

AUDREY MACKLIN

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## "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. (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.<sup>1</sup> 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 disproportionately 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.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> 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.<sup>4</sup> 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).<sup>5</sup> 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.<sup>6</sup> 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