

# Displacement as Discourse

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## **Abstract**

This paper argues that rural migrant women in Greater Khartoum<sup>1</sup> face an urban/state discourse that confines and restricts them within the boundaries of the label "displaced". Yet the "displaced" women have their own discourse regarding their own situations and identities as "displaced". Foucault's approach to discourse as a site where meanings are contested and power relations are determined is useful in analyzing and understanding the "displaced" women's discourse as a discourse in interaction with state discourse on "displacement". Approaching "displacement" from "displaced" women's perspective(s) and lives is consistent with feminist politics that emphasizes that empirical knowledge, which is part of human lives, should be included in scientific research. As such, the paper departs from a feminist standpoint that women are agents of knowledge. To deconstruct the term "displaced" it brings to the surface the voices and the experiences of some "displaced" Sudanese women in Greater Khartoum. These voices will be presented in this paper through interviews with some "displaced" women and through some songs and poems that the "displaced" women composed in their attempt to interpret their situations and their daily hidden struggle as "displaced". The paper is based on ethnographic methods of open-ended interviews in 1995/96 with some "displaced" women in Omdurman in Sudan.

## **Introduction**

"Displacement" or mass rural-urban migration resulting from drought and famine<sup>2</sup> in Western Sudan in 1983 has been the subject of many studies that either approach "displacement" as process caused by socio-economic factors or as an event caused by natural disasters such as desertification and drought that badly hit the two regions of Darfur and Kordofan in Western Sudan in 1983/84 and 1990. According to these two main approaches, the "displaced" people are, on one hand, perceived as victims of complex rural/urban relations of production that resulted in drastic changes in the economies of the self-reliant population in Western Sudan. This population was transformed from rural food producers to food consumers in

the urban areas to which they moved to seek a living (El-Shazali 1990; Eltigani 1995). On the other hand, the "displaced" are perceived by another approach, as mere victims of natural disasters who migrated to urban areas in search of non-farm activities to support themselves (Abdel Gader, 1991).

Contrary to these approaches, this paper argues that "displacement" is not only connected with and limited to social-economic and natural factors but it is also a discourse. In this respect, I argue that "displacement is a continuous labeling process within the urban setting in which the "displaced" people live. Furthermore, the power relation between the "displaced" and the Sudanese state, as an ideological institution, is important for understanding the term "displaced" as a social construct.

Yet, human lives are not homogenous in any gendered stratified society. Women and men are assigned different kinds of activities in their societies; consequently, they lead lives that have significantly different contours and patterns (Harding, 1991). As such, I would argue, experiences, even displacement, are gendered. "Displaced" women's experiences and knowledge have been devalued and neglected as a source of knowledge emanating from day to day experiences. Accordingly, it is important to let the "displaced" women's voices be heard through their reaction to the term "displaced" and their views on the urban setting in which they live.

The Foucaultian perception of discourse adopted in this article refers to the different ways of structuring knowledge and social practice (Fairclough, 1992). Discourse is always power: the power of truth, of knowledge, of knowing and of defining what is truth (Foucault, 1980). Thus, the discourse(s) of the "displaced" women will provide another part of the "truth" about the "displaced".

### **The state discourse on the "displaced" women**

The displaced share with the established urban population the already deficient and meager municipal services. They constitute an obstacle to appropriate planning. Being far from security checkpoints, squatters living in shantytowns and slum areas commit all kinds of crimes that threaten the security of other citizens (Minister of Housing and Public Utilities, Sudanow, 1993).

The state discourse on the "displaced" is dominated by an urban view which perceives the rural population as a negative "Other". The "displaced" in this discourse are conceived as unproductive, beggars, a source of diseases, and a source of insecurity to the cities. "Displacement" is always referred to in the state discourse as a product of "natural" causes implying that the state is not responsible for the whole process of "displacement". Instead the state blames nature and "others" for causing mass rural-urban migration ("displacement"). In this respect the Minister of Relief and Refugee Affairs stated that: "displacement is not the **problem** of the government alone, but of nature and the society" (Sudanow, 1991 [emphasis added]). According to this vision, the state developed many aggressive strategies toward the "displaced". Street cleaning campaigns policy (*Kasha*)<sup>3</sup> is one of these strategies which includes the demolition and bulldozing of the houses of the "displaced" and the informal market in which the "displaced", especially the "displaced" women, sell their products for a living. Moreover, according to the classification of residential lands in Greater Khartoum, the Ministry of Housing classified the "displaced" residential lands as fifth class. According to the Minister, fifth class houses should be built of temporary (non-permanent) materials such as: wood, grasses, and carton (Sudanow, 1993). The assumption behind the government's housing policy is that the "displaced" are given a transitional status on the peripheries of the capital.

Besides being part of the category "displaced", the "displaced" women are also confronted by facing another state discourse. The Islamist<sup>4</sup> ideology of the current Sudanese government sees a "pure" and authentic Islam as Sudan's only defense and cultural salvation against the West. The woman is perceived as the custodian of this authentic culture that is responsible for safe-guarding it. Through emphasizing the domestic and reproductive roles of women, women's behavior is ideologically manipulated by male-controlled religio-political institutions (Hale, 1992). Consequently, in 1992 the government of Sudan issued the Khartoum State Public Order Act (KSPOA).<sup>5</sup> This act controlled the mobility of women especially the "displaced" in public places. The Act strictly prohibits women from selling food and drinks between 5 pm and 5 am. Despite the realization that "displaced" women depend entirely on work in the informal sector such as selling food, these women are daily subjected to violation, assault, and harassment by the government officials who in many cases accuse them of prostitution, beer brewing, and being uncommitted to the proper Islamic dress code<sup>6</sup>.

This Islamist and androcentric vision obscures the meaning and perception of the

"displaced" women's work. Work for the "displaced" women is not only important as a coping strategy but also a means of sustenance as well as for formulating and constructing positive self image(s) and identities. They are independent citizens who did not deliberately move from their areas to be entirely dependent on the state. Moreover, for the women, coming from Western Sudan, work is an important construct of their identities as women and mothers<sup>7</sup>.

Generally speaking, by labeling the "displaced" as a negative "Other", the state discourse decomposed and de-linked them from their stories and represented them as a case.

### **The Discourse(S) of the "Displaced" Women**

al-Hakoma (the government) calls us naziheen (displaced) because we are strangers to it. But we are not going to leave our land in Omdurman. Here we have a living but in Kordofan there is *jafaf* (drought) and insects that ate our harvest (Bakhita a working "displaced" woman in Omdurman, 1994).

It is important to understand the "displaced" women's discourse as a discourse in interaction with the dominant state discourse on "displacement". Subsequently, when they come to identify themselves, the "displaced" women always refer to the government and the urban setting as the other: an extension of the self. In this respect, McNay argued that identity is "constructed through a process based on the interaction and cognition of differences between the self and the other" (McNay, 1992, p.168). Subjectivity, on the other hand, refers to "the conscious and unconscious thoughts and emotions of the individual, her sense of herself and her way of understanding her relation to the world" (McNay, 1992, p.32).

Subjectivity is important in the discussion of this article as it refers to the power to identify the self and the world as a subject of a discourse. Moreover, the self is sustained by continuous redefinition of the boundaries of the self and other. Accordingly, the two concepts will be used interchangeably. Both subjectivity and identity are shifting and unstable as the boundaries between self and other are dynamic. My interviews with some "displaced" women are direct examples of shifting identities of the "displaced" women and my own identity. To the "displaced" women, I belong to the "other" (the city, the government, the international organizations, etc.). This "other" plays an effective role in favouring

one identity by a "displaced" woman at a specific moment among other identities.

## Shaikha

When I visited Shaikha in her home I was accompanied by a friend who used to work with an Irish Aid Organization called Concern<sup>8</sup> and knows the "displaced" women in block 18 & 17 in Dar al Salam<sup>9</sup> Area in Omdurman in which the interviews took place. I introduced myself as a student carrying out a research on the "displaced". I am concerned with discussing and chatting with the "displaced" women in Dar-al-Salam about their lives and situations in Dar-al-Salam. I am also interested in talking about the problems of high cost of living in Sudan and how we all try to cope with it. My main questions about how the "displaced" women perceive the terms: "displaced", the government, and the city all came indirectly through the chatting.

-Saadia (the author's name): Shaikha, can you talk a little about yourself, your ethnic group, your land in Western Sudan, and your life here in Omdurman.

-Shaikha: I am from al-Humra, in Kordofan from an ethnic group called ad-Dawaleeb. I came to Omdurman with my husband and children in 1984, immediately after *al-Jafaf* in Kordofan. We first settled in al-Mulih, then al-Shaikh Abu-Zied, then in Dar-al-Salam. We settled here in Dar-al-Salam in 1992.

-Saadia: What is your opinion about the movement from one place to another and what is your opinion about Dar-al-Salam?

-Shaikha: The worst thing in the world is to see "*kharab al-Diar*" (the destruction of your home). When the government destroyed our homes in al-Mulih and al-Shaikh Abu-Zied I cried so much that day because we built our homes with our sweat. The government is always destroying our living situation. About Dar-al-Salam, I can say: "*katalok wa la jok jok*" (it is better to die than to be threatened with death).

-Saadia: How? Could you please elaborate on this?

-Shaikha: Although Dar-al-Salam is a very remote place, very far from the market and without any services, I feel comfortable. This is my home and no one has the

right to force me to move from this area because it was registered by official documents.

-Saadia: What about Omdurman and your life here?

-Shaikha: I heard about Omdurman before I came. My husband had come to Omdurman several times in search of work. In Omdurman there is electricity, a variety of food, and running water.

-Saadia: But you do not have running water or electricity in Dar-al-Salam?

-Shaikha: One day we may have electricity. Electric lines will be connected with Omdurman in the near future.

During this dialogue, a neighbour, a man, talked to Shaikha from his house through the wall separating the two houses. He asked me: Who are you? And from where did you come? I said: "I am a student doing a study and I came from Khartoum to chat with the women here". The man said that Dar-al-Salam will be the new Omdurman and Omdurman will be the old Omdurman. He said Omer al-Bashir himself, the President of Sudan, said that when he visited Dar-al-Salam.

-Saadia to Shaikha: Why didn't you tell me about the visit of Omer al-Bashir?

-Shaikha: I forgot about it. I didn't go to see al-Bashir because I was not interested in doing so. Al-Sadiq al-Mahadi's<sup>10</sup> government stood beside us and gave us the right to own the land of Dar-al-Salam. It gave us the land but no any financial resources to build it. We established our houses by our own effort and resources. We built those houses by our sweat and our blood. We will stick to our land till death. If the government asked us to leave the land we would struggle till death. Death is better than leaving our land.

-Saadia: What is your reaction to the term *naziha* (displaced)?

-Shaikha: I will not accept this word from anybody. It is a negative adjective that entails that we moved to another country, but we are inside our country (Sudan). Sudan is the land for all Sudanese and we all have the right to settle in any place in this country. During the first years after I settled in al-Mulih in 1984/85 I had no

objection to the term *naziha*. At that time the term was new to me. I thought the term at that time was expressing the events of *al-jafaf* and *al-Majaa* in 1984. However, ten years later after ten years of living in Omdurman, I would never accept the word *naziha*.

-Saadia: Do you have any interest in going back to Kordofan to live?

-Shaikha: No, because in Kordofan we depended entirely on rains for our livelihood. Rains have been unstable and very poor since the 1970s. There is never a guarantee of a completely stable life if I returned to Kordofan. The events of 1983/84 may be repeated and then I would find myself returning to Omdurman.

-Saadia: Then living in Dar-al-Salam is better than living Kordofan.

-Shaikha: "*Baladan taishak wa la baladan taizak*" (it is better to live in a place or a country in which you can make a living than to live in a place where you can have dignity). In Omdurman food, water, and wood are available despite the fact that they are very expensive. But in Kordofan we could not survive. All our means of production were destroyed: our herds died and our harvest failed. Nothing was left. We had no option but (*al-Rahee*) to leave for Omdurman.

-Saadia: How do you cope with the increase in the prices of food? And do you know the reasons for the increase in the prices of food?

-Shaikha: *Al-ghla min Allah* (increase in prices is caused by God). The increase in the prices of food and living in Omdurman has equalized the rich and the poor. Both are facing difficulties in finding access to food. We are trying to cope with these difficulties. I used to work as a cleaning woman but now I stopped. Now I am taking care of my newly born child. My husband now works as a middleman in Suq Libya (Libya Market). One of the strategies we developed is to cut the food consumption. We don't eat meat. We used to eat a lot of meat while we were in Kordofan. We stopped eating millet. Now we eat *fatarita* (sorghum).

-Saadia: What about your relationship with other women and your relationship with other people from other ethnic groups in Dar-al-Salam?

-Shaikha: Our relationship as neighbours is very good. The only ethnic disputes

among us are conflicts between Nuba people and some Arab ethnic groups. The Nuba are thieves. They are accustomed to stealing. Stealing is one of their habits and characteristics.

-Saadia: That is why the Arabs have conflicts with the Nuba people?

-Shaikha: Because we know that they are thieves, we do not want to develop any relationship with them. When the Nuba people recognized that we isolated ourselves from them, they tried to come up with problems and troubles in order to make us angry. Regarding my relationship with other *naziheen* ("displaced" people), I am really afraid of the people coming from the South of Sudan. They always come to garbage area near my house and take rotten food to eat. I am afraid that one day they will come to kill and eat me.

During our discussion another woman came to visit Shaikha. I started talking with her. Shaikha started talking about the sugar they received through the ration card that week. She provided me with a cup of tea and some of the sugar to taste saying that the sugar they received that week had a very strange colour and a nasty smell. It was the first time I had ever seen a reddish sugar with a very strange smell.

Then I started chatting with Shaikha's friend Mardofa.

## **Mardofa**

-Saadia: Are you living in the same block as Shaikha in Dar-al-Salam and are you working?

-Mardofa: No, I do not live in Dar-al-Salam. I live in another camp called Jabarona also in Omdurman. I work in exchange. I exchange the sugar that some Aid Organizations bring to us for utensils from Suq Libya. Then I sell the kitchen utensils in Omdurman neighbourhoods.

-Saadia: What is the difference between Jabarona and Dar-al-Salam?

We, in Jabarona, do not own our land and our houses. In Jabarona, however, we are still supported by the International Aid Organizations such as the Islamic Dawa Organization and The Organization of African Muslims. The people in Dar-al-



Salam just own their land without any support from these organizations.

Then the discussion included Shaikha and me. It was about what is more important to own: a land or to have part of your living supported by Aid Organizations.

-Mardofa: I can not eat land. It is better have a guarantee of some sources of food than to own land.

-Shaikha: It is better to own land because land means a right: it means the **right** to settle.

-Saadia: Then Mardofa what is your opinion about the word *naziha*?

Mardofa: I do not get angry about the word because I am really *naziha*. I moved from area to area because of *al-Jafaf*. Why should I get angry about the word?

-Shaikha to Mardofa: The word means the movement from country to country. However, since I depend totally on myself for subsistence and the government provides no help to me, no one has the right to call me *naziha*. Since I do my work with this arm (she raised her arm), what do they want from me?

-Saadia to Shaikha: How is it that you perceive the term *naziha* as someone who moves from country to country?

-Shaikha: From our experience and struggle with the government. If the government considered us to be Sudanese, we would not have been treated as strangers. "*Al-Arab nihna min hum wa bari min hum*" (we are Arab in ethnicity but not in deeds.) Shaikha meant that she and her ethnic group are Arab. They share the same ethnicity with the government of Sudan, which is dominated by Reiverain Arabs of Northern Sudan, but they are not treated equally.

Then we returned to our discussion about Jabarona. I asked Mardofa about her relationship with "Southerners" (people coming from the South of Sudan) living in Jabarona and other groups?

-Mardofa: "Southerners" can be trusted not like the Nuba. Stealing is a characteristic feature of the Nuba not the "Southerners".

The discussion turned to the story about the resistance of the "Southerners" to move to Jabarona.

-Mardofa: On that day Suq Libya was full of "Southerners" who refused to move from their homes in the Suq Libya area to the area which was called by them "Jabarona". They stood there the whole day in opposition to the decision of the movement. They stuck to their position till al-Ziber, the Vice President of Sudan, came to convince them to move. Finally, they submitted to the order and moved. They called the area they were forced to move to: Jabarona, which literary means (we are forced).

-Shaikha: If the government tries to force us to leave Dar-al-Salam, we would do the same as the "Southerners". We would congregate here. We would never submit to their orders. We would never go back to Kordofan except if they ensured us that our living situation in Kordofan would return to its pre-drought status. The next step from Dar-al-Salam is either death or going back to our home in Kordofan where we would like to be. No movement will be made within Omdurman.

After I finished chatting with Shaikha and Mardofa in block 17 in Dar -al-Salam, I went with my friend who used to work in Concern to block 18 to meet Fatima.

## **Fatima**

-Saadia: Where do you come from Fatima? Can you tell me about your life in your area before you moved to Omdurman?

-Fatima: I come from Hamrat al-Wiz, Northern Kordofan. Our life was a nomadic one. We depended on herds for our living. We relied very much on rain. All the seasons, except summer, were good because in the summer time the water becomes very scarce and the pastures become very poor. In the fall season, however, our *dar* (land) becomes like paradise as it becomes green and fertile. We depend on milk, butter, millet, and yoghurt in our diet. We never experience illness and diseases in our *dar*. We have experienced illness, like malaria, here in Omdurman. I had never heard about malaria until I came here. In our *dar* we used to eat meat but here we never eat it because it is too expensive, instead we just eat *fatarita* (sorghum) with stew, if it is possible, or with plain water. We used to live in Kordofan with our wealth and dignity, but *al-Jafaf* (drought) destroyed

everything. We just *jeenah* (came) to Omdurman to save our lives.

-Saadia: What about your situation and your position in both your *dar* and in Dar-al-Salam?

-Fatima: In *ad-Dar* I was with my ethnic group. But here in balad al-ghurba (The alien land) life is very difficult. We do not have any source of living except what is provided by my own son who works in construction and sometimes as a herder.

-Saadia: Then how do you cope with the economic situation here?

-Fatima: We do nothing. We just depend on our son.

Then her son interrupted the discussion and said: "I will never allow my mother to work. I am able to provide my mother and family with a means to subsist. There is no need for my mother to work."

-Saadia, (To Fatima and her daughter Aisha): How do you perceive women's work? Is it *eib* (unacceptable)?

-Fatima: Life is very difficult. The efforts of both sexes are necessary. (Then she asked me): Is it true that women and men in the city work and help each other to survive?

-Saadia: As you said life is very difficult, so men and women try to find access to a means to survive and cope with the rise in food prices. Women's work is not *eib*.

-Saadia: What is your perception of the term *naziha*?

-Fatima: Yes, I and others, are all *naziheen*. There is nothing wrong with or degrading about the term. We are really *naziheen* because we left our *dar* after the drought and came here. The people who get annoyed with the term are just narrow-minded.

-Saadia: If you are asked to go back to your *dar* will you do so?

-Fatima: No I will not go back to *ad-Dar*. I am *mortaha* (comfortable) here

although my son and my daughter work very hard. But in *ad-Dar* I was shagiana (working very hard and tediously). I do not think if I returned back to Kordofan I could fit there anymore because I am used to the way of living here in Dar-al-Salam. Life here though it is difficult, the alternatives and the means to cope with it are many not like in *ad-Dar*. In *ad-Dar* we just rely on the rains that recently became very scare. Above all the government has no right to force us to move as it did in the previous cases. Now, we have the right to say no because now we own our homes in Dar-al-Salam. If the government tries to force us to move, we will not move to another area within Omdurman, we will move to *ad-Dar*.

-Saadia: What is your perception of the state (the government)?

-Fatima: *al-Hakoma* (the government) did not provide us with any services. *al-Hakoma* on the contrary takes from us. It takes part of our monthly amount of sugar as support for the Popular Defence (Popular defence forces are created by the Islamist government of Sudan from youths from different parts of the country to fight beside the Armed Forces on the ongoing civil war in the South).

-Saadia: What about Omer al-Bashir's visit to Dar-al-Salam?

-Fatima: No, Omer al-Bashir did not visit Dar-al-Salam in his entire life. Maybe he does not know where it is. Only the police come to Dar-al-Salam to take people from here to Khartoum when there is a political occasion. The people of Dar-al-Salam are taken to increase the crowdedness in Khartoum to show the support of the people for the president.

-Saadia: What about your relationship with other women in Dar-al-Salam?

-Fatima: Our relations as neighbours are very good. But we visit each other rarely.

-Saadia: Why?

-Fatima: I don't know why, but I don't like being out of my home and I don't like visiting others regularly.

There is an overwhelming critique of and opposition to state policies towards the "displaced" by the "displaced" women. Yet, the strategies taken by the "displaced"

women in their opposition to or acceptance of the term "displaced" is conflicting. This is related to the social location that a "displaced" woman takes in relation to the term. Identity is fluid and tactical. Accordingly, the different life experiences and multiple identities (housewives, mothers, workers, etc.) of the "displaced" women moulded their different perceptions and knowledge of the world around them. Accordingly they developed different strategies in dealing with the term naziheen. The following two quotations representing two strategies taken by two women from the same location (identity): national identity, i.e. as Sudanese.

Om Ballaina, a "displaced" housewife says:

The word nazih is very humiliating. Sudan is for all Sudanese. We are all Sudanese with the same riasa (Presidency). Every Sudanese has the right to settle and live in whatever place he wants. We are not strangers. We are Sudanese. If an enemy attacks Khartoum will he distinguish us as naziheen from the people of Khartoum? On the contrary he will kill us first because we are on the periphery of the city. Now we are protecting the urban people. (Interview with Om Ballaina, 1994, Dar-al-Salam.)

A food seller (barbecued meat seller) in Suq al-Naga (Camel Market), Suq Libya says:

The word nazih means I am a stranger in this country. It means the land I am now living on in is not my land. But, the word never makes me annoyed. What can I get from anger? It is better for me to keep silent. I need work not talk. (Interview with a "displaced" woman, 1994, Suq al-Naga (Camel Market), Omdurman.)

The two women quoted above both attacked the term "displaced" while locating themselves within the boundaries of nationality as an identity. Yet, they differ in their strategies and reaction towards the term. Being a worker in an "informal" sector which is a direct target of the government, can mould a different strategy in attacking the discourse of the state on the "displaced". Silence can be a strategy to cope with the continuous harassment of the government to the livelihood of the "displaced" women. On the other hand, not being in daily contact with the police and its bulldozing campaigns, a "displaced" woman can take speaking out as a strategy to express herself and project her image as the "other" that protects the urban: "We are protecting the urban people."

The discourse of the "displaced" women on their social construct as naziheen was not only influenced by the state as an Other but also influenced by many Others that were an extension of the self. In this respect, I myself was an Other, and the "displaced" from areas other than Western Sudan, and the urban poor in Dar-al-Salam were all Others influencing the perception of the "displaced" women to themselves.

Two "displaced" women talking to me:

We should first ask you some questions before you ask us. We get tired of questioning. People from Khartoum always come and ask us without giving us a chance to ask them (Interview with a displaced woman, 1994, Dar-al-Salam).

Another woman said to me:

I want you to eat with us because we want to strengthen our relationship with you. We haven't forgotten about our generosity in our dars in Western Sudan. We are even more generous than the people of the city although we are poor, not like you (the people of the city).

Some "displaced" from the White Nile area, which was affected by drought in 1984, did not consider themselves naziheen:

We (Those from the White Nile Area) have been classified as naziheen. What shall we do? We should accept it. The naziheen are very peaceful. All my friends are naziheen... What has been said about the naziheen is that they are sick and a source of diseases for the people of Khartoum.

The "displaced" women in their discourse, which is largely a reaction to the dominant (state) discourse on them, perceive the urban people such as researchers and state officials as those who take the "displaced" as a category from which they can produce data for their own benefit: "You always come to ask us without giving us a chance to ask you". The urban people never give the "displaced" a chance to speak about themselves and a chance for the "displaced" people to ask urban people as well. More interestingly, the "displaced" women view the urban people as greedy: "We are more generous than you, although we are poor".

The "displaced" women are facing a general dominant discourse that has been adopted by different agents who are the subjects of that discourse: The urban people, the state officials, and the urban poor. One of the urban poor women living in Dar-al-Salam said: "We have been classified as *naziheen*. What shall we do? We should accept it". Accordingly, the "displaced" women are in a continuous struggle to shape their own identities in relation to these agents. In their struggle, Dar-al-Salam is taken not only as an area to settle in, but also as their **RIGHT**. Dar-al-Salam symbolizes the right to settle, to be entitled to citizenship, and above all the right to say No to the government policies that are directed toward the further displacement of the "displaced" people. Thus, Dar-al-Salam is the discursive field of struggle appropriated by the "displaced" women.

The struggle to shape a positive image about the self and to make other people understand this self-image requires a wider space for the public to know and to understand these self-images. Thus, the poems and songs composed by the "displaced" women are another discourse about the self-images and another discursive space for the "displaced" women to express their realities and shape their own identities.

### **"Displaced" Women Speak Through Songs and Poems: The Discourse of the "Displaced" Women to The Public**

A graduate student at the University of Khartoum and a friend of mine told me about the poems and songs the women of Dar-al-Salam have composed about "displacement" and about their lives in Omdurman. He mentioned to me that the women of Dar-al-Salam recite these poems to themselves at their conversational gatherings. He said he heard some of these songs in Suq Libya from some women he know and work there.

Thus, while I was interviewing the "displaced" women, I asked them if they know any poems and songs about *al-Nizoh* (displacement) and about the city. They first refused to recite the poems because they consider them dated and irrelevant. One displaced woman said: "These songs are ten years old and they describe a situation that no longer exists. They described our situation when we were affected by *al-Majaa* (famine) at that time" (Interview with a displaced woman, Dar-al-Salam, Omdurman, July 1994).

Poems and songs are an important part of the discourse(s) of the displaced women

because they represent discourse about the self and the external level of politics. Abu Lughod argues that: "Personal poetry has led us to an expanded vision of politics, to include not only the system by which external relations are ordered but also the system that organizes internal relations of domination" (Abu Lughod, 1986, p.256). Moreover, by framing personal experiences in poetic terms, individuals proclaim their similarity to others and assert the universality of their experiences (Abu Lughod, 1986). Poems are important in the creation of self-images. They are not only expressive but they contribute to coping, psychologically, with the new community the poems try to explain and also enable its subjects to find a space within that community. Songs, on the other hand, like poems do frame personal experiences. Yet, songs, especially the songs of the "displaced" women, are always connected with the loss of something; loss of property, of some one dear, etc. Songs as a discourse developed by the displaced women refer to the "golden" past and its comparison with the present that has often been pictured as a miserable destiny. The songs and poems deal with the same problematic areas the interviews focused on: the state, the urban people, the term *naziheen*, and the representations of the "displaced" of their own images. These images have largely been created through a comparison between the rural and urban settings. Accordingly, the songs and poems were classified and analysed in relation to these settings and the power relations and power structures that are located in each.

### **Songs and Poems About the Term: Naziheen**

(1) *Regan al-hanin...aklaoho al-Muzafeen.. wa samona al-Naziheen.*

Reagan the kind...has been eaten by the state officials who named us naziheen.

*"ish al-Naziheen akaloho al-Muzafeen...nihna rikibna mudrikeen.. fi shan al-Naziheen"* .

After we faced many difficulties and risks along the road to the city. We found that our aid (The American Aid) has been eaten by the state officials and our share is the term: displaced.

(2) *Can ma Regan jana...can al-Ju tafana*

If Reagan did not come... We would have died of hunger.



*Nas al-Lajjna ijoloh...lel miskeen ma bidoroh..Al-Mutgushshed le shotoroh..bagi al-Mukhzan holoh.*

The people of the committee do not like the poor...The belly-god and greedy man, owned all that remained in the store.

These two songs reflect the "displaced" women's vision to the term: *naziheen*. It is clear from the above songs that the term was a state and urban construct.

According to the "displaced" women, the term *naziheen* was constructed by the state officials who benefited from the process of displacement through their use of the American Aid to satisfy their own personal needs. These songs in fact not only refer to the economic corruption of the state and its officials but also to the state's power in naming. They represent the state as an ideological apparatus that uses its power (power here is equated with repression) to classify and identify the rural-urban migrant people as *naziheen*. The songs also indicate the state of disappointment that the "displaced" faced when they reached Greater Khartoum. In this respect, one song's lyric said: "when we moved to the city, they just found the label (*naziheen*) as our share in the city". Moreover, the songs also reflect an external level of politics and power relations. "If Reagan did not come we would have died of hunger". From the perspective of the "displaced" women, International Aid, which was symbolized by Reagan - The American President during the time of famine (1984/85) - and not the state, rescued them from death. "Reagan" played the role that the state was supposed to in satisfying the urgent needs of the "displaced".

It is worth noting here that the international organizations monopolise a very large space in the discourses of the "displaced" women. The international organizations are not only an active agent at the external level of power relations but also at the household level of power relations. In this respect, the international organizations took over the supposed role of the Sudanese government in providing food and shelter for its own people and also the organizations took over the "traditional" gender-ascribed role of the husband as a bread winner whose responsible for providing the urban household with food and other expenses. The following songs will explain this argument further.

### **Songs about the International Organization and the Related Changes in Gender relations**

*Min yomak al-fazate...*

*CARE biga seed bate..*

*Kull ma shahar hallate...Shawal wa bagat zate.*

Since you have fled...CARE becomes the husband (The head of the household)..

Every new moon... A sack and a gallon of oil.

*"Ar-Ragil al-Kuwaiti...Nassani seed baiti .*

The man, The Kuwaiti... has made me forget my husband.

The two songs above expressed "displacement" as a process that changed the gender arrangements within the rural household. After being impoverished and destitute, rural people started searching for other sources of subsistence. Men moved to search for work either at the urban areas or abroad and women were left to cope with the difficulties in rural areas. They could only depend on the help of the international organizations. CARE is also taken as a symbol that refers to other international organizations. "CARE", in the song, played the role of the absent husband. The role of the husband as a breadwinner who is responsible of making decisions at the private and public level, has been so successfully supplanted by the international organizations that the wives forget their husbands. Thus, the song said: "if food is available there is no need for the husband" meaning that gender relations are shifting and the power hierarchies in these relations are not static. Through the provision of desperately needed basic necessities, the position of the husband at the top of power hierarchy can be granted to international organizations, which are outsider agents.

Finally, the songs and poems of the "displaced" women focus on expressions of self-image and assertions of identity by the "displaced" women. The construction of a Self-image or the "self" has been made in relation to the urban setting where the displaced women are the "Other"

### **Songs about Self-image and Identities**

A "displaced" woman working as a cleaning woman in Omdurman says:

*Tagate al-bab al-garih...*

*Galo le gassallna umbarih...Ahal al-Rig al-marih..Giatahum ma min salih.*

I knocked on the strong, well built door... They said we cleaned yesterday...It is not for the benefit of the people of herds to come.

This song has many implications based on the words that have been used by the "displaced" woman in expressing her image and her situation in Omdurman. Metaphorically, the term "*al-Bab al-Garih*" is not only a mere description of the door of the house in Omdurman as big and strong but also the psychologically, socially, and culturally constructed barriers between the urban and the "displaced" people. The urban people are protected by big strong doors, while the "displaced" initially have no entrance doors for their houses. They are exposed to the street and they are not protected. On the contrary they protect the urban people from any external attack as one of the "displaced" women stated elsewhere. The strong door is a symbol of the urban structure that does not welcome the "displaced". The other part of the song attempts to make the urban people, who close their doors to keep out the "displaced", understand that the "displaced" are originally rich people who are obliged to come (*jeenah*) to Omdurman as a last resort. The song says that, unfortunately, the once rich people (i.e. the "displaced" people) discovered that being in Omdurman is not to their benefit because the people of Omdurman are not willing to understand them.

Another poem about self-image that criticizes the urban setting goes as follows:

*Bakhita um saraih...*

*fog lugdan faih...*

*Gismatana um lonan zaih.. forggah wa omran raih.*

Bakhita (a typical Kordofani female name), the fortunate..

In the fertile, sweet-smelling green..

Our dim-coloured- drab (fate)..Alienation and loss of life.

The song makes a comparison between two situations of a "displaced" woman before and after leaving the rural area. It refers to rural life as a life of wealth and prosperity, while life in the urban setting represents alienation and loss of life. The term "*foroggah*" (separation/alienation) was used by the displaced women throughout our dialogue more than once. Alienation is always related to the loss of herds (i.e. loss of the means of production) and the loss of the rural life on the whole. Furthermore the term "*foroggah*" (alienation), as used in the songs and poems of the "displaced" women is a continuous process within the urban setting. "*Foroggah*" is used to symbolize the stance of the urban setting and its people against the absorption of the "displaced" within its socio-economic and political structures.

### **Songs About Life in Omdurman**

*Fad sajaika min as-Sajaik tahod al-Hum..*

*Labanaha isheel aj-Ju al-Mukhaltah jahum..*

*Ishat han...seedaha ma binjum...Mahanah wa amraha hakum.*

Only one female camel erases solicitude (worry)

Its milk releases from hunger and the need for meat

The seeker of life here (in Omdurman) never relaxes

Humiliation and ever-lasting degradation.

The song describes the difficulties that the "displaced" face in their search for subsistence in Omdurman. It expresses how the "displaced" people used to eat food such as milk and meat in the rural areas, which they could not eat in Omdurman due to lack of money and consequent access. The "displaced" women added that: "the seeker of life in Omdurman never relaxes" and life in Omdurman is humiliating because the people of Omdurman do not know who the "displaced"

are. They do not know the stories of the "displaced", they just know the "displaced" as a label.

## Conclusion

Based on the above discussion of the discourses of the "displaced" women on "displacement", I argue that these discourses are reactions to the dominant discourse on the "displaced". The discourses of the "displaced" women are motivated by the interest in creating and moulding positive image(s) of the self. The "displaced" women are aware that the self that they were trying to represent, has been obscured by the dominant discourse. The dominant discourse has led to the production of negative images of the "displaced" as beggars, sources of diseases, and unproductive. By telling the public that they are independently seeking their livelihood and that they never experienced diseases except in Omdurman, the "displaced" women opposed the dominant discourse by shaping their own image as independent people searching for access to food through their own physical efforts.

The term *naziheen* was never used by the "displaced" women in their discourse (i.e. the interviews). The term only enters the discourse at the moment when I ask them about its meaning and its implications for them. When they talk about their past life experiences in Northern Kordofan and Northern Darfur and how they were obliged to move to Omdurman, they use terms such as: *rikbna*, *jeennah*, *forggah*, and *al-Raheel* but they never say *nazahn* (become displaced). The four terms used by the "displaced" women in their reference to the movement from the rural areas to Omdurman are terms to which they are accustomed in the rural setting. As such the term *naziheen* is for them, an urban construct. In their songs and poems the "displaced" women blamed the state officials for naming them *naziheen*: "after the state officials ate the Aid of the people who took the risk to reach Omdurman, they named us *naziheen*". The "displaced" women object to the term *naziheen* as an ideological term that labels, moulds, and classifies them as a category that is subjected to continuous processes of marginalization. During an interview one woman defines term *naziheen* as expressing a situation that no longer exists. To her, the term should be related to the context in which it originated. The term from the perspective of that woman is related to famine and drought. For the term to be used after the context has changed is something unacceptable to her. In that sense the term *naziheen* as used in the state discourse is perceived as ahistorical.

The term *naziheen* was related by the discourse(s) of some "displaced" women to taking a nationalist identity. "We are Sudanese and not strangers". By taking this position in their discussion of the term *naziheen*, the "displaced" women exposed the state as an isolated or alienated entity in relation to its civil society. It could be argued that the discourse(s) of the "displaced" women, unlike the state discourse, may lack an institutional basis, but it has the power to oppose and to expose the dominant discourse. Furthermore, the "displaced" women's discourse(s) have the power to express and name areas of silence in the dominant discourse on displacement in Sudan.

## Endnotes

1. Greater Khartoum is the capital of Sudan. It includes the three towns of Khartoum, Khartoum North and Omdurman. The experiences of migrant (displaced) women from Western Sudan to Greater Khartoum, especially to Omdurman is the concern of this paper.
2. The 1983/84 famine in Western Sudan was a political construct. The issue was that famine was not about starvation resulted from scarcity of food at the national level. It was the failure of food crops at the regional level of Darfur and Kordofan in Western Sudan. Most importantly, it was the scarcity of cash by which food could be purchased is what produced hunger and starvation in the Northern parts of Darfur and Kordofan. For more information please see De Waal, Alex (1989).
3. *Kasha* policy, as has been argued by Salih (1990) "is an indicator of the failure of the state in addressing the immediate problems of underdevelopment and an indicator of the failure of the state in assisting those incapacitated by drought and famine, the state had only coercion at its disposal to impose its legitimacy and assure its survival" (Salih 1990:124).
4. "Islamism is the militant ideology of contemporary Islamic movements or more directly the dogmatic politicization of the religion which its main aim is power" (El Ahamadi 1994:19).

5. The KSPOA meant an attempt by the state, "to develop the legal power of establishing total discipline in all aspects of life to the regions of Sudan including Greater Khartoum" (Sudan Human Rights Voice 1992:2). By this act men and women in public are segregated. It was argued that segregation is a religious obligation that must be upheld to ward off any provocation caused by the intermingling of women and men public. According to this Act, non-compliance with the Islamic dress and the use of perfume by women are violations of law, and thus warrant punishment depending on the type of dress and the intensity of the perfume (Sudan Human Right Voice 1994).

6. The Islamic dress, proposed by the Islamist government of Sudan, supposed to cover the whole body of the woman except her face and hands.

7. In this respect, an interviewed "displaced" woman who came from Northern Kordofan said: "the woman who does not work in our area called *khamlla* (lazy). And a woman who works is active and a good mother who is responsible for her children and the household". Grawert (1992) mentioned that in Kordofan women are entirely responsible for the provision of food to the household members. At the market level, women sell vegetables and fruits as retailers and sell craft products. They spend the cash immediately to meet the basic needs of their households.

8. Concern is a Non-Governmental organization responsible for establishing small- scale projects, such as sewing machines, to enhance the lives of the displaced women of Dar-al-Salam.

9. Dar-al-Salam is one of two main "official" camps of the "displaced" in Greater Khartoum. Dar-al-Salam area is located 6 Miles west of Omdurman. It is composed of twenty- two blocks. Each house in these blocks is about 200 square meters. That area is only sufficient for two small rooms, a kitchen, and a bathroom. The majority of houses of Dar-al-Salam have no built entrance door. The houses are made of temporary poor materials such as cartoons and sacks. Moreover, Dar al-Salam is an ethnically diversified area. In this respect, it includes "displaced" people from Southern Sudan who have

been affected by war, other "displaced" people from Nuba mountain in Western Sudan, and the "displaced" people from White Nile Area in Sudan.

10. Al-Sadiq al-Mahadi was the Prime Minister of Sudan in a democratically elected government (1986-89)

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