AUDREY MACKLIN

"Our Sisters from Stable Countries": War, Globalization, and Accountability

Abstract

The article explores linkages between the transnational activities of a Canadian oil company operating in Sudan and the human rights and humanitarian violations committed by the government of Sudan against the people of southern Sudan in the course of the ongoing civil war. The specific impact of the armed conflict on women is recounted in microcosm through a meeting between the author, a member of a fact-finding mission to Sudan, and a group of Nuer women. The encounter also provides an opportunity to query and theorize rhetorical strategies deployed within a context of profound asymmetries of power. These discursive appeals are designed to generate both solidarity and accountability among women for the violation of fundamental human rights. The author warns against attributing fixed and invariant meanings to particular tropes (such as sisterhood), arguing instead for an evaluation that takes into account the specific context within which discourses are deployed, including the position and agency of the speaker in relation to the listener.

Zygmunt Bauman's stark rendering of globalization splits the world into two kinds of people: tourists and vagabonds. For the former, borders are esthetic rather than material, and free-flowing global movement manifests their ability to ride the crest of the post-modern space-time compression. Globalization enables and encourages

them to transit comfortably through cultural, technological, and territorial spaces. Vagabonds may also be on the move, but not by choice. Conflict, poverty, disaster, persecution drive them to wander. Insecurity keeps them perpetually unsettled, though not necessarily mobile. States erect borders, cities pass restrictive bylaws, and sometimes there is nowhere to go. In Bauman's view, the forces of globalization structure and define both populations' (im)mobilities.

Bauman's binary typology may fairly be criticized as overly schematic, reproducing rather than challenging the binary oppositions that postmodernists so distrust. If nothing else, few of us can identify wholly as tourist or vagabond.

And yet.

Sometime in the summer of 1998, I was flipping through the pages of the Guardian Weekly when I came upon a photoessay featuring images from the famine in the Bahr el Ghazal region of Sudan. In a departure from their usual style of disengaged reportage, the Guardian accompanied the photos with a direct appeal to readers to contribute money to the humanitarian relief effort and provided contact information for an international nongovernmental organization (NGO). The photos were searing. I can still picture one of them clearly: a naked stick-figure of a boy of about 13, crawling on all fours, with one hand outstretched toward a man standing next to him. The man, stout and resplendent in his flowing white robe and turban, had his arms folded across his chest and was studiously ignoring the boy with an expression that managed to convey both utter disdain and sheer indifference. I remember pulling out my credit card, picking up the phone, and making a donation.

> Let us add that all associations of the horrid pictures of famine, as presented by the media, with the destruction of work and work-places (that is, with the global causes of local poverty) are carefully avoided. People are shown together with their hunger—but however the viewers strain their eyes, they will not see a single work-tool, plot of arable land or head of cattle in the picture—and one hears no reference to them. . . . The riches are global, the misery is local—but there is no causal link between the two; not in the spectacle of the fed and the feeding, anyway. (Bauman 1998, 74)

In December 1999, I found myself among a crowd of southern Sudanese women, men, and children on the flat plains of Western Upper Nile, Sudan. The name of the place was Nhialdiu, marked only by an airstrip and a scattering of mud and thatch huts (tukuls). My two female colleagues and I listened as the men and women described the experience of living and dying in a war zone. The people

speaking with us were a few of the 4 million internally displaced people of Sudan, cast into internal exile by a war that will not end.

We were in Sudan because a Canadian oil company, Talisman Energy, was also in Sudan, pumping oil from a field probably no more than a few dozen miles from where we stood. Talisman's corporate home was in the province of Alberta, known in Canada as a place of oil and cattle. Here they were, Talisman's men, half a world away, in a land known in Africa for oil and cattle. I wondered if in some dimly perceived way they felt at home here in such an alien location.

I was a member of an assessment mission appointed by the Canadian foreign minister to investigate the human rights impact of Talisman's presence. Our mandate required us to "investigate and report on the alleged link between oil development and human rights violations, particularly in respect of the forced removal of populations around the oil fields and oil related development" (Harker 2000, 1).

In true tourist fashion, I casually traversed many borders and communicated instantaneously across continents during the circuitous journey that began at my home in Canada and ended in Sudan. I had left Halifax in the fall of my sabbatical. I proceeded to Budapest and then Zenica, Bosnia. In Bosnia I picked up the e-mail inviting me on the mission. I headed to London to meet with NGOs and gather information. When it seemed that the mission would be postponed, I flew to Jerusalem to resume my original sabbatical plans. A few days later, the mission was back on track. I transited through Cairo, where the Canadian embassy swiftly replaced my passport, lest Islamist Sudan deny me entry on account of spending time in Israel. (It seems that one of the privileges of being a tourist is the ability to efface one's official presence in a country. One of the burdens of being a nomad is the compulsion to do the same.) Finally, I jetted down to Khartoum. Because Sudan is in the midst of civil war between the Arabicized north and the African south, one must fly from Khartoum to Nairobi and enter southern Sudan via the Kenyan border. Our last destination in southern Sudan was Nhialdiu. We flew in on a light plane operated by Operation Lifeline Sudan, a consortium of U.N. agencies and international NGOs supplying humanitarian aid to the region.

The people with whom we spoke in Nhialdiu were members of the Nuer people of southern Sudan, second in population size only to the Dinka. They also journeyed considerable distance over days and weeks to arrive at the place where we met, except that they traveled on foot. Many had died or disappeared en route, especially children. The elderly chiefs, the few among the group who were literate, carefully wrote down for us a list of the villages they had come from,

villages that were preserved only in name and memory because the government of Sudan forces had bombed or burned them out of existence. There are no roads anywhere in the vicinity of Nhialdiu, only a rough airstrip cleared to receive the planes delivering humanitarian aid. Most of the cattle have been killed or looted. Distance between two points is measured in hours' or days' walk. People were too apprehensive about alerting the government to their presence to build huts; they stayed in the bush and the swamps, fishing and foraging. Living conditions were miserable, and children particularly succumbed to disease and malnutrition. We were told that many other people did not emerge from the bush to speak to us that day; they only take the risk of exposure for flights delivering food or medicine. We had neither.

The respective trajectories of the Nuer and the mission converged at the same geographic position, but in other senses our locations could not have been more divergent. In Bauman's terms, I was a tourist and they were vagabonds. But to the extent that Talisman was the reason both of us were there at that moment, we were connected to one another through a common node in the vast network of global capital.

The official account of our fact-finding mission is contained in the document Human Security in Sudan: The Report of a Canadian Assessment Mission (Harker 2000; hereafter Report). My objective is to depart from the text of the Report to interrogate my own relationship to and accountability for the people of southern Sudan who are adversely affected by the activities of a Canadian oil company operating in collaboration with a regime that is waging a brutal and devastating war on them. V. Spike Peterson poses the question: "In what sense are state-centric identities consistent with a politics of accountability in the context of global capitalism?" (Peterson 1996, 13). For me, this translates into a concern about my identity as a Canadian who travels under the same national sign as Talisman, versus my accountability to those people of southern Sudan whose lives have measurably worsened because of those activities.

I do this through a feminist reading of the encounter between the Nuer community, my two colleagues, and me in Nhialdiu. I focus mainly on statements made to us by various women, in part because they raise urgent and wrenching questions about relationships between women positioned in radically different ways across axes of power. The next part of the article sketches the circumstances in which Talisman operates in Sudan to provide a context for the account I give later of the meeting in Nhialdiu. I use this meeting to illuminate the question of accountability between and among individuals for the global human rights implications of transnational operations in a zone of armed conflict.

One caveat: I do not present myself as an expert about the Nuer or the Dinka of south Sudan. I do not presume to provide an authoritative account of the Nuer or Dinka people, their culture, their beliefs, or their gender order.[1] My goal is to interrogate how one arrives at inferences and interpretation under conditions that do not permit the development of trust, relational understanding, and continuing dialogue. I believe the value of this enterprise resides in the fact that most of us, most of the time, do not in fact have the opportunity to learn as much as we would like or as much as we would need to know to speak authoritatively about the condition of the other. Yet it is surely the case that we always and inevitably construct our understanding of others, of ourselves and of the world under the constraints of partial knowledge. We cannot continually defer our own responsibility to others on that account.

Background

The geopolitical borders of Sudan, like those of other African countries, were drawn freehand with a pen dipped in colonial conceit and contain within them an arbitrary collection of peoples. Sudan is comprised of an Arabicized, Muslim north and an African, animist/Christian south. One of the legacies of the Anglo-Egyptian colonial rule was the entrenchment of a northern elite that ruled both north and south with little public participation.

Sudan has been at war with itself since the departure of the British colonial administration in 1956, with only one hiatus from 1972–83. The northern Government of Sudan (GoS), currently led by the fundamentalist National Islamic Front (NIF), seeks to extend Islamic law throughout the country. An array of southern rebel groups, the most prominent of which is the Southern People's Liberation Army (SPLA) and its political wing, the Southern People's Liberation Movement (SPLM), oscillate in their ultimate goals between secession and a federal, secular state. There also exist many opponents of the NIF regime within the north, and internecine conflict between southern rebel groups has at various moments cost more southern lives than attack from the northern adversary.

The war is a seasonal, slow-motion, and low-tech conflict that inflicts enormous devastation—death, displacement, malnutrition, disease—especially on southern Sudanese women and children. As a former U.N. special rapporteur on Sudan wrote,

> Although of low intensity, the war has had a disproportionally high impact on the civilian population, particularly women and children, even more so as the war has been conducted with

> complete disregard for the principles of human rights and humanitarian law by all parties, the greater portion of responsibility being with the Government.
>
> The violations of human rights and humanitarian law by the parties to the conflict have had a number of tragic human consequences, such as forced displacements, killings, rape and abduction of women and children for forced labour and slavery-like purposes. The famine [in Bahr el Gazal], which constituted such a humanitarian disaster in 1998, was also exacerbated by the continuous violations deriving from the conflict. (Franco 1999, paragraphs 140–41)

The life expectancy of the average woman in southern Sudan is 40 years. The war began before that woman was born, and if it doesn't kill her directly, it will almost surely outlive her.

The main theater of war is southern Sudan, where the GoS controls only about 20 percent of the territory. The remainder is held by the Dinka-dominated SPLA, led by John Garang, as well as various other militias that draw most of their support from Nuer and other ethnic groups.

In addition to the appalling human cost of this war, there is also a financial cost: Waging war on the south drains a million dollars daily from Sudan's grossly indebted and stagnant economy (Nikiforuk 1999, 70). Sudan's external debt is $17 billion (U.S.), its current account deficit is approximately $700 million, and it owes interest payments of approximately $4.5 million per month. All of this makes Sudan one of the single largest debtors of the International Monetary Fund (IMF; Economist 1999, 53; Nikiforuk 1999, 70). The government of Sudan desperately needs foreign currency to service debt and to wage war. And Sudan's most valuable resource in the international market is oil.

Back in the early 1980s, when oil reserves were discovered in the southern region bordering the north, the GoS borrowed a lesson from their colonial predecessors and attempted to politically and discursively reconstitute the southern province of "Western Upper Nile" as the northern "Unity State." Unsurprisingly, southerners—who predominate in Western Upper Nile—resist this reassignment. Nevertheless, the GoS managed to attract Malaysian, Chinese, and Canadian partners to collaborate in developing oil fields located in Western Upper Nile over which the GoS exercised a tenuous and contested military control.

Enter Talisman in 1998. Talisman Energy is the world's third largest independent oil producer. According to one commentator, "The Sudan project is expected to fuel strong rates of growth in volumes

and cash flow over the next several years that would be difficult to achieve in Canada's domestic field. . . . Companies of the size of Talisman are currently facing the prospect of their growth stalling or at least being difficult to sustain, and thus many are establishing an international presence" (Lado 2000). In other words, the scattered hegemonies of mobile capital play out concretely and specifically in the logic of a Canadian oil company's transnational investment strategy (Grewal and Caplan, 1994). By entering into the Greater Nile Petroleum Operating Company (GNPOC) consortium with the GoS, Malaysia, and China, Talisman contributes technological expertise, managerial skills and financial backing. In return, it holds a 25 percent stake in GNPOC. Although the oil is located in the south, it flows northward to the Port of Sudan via a pipeline that the GoS managed to build with foreign assistance under cover of the 1997–99 Khartoum Peace Agreement. Likewise, royalties travel northward into the GoS treasury.

No sooner had Talisman entered Sudan than a civil society coalition of church groups, NGOs, trade unions, Sudanese organizations, and human rights activists launched a high-profile divestment campaign against Talisman. Talisman's critics charged the company with complicity in the human rights and humanitarian violations committed by the GoS against the south in the course of waging war. Opponents focused particularly on reports by human rights investigators (including the U.N. special rapporteur on Sudan) of aerial bombing and ground attack carried out by the GoS army and allied militia in and around Talisman's oil concession, allegedly for purposes of securing the oil region by driving out the resident southern population. Though GNPOC is a northern GoS enterprise, the surrounding population is southern. Rebel leaders have not concealed the fact that they view GNPOC as an illegitimate incursion into their territory and a seizure of their resources by the northern NIF regime. For its part, the GoS constructs southerners as objects of suspicion and potential saboteurs, thereby rationalizing the necessity of a cordon sanitaire around the oil field.

These same critics of Talisman roundly rebuked the Canadian government for failing to impose sanctions or other measures on Talisman to force its exit from Sudan, accusing Canadian Foreign Minister Axworthy of hypocritically selling out his vaunted "human security" foreign policy to corporate interests. Axworthy responded by appointing the independent assessment team composed of six Canadian development and human rights academics and activists, including me.[2]

The Report contains the findings of the Assessment Mission, which include the following: The presence of oil did not ignite the

civil war, but it does fuel it. The value of oil is recognized by all combatants, with the result that the main theater of conflict has shifted to areas that are, or are believed to be, oil-rich. The GoS and its allied militia have engaged in bombardment, ground attack, terrorization, and other means to forcibly displace southern civilian populations from the regions in and around the oil fields and to otherwise assert sovereignty over the area against the southern rebel forces. Attainment of these military objectives is enhanced by royalties paid by GNPOC (including Talisman) to the GoS, which in turn help it finance the purchase of weapons. The GNPOC airstrip, built to facilitate the movement of oil company personnel and supplies, also serves as the departure point for aerial attack by the GoS. Antonov bombers and helicopter gunships take off from the airstrip and make sorties to surrounding areas.[3] Roads built within the oil concession for industrial purposes also enable the movement of GoS troops and armaments. The Report concludes that "our own observations and investigations only add to the growing body of evidence and information that identifies Sudan as a place of extraordinary suffering and continuing human rights violations . . . and, significantly, that the oil operations in which a Canadian company is involved add more suffering" (Report, 66).

Uncommon Commonalities

It requires little insight to realize that the interplay of globalization, (neo)-colonialism, race, and gender that has produced Talisman in Sudan also produces me, the fact-finder and manufacturer of knowledge about human rights. As Rolando Gaete writes, multilateral financial institutions (the IMF, the World Bank) are positioned "at the vanguard of the total mobilization of the humanity in pursuit of the consumption of the earth. . . . Human rights have become a banner representing the 'civilizing mission' of financial institutions and of the countries that provide most of the funds for these institutions. After the 'conquest of the last ideological frontiers,' no other secular ideology is left" (Gaete 1999, 232–33).

The irony of the enterprise has not been lost on me. Human rights have clearly supplanted Christianity as both instrument and measure of civilization. Lest I let it slip from view, the fact that we Canadians are on a mission in Sudan provides a constant reminder. Even though our focus is on investigating the complicity of a Canadian company in human rights abuses, our role in legitimating the West ("see, Canada really does care about human rights") is self-evident. I wonder if it is a peculiar triumphalism spawned by the internal contradictions of Western liberalism that promotes capital's unbridled and unfettered

quest for profit maximization across the globe, then solemnly parades its moral authority (if not authorship) over human rights by dispatching people like me to assay the damage.

Our official task was to investigate the impact of oil exploration and extraction on the conduct of the civil war by the GoS, and to evaluate our findings against putatively universal standards of human rights and humanitarian law. Gaete notes that "economic growth, and the spread of technology, free markets, and modern systems of law has been shown to coexist with patterns of repressive practices and with various political forms, not all of them democratic" (Gaete 1999, 234). In Sudan, the alleged relationship was not coexistence but facilitation.

We relied on various informants to gather information, including the people whom I describe shortly. However, we could not assert knowledge (in any anthropological sense) of the people and societies we encountered. To do so after a highly managed two-and-a-half-week stint in Sudan would be preposterous.[4] Indeed, we arrived with a pre-fab normative structure within which we would ostensibly re-present (speak about) the experiences of the people we met, but made no claim that we could thereby re-present the people themselves. Our focus was not so much on what people did but on what was being done to them.

Along with others on the mission, I wanted to ensure that women's experiences were recorded, recounted, and incorporated into the assessment. At the same time, none of us spoke the Nuer or Dinka languages (we relied on male interpreters), only one of us had even been to Sudan before, and the duration of our trip was brief. Though we attempted to build into our framework a feminist understanding of human rights, it was our feminist understanding, not theirs.

On the suggestion of another woman on the mission, the final report contains an appendix excerpting quotes from the southern Sudanese women and men who spoke to us about the conditions of their lives. Beyond identifying them by name and location, the appendix did not attempt to contextualize or interpret their statements. The passages constitute raw testimony and were transcribed by us through an interpreter and selected for inclusion on the basis of our perception that they were powerful. Many of the statements emerged from a single meeting with a displaced community, and in what follows I will attempt to furnish some of the missing context.

On the last day of our mission, we met with a large group of men, women, and children who had been driven out of their villages by GoS and GoS-sponsored militias. There were, in effect, living in the bush. A rebel commander and his force were located nearby, and we

were able to notify them of our visit through radio contact. When our small plane descended onto the makeshift landing strip used for relief flights, we were greeted by about 200 Nuer women, men, and children. Half the mission plus foreign service officers went off to interview the commander, and three of us stayed behind with an interpreter to meet with the civilian community. As it happened, the three who remained were the three women members of the mission.

Like most of our meetings, this one is highly staged—the logistics of arranging and scheduling a gathering of this kind in a remote area that is also a conflict zone means that little can be left to chance. There is nothing casual or spontaneous in its unfolding. The people begin by pointing out shrapnel, shells, and bomb fragments, which they had assembled into a display for us: Look, they say, the bombs the government drop on us come from Russia, they are not coming from Arab countries. Why are you (the West) supporting them?

Handmade chairs are produced for us to sit on, while people gather around us in a tight circle. People are thin and solemn. The chiefs stand out in their threadbare suits crossed by a sash, ironic and jarring souvenirs of British colonialism. I do not know what these clothes signify today for the chiefs or for the people. As for the rest, a surreal jumble of tattered traditional garments and ragged Western clothes hang from their bodies. Some children have no clothes. The larger aid organizations focus their energies on food, medicine, seeds for cultivation, fishing, mosquito nets, and so on. Clothes do not get much attention except from smaller charitable organizations on an ad hoc basis. I fix on a woman wearing a garishly red polyester slip. I wonder who wore it before her, and if that previous owner could ever imagine that she was linked to a Nuer woman in rural Sudan in this bizarrely intimate way. Would she even recognize it as a connection?

Each of us is given a string of beads as a gift to honor our presence. We express our gratitude, we explain why we have come, and we listen. The mood is very somber. The (male) chiefs speak first. They produce a list of villages bombarded by Antonovs; they describe how children have been scattered and lost, entire villages displaced. People are dying of hunger, the cattle are gone, and cultivation is not possible. They need medicine, food, fishing equipment, blankets, mosquito nets, and veterinary drugs. They used to cultivate in the rainy season, but because of the fighting and the insecurity, they cannot graze animals or cultivate crops. This discovery of oil has caused a big problem, they tell us. Until the 1980s the Arabs could not exploit the oil, but now they can with the help of the West. They use oil against us, we are told. If the oil is taken peacefully, it can be good, but not in war.

One of the chiefs says to us: "We don't know if we are included in the human rights of the world. If we are included in the human rights of the world, why are the Arabs able to kill us? We have been dying here since the 1980s and you are the first team to visit us."

Then the women speak. From time to time, they are interrupted by others clapping or signaling support. S. speaks first:

> We women are happy to see women and men together as equal people in the world. We women are suffering because of trouble between men. We lose our children who flee bombardment or become soldiers. We thank God he has brought women to see our problems. We eat these leaves, we run to the swamps, mosquitoes kills us. Don't think we are the only ones. It's hard to get people to come talk to people who don't bring food.

M. addresses us next: "You are my children. I have given birth to many children and most have died. If the world is willing, it can stop this oil crisis. We suspect the world of cooperating to kill us and take our oil. Why not take the oil in a peaceful way?"

All the women, and the men, too, speak of basic needs—food, medicine, mosquito nets, blankets, veterinary drugs for the cattle. We are told that "women are not having babies anymore." Infants are stillborn, born prematurely, miscarried, never conceived at all. The men are gone, the children have disappeared—killed, separated in the frantic scramble into the bush, conscripted as child soldiers.

M. insists that bringing food and medicine will not suffice, for without guns the government will still kill them anyway. "How can you fight people who have guns when you don't? Even if you bring food and medicine but no guns, they will kill us." She is the only one who speaks openly of wanting to fight back, but it's clear that she is not alone in her views. No maternal pacifism here.

D. wears what looks like a man's raincoat. The way she stands and the way she speaks—with subdued force—creates an aura of stillness around her and compels rapt attention:

> Greetings sisters. We are living in a war-affected area. The place from where we ran was burnt. Our sisters from stable countries: this problem of our country is caused by men. Most people have not come to see you because they fear bombardment. Since we ran away, we have lost cows, children, and men. The people coming to you today are here not because they think you have food, but because they want you to convey our problems to the world. Since our tukuls [huts] were burnt, elders have died without blankets to keep them warm. If women have come to interview us, we know women are equal. (Report, 86–87)

Many times since, I have revisited what people said and revised what I thought I heard. Given the profound practical constraints limiting our communication—quite apart from more theoretical concerns about the indeterminacy of meaning—it would be ludicrous for me to assert any serious claim to interpretive authority over those who occupy a paradigmatic subaltern status. What were we doing there? We were not just visitors recording their stories, or sympathetic academics engaged in the problematic exercise of information retrieval, or even activists offering to act as their advocates. We could not purport to represent them in a literary, political, or legal sense. We were envoys dispatched by the state that claimed both Talisman and us as citizens, and our job was to take back "facts." Our power resided in the authority conferred on us qua objective, professional, independent North Americans to construct a narrative about oil, war, and accountability for consumption by Western audiences.

That narrative is contained in the Report, and I do not propose to reiterate it here. Instead, I embark on a self-conscious and deliberate excursion onto the terrain of projected meanings and speculative interpretation. Though I adopt an approach that courts the obvious risks of appropriation, I hope to give a reading that both acknowledges and interrupts the neocolonial power relation that structures—perhaps overdetermines—my presence in Sudan. My method is guided by S. P. Mohanty's argument that "'a simple recognition of differences across cultures' leads only 'to sentimental charity, for there is nothing in its logic that necessitates our attention to the other'" (quoted in Friedman 1995, 124). Instead, as Susan Stanford Friedman explains, an assumption of agency is necessary to generate productive alliances for political and ethical change: "To cross the divide between Us and Them, [Mohanty insists], involves being able to imagine the agency of those other than ourselves, to assume their capacity, like our own, to reflect upon and negotiate the shifting confinements and privileges of their multiply constituted positions" (Friedman 1995, 146).

It bears reiterating the obvious point that the material exigencies under which the civilians of southern Sudan live and die shrink the compass of agency to the point where the most profound display of resistance is endurance. War, famine, disease, and death are the daily preoccupations: "This is how life is now, this is just the way of it, it is what living has become: a daily escape from death, until the day you don't" (Rushdie 1991, 205). Nevertheless, one must resist the obliterating move of conflating a profoundly limited scope of agency with an incapacity for agency.

Robert Carr writes that testimonio involves "the speaker from an exploited, oppressed community working with someone who has or

can gain access to the managers of the mass media to produce a commodity that can be marketed" (Carr 1994, 156).[5] Given the official status of our mission, I surmise that the speakers worked less "with" us than "through" us and "on" us in (re)presenting their experience for international distribution and consumption. I am not complaining that the encounter bore the elements of spectacle. Quite the contrary. I wish to foreground the speakers' agency by moving beyond my rendition of the facts disclosed by their statements, to postulating the ways in which their performance constituted and conscripted us through invoking discourses of relationship. Thus, for instance, I devote little attention to resolving ontological or epistemological questions about the culturally specific meanings of equality, sisterhood, or woman in Nuer versus Canadian culture, a topic about which I am wholly unqualified to comment. I am more concerned with ethical and political prerogatives—what is equality for?—and the pragmatist problematic—what can the invocation of sisterhood do? (Bhabha 1997, 434). When Gayatri Spivak declares that "transnational feminism is neither revolutionary feminism nor mere celebration of testimony," I interpret her as (among other things) taking the Other seriously as interlocutor and subject (Spivak 1988). What follows is my attempt to speculate on how the speakers positioned themselves and us in relation to them, recognizing that they were conveying a message intended to motivate us to act on their behalf.

We Don't Know If We Are Included in the Human Rights of the World

One of my colleagues wondered afterward about the route by which the formal discourse of human rights traveled to this remote and isolated Nuer community devoid of schools, media, books, where only a handful of men are literate and 98 percent of women are not.[6] Was it transmitted by international NGOs working with local populations, by the few individuals (including rebel leaders) who had received formal education before or despite the war, or through some other vehicle? The chief was not concerned about the importation and imposition of alien and culturally inappropriate standards on his community. Rather, his rhetorical query served up the paradox of universalized standards delimited by particularized boundaries of inclusion and exclusion from the ambit of actual protection: Either we are not human in the eyes of the world, or there are no rights. Because there is no sign of human rights here.

Are the people of southern Sudan included in the human rights of the world? Our Report contains a 17-page appendix correlating our factual findings to applicable principles of customary and conventional human rights and humanitarian law. It requires little legal

acumen to catalog the violation of international human rights and humanitarian law when one is confronted with a pattern of indiscriminate attacks on civilian noncombatants, rape, killing, torture, forcible displacement, the use of starvation as a weapon of war, enslavement, and so on.

Thus, the appendix to the Report reads like a shopping list of most major legal instruments and customary rules binding Sudan in circumstances of internal conflict (Report, Appendix 7). These include the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 (which sets out, inter alia, war crimes and crimes against humanity), the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the International Covenant on Economic and Social Rights, the Convention Against Torture, the Slavery Convention, the African Charter, the Forced Labour Convention, and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. The chart goes further and refers to the statute of the International Criminal Court. Although the statute is not yet in force, it contains the most "recent, relevant and widely accepted opinion of states on the content of international humanitarian law" (Report, 105). Although Sudan has not signed the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the violations of Sudanese women's rights under the conventions, treaties, and customary norms binding Sudan amply demonstrate the government's disregard for its international human rights commitments.

I suppose that the existence of our mission, and even our chart, signify that the people of southern Sudan fall within the compass of international human rights and humanitarian law. Otherwise, why pay attention to their plight at all? They have rights. If the findings of our mission, and the content of our chart suggest anything however, it is the people of southern Sudan subsist in a virtual human rights and humanitarian vacuum. They have no rights.

The legally correct analysis requires me to say that they have rights, but those rights are violated. Forests of trees have been sacrificed to academic explorations and critiques of this dilemma. But if rights on paper disintegrate when they hit ground, how does one persuade people on the ground that they ever existed in the first place? Would it have been worth mentioning that one of their fellow southerners, Francis Deng, is the U.N. secretary-general's special representative on Internally Displaced People, and that the Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement (Report, 91–101) he developed were inspired by the desperate situation of Sudan's 4 million internally displaced people? I did not dare. What did they have to show for the Guiding Principles?

Earlier in our mission, while in Khartoum, I spoke with a Sudanese U.N. worker who interviewed a murahleen tribal leader

involved in raiding Dinka villages and abducting and enslaving Dinka women and children. This activity is tacitly sanctioned by the GoS as a form of warfare. The U.N. worker reported to us that the murahleen leader—who had been educated at University of Khartoum—asked the U.N. worker if he might someday be taken before a war crimes tribunal for his actions, like his counterparts in the former Yugoslavia and Rwanda.

I want to tell the Nuer chief that yes, you are included in the human rights of the world. I want the murahleen tribal leader to believe and to fear that yes, he will be accountable for war crimes and maybe even genocide for his role in abducting and enslaving Dinka women and children. But I am expressing an aspiration, not making a prediction. Perhaps progress includes the growing consciousness on the part of both perpetrator and victim that there exists (in principle) a global standard of human rights against which their actions and experiences can be measured and may be judged.

But in the end, is all this human rights discourse merely talk? For it seems to me that the question posed by the chief—are we included in the human rights of the world?—is not the same question as "why are our human rights not respected?" For at some point, marginalization as a subject becomes tantamount to erasure, and to be erased from the human rights map is to be Othered into extinction as a subject.

Ironically, the Nuer of southern Sudan are included in the global economy. Though their lifestyle is pastoral and semi-nomadic, and they do not operate within a capitalist market economy, their present circumstances are inextricably linked to Sudan's position as a deeply indebted but resource-rich state, the transnational momentum of Talisman's corporate expansion, and Sudan's need to provide a "secure" environment for oil exploration and extraction in the midst of a conflict zone. The latter objective, crucially important to both Sudan and Talisman, is putatively achieved by displacing the Nuer from in, around, and near the vicinity of the oil fields. In this sense, the Nuer are paradoxically peripheral and central to the operation of the global economy.

Women Are Not Having Babies Anymore

I thought I understood why these women were not bearing children: absent men, illness, malnutrition, and disease all precluded conception or precipitated miscarriages and stillbirths. Only later, long after leaving Sudan, did I learn of a supplementary narrative about women, militarization, and reproduction in southern Sudan.

In research conducted among the Dinka, ethnographer Jok Madut Jok (2000) documents how the war has not only placed increased pressure on women to reproduce the nation and compensate for high

infant mortality. It has also corroded the social rules, taboos, and mores regarding when, with whom, and how often to engage sexually. Women have lost much control over sexual and reproductive decisions and are exposed to sexually transmitted diseases and unwanted pregnancies. Women in conflict zones are at gravest reproductive risk at the time of enemy raid and capture, but another period of heightened peril occurs when soldier/spouses return home from a long absence and breach traditional rules of sexual access in their determination to reaffirm militarized masculinity and/or conceive another child before resuming their military duties. Extramarital or premarital sex also increases during such intervals. Women are then left alone to cope with another pregnancy and rear another infant under conditions of extreme material deprivation.

Under these circumstances, the physical and psychological damage of bearing yet another child prompt some women to resist by terminating their pregnancies surreptitiously, often by resorting to unsafe methods in unsanitary conditions. As a statistical matter, these abortions appear as miscarriages. Jok Madut Jok contends that abortion emerges as a means of negotiating and emending hegemonic ideologies of gender, militarism, reproduction, and the nation. He concludes that the experience of abortion is also politicizing, for "it is also within the domain of individual experience that these women are beginning to struggle with awareness of the connections between their suffering, on the one hand, and community-level gender relations and the military environment on the other" (Jok 2000, 209).

After reviewing my notes and rehearsing in my memory what the women said to us that day about bearing children, I realize that there were discursive gaps, fissures that I had not noticed at the time. Even now, I do not know how much was simply lost in translation. Moreover, the women we met on this last day were Nuer; Jok Madut Jok's research concerned Dinka women, although it does appear that the social circumstances and strategies of resistance of Nuer women are broadly similar to those of their Dinka counterparts (Hutchinson and Jok 2002, 101–4). I no longer know what material realities lurked behind the statement "women are not having babies anymore." Kamala Visweswaran (1994, 99) writes that "in interrupting a Western (sometimes feminist) project of subject retrieval, recognition of the partially understood is not simply strategy but accountability to my subjects; partial knowledge is not so much choice as necessity." One irony revealed to me is that the partiality of prior knowledge may not become apparent until more knowledge is acquired, and even then, meanings remain in flux. So Gayatri Spivak's question persists for me: the subaltern can indeed speak, but can I attend to what she is saying? (Spivak 1988, 820, n.29).

> Greetings, sisters. . . We thank God he has brought women to see our problems. . . We are happy today to see women and men together as equal people in the world. . . If women have come to interview us, we know women are equal. Our sisters from stable countries: this problem of our country is caused by men. We are suffering because of problems between men.

I have no idea what kind of gender equality we signify to the women before us. Perhaps they construe our presence as "official" interviewers on behalf of a government as evidence that we are authorized to extract, produce, and deliver our knowledge with the same credibility as male-authored knowledge. Perhaps the fact that our mission consists of male and female participants as such connotes equality. If representation of women in ostensible positions of power is their implicit indicator of equality with men, then I concede that Canadian women of my generation enjoy more equality with men than did the generation of Canadian women preceding me. Indeed, even if one remains in the Canada-Sudan context, one can add the appointment of Senator Lois Wilson (and later, Senator Mobina Jaffer) as Canada's envoy to the moribund peace talks between the GoS and the SPLA. Then there is Jackie Sheppard, vice president of Talisman Energy, a woman whose public relations role seems to involve putting a kinder, gentler—dare I say more feminine—face on Talisman. One can see her on television and read her in the newspapers, politely and firmly rebuffing the voluminous evidence documenting the systematic commission of human rights and humanitarian abuses in and around the oil region. As Canadians, Senator Wilson, Jackie Sheppard, and I all benefit in myriad material and symbolic ways from the past legacy and current practices of North–South economic exploitation and colonialism. These mechanisms are, in large measure, what constitute and sustain the implicit referent for equality (white, privileged males), and what enables us (white, privileged females) to approximate that standard.

So, looking across to the Nuer woman, this sex equality she invokes reflects back on me as the glare of extraordinary and illicit privilege. Inwardly, I wince.

The women could have addressed us not as sisters but as allies of the GoS regime, as apologists for our corporate compatriots, as the beneficiaries of oil stolen from their land and over their dead bodies. They could have reproached us as the white oppressor/Other. Instead, they elected to trace a common bond between us by intoning the category of women, by greeting us as sisters, and by depicting our presence as a measure of women's equality, not just in Canada, not just for white women, not just for affluent women, but for the unfashionably essentialist category of "woman."

As a Western feminist educated and admonished by critiques of universalized discourses of international or global sisterhood, their address startles me. The claim that our presence signifies to them women's equal status in the world presupposes a unity of identity qua woman that everything about the context of that encounter refuted utterly and unequivocally.

In the early 1980s, Bell Hooks derided the "false sisterhood" derived from the experiences of white women imposed on all women within Western feminist circles. Not only did this sisterhood fail to contend with the exercise of race and class privilege by women against women, it converted those who exposed the fallacy of the concept into disloyal to feminism (Hooks 1984). More recently, Oyeronke Oyewumi (2001) challenges the viability of sisterhood as a metaphor for transboundary feminist relationships between African and Western feminists. Oyewumi argues that the concept of sisterhood is rooted in the specificities of the patriarchal Euro-American nuclear family, which is not exportable as such to African communities.

Following Maria Lugones (who draws on Latina cultural patterns to propose friendship as a preferable model for feminist alliances), Oyewumi canvasses possible African alternatives, including motherhood and forms of institutionalized friendship. Ultimately, however, she discards gender-based identity grouping as a potential source of solidarity:

> In many African societies, any notions of universal sisterhood will immediately run up against the differing and often opposed interests of women as daughters and women as wives in the lineage and in the society at large. In African societies, the question of organizing to attain a political goal speaks to the issue of forming political alliances, and not sisterhood, since group identity is constituted socially is not based on any qualities of shared anatomy popularly called gender. (Oyewumi 2001, 10)

Writing about relations between international (white) women's NGOs and (black) South African "grassroots" organizations, Deborah Mindry theorizes that kinship metaphors—such as the global family—inscribe a certain moralizing subtext that shapes what she labels "the politics of virtue" (Mindry 2001, 1193): "This global family signals a moral commitment, often expressed in terms of feminized and naturalized obligations, 'to help one another.' However, help cannot be freely given; there must be, it is argued, some evidence that those receiving help are in fact deserving of help" (Mindry 2001, 1193).

Elsewhere, however, Mindry admits that the groups she investigated tended not to invoke sisterhood as a descriptor for their relationships. Both the first-world women from the international NGOs and the

South African women (from the local NGOs) perceived the inequality in their relations, with the first-world women characterizing their privileged position as a source of "obligations or responsibilities to assist the poor and oppressed—usually third-world women." Mindry concludes that "relationships between first- and third-world women are shaped within this philanthropic ('doing good for one's fellow human being') mode of power" (Mindry 2001, n. 31)

I do not wish to take issue with the suitability of sisterhood as a metaphor for solidarity among women. Nevertheless, one cannot ignore the fact that, pace Oyewume, certain African women did invoke sisterhood in addressing us. Furthermore, Mindry seems to acknowledge (if inadvertently) that the philanthropic mode of power does not require kinship metaphors. This begs the question of whether kinship metaphors (including sisterhood) are intrinsically burdened with the patronizing freight typically ascribed to them. To push the question even further, is it wrong to feel obliged to assist those who are subordinated or oppressed, or does the problem arise in the terms and conditions under which a particular obligation is framed?

In pondering these theoretical queries, I return to wondering why the Nuer women might have greeted us as sisters. It seems important to consider the question in its specific context. Anthropologist and aid worker Simon Harragin writes that "we need to be forced to confront our failure to care enough about Sudan" (Harragin 1999, emphasis in original). When the chief said, "We have been dying here since the 1980s and you are the first team to visit us," he was telling us that they knew better than anyone that the world did not care about them. This was their first—perhaps only—chance to make us care. The gravity and the formality of the occasion, and the determination of these women and men to make the best possible use of it, suggest to me that words were chosen deliberately.

In the months that followed, I have speculated on the motives animating the women's discursive strategy as a means of focusing attention on their subject position. Speaking up, addressing us as sisters, and framing our presence in terms of gender equality all constitute political acts by women who some might label as paradigmatic subalterns. I believe that exploring these acts foregrounds their agency more than an interpretive exercise directed at deconstructing the cross-cultural meanings of equality or sisterhood.

In writing about the preconditions for communication across difference in culture, aims, interests, and position, Iris Marion Young (1996, 129) stresses the value of "greeting." Young includes within the term both contentless forms of address, as well as "various forms of flattery; introductory speeches that. . . acknowledge the greatness of [the other's] achievements and ideals, and so on" (129). The purpose

of these preliminaries and intermittent interventions is to establish respect or trust, to lubricate discussion, and to provide "polite acknowledgment of the Otherness of others" (130).

Young usefully alerts us to the value of greeting as a supplement to argument in facilitating meaningful communication "in the absence of significant shared understandings." However, the speakers accomplished more with their greetings than Young would allow. First, by bestowing each of us with a welcoming gift, they established us as recipients of their generosity and hospitality, thereby disturbing (if not dislodging) the donor–recipient dyad so typical of today's neocolonial encounter. Second, the female speakers located us in relation to them not by acknowledging the myriad aspects of our Otherness, all of which position us on top and them on the bottom of virtually every conventional gauge of power and privilege. Nor did they implicitly deny otherness per se by appealing to a universal, cosmopolitan identity as human beings.

Instead, they deployed a subcategory we shared in common, thereby reconfiguring, if only contingently and fleetingly, the glaring us/them boundaries that appear to define and precipitate our meeting. They greeted us as sisters, as opposed to guests, friends, or visitors. They invited us into a discursive space where men, though not excluded, certainly receded into the background as object and audience. The oblique reference to how the war and its horrific consequences were problems created by men subtly undermined the supremacy of nationality and ethnicity as definitive and exhaustive of identity, offering gender as a cross-cutting basis for connection and communiciation. The honorific invocation of sisterhood connotes a relationship of mutual support, concern and, most important, of responsibility: I am my sister's keeper. And she is my keeper.

Seen in this light, the claim that our presence denotes women's equality in the world imparts a special weight. In choosing their words as they did, the women were not merely flattering us; they were issuing a challenge. Casting our positioning as symbolic of women's equality could not fail to render this putative equality a signifier of power in relation to the women before us. It is precisely because the material and social asymmetries between us are so enormous that their reference to sex equality invites this reading. Equality as such typically denotes a relation, a status, but not usually an action. Power, on the other hand, manifests through its exercise, and we judge and are judged by how, when, and to what end power is used.

Indeed, feminists everywhere lobby women who appear to occupy positions of influence in the hopes that such women will at least try to use their agency to advance goals of equality and antisubordination.

There is no guarantee that these women in fact possess feminist consciousness and commitments, but clearly the attempt is made to draw on a shared identity as woman (however problematic the category may be) as a strategically useful basis for dialogue and persuasion.

Given this, I interpret the women's introductions as setting before us a gendered lens that would not just focus our gaze on particular aspects of Sudanese women's militarized lives. The lens also mapped our relative positionings as women onto a normative landscape: We owe a distinct responsibility to those with whom we share a special relationship. We are accountable to those who are disempowered for how we exercise our power, especially (though not exclusively) when we are implicated in their oppression.

At first, the women's reference to sisterhood and equality left me deeply uncomfortable, almost embarrassed. My next reaction was what one might dub "arrogant feminist perception"—I saw their invocation as expressing a naive and dated notion of subjectivity ("I guess they haven't heard about essentialism"). Yet I have become increasingly convinced that the women speaking to us engaged in the deliberate and tactical deployment of woman as a universal category with full awareness of the depth and breadth of the power gulf between us. The discursive act of redrawing a circle of inclusion containing both us and them momentarily distracted the mission from the vivid lines that so glaringly divided us, destabilizing the other categories of nationality, race, and class that conjoined us with Talisman Energy. In so doing, I suggest that the speakers were reclaiming the colonial spaces of detachment with relationship, pity with accountability, and confrontation with engagement.[7]

Writing about African-American use of kinship terms, Lugones and Rosezelle assert that "it is a political act to call those who are not our blood, but who are your people, 'brother' and 'sister'" (Lugones and Rosezelle 1995, 139). Similarly, for Nuer women to call us sisters was also a political act. I interpret it as an appeal to solidarity, initiated by women of southern Sudan and directed at us (Dean 1996). Christine Sylvester counsels privileged women that the "practice of doing feminism on the road" requires that we "see world travelling going on where we tend to assume that only we did the traveling to be there. We must see subtle negotiations where our tourist eyes see 'oppressed people everywhere'" (Sylvester 1995, 965). I have hesitated to deploy world traveling in this context, if only because its figurative use—with all its playfulness and intellectual appeal—risks cheapening the material brutality of the displaced Nuer's literal world traveling. Nevertheless, it does seem to me that the Nuer women who spoke that day implicitly made deliberate choices from among competing,

contradictory and even oppositional subjectivities to communicate their message to us and through us.

Aili Mari Tripp's insight about the African women's movements she studied seem apt here. Tripp concludes that the women's movements chose "to err on the side of emphasizing similarity and [chose] to ignore the power dimensions of their differences for tactical reasons, not because they are misunderstood but because they are understood all too well" (Tripp 2000, 673). Mindry's critique notwithstanding, I did not hear the women's address to us as an appeal to philanthropy.

One of the lessons I draw from my experience is that sisterhood as rhetorical device has no static and fixed content. Wendy Brown argues persuasively that endemic power asymmetries dispel the illusion of transparent communication. Instead, we must recognize the "partiality of understanding and expression, cultural chasms whose nature may be vigilantly identified but rarely 'resolved', and the power of words and images that evoke, suggest and connote rather than transmit meanings" (Brown 1995, 50). Applying Brown's point, I contend that the significance, political reverberations, and utility of the word sister depends on who is speaking it, who is hearing it, and where speaker and listener stand in relation to the other. When a Nuer woman greets me as a sister, the work done by sisterhood is not the same as if I had been the one to invoke it.

Conclusion

The people who participated in that meeting did so at great peril to their safety. By coming out of the bush, they exposed themselves to possible detection and attack by GoS military, who coldly track humanitarian relief deliveries to locate and target civilian populations. M. was blunt about the calculus that went into their assumption of risk: "The people coming to you today are here not because they think you have food, but because they want you to convey our problems to the world."

People have opinions about what is happening in their lives and why, and they discuss them when conditions allow it. Children—the ones who are not too sick to lift their bodies—laugh and play with spent shells and shrapnel, but they play all the same. I caught myself tempted to cling to these trappings of normalcy, the way in which people get along from day to day, as evidence that things could not really be so hideous after all.

But then, like one of those visual distortion puzzles one finds in undergraduate psychology textbooks, my brain reassembled the same elements and projected another meaning into the foreground. Now the situation was all the more horrifying precisely because of

the sheer ordinariness of the people. They did not belong to an exotic other species of human being uniquely adapted to suffering by some perverse process of natural selection. Nor were they fungible vessels of pain into which one poured aid and pity. The fact of their suffering was no longer sufficient to constitute them as essentially different from me.

In saying they were "just ordinary individuals," I acknowledge that my reaction can be criticized as both naive and condescending—what did I expect to find? I describe my reaction without defending it, and only because I suspect that many of us who have not lived with and among those who endure incomprehensible suffering or brutality rarely have occasion to confront the illusions we create to distance ourselves from them. I also recognize that the implicit referent for ordinariness is typically the speaker—in this case, me. I am mindful of feminist critiques of the perils of self-referential essentialism ("we are all the same—just like me"), or of the imperial constitution of the subaltern subject ("they just want what we all want. . . they want to take from us what we have"). I am equally wary of a self-serving, disengaged Othering ("we are utterly different—so I shouldn't try to say or do anything to you, with you or about you") (Carr 1994, 162). Nevertheless, I wish to create a space within which the paradox of "I am like you/I am not like you" can express moral concern and political accountability in the face of radically incomplete understandings of difference.[8] Elizabeth Spelman queries the source of our reluctance to acknowledge the equality of the Other when she asks "whether human suffering is one of those places where some humans have gone to some length to mark differences among people precisely because our relatively equal capacity for suffering threatens to demand acknowledgement of equality in other areas" (Spelman 1997, 8). Over a century earlier, novelist George Eliot made a similar observation about the cost of recognizing the suffering of others: "If we had a keen vision and feeling of all ordinary human life, it would be like hearing the grass grow and the squirrel's heartbeat, and we should die of that roar which lies on the other side of silence. As it is, the quickest of us walk about well wadded with stupidity" (Eliot 1964 [1872], Chapter 20).

The complexities of testimony, the problematic tension between re-presenting (speaking for) and representing (speaking about) in the context of tourist/vagabond power relations makes silence simultaneously tempting and intolerable. Carr cautions that the process of testimonial "is itself caught up in the mechanisms of production, the shift of value/labor power from a Third World to a First, and the operations of a deep capitalist, patriarchal structure working to produce a commodity that may ultimately help to undo it" (Carr 1994, 157).

Although not strictly speaking a testimony, the Report is another of those commodities whose value may be measured in the extent to which it subverts the authority that produced it.

These are the final words M. spoke to us that day in Nhialdiu: "We are waiting for death. We are being killed, chased, burned out of our homes. If you leave these people for a year and come back, many of us will be dead."[9]

In early 2001, about 14 months later, I received an e-mail. It said that Nhialdiu had been bombed, and everyone was gone. A few months later, one of my colleagues from the fact-finding mission returned to Sudan to do a follow-up assessment on behalf of various NGOs.[10] In a location south of Nhaldiu, further away from the oil fields, she found some of the people we met on that day in Nhialdiu, but she did not see any of the women.

Postscript

In fall 2002, Talisman announced that it would finally sell its Sudan interest to a subsidiary of India's state-owned oil company. The sale was completed in March 2003. Talisman President Jim Buckee admitted that the reputational cost inflicted on the company by civil society had grown too high. Significantly, neither the government of Canada nor the United States actually took concrete action against Talisman, although occasional gestures indicating their willingness to do so certainly contributed to shareholder anxiety.[11]

At the time of this writing, a U.S. lawsuit against Talisman under the Alien Tort Claims Act is proceeding (Presbyterian Church of Sudan v. Talisman Energy, Inc., 2003 U.S. Dist. LEXIS 4085 [S.D.N.Y., Mar. 19, 2003]). The lawsuit seeks damages against Talisman for complicity in killing, displacement, and other violations of international law committed against the Nuer and Dinka in and around the oil region. No contemporary lawsuit under the Alien Tort Claims Act has ever actually yielded compensation to plaintiffs, but some believe the litigation provides a valuable source of political pressure.

Meanwhile, the Sudan peace process limps along. A cease-fire was signed in October 2002, and almost immediately honored in the breach: from December–February 2003, the GoS staged an offensive in the oil region with the assistance of Nuer militia disaffected from the Dinka-dominated SPLA. According the International Crisis Group, the latest offensive was simply

> an extension of the government's long-time strategy of depopulating oil-rich areas through indiscriminate attacks on civilians in order to clear the way for further development of infrastructure.

> Eyewitness accounts confirm that the tactics included the abduction of women and children, gang rapes, ground assaults supported by helicopter gunships, destruction of humanitarian relief sites and burning of villages. (International Crisis Group 2003, 1)

A new cease-fire was signed in February 2003.

NOTES

I thank Ronalda Murphy and Kerry Rittich, as well as the anonymous reviewers for Social Politics, for thoughtful and constructive comments.

1. As this article was going to press, a recently published book came to my attention. It specifically addresses the impact of the conflict on women from various cultural groups of south Sudan (Fitzgerald 2002).

2. The head of the mission (John Harker) was a consultant with many years experience in southern Africa. Only one of us had prior experience in Sudan. All of us were Anglo European, with the exception of one team member originally from north Africa. Because of his Arab identification, he was unable to travel with us to the south because he would be viewed with suspicion by African southerners.

3. The Antonovs and helicopter gunships were temporarily relocated by the GoS prior to our arrival, apparently to conceal them from us, but we subsequently learned about them and questioned Talisman management. Talisman did not deny that the airstrip was used for military purposes, but claimed that they voiced their objection to the practice and, in any event, were powerless to stop it. Characterizing the airstrip as private property of GNPOC versus public property is complicated by the fact that the GoS is both business partner and government.

4. Simon Harragin, anthropologist and relief worker in Sudan, makes the point that "for an outside consultant to admit that they do not know enough about Sudan to assess the situation of child-soldiers after a two-week visit takes humility and courage, as it would probably mean that person would not get another job! Most of the time such people try instead to fabricate 'knowledge' and give it a false degree of academic credibility by using the current terms and techniques that give the aura that 'development' is genuinely progressing towards a greater knowledge of its 'subjects' (Harragin 1999, 3).

5. I am aware of the political and scholarly importance of testimonial writing, and I acknowledge that in some ways, my tentative comments on this theme participate in that tradition to a very limited extent. I do not purport to engage here in a serious way with the complex analyses and debates regarding testimonial writing. I thank Vee Farr for bringing this point to my attention.

6. I am not referring to the values and norms captured under the rubric of "human rights," which exist in various forms in many cultures, including Nuer.

7. Or, to borrow Spivak's words, they "made a strategic use of positivist essentialism in a scrupulously visible political interest" (Spivak 1988, 13).

I believe cultural studies scholar Fred Pfiel hints at a similar strategy when he advocates a dialogic tension that is worked "discursively and in political practice, through the fluttering gap between the potentially levelling universality of a discourse and politics opposed to all forms of exploitation, and the potentially centrifugalizing differences in the discursive and practical repertoires from which our separate yet multiple identities are drawn" (Pfiel 1994, 225).

8. My remarks are indebted to Fred Pfeil's (1994) survey and analysis of postcolonial feminist discussions.

9. I was disappointed (though unsurprised) that the Canadian government did not take meaningful action in response to the Report. My experience left me with a sense of personal engagement and personal responsibility. In truth, I felt ashamed as a Canadian that our mission had accomplished so little. When I returned to Canada several months after the mission, I became involved in various efforts to publicize the human rights catastrophe in southern Sudan and to protest Talisman Energy's role in exacerbating it. Along with the other women on the mission, I continue to work on the general issue of corporate complicity in the violation of fundamental human rights and humanitarian law in zones of conflict. On a personal level, I have developed a supportive connection with a grassroots organization made up of and serving the needs of southern Sudanese women displaced to Khartoum.

10. My colleague (Georgette Gagnon) and her partner on the mission produced a superb report that documents and contextualizes the escalation of human rights and humanitarian law violations in and around the contested oil region in Western Upper Nile during 2000 and 2001 (Gagnon and Ryle, 2001). See also International Crisis Group (2002) and Human Rights Watch (2002).

11. As noted earlier, the Canadian government did not sanction Talisman or otherwise compel it to withdraw from Sudan. The U.S. Sudan Peace Act, which would have inflicted the devastating blow of delisting Talisman from the New York Stock Exchange, was amended to drop that provision.

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