, such as the Sudanese Women's Union. Hasan Makki (Muslim Brother) in this respect, emphasized that the Islamist movement was indebted to Islamist Women for their success and full attendance in the council of central and regional departments, and for that their attendance in the department of the Islamist organization was quantitatively and qualitatively more than that of the movement's male members.⁵⁸

4.8. Era of Maturity 1984-1989:

This era was defined by al-Turabi, as an age of the movement maturity, because it experienced such a consciousness of itself and its surroundings that it could thereby absorb shocks and get out of the blockage imposed on it, and utilize different fluctuating situations in the interest of its steady growth.⁵⁹ After April uprising 1985, the male Islamist movement organization resumed its activities under the title the National Islamist Front (N.I.F). By the same token, the Muslim Sisters regained their activities through their organization the National Women's Front (N.W.F). The NWF held its first general conference, which was attended by representatives from different regions of Sudan. It elected at the conference the general shura body and its chairwoman, the secretary-general of the Woman Islamist Front, and the executive office which was composed of ten members and nine sub-offices for the following domains: organization and management, social affairs, personnel affairs, da'wa and cultural affairs, communication and external relations, economic and financial affairs, National capital affairs, and regions' affairs.⁶⁰

The National Women's Front during the 1980s acquired a new organizational skill. It was decentralized, due to the increasing number of Muslim Sisters in different regions. Consequently, Muslim Sisters in other regions were given freedom of holding regional conferences of the National Women's Front, and establishing the organs of the regional fronts and training their members, without any intervention by the central National Women's Front.

This period also witnessed, for the first time, the representation of the National Women's Front in the organs of the Islamist movement. It was admitted in the General Shura Body of the National Islamist Front, making up 10% out of the whole number of representatives.⁶¹

The political activity of the National Women's Front was restricted, in this period, to Elections preparations such as, voting, voters' registration, manipulating voters, conducting and encouraging debates and lectures. These activities mostly carried on woman sector.

The NWF was also able to be active on the field of public communication and external relations. It made contacts with women members of the diplomatic corps and some Arab and African embassies in Khartoum. It attached great importance to co-operation with the People's Republic of China. It participated in escorting visiting delegations, such as the Chinese and Libyan female delegations, exchanged with them experiences in different areas, and gave banquets in their honour. It, also, gave banquet in the honour of Muhammad Ali Klai and his wife when they visited the Front's residency in Khartoum.⁶²

As for the social activities, the Women's Front established many societies, as *Al-Bir Society* which was concerned with refugees and the displaced, and *Aghniya mina Al-ta'af-fuf Society* which was devoted to the poor who did not ask other people help, out of that their pride should not be hurt. So, aids were secretly showered onto them. These aids included clothes for feasts and schools, money and rents. Also a society for *al-Usra al-Munteegah* , literally it means productive families, but here it denotes to e society that concered with income-generating activities such as cloth sewing and cutting, handicrafts, animal and poultry breeding and soap industry.⁶³

National Women's Front ,also established another organization within the framework like the league of working woman (*Rabitat al-Mara Al-Amila*).It is a voluntary organization being established for improving the working conditions of women.Its programmes of action addressed the following demands: firstly, fighting sex discrimination in employment, secondly, calling for extending maturity leave to six months with full-payment. Thirdly, urging employers to provide transport for female employers and finally calling for organizing women in informal sectors.⁶⁴ the working women league raised these demands at a time of democracy when two Muslim Sisters were represented in the Parliment. Those two candidates who won the elections for the Constituent Assembly in 1986, were Dr. Su'ad Al-Fatih and Hikmat Hasan Sid Ahmad.

The activities of Girl's College of the Omdurman Islamic University were upgraded in this period.The Female Student Union of this college, in co-operation with the International Forum of Islamic Youth and the General Union of student organizations, held the First International Islamic Camp in 1985 under the title *al-Islam yagaud al-Haia*

(Islam leads life) and the second International Islamic Camp in 1987 under the title "Muslim Woman: Getting out of the shackles of Reality to the World of Religion." The goal of those camps were to instil Islamic awareness among women, reflect problems of Muslim Women in the world and their role in social building. 500 female members from inside and outside Sudan participated in the two camps. At the camps, problems of women in the participant's countries (such as Malawe, Comoros, Kenya, Pakistan, and Yemen) were discussed. At the end of deliberation session of the two camps, a necessity cropped up, this was the setting up of international organization for Muslim women, so as to look after their affairs, and to strengthen and regulate activities among them.⁶⁵

Through such attempts the Islamist movement aims at organizing female component of Islamist Internationale and as will be reviewed in the section that follows these endeavours have succeeded in establishing regional organizations as well as international networks.

4.9. Era of al-Tamakeen "Empowerment" 1989-1995: ⁶⁵

This is the time of the National Salvation Government headed by Al-Bashir, and politically and economically backed by the dissolved National Islamist Front. Al-Bashir's government has lifted the burden of da'wa off the Islamist movement. And instead of promoting the da'wa by public discourse through the institutions and bodies of the Islamist movement, the government, as Hikmat Hasan Sid Ahmad said, has made the da'wa a public target, everyone has to do with it.⁶⁷ The National Women's Front has, as a result, been dissolved like any other woman organizations, to prove credibility of the government, and

to substantiate the fact that the National Women's Front could have not coped with this stage.⁶⁸

The present era requires the Islamist movement to take organizational forms other than those taken in previous eras, and to adapt itself to the present conditions of al-Infatih (conditions of spreading at all levels). Al-Turabi, in this connection, said:

*"The public life has been producing for the movement many challenges that necessitate organizational adaptation, also the increasing needs compel the movement to expand its Islamic functions in order to satisfy those needs, and to develop its organizational frameworks in order to assimilate those functions,..., the movement thereby ensures continuity of experience."*⁶⁹

Therefore the movement's member has been obsessed by changing the society, da'wa at individual level became his responsibility, therefore his/her loyalty to the movement declined and institutions and different forms of organizations have been set up, with individual and personal initiatives by Muslim Sisters.⁷⁰ Of these organizations are International Women Bond, Miheira Humanitarian Society, and International Islamic Women Centre. Some women organizations, such as the National Women's Front and the *Rabitat al-Nahda* have disappeared since they extended their services and achieved its objectives according to the demands and necessity of the former stages.

In this stage, the Islamist movement looks to new organizational adaptation, in order to assimilate within its organizations the Sudanese women, be they Muslim Sisters or non. For instance, we find that the chairwoman of the International women Bond (I.W.B.) is Dr. Samira Amin who does not belong to the movement, while the Bond's Secretary-General is a Muslim Sister. The Bond, however, has excluded any Islamic term from its

title, to add to its membership female christians and female elements who do not belong to the Islamist movement. This Bond conforms to such other organizations of the movement as "the International People's Friendship Council," which participated in the establishment of the Bond.

The Bond is a woman organization that includes in its membership male elements, and aims at dealing with the present international issues such as woman and decision-making, realizing peace, refugees, and poverty elimination in a local framework. In this framework, the Woman Symposium was held in December 17-18, 1994 under the title "Empowerment and Decision Making".⁷¹

In an attempt to internationalize the experience of Muslim's Sister, the International organization for Muslim Women (I.O.M.W) was given birth to in November 1989. Twelve countries from all over the world participated in the constitutional conference of the organization. Some of these countries are: Zambia, Comoros, Tanzania, Chad, Mauritius, and Pakistan. The idea of establishing this organization emanated from the first and the second International Islamic camps held in 1985 and 1987 respectively, and sponsored by the International Islamic Youth, and the Omdurman-Islamic University Union of Female Students.⁷²

Some of the objectives of the organization are promoting Islamic awareness among non-Muslim women, teaching Muslim women the ways of mastering Islamic principles, enhancing the conditions of women and encouraging them to intellectual production, rehabilitating and training women to fully play their roles in society, and spreading the spirit of understanding and tolerance among Muslim and non-Muslim women.⁷³

Also in attempts to establish its international female component, I.O.M.W has set up external offices in Kenya, Chad, Mauritania, Tanzania, Yuganda, Egypt, Jordon, and Yemen. These offices rehabilitated and trained Muslim women to assume their role in da'wa and in the movement establishment, through social centres, training courses, forums, and camps.

The administrative structure of the organization consists of first, Council of Secretaries. This is composed of 30 members, at least two thirds of them are women, and one third or less are men. It comprises women leaders who have a notable concern with intellectual matters, and with studies and evaluation of woman affairs, for the purpose of enhancing their performance. The council annually conducts surveys to evaluate performance of the organization. Second, General Secretariat which is chaired by the secretary-general, and is composed of ten members belonging to the executive office or from outside. Its functions are developing broad plans, adopting reports, evaluating performance, and supervising other institutions of the organization. Third, Executive Office. Its duty is implementing all the plans and programmes of the organization. It is chaired by the executive manager, and has a deputy executive manager. It supervises international management, resource development and investment.⁷⁴

The organization has many achievements (see appendix 3). It has established 5 social centres in Sudan, three of which are in Khartoum, one in Northern Darfur State, the other in Equatoria State. These centres consist of sub-centres for developing skills of women, and others for handicrafts activities as well as model cultural kindergartens.

In the domain of training, the organization has trained da'wa agents in different areas such as management, computer, and language courses. It has also made camps for female da'wa agents, to rehabilitate da'wa agents of Southern Sudan as an effort that might help in islamization process which carried by Islamists in the southern Sudan.

In addition, the organization held the First Women Forum in 1991, under the title: "Women: present and Future Perspectives." This forum was attended by delegations from 15 different countries. The organization also held the Second Forum in 1992 under the title: "Women are the Leaders of Civilization- Building Process". This was attended by delegations from 35 countries from Europe, Asia, Africa, and America. In 1994, the third forum was held, commonly with the International Women Bond, under the title: "Fair Law breeds Decent Society." This forum tackled the position of women in laws, because of the importance of laws in identifying women's roles in society .⁷⁵

In this period, Muslim Sisters also have come to exercise a new experience joining camps of "popular defence", and participating in military operations. The actual participation of women in the popular defence began in the middle of the year 1990, when they joined "Omar Ibn Al-Khatab Camp", in spite of the opposition they met. Some conservative Islamists within the movement like the magistrate Hag Nur criticizes the Muslim Sisters' participation in military operation in southern Sudan (which the Islamist movement called *al-jihad*) in view that Muslim women during the prophet Mohammed's era participated in *al-Jihad* with *Mahram* (guardian either father or brother or husband) and what practising now is considered as *Bida'aa* (it denotes new practices or legislations that are not accustomed to in Islamic tradition and not acceptable by conservative Islamists

) . Others argue that the Islamist movement indulges Muslim women in *al-jihad* so as to encompass a gender-sensitive trend developing among Islamists women. However, those who participated in the first Popular Defence's camp were about 512, most of them were Muslim Sisters. The camp was conducted under the auspices of the General Union of Sudanese Students and some soldiers from the Military Academy. This camp bore the title: "Challenge Course". The success in that experience has resulted in the large number of women who are interested in the popular defence. This led to the establishment of the "Women Popular Defence Co-ordinator Unit," then Samiya Al-Faki (Muslim Sister) has been the first coordinator in charge of that unit.⁷⁷

Muslim Sisters participated in many missions some of which are: *Saut al-Haqq* (Voice of Truth) mission during September-November 1994. It was carried out for da'wa, health, and educational purposes. The members of this mission filled in the gap of school teachers set up classes for eradicating illiteracy, and Khalwas (places for teaching and memorizing the Holy Quran).⁷⁸ And *Al-Fath Al-Mubin* mission during February-April 1995. It was accomplished for social, da'wa, cultural, and military purposes. Its members held in Bantio region a popular-defence camp to train some 62 recruited women whose ages range between 16 to 50 years. They, notably, tried to invite Riak Mashar group to negotiate peace with it. Ten Muslim Sisters had talks with that group which involved three lieutenants, two captains, and one belonging to the intelligence agent. These Muslim Sisters explained to the group the purposes of their mission, and their genuine efforts to realize peace.⁷⁹ The results of this mission, as summed up by Zakiya Ahmad Nur, are the response of citizens to the experience, learning to be active and efficient, establishing good social

relations with the people of the region and some women from the southern Sudan became Muslim.⁸⁰

The Muslim Sisters, after being incorporated in the political and social fields, have been looking forward to a new world of al-jihad which is full of challenges. In spite of the controversy in this area, they go ahead practising their experience without any fear from results. All that is done out of their interest in acquiring new knowledge and in being trained on militant fieldwork. The Muslim Sisters' movement, after being matured competent and proficient through experiences, is trying, now to internationalize its message and transmit its experiences at global level. In an interview, al-Turabi emphasized that *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat's* experience in public life can be a model not only for Muslim women, but also for those in the Western countries who have undergone problems in their communities.⁸¹ Though the Islamist movement has not made a genuine transformation in the Sudanese women's social, legal and economic status, it dreams that it may transmit al-Akhwat's experience at global level.

However, Is this development in the attitudes and trend of *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* movement towards women's traditional domestic role and their incorporation in public life is a result of an authentic development that has been dedicated by the Islamist movement or a side-effect of a feminist awareness has been growing within *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat*?. The answer to this question will be investigated in the chapter follows.

Footnotes

1. Hassan Abd alla al-Turabi, (1989) Islamist Movement in Sudan: Development, Gain and Approach, Khartoum , Institute of Research and Islamic Studies, p.137.
2. Ibid., p.137.
3. Ibid., p.140.
4. Interview with Dr. Said al-Fatih (Muslim Sister's pioneer), al-Abasyia Omdurman 19.10.1995.
5. Ibid.
6. Ibid.
7. In Interview with *Ibtisam Hassan* (Muslim Sister's activist). She said no woman had been Amirah in al-Usra (Family) until the mid-1970.
8. Al-Turabi, op.cit, p.46.
9. Badria al-Baqir, (1991) Islamist Women's Movement in Sudan, unpublished Diploma research, IASS, U. of K, p.38.
10. Su'ad al-fatih, op.cit.
11. Su'ad al-Fatih graduated from faculty of Art in 1956.
12. Su'ad al-Fatih, Ibid.
13. Ibid.
14. Al-Turabi, op.cit, p.27.

15. A lot of debates had been followed the separation of al-Akhwat al-Muslimat from the Sudanese Women's Union. Fatima Ahmad Ibrahim attributed the resignation of Said al-Fatih and Thuraiya Umbabi from the Union, and their affiliation to Jamyat Nahda al-Mara to the claim of women's political rights which raised by S.W.U in 1950s. (al-Siyassa newspaper , 24 Oct. 1988, p. 9). While Dr. Su'ad (interview op.cit) replied that we were not against woman's political rights, but we thought that time was not yet ripe for such claims. She further added that if Harakat al-Akhwat al-Muslimat were against these claims, it would not have presented Thuraiya Umbabi for candidacy in 1965 and herself for candidacy in 1986. She attributed their separation from S.W.U to the manipulation of the union by the Communist Party .
16. Interview with Thuraiya Umbabi , Muslim sister's pioneer, al-Safia, Khartoum North, 18-9.1995.
17. Su'ad al-Fatih, op.cit.
18. al-Amin al-Hag. M. Ahamed, (1994) Islamic Movement in the Sudan its positive and negative aspects (1944-1989),(N.P), Electronic centre press and publication, p. 23.
19. Badria, op.cit, p.33.
20. Interview with Ibtisam Hassan al-taiib ,Muslim sister's activist,Khartoum, 15.4.19. 21. Al-Turabi, op.cit, p.41.
22. Ibid., p. 137.
23. Al-Mathaq al-Islami newspaper 11.4.1969 & 7.5.1969.

24. Umbabi, op.cit.

25. Ibid.

26. Nifissa Ahamed al-Amin, (1994) Democratic Advance and Women's Movement in Sudan , Omuderman,al-Ahfad University for Women,Documentation Unit, p.25.

27. Thuraiya Umbabi, op.cit.

28. Al-Sudan al-Gadid newspaper 7.2.1967.

29. Ibtisam Hassan, in an interview with her (op.cit), stated that the Muslim Brothers when were asked about presenting her candidature for elections they said that they did so, so that no communist female entered the Khartoum University Students Union. She added further, that the Muslim Brothers at that time did not have any authentic interpretation for enrolment of women into political activities.

30. Badria, op.cit, p.34.

31. The Islamist movement became active during this period amongst the Girls Secondary Schools at Berber and Kassala Girls Secondary Schools. Al-Mithaq el-Islami journal (issues No. 320, 326 and 330 of 12th., 19th. and 23rd September 1966 consecutively) handled the issues pertaining to problems that occurred in these two schools, as a result of conflicts between the girls affiliated to Islamist movement and the other communist girls.

32. Ibid., p.32.

33. For more details see Hassan Maki, (1982) Movement Muslim Brothers in Sudan 1944-1969 , IAAS, National Press Building),p. (83, 84, 85).

34. Su'ad (interview), op.cit.
35. Badria, op.cit., p.35.
36. Ibtisam Hassan (interview), op.cit.
37. Badria, op.cit., p. 42.
38. Su'ad, op.cit.
39. Interview with Dr. Sumaiya Abu Kashauwa, Muslim Sister's activist Sudanese Women General Union, Khartoum.
40. Interview with Wisal al-Sadiq al-Mahdi, Muslim Sister's activist , al-Manshiya, Khartoum, 18.11.1995.
41. Interview with Ibtisam, op.cit.
42. Al-Turabi, op.cit., p.
43. Hassan Al-Turabi, (1991) Women in Islam and Muslim Society , p. 3.
44. For more details see M. Wagia Allah (1988), al-Akhwan al-Muslimoon wa Sanwat Mayo, Qusa wa Wathaiq al-Secra wa al-Musalah , Khartoum , Dar al-Fakir, p.45.
45. al-Bigar, op.cit., p.41.
46. Al-Turabi, Islamic Movement, op.cit. p. 33.
47. Wagia Allah op.cit. pp. 59-67.
48. Al-Turabi Islamic Movement op.cit. p. 43.
49. Interview with Amira Al-sir, Muslim Sister's activist, Mazad al-Aushra square 24.6.1990.
50. Ibid.

51. Al-turabi Islamic Movement op.cit , p. 170 and Haider Ibrahim (1991) Azamat al-Islam al-Syasi, Cairo, Sudanese Studies Centre , p. 140.
52. Jamiyyat Raidat El-Nahda , "Experience and Achievement" pamphlet 1985 , p. 25
53. Ibid.
54. Ibid., p. 30.
55. al-Ryia newspaper , 9.12.1987.
56. Islamist movement was running its activities in secondary schools and in universities under the name of al-Itegah al-Islami which includes in its membership both muslim brothers and muslim sisters.
57. Badria op.cit, p. 37.
58. Hassan Maki , (1991) Islamist Movement in Sudan 1969- 1985, Khartoum , IRSS and biet al-Marifa, p. 167 .
59. Al-Turabi Islamic Movement op.cit, p. 35.
60. National Women's Front Documents ,secret document ,not available.
61. National Islamic Front, Second General Conference. Khartoum 14-16 Jan. 1988, Act 3 (A) membership selection.
62. National Women's Front documents file, op.cit.
63. For more detail see Badria, op.cit, p. 47-48.
64. ISS, Sudan final report in " Women's Movement and organization in Historical perspective with special reference to colonial and contemporary societies." Hague, Netherlands 1985, p. 180.

65. For more details see information Bulletin issued by International Organization for Muslim Women.

66. This classification is not existed in Al-turabi's Book: Islamic Movement op.cit., but I have added it so as to complete the evaluation of the role of al-Akhwat al-Muslimat in Sudanese Society until the publication of this research.

67. Interview with Hakmat Hassan Sid Ahamed ,Muslim Sister's activist, Transitional National Assembly ,Omdurman,10.7.1995.

68. Amir al-Sir op.cit.

69. Dr. Al-Turabi, op.cit., p. 62.

70. Dr. Al-Turabi confirms these individual initiatives, he said that women's affiliation to the movement resulted in the appearance of independent social organizations, in the form of a general structure for women which mobilized women to women-specific issues. These separate associations did not deprive al-Akhwat al-Muslimat from participating nor affiliating to other organs of the movement. (op.cit., p. 30.)

71. Interview with Sahir Ahamed Salih ,Muslim Sister's activist , Khartoum , 2.9.1995.

72. We and Them , periodical bulletin issued by International Women Bond (al-Rabat al-Nissai al-Alaalemi), Feb. 1995, p. 8.

73. Information bulletin issued by International Organization for Muslim Women , (IOMW).

74. International Organization for Muslim Women's report (1989-Dec. 1994).

75. Seminar al-Mara wa al-bundgia (Women and Gun), Friendship Hall, Khartoum sept. 1992. Video Tape.

76. Al-Nasir newspaper 29.3.1994 issue No. 190.

77. Interview with Omiyma Ahamed al-Dageer, Muslim Sister's activist, Khartoum , offices of Information Coordination Unit of Popular Defence, 11.7.1995.

78. Interview with Zakia Ahamed M. Nuor , Muslim Sister's activist, Khartoum , offices of information coordination Unit of popular Defence, 11.7.1995.

80. Ibid.

81. Interview with Dr. Hassan A. al-Turabi,(leader of the dissolved NIF), khartoum ,31th. Janiuary, 1996.

Chapter Five

Al-Akhwat al-Muslimat: An Ideological Aspect

Harakat al-Akhwat al-Muslimat, has been playing, as reviewed in the previous chapter, a "progressive" role in Sudanese public life compared to conservative Islamist women group, a role that changes through different eras. This chapter attempts to reflect how the influential members in *al-Akhwat* movement thought, what were their perspectives on issues and concepts such as women's liberation, women's political participation, women's participation in al-jihad and gender-sensitive interpretation of Islamic tradition.

5.1. Samples: Selection and justification

Purposive samples are chosen from al-Akhwat al-Muslimat who have been playing a distinguished role in the movement, most of them are activists and academicians. They are divided into four groups, each group was classified according to the affiliation of the purposive sample to the Islamist movement. The study selected the criteria of affiliation as a standard of classification, because we assume that any group that falls within the same period of affiliation has been exposed to the same process of socialization and they are coeval to each other. The importance of reflecting the view-point of each group which may represent a generation is attributed to the premise that each generation adopts its own point

of view which may or may not be identical with other generations. This classification of generations is essential for comparative purposes.

Also, the selection of these purposive samples is important because they hold leading positions on institutions or organizations through which they may transmit and convey their view-point to a large sector of women. More precisely, these individual cases might have an influence on the others. However, the study classified them into the following categories: the Forerunners 1950-1960, the Hesitant group 1960-1970, the Divergent group 1970-1980, the Militant group 1980-1990. For the purpose of comparison each group was asked certain questions such as: How did they view the concept of women's liberation ?; Did they consider their political participation invalidate with the Hadith " **those who entrusted their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity**" , if not , how did they interpret this Hadith ? ; The involvement of *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* in political domain and " Popular Defence Force" was considered by conservative Islamists (e.g. *Insar al-Summa*) as *Bi'ada* how did they view this perspective ? , and finally did they support those who advocate the trend of reinterpretation of Qura'n and al-Ahdith in a gender-sensitive approach or not ? . This particular set of questions is raised by the study because it is polemical and we expect they will stimulate discussion among interviewees which may reflected in different perspectives. Debates over these questions might jeopardize the existence of *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* as a movement , therefore raising these questions is important to see how did al-Akhwat articulate their perspectives to defend their existence ? .

5.2. *Al-Akhwat al-Muslimat*: The Forerunners 1950-1960

This was the period of struggle for independence and for democracy. Sudan was in the stage of nation-building in which every one should participate, thereby nationalists encouraged the participation of women in public life. During this period Sudanese women came to organize themselves into associations with an intention to promote political and social status of Sudanese women. *Al-Akhwat*, Thus, witnessed this era, some contributed in establishing these associations. The purposive samples of this generation played a vital role in the initiation of the first Muslim Sisters organizations "National Women's Front".

The first case of this group is **Saud al-Fatih al-Badawi** who was born in al-Obied in 1930s. She pursued her primary, intermediate and secondary education in missionary and governmental schools in al-Obied, Atbara, al-Khartoum and Omdurman. She graduated from the Faculty of Arts, Khartoum College in 1956. Then continued her higher education in England where she received her Ph.D degree.

Saud's interest in religious activities had grown since she was student in secondary school. Under sponsorship of her teacher Abu Haraz (a sophist), she had taken her first dose in islamic teaching. Then in 1951, when she was called by Mohamed Yousif and Babker Karar (ex-Muslim brother), she was easily recruited as a member of Islamist movement. Through this affiliation Saud sought for psychological balance and to fulfil leadership skills .

Saud al-Fatih, as has been reviewed in Chapter Four, joined many women organizations such as the Sudanese Women's Union (1952), and Women's Cultural Revival Society (1955). Moreover in 1964, when ideological confrontation escalated with Fatima

Ahamed Ibrahim (the leader of S.W.U), Saud al-Fatih with other Muslim sisters established the National Women's Front.

In the 1980s, Saud held the Dean's responsibility of the Girls College of Omdurman Islamic University. During her deanship, she imposed *al-Zai al-Islami* upon the students and led a hard socialization process among them. However, the outcome was that the students union in that college has been manipulating by Muslim sisters since 1980s.

After the World War II, the feminist and women's liberation movement in western countries began to throw its shadow on women's movements in the Third World countries. Since, then, Saud al-Fatih attempted to develop view-point on "women's liberation" differed from these groups. She derives the general understanding of the concept of "liberation" from Islam. Women, for her, should be liberated from fear, they should fear nothing but Allah. Thus women should be incorporated into public life, diffuse *al-Da'wa al-Islamia*, participate in decision-making bearing in mind that Allah's message on earth should be delivered. Saud believes that there is no struggle or antagonism between men or women and if men are unjust towards women, this is because they are religiously misinformed or ignorant. She concludes that Islamic understanding of women's liberation is not parallel to that of western feminists which calls for absolute equality between men and women. Conversely it is derived from the belief that men have their rights and women have theirs, then we have to balance between them. Hence, Saud believes that women's and men's role in public life are not equivalent but are collateral.

In general, Saud al-Fatih emphasizes women's reproductive role, in this respect she claimed in 1986 Constituent Assembly the right of two years motherhood leave with full payment.

The second case of purposive samples is Ustaza **Thurayia Moahmed Umbabi**.³ She was born in Omdurman in 1930s, completed her education till secondary stage in Omdurman. She was appointed as a teacher in al-Ahfad secondary school during 1954-1964, then she was dismissed from the Educational Administration for political reasons. In 1969, she established her own school under the name of "National Women's Front" then it changed into "al-Arda Intermediate" school and she became its headmistress.

Thurayia Umbabi was brought up in a family that religiously devoted. Commenting on her memories of recruitment, she said that Saud al-Fatih invited her to attend a lecture about Islam presented by Mudathir Abd al-Rahim (ex-Muslim Brother). This was the first time to be acquainted with the thoughts of the Islamist movement, she find herself in these thoughts and consequently she became psychologically ready to join the movement, notably when she was called by Mohamed Yousif and Babker Karar.

Like Saud al-Fatih, Thurayia developed an Islamic understanding to the concept of women's liberation. This concept, for her, does not mean that women might violate tradition and norms of society. Furthermore she believes that within an islamic context, women's right of participation in public life should be asserted. To support this right she cited surah al-Tuba verse 71 :

" And the believers, men and women are allies of each other, enjoying the right and forbidding the wrong, establishing prayer, giving alms and obeying God and his messenger. As for these, God will have mercy on them , God Mighty and Wise."

While she discusses the validity of Hadith "**those who entrust their affairs to a woman will never know prosperity**" in reference that Muslims' affairs should not be run by women alone. Here, Thurayia Umbabi believes that women by nature are weak and dependent, therefore they could not alone lead the Muslim communities.

Thurayia, eventually, disagrees with trends that lead to incorporate women in al-jihad and other men domains. Also she is reluctant to discuss legislations concerning women such as divorce and polygamy within a gender-sensitive approach.

The third sample is **Wisal al-Sidig al-Mahdi** who was born in Omdurman in 1939. She received her primary, intermediate and secondary education in Omdurman schools. She joined the Faculty of Law, University of Khartoum in 1959, but she had graduated in 1967 because she left the country for France with her husband (al-Turabi). She did not hold any occupation, but recently she has been appointed as a General Secretary of International Organization for Muslim Women (I.O.M.W).

She joined the Islamist movement in 1956, when she was a student at the Omdurman Secondary School. Later she became a member of the executive committee of the National Women's Front (NWF) in 1964. She was an inactive member and was not much preoccupied by the social and political activities of the movement when she was a student at the secondary school. This attitude might be attributed to her belonging to a sectarian family. She was brought up in al-Ansar's family, so she could not easily engage in the Islamist's activities the rival of her family. Yet, her activities when she was at university were confined, only to *al-Tajneed* (recruiting new members to the movement) and voting

in favour of *al-Itigh al-Islami* (students' associations, through which the islamist movement earned its political and social activities in secondary schools and universities).

Her view point on women's liberation is based on the belief that there is no absolute equality between men and women, as is the case with the western feminists. Each one has his own sphere of action: a man is a bread winner and a woman has been created to be a housewife, responsible for child caring and rearing.

As for women's political participation, she explained the mentioned Hadith "Those who entrust..." is a provision stated for a certain woman and it does not entail that women should be excluded from politics.

About the attempts that were carried by some Islamist feminists such as Riffat Hassan, she said " I have a chance to meet Riffat at Beijing Conference in September 1995", she went on " This woman holds a strange viewpoint that al-Hadith are not the principle of *Usul al-figh* (Principles of Islamic Legislation) ". Wisal yet agreed that women could conduct research within Islam, but this does not necessarily mean to violate the Islamic tradition and adopt the thought of the Islamist feminists .Though Wisal supports women' s participation in political life and Holy war (jihad), however, throughout the interview, she asserts women's domestic role.

5.3. *Al-Akhwat al-Muslimat*: The Hesitant Group 1960-1970

This group witnessed Aboud military regime and the second democratic experience after 1964. During this period *al-akhwat al-Muslimat* were inactive, yet after 1964 they drew some gains when they established their own organizations, and participated actively in

the political sphere. Al-Akhwat al-Muslimat during this period, were manipulated by Islamists as a political force against their rivals.

The first case of this group is Ustaza **Hakamat Hassan Sid Ahamed**.⁵ She was born at Marawi in 1940s. She received her primary education at Marawi, intermediate at Atbara and secondary at Omdurman. She had graduate from the Teacher's Training Institute. She worked in the capacity of a teacher, then a headmistress in various secondary schools. She was, also, a parliamentary member of National People Assembly in 1990.

She joined the Islamist movement in 1960s and became a member of the Executive Committee of NWF in 1964. Most of her activities were focused on cultural issues, she had been a reporter in various newspapers and magazines. For instance she was the reporter of *Safaht al-Mara* (women's page) on *al-Mathaq al-Islami* newspaper. The articles of this page concentrated on discussing the responsibility of schools and houses in the process of socialization, ensuring that this socialization should be followed and adopted according to Islamic principles.⁶

Her point of view on "Women's liberation" emanated from the belief that there is no absolute equality between men and women; but women should be provided with the chance to pursue professions that suit their physical potentiality and ability.

The political right of a Muslim woman, in compliance with her perspective is derived from the Quranic verse 71: Surah al-Tuba. While the hadith "those who entrust..." forbids women from leadership role i.e being a Khalifa. Thus, when Hakamat was elected as graduate constituency representative in 1986 General election, she was satisfied with this participation because she considered her participation within the permissible area of the

mentioned Hadith. To support women's political right she narrated the incidence of *al-Biyaa* (showing allegiance and loyalty) between Muslim women and prophet Mohammed (pbuh)), she explained that this Biyaa is a form of political contract which had been practised since the prophetic era.

Hakmat agreed that women might participate in al-jihad on equal footing with men especially when the country is susceptible to invasion by enemies.

Finally, Hakmat support the attempts that call women to learn and study the islamic teachings that support their incorporation in public life, but this could not be attained without the support of men. She denied the existence of "patriarchal Islam" on the ground that there are some men who are not gender-bias , and therefore we should consider their opinions.

The second case of this group is **Ibtisam Hassan al-Tiib**.⁷ She was born in Rufaa' in 1948. She finished her primary and intermediate education in Portsudan and her secondary education at Kassala town. She had graduated from the faculty of science, University of Khartoum in 1975.

She joined the Islamist movement in 1960. She had been recruited by her brother, who left the movement now. He supplied her with literatures of *al-Akhwan al-Muslimoon*, such as al-Maududi and Said Qu'tb writings. The activities that she conducted during the early days of her affiliation varied from recruiting new member to the movement to participating in the 40-Council Executive Board of Khartoum University Student Union (KUSU), for the three sessions of 1972, 1973 and 1974.

She was employed at the Ministry of Industry, in al-Junied Sugar Factory. Then she left the country for ten years to work as laboratory's expert at Arab Emirates. Now she is a manager of her own company, called "Jilfar for typing, photocopying and stationeries" in Khartoum.

About the concept of "women's liberation", Ibtisam does not believe in absolute freedom for women, to quote her words, "I do not claim that woman should leave like free electrons without stated rules and regulations that derived from Islamic tradition" she said. Generally speaking she emphasized that women are passionate and therefore they should keep away from any duty or job that would affect negatively their femininity and their domestic role. She, also, believes that women's political participation according to the Hadith "Those who entrust..." is restricted, since this Hadith prevents women from holding the post of Muslim's Khalifa which needs certain requisites that women have not.

Though Ibtisam is running her own company, she emphasizes that women's role in public life should be rearranged. She argues that women's role outside the domestic domain affected, negatively on the family and in some cases led to its disintegration. Therefore after the establishment and empowerment of Muslim Sudanese society women should return home or confine their public role to the social or the educational activities. Here Ibtisam like the conservative Islamist M. al-Sharawi, believes that women's participation in public life not only should be allowed if there is a necessity but also confined to certain jobs.

Finally, she disagrees with Riffat Hassan who argues that there is a "patriarchal Islam". Because Ibtisam believes that the integral role of men and women in society will be affected if we divided Islamic scholars into two categories according to their gender. It is

evident that this case like another one Hakmat Hassan fears to introduce polemical concepts such as gender-sensitive approach within Islamic tradition.

The Third sample is **Um Kalthoum Yousif Ismail** (her nickname is Thurayia).⁸ She was born at Bara (Kurdfan province) in 1947. She completed her primary and intermediate school in El-Obied, and her secondary in Omdurman school. She had graduated from Omdurman Islamic University, Girls College. Then she pursued her higher education for a Ph.D. in Manchester University in 1979 and obtained her degree in 1983.

She was appointed a Teaching Assistant in Omdurman Islamic University, and then a lecturer in 1983. Then she left the country to Saudi Arabia having obtained a lecturing post. At present she is a member at various NGOs such as the council of Justice and International Islamic Women's Centre.

She joined the movement while she was in Omdurman secondary school in 1965. She was already a religiously devoted person when she was called upon by Dr. Saud al-Fatih to join the movement. Her activities were concentrated on cultural aspects for example she conducted in collaboration with Aisah al-Ghubshawi (Muslim sister), some Television Programmes called "The Muslim Family" during the years 1979-1982.

She views the women's liberation within the context of freedom of choice and liberation of obedience to no one except Allah. Therefore, she believes that women should have the right to participate in political life and jihad as far as they obey Allah and foster worshipping and justice. She refers to surah al-Tuba:71 to confirm women's right in political participation. She, also, cited from al-Sareet al-Nabawyia the incidence of Um Hani who gave a sylum to an infidel as an evidence of political right that was granted to

women during the prophet's era. But she thinks this participation is restricted according to the mentioned Hadith.

Finally, she believes that the school of thoughts which calls for gender-sensitive interpretation of Qura'n has emerged as a reaction to the domination of *al-fiqh al-Islami* (Islamic Jurisprudances) by men, so in order to avoid any bias in interpretation of Islamic tradition especially with regards to women's affairs, both men and woman should participate in this field.

5.4. Al-Akhwat al-Muslimat: The divergent group(1970-1980)

During this period al-Akhwat al-Muslimat had undergone a political harassment by Nimieri's regime. Therefore till the mid-1970s they confined their political activities within the University Students' Unions . However after National Reconciliation in 1977, al-Akhwat al-Muslimat experienced little freedom of action which reflected in establishing their own organizations.

The first case is **Sumaiya Mohammed Ahamed Abu Kashawa** ,⁹ who was born in al-Obied in 1950s. She had pursued her primary, intermediate and secondary education in al-Obied and al-Dyain. She had graduated from the Faculty of Science in 1977 with B.Sc. (Honours) First Class. Then she continued her higher education for Ph.D. degree in Canada. She was appointed a lecturer at the Faculty of Science, Khartoum University. Now she is the president of Sudanese Women's General Union (SWGU).

Sumaiya joined the Islamist movement in the seventies to fulfil leadership skill and absorb vital traits in her character . Her political activities were manifested since she was a

student at university. In 1973, she was elected a member in the Board of 40-Council Executive of KUSU.

Women's liberation, for her, does not entail that there is a conflict between men and women, but she believes that women have due rights that have been mentioned in Qura'n and no one could deny them. These due rights include their participation, not only, in public life but also in al-Tadayon (religious activities), such as reciting, learning and interpretation of Islamic traditions. Therefore, she believes that Muslim women are responsible to draw forth the Islamic teachings and instructions that support their participation in public life.

Also Sumaiya believes that women can participate in political life without restriction, they may even hold a presidential post as far as they are competent and qualified to handle and enact the Islamic laws into practice. She argues further that the Hadith "Those who entrust..." is stated in special incidence related to a Persian Queen, hence it could not be enacted as a general principle that ought to be applied to all women.

However, Mrs Abu Kashawa concludes that men and women have a complementary role in society therefore we could not use the term equality if we intend to discuss women's question. Instead, as an Islamist, she prefers to use the term justice which has been mentioned in Qura'n because absolute equality does not exist.

The second sample is Ustaza **Amna Mohamed Abd al-Kareem Badri**.¹⁰ She was born in Omdurman in 1953, completed her primary, intermediate and secondary education at Abasyia, Ahfad and Omudmran Schools consecutively. She had graduated from the Faculty of Arts, University of Khartoum in 1977. She received her M.Sc. degree from

Morary College in Britain in 1988, now she is pursuing her Ph.D. study at Khartoum University.

About her affiliation with Islamist movement she said "since I was a child I had been exposed to the thoughts of the Islamist movement. This is when my uncle Malik Badri used to convene Islamist's meetings in our house." But practically she joined the movement when she was called on by her colleague (Muslim brother) in Khartoum University in 1972. Then she was elected as a member in the Executive Board of KUSU of 1972 and 1973 sessions.

She held various post in different institutions such as a teacher in al-Ahfad secondary school, lecturer at Omdurman Islamic University, Girls College (1984-1996) and al-Ahfad Women's University (1996).

Sudanese women have no problems of economic, social and politics inequality as experienced by European women, therefore, Aman said the concept of women's liberation is a western one and does not reflect the situation of Sudanese women.

She believes that men should shoulder the financial and organizational responsibility of the family; and women should not claim economic independency, because this will lead to family disintegration. She views women's political participation is restricted according to the Hadith "Those who entrust...". In this respect Mrs. Badri believes that men are more biologically and emotionally prepared than women to hold leadership role (i.e to be a president or Khalifa).

Women's participation in al-jihad, in her view , should not have been permitted if it had impeded the advancement of the army. In this respect Amna disdains the attitudes of

Islamists, during al-Bashir's regime, towards women's participation in al-jihad. She argues this participation, referring to many experiences, has been at the expense of the family. Here Amna, apparently supports women domestic role over any duties or role that discrepant with it.

Finally, Mrs. Badri disagrees with those who call for gender-sensitive interpretation of Islamic tradition, because she believes that this is one aspect of the trends which attempts to innovate understanding and concepts within these traditions that conform with the western ones.

5.5. *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat*: The Militant group (1980-1990)

This group witnessed the last day of Nimir government and the Third democratic experience in Sudan. During this period the Islamist movement was actively participated in economic and political life, establishing its empowerment strategy and *al-Infisah* policy (open door policy). Through such policy and strategy the movement was able to enhance its political status. Al- Akhwat al-Muslimat, likewise, were influenced by these strategies and their gains in political and social domain were enhanced.

The first case of this group is **Lubaba al-Fadil Abd al-Hameed**.¹¹ She was born in 1956 in Dongala (Northern State), completed her primary and intermediate education at al-Golid and secondary education at Barber. She had graduated from the former Cairo University, Khartoum Branch now, El-Nileen University. She is now pursuing her postgraduate studies at Khartoum University.

Though Lubaba was brought up in a religious family whose members are from Ansar al-Mahdi sect, she joined the Islamist movement in 1980. Lubaba has a rebellious character always disagrees with her father who is a Mahdist adherent. As Islamist activist, she led *Arkan al-Nigash* (public debate forums) in universities. In these forums she presented the thoughts and arguments of the Islamists and counteracted the arguments of communist group. She also wrote some articles on Islamic issues with much focus on the role of Muslim woman in the society.

She worked in different non-governmental organization such as Raidat al-Nahda (1984-87), Islamic Relief Agency (1987-1995), and now she is the General Secretary of International Women's Bond.

About women's liberation and equality, she recited verses from Qura'n such as Surah Al-Omran:195, al-Bagrah:131, al-Tuba:71 and Yunis:99, to confirm that Islam is based upon the general principles of Equality, Democracy, Participation and Freedom. Under the principle of equality, Lubaba asserts, biological differences between man and woman would be marginalized, and instead fraternity and cooperation among them would be instituted because each person in his\ her work would search for God's obedience, and conflict among males and females would disappear.¹²

Also, Lubaba does not believe that there is a system of seclusion in Islam, and those who confined women's role to private sphere only derived their argument from the principle of *Sad al-Zaria'a* which she does not support.

About women's political right, she derives surah al-Tuba:71. She states that *al-Amir Bil Marouf wal Nahi un al-Munkar* (permitting good deeds and forbidding bad ones) which mentioned in this verse includes the legislation and any political activities. Therefore women could hold any governorship posts, since there is no stated provision in Qura'n preventing them from holding these posts. She, also, cited from surah al-Naml (The Ants)

verses 23,32,34,35 the story of the Queen of Sheba as an evidence that the woman as a politician is a wise person, endowed with democratic behaviour, an intelligent negotiator and peace keeper. Allah states:

"I found there a women ruling them and provided with every requisite; and she has a magnificent throne ;....; she said: ye chiefs advise me in (this) my affairs: no affair have been decided expect in your presence ; she said: kings when enter a country, despoil it, and make the noblest of its people its meanest , thus do they behave ; but I am going to send him a present , and wait to see with what (answer) returns (my) ambassadors ". Surah al-Naml verses :23,33,34,35.

She also considers the Hadith "Those who entrust..." as one of *Ahadith al-Ahad* and therefore is doubtful. In this connection, she refers to Qura'n as the principle source of Islamic tradition, together with al-Hadith which only conform with the provisions that are stated in the Qura'n.

Lubaba considers al-jihad as one aspect of worship, therefore no one even the governor has the right to exclude women from participating in it if they have chosen to worship God through al-jihad.

Finally Lubaba believes that there are patriarchal interpretation of Islam. She agreed with those Islamist Feminists who lead the movement of re-interpreting Islamic tradition. She argues *al-Figh* (Islamic jurisprudence) on women issues had been static and retrograded because women yielded and surrendered the role of legislations (*al-Eftaa'*)- which had been practised by al-Sida Aisha (prophet Mohamed 's wife)- to men for a long time. Therefore, women should regain this role .

The second sample is **Amira al-Sir Omer** who was born in Kosti in 1981.¹³ she finished her primary intermediate and secondary education at Kosti.

She joined the movement in 1980 when she was student at Kosti secondary school for girls. She was the first Muslim sister who held the post of *Amirah al-Usra* at Kosti.

After April uprising 1985, she became the president of National Women's Front at the provincial level (White Nile Province). Now she is involved in social activities as she holds the post of the General Secretary of Jamyat Mihira(Mihira society) in Kosti.

"I have become disinterested in political activities and I have devoted my time to social activities because of the bad memories (referring to Islamists illegal practice of manipulating the voters) I have experienced during 1986's election" Amira said.

Amira views women's liberation as a western concept which claims absolute equality between men and women. However women's participation in public life namely political life and al-jihad must derive its support from Islamic tradition. She cited the incidence of Battle of Camel when al-sida Ashi'a led an opposition against Ali the fourth Kalifa(the leader of the Muslim communities) as an evidence that women could participate in political life.

Also she mentioned Surah al-Mudathir:38 "*Every soul will be in pledge for its deeds*" to prove that *al-Gawwama* principle in aspect of earning and deeds is not valid each person whether man or woman is responsible of his/her action. Hence Amira refuted the argument raised by conservative perspective advocates that *al-Gawwama* principle is one reason that debars women from participation in public life.

In general, Amira believes that in order to reach a sound and a thoughtful understanding on women's question or women's rights we should recourse to Islamic tradition, examine it within the context of the changes that have occurred since prophet's era. Thus Amira supports the trend of some Muslim Feminists that invites the Muslims to re-read the Hadith and Qura'n. She believes that women should participate in this trend because men denied due rights of Muslim women except those who are enlightened like al-Turabi .

The Third sample is **Suhair Ahamed Salah**, who was born in al-Obied in 1968.¹⁴ She received her primary, intermediate and secondary education at al-Obied, and graduated from Omdurman Islamic University, Girls College in 1990. Now, she is following her M.Sc. study at Khartoum University.

Suhair worked in different voluntary organizations such as International Women's Bond and Muslim women's International Organization. Presently she is working with Arab Islamic People Conference.

She joined the movement in 1988 as she had been fascinated by the idea and experience of *Shabab al-Waton* (National Youth) and *Raidat al-Nahda*, then she was incorporated into their activities. At the university her activities were mainly reflected her cultural and political public lectures and exhibitions.

The liberation of Muslim women, she argues, could not be achieved if we did not consider Islamic tradition. She states Islam maintains great rights to women and we shall have gained them if we re-read Islamic tradition and re-establish the truth of revealed text. She, also, believes that each verse in Qura'n has its reason of revelation which has, accordingly, determined its understanding. But as the time or situation has changed this verse should have been re-read according to the new situation.

To support her argument on women's participation in public life or in Holy war she cited many examples from *al-Seerat al-Nabwyia*. For instance to support her argument on women's participation on "Popular Defence Force" then al-jihad, Suhair recites Surah al-Infal:60 as an evidence that military preparation and training is an obligatory duty. Allah states: " *Against them make ready your strength to the utmost of your power, including steeds of war, to strike terror into (the hearts of) the enemies,*". The verse addresses both men and women to participate in this duty she explained further. In this respect Suhair

narrates her experience in the Popular Defence Force's camps and in the battle field in Southern Sudan. Suhair believes that through experience , she became more solid, and tolerant. Such training and experience-as she felt- would provide women with a feeling of safety and power.

5.2. Discussion and Conclusion

Before investigating and verifying the propositions raised on this study on the thoughts of al-Akhwat al-Muslimat (their perspectives vary from one generation to another, they are trying to develop a liberation theology in Islam in favour of women) I will, first review general remarks.

A general outlook to the interviewed samples, proved that the Islamist movement succeeded to incorporate and win the support of Sudanese women from different social classes : some came from a sectarian bourgeoisie background and other from middle class background. Also it is worth noting that about 55% of the interviewees received their secondary education at Omdurman Secondary School for Girls. Here it is important to mention that in this school the first strike ever known in girl's school against the British school mistresses was carried out in 1951. Those students who ignited the strike later became the leaders of the Sudanese women's movements among them were Saud al-Fatih, Thurayia Umbabi, Fatima Ahamed Ibrahim and Aziza Maki.¹⁵ Thus, one can conclude that Omdurman Secondary School for Girls had played a pioneering role in the growth and development of Sudanese women's political awareness manifested, in the affiliation of its students to political organizations. this was not strange, because Omdurman , since earlier times, was a centre for political activism and nationalism .

Also about 91% of Interviewees are university graduate or post-graduate students and 36% are university's lecturers . Therefore the study expects there will be a thoughtful

and descriptive understanding for the questions being asked. But what empirically has been observed is that about 46% of the interviewees draw flat account and unarticulated answers, because they are hesitant to discuss such controversial questions.

Another inference is that it has been expected that children including daughters adopt their fathers' political views, or that husbands dominate their wives political trend. But the empirical case of this study proves that this generalization is invalid in all cases. All of the Interviewed samples were influenced and recruited either by their male teachers, colleague or brother. While all of them except two were married to Muslim Brothers after they had already joined the Islamist movement i.e their husbands have nothing to do with their affiliation with the movement. But this empirical case might conform with studies which concludes and simply assumes that women's political behaviour and affiliation is dominated by men in their lives.¹⁶

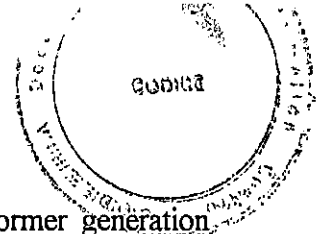
Also generally it was assumed that the responses of the interviewed samples should have been identical since they were all affiliated to the same movement. But their attitudes and perspectives vary more or less from one generation to other and from one sample to another even within the same generation. However, 100% of the respondents refrain from discussing the liberation of Muslim women within the Western feminist pattern which claims absolute equality with women. Because they (the respondents) believe that absolute equality does not exist in reality but what can be achieved is justice. All of them, also, adopt a theological understanding for the liberation concept. Instead of making use western feminists' suggestion and strategy for women's liberation, they recite the Qura'n, the Hadith and *al-Seerat al-Nabawiyia* to support and explain their views on the concepts raised by the study. But this does not necessarily mean that they are not influenced by western feminism , because about 37% of respondents are gender- sensitive when they have discussed the Muslim women's question within Islamic tradition . The respondents, also, are in

agreement when they all derive Surah al-Tuba:71 to emphasize that Islam recognizes women's right in political participation.

It is difficult to put substantial generational classification of Muslim sisters according to their view points, because it is almost absurd to think about measures of perspectives and attitudes . Then, since it is difficult we recourse to relative measures using term such as absolute or more or less when we compare al-Akhwat's perspectives .¹⁷ However, the following comparative points have been drawn.

Firstly, the interviewed samples of the First generation though they were among the pioneers of Sudanese women's movement in 1950s, and they were politically active, yet their perspective on the participation of women in public life was conventional . They put much emphasis on women's reproductive role while they confined their political participation only to *ad hoc* politics¹⁸ and parliamentary activities, because they believe that women could not lead the Umma (Muslim communities) according to the Hadith "those who entrust...". Also the first generation of al-Akhwat does not support any attempts of gender-sensitive approach within the Islamic tradition which they believe will lead to the *Bida'a* .

Therefore one can identify this group as being conservative but they do not hold an absolute conservative attitude since they support women's incorporation in public life. However, they hold an absolute conservative attitude with regard to attempts that intend to develop new theological interpretation within Islamic tradition with regard to Muslim women's question. The attitude of al-Akhwat might be attributed to: firstly, they could not detach themselves from the patriarchal structure of Sudanese society lest they might be identified with their contemporary rival (the communist women group). Secondly they were grown up during the era (1950-1960) in which the Islamist movement held conventional and retractive attitudes towards women.



Secondly, the respondents of the Second generation like the former generation witnessed the era of 1960-1970 in which the Islamists established the first formal Muslim sisters organization (NWF). Thus , they witnessed the era when *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* had acquired organizational and political skills and knowledge. Nevertheless their attitude towards women's emancipation and political participation remains conservative. The respondents consciously or unconsciously emphasized the division of labour when they argued that women should carry out only activities which did not negatively affect their femininity and reproductive role. Also all of them did not accept the concept of Patriarchal Islam and refused to incorporate a gender-sensitive interpretation within the context of Islamic tradition. In this attitude they are more conservative like the samples of the former generation.

It is important here, to mention that the attitudes of the respondents is supposed to be congruent with their behaviour. But what has empirically been observed, with regard to the behaviour of respondents of the First and Second generations, is that they are liberal, in the sense that they are moving freely outside the country without the company of their husbands, running their own business, dressing *al-Zai al-Islami* but in a fashionable style, driving their own cars and using technological facilities such as Satellite Canal (the Dish).

Thirdly, the samples of the third generation witnessed the era, in which al-Turabi developed an authentic attitudes towards participation of women in public life. Yet both the two samples have differently been influenced by this " authentic" trend. We have found that Sumaiya's attitude towards the interviewed questions is congruent with that is held by al-Turabi, for instance both believe that women's incorporation into public life is a part and parcel of *al-Tadyon* (religious activities) where the Faith of both men and women would have been examined. While the other sample Ustaza Anna Badri views these liberation trends of Dr. al-Turabi as leading to disarray and divergence from Islamic tradition.

However one might define Dr. Sumaiya's attitude as a liberal one since she encourages research within Islamic tradition and has no reservation at the leadership of competent women to the Muslim communities. While Ustaza Amna's attitude might be considered as conservative like other samples because she stresses the division of labour according to biological differences. She maintains that men are biologically and emotionally more prepared than women to the leadership role. Also, she is more conservative towards any attempts of gender-sensitive interpretation within Islamic tradition.

Fourthly, the interviewed samples of the last generation (i.e. generation of the 1980s) have grown up during the era in which the Islamist movement had been carrying out its strategy of comprehensive empowerment. In this era *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* became pragmatic as they participated actively in the social activities through organizations such as *Raidat al-Nahda* and *Shabab al-Watun*. Also they witnessed the era in which they became more militants and mature, participated in Popular Defence Force, and established their international organizations that would convey their experience to other countries and open dialogue with others. Consequently, it is not surprising that the responses of these samples have come to be more similar to the radical perspective suggested by the study in chapter two. All of them agree that there is an urgent need for new reading and interpretation of the Islamic texts. They, also, support a liberation trend within Islam in favour of women. One respondent of this generation-Lubaba al-Fadil- has her own contribution in this aspect.¹⁹ She argues that the Hadith, "*Treat women nicely, for a woman is created from a rib, and the most curved portion of the rib is its upper portion so if you try to straighten it, it will break, but if you leave it as it is, it will remain crooked. So treat women nicely.*", has to be rejected because Quranic verses do not emphasize, or assert or even imply that women are derivative elements and created from the crooked rib of Adam. Further she recites surah al-Araf:189 to prove that the origin of *al-Khalig* (the creation) is not the male element but

it is *al-Nafs al-Wahida* (the same soul) which carries both femininity and masculinity characteristic. Allah states:

" It is He who created you from single soul and made his mate of like nature, in order that might dwell with her (in love). When they are united, she bears a light burden and carries it about (unnoticed) . When she grows heavy, they both pray to God their lord, saying : if thou gives us a goodly child we vow we shall (ever) be grateful" al-Araf:189.

However, as the study considers the socio-political environment, in which each generation lived, as a variable that has its impacts on perspectives and attitudes of the respondents , here it is important, also, to consider differences in personal characteristics as another variable. Empirically it has been observed that those respondent who adopt either liberal or radical perspectives hold certain characteristic such as they are defiant, militant, broad-minded, ambitious and gender-sensitive while those who adopt conservative perspectives are hesitant and narrow-minded.

To conclude the attitudes, perspectives and behaviour of Interviewed samples as they are affiliated to the same movement need not to be regarded as different but they are not identical either. Here another conclusion can be drawn, that the freedom of action and independent performance permitted by the Islamist movement for female membership help in the development of less-identical attitudes among *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat*, where we found that out of the total samples about 63% holds a conservative attitude and perspective while about 37% adopts liberal and radical ones .

CONCLUSION

Investigating the attitude and perspective of *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* on the participation of women in public life became an important area for this research. Consequently, the thesis, through purposive samples from *al-Akhwat*, attempts to reveal their perspectives on women's participation on public life.

Exclusion of Sudanese women from public life had been imposed, during the funj Islamic sultanate in earlier fifteenth century and al-Mahadist state in the mid-eighteenth century, according to the reading and interpretation of classical and conservative *fiqh*. Also during struggle against colonialism and after independence, Sudanese women's participation in public life faced resistance from religious and conservative groups. For instance associations among Sudanese women (e.g. Sudanese Women's Union), was opposed by both traditional and religious groups. They feared that these associations would encourage women's liberation and threaten old times traditions and thereby undermine their patriarchal authority. These Sudanese women's associations and organizations since 1950s, had pushed forward women's education and attained rights of suffrage and candidacy in 1960s. Nevertheless, the women's right to vote had been used to the vantage of political parties which were male dominated. Moreover these associations, with formal educational institutions, fostered the ideologies of women's domestic role through adopting educational policy that for instance teaching sewing and home economic courses only to girls' students. Also these associations failed to introduce radical reforms on Muslim personal family laws lest they being accused of betraying Islam. The thesis has, also, attempted to deal with the question why the attitude of Islamist movement in Sudan towards women's participation in public life developed from conventional retroactive, then authentic attitudes. Islamists at first regard Islamic reforms and *al-Dawa* diffusion as only man's responsibility, while

women's responsibility is confined within domestic domain. In its earlier times, the Islamist movement embarked on recruitment policy among male students rather than female ones. Yet, this situation changed when the communist gained the support of the Sudanese women's movement representing in Sudanese Women's Union (S.W.U.). Then *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* group was formed in 1950s to curb the communist activities among Sudanese women's associations.

The development and achievements of *al-Akhwat* movement were affected by the political situation and gains of the Islamist movement in Sudan as has been shown in chapter four. For instance during the democratic era after October 1964. *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* acquired new skills when they formed National Women's Front. This front acted as a platform for political and social activities ran by *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat*. It attempted to combat the influence of the leftists among S.W.U. by adopting the same claims demanded by S.W.U., such as right to vote and stand as candidate for election. *Al-Akhwat* in their claim for these political rights used the Qura'n and al-Ahdith to support their demands. This attitude support the thesis frame of reference that women's question in Muslim communities could not be discussed without considering of Islamic tradition.

During Nimir military regime, *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat's* activities were different. They confined their activities to social sphere, yet implicitly these activities had their political dimensions. Consequently *jamiyat Raidat al-Nahda* (Women's Renaissance Pioneers Society) was established in 1970s, to encounter both the activities of Western voluntary organizations that increased during 1983/1984 famine and of *Itahad Nissa al-Sudan* (Sudan Women's Union) which was organized by Nimir's regime.

During the third democratic period in 1986, *al-Akhwat* became more mature when two Muslim sisters were elected to the Constituent Assembly. However, *al-Akhwat's* aims were so ambitious, during al-Bashir's regime, which is backed by the Islamists. They

attempted in 1990s to organize women component of Islamists Internationale. Hence they established the International Organizational For Muslim Women (IOMW), which has many offices in different part of the World such as Asian, African and Arab countries. This new trend is one of the strategies raised by the Islamist movement to internationalized *al-Akhwat's* experience so as to contain the Western Feminist trends in Islamic countries.

However, the research attempted mainly to reflect *al-Akhwat's* perspective as Islamic activists. The thesis infers that, though *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* are affiliated to the same Islamist movement, each generation develops its own perspective which varies more or less from other generations, sometimes from one sample to another within the same generation. The researcher attributed this variation firstly to the fact that each generation had been recruited and brought up during different times and within different environments. Secondly another variable was considered that was differences in personal characteristics. As has discussed in chapter five, it has been observed that, those who hold either liberal or radical perspective have certain characteristics different from those who had conservative one.

The present generation of *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* holds a radical perspective. They believe that Muslim women were excluded from public life because those who read and interpret Islamic tradition are not gender-sensitive; they structure an image of Muslim women that conforms to their reconstructed identity, through selective uses and interpretation of Islamic tradition. This group of *al-Akhwat* advocates a "theological liberation" within context of Qura'n and Ahadith in favour of women. However, though the present generation of *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* lead a militant role in public life as well as intellectual role, one observes that the social relations among them and with the former generations are weak and also their loyalty to the Islamist movement. More precisely competition for political or personal interests are more apparent among *al-Akhwat* during

the present period than before. This may be attributed firstly to the fact that the Islamist movement after achieving political gains during al-Bashir's government, became less interested in and negligent to any social reforms or educational bringing up among its members. It has been observed that though the numbers of women who wear *al-Zai al-Islami* have increased but most of them are not religiously committed. Secondly, the manipulation of the Islamists to al-Bashir's government raises the ambitious of the opportunists who joined the Islamist movement only, either for economic or political gains.

It is essential, therefore to see how *al-Akhwat al-Muslimat* movement within such atmosphere will survive and how their future as a movement will look like. We hope further researches will examine these inquiries.

However, the purport of the thesis suggests that Muslim women's exclusion from public life is delineated and enforced through patriarchal interpretation of Islamic tradition, here the researcher applies the term "**Patriarchal Islam**" to this trend of interpretation. The patriarchal traditions of pre-Islamic Arab tribes moulded this trend and coloured the precepts of classical *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence). Also, the thesis suggests that strategies and tools for emancipation of Muslim women should be carried out through adopting gender-sensitive approach within Islamic tradition. Furthermore the thesis calls for "liberation theology" within Islam in favour of women.

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