

Homophobia in Sudan

Breaking News: LGBT has hit Sudan!!

There is a Sudanese website called *Rumat Alhadag*¹ which posted in 2009 an article about the establishment of the Sudanese LGBT Association *Freedom Sudan*² and its goal to improve the rights of LGBT individuals in Sudan, a quick analysis of the replies to this article reveals the following:

- 1- There were 39 replies (repetitions were not counted).
- 2- While only 4 replies reflected positive attitude toward homosexuality and homosexuals, 33 replies displayed a negative (many times very aggressive) attitude toward the issue. However, 1 reply acknowledged its existence without showing a clear attitude and another one only displayed a surprise feeling.
- 3- Words used to describe homosexuals included: “dregs”, “decadents”, “immoral”, “animals alike” and “salacious” with calls to “be expelled to an empty jungle”, “buried alive” and “pursuit by authorities”.

Before the establishment of the LGBT association in Sudan (Freedom Sudan) in 2006, homosexuality was a taboo subject and not many people dared to talk about it publically and if they did so they would then have to face fierce and sometimes personal attacks from the society members even if they displayed a judgmental negative attitude toward the issue and they would probably be labeled with descriptions like “profligate” and “excitement seekers” and accused with “attempting to distort the image of Sudan”.

Sexual behaviors in The Sudanese culture are strongly linked to the sense of honor (the honor of the individual and the honor of the group are inseparable) and the concept of “honor” is of great and dangerous deal here in Sudan, it pushes many people to lie even to themselves if it was necessary in order to protect it. That is why these attempts to talk freely about homosexuality were met by such an enormous denial and aggressive attack. Even until now after it has started to become less and less forbidden subject, many people still think that this issue shouldn't be discussed openly and should be dealt with secretly by security measures only, after all (according to these voices) these “deviants” represent only a very small and closed group in Sudan and no one support them.

Homophobia in Sudan: a “ping pong” game!

In the highly charged political climate of Sudan, many political and religious movements seized the opportunity of the already existent negative public attitude toward LGBT people and the shock caused by the formation of an association for LGBT individuals and also the appearance of LGBT groups on Facebook (i.e. “gay story in sudan”³, “SUDAN NEXT TOP GAY”⁴, “Sudanese Gays”⁵..... and others) they seized all this and used it as an argument against other opponent groups.

Those who consider themselves to be moderate or even liberals or progressive thinker blame the hypocrisy of NCP* government and its supporters which, as they like to prescribe, while raising the logo of “civilized Islamic project” have created a proper atmosphere for “extraneous and deviant phenomena” like the “spreading” of homosexuality by forcing in a puritanical form of Shari’a** (was prominent during the 90s then started to weaken afterwards) that inhibit the mixing of males and females in public and academic life which caused the elevation of sexual oppression among both sexes and pushed them to search for the “alternative” (by which they mean homosexuality)!. Many of them like to adopt the opinions of some journalists and social thinkers and like *Mariam Othman* and *Hanan Aljak* who prescribed Homosexuality and Bisexuality as psychological ailments and attributed them to many factors like: sexual assaults during childhood, physical or emotional absence of the parent from the same gender and also some other socio-economic factors like poverty, ignorance and the rising costs of traditional heterosexual marriage.

Ironically, extremists and fundamental Islamists like *Ansar Alsunna* (which has close ties with Saudi Arabia and the thinkers of the strict *Hanbali* School of Islam which prevails there) also blame the NCP government for its failure to implement the Shari’a sufficiently strong enough, they also don’t forget to aim their arrows at their natural enemies (the liberals) for calling for more freedom in the society and separate religion from politics.

Meanwhile, the NCP seems to be using the issue tactically against its opponents like in the famous case of the journalist Lubna Hussein who was arrested in August 2009 among other women from a restaurant in Khartoum for wearing “indecent dress” in a public place and thus breaking the notorious article 152 in the Sudanese law “Indecent Acts” (She was wearing trousers in that incident). The other women were flogged by law 40 lashes each, Lubna was excluded

from the sentence due her immunity for working for the United Nations Mission in Sudan, however she challenged the authorities by refusing to pay a fine and called for the abolition of article 152. Her case caused great embarrassment to the NCP government which was faced with not only international calls from human rights organization to release Lubna and remove the above mentioned article but also with demonstrations inside Sudan which supported Lubna and her cause. When the preparations of these demonstrations were taking place, an article was published in Alwifaq newspaper (known to be a pro-government newspaper) under the title “And with the aid of western embassies, demonstration by prostitutes and homosexuals for the abolishment of the public order law” in which the writer mentioned that a demonstration was going to be organized by prostitutes and homosexuals benefitting from the case of the journalist Lubna with the aim to reach the headquarter of UN in Khartoum and to handle a petition requesting to exert a pressure on the government to remove the public order law. The article was largely condemned and the government was accused with attempting to abort the demonstrations that support Lubna and prevent supporters from gathering by sending a message via this article that whoever goes out in this demonstration is either homosexual or a prostitute (In other words using public homophobia as a weapon against opponents’ demonstrations).

In the middle of all this political exchange, the public opinion becomes more congested and homophobia exacerbate. So it wouldn’t be a surprise to find a group on Facebook named (as it is translated to English) “fighting homosexuals and those who call for sex in Sudan on Facebook” which incites the visitors to help in closing Sudanese homosexual groups by clicking (report/block this person) on their page. Even many individuals who are supposed to be objective considering their position display obvious prejudiced non professional opinions which could be sometimes completely wrong, for example, in the forum of the *Sudanese universities of public health graduates and public health officers* (suphof) ⁶ some members put homosexuality side to side with increasing cases of AIDS in Sudan. Additional homophobic statements were made by some members of National Program for the Prevention of AIDS of whom some prescribed homosexuality as a “negative mutation” in sexual practices in Sudan and also contributed to the high increase in AIDS in Khartoum state although they mentioned concurrently that whereas the known HIV to them reached around 10000 cases (the estimate is 88000 cases) , the number of Homosexuals known to them was only 715 individual and the estimate prevalence of HIV

virus among them was estimated to be 7.8% which means, according to their figures, there is only around 56 homosexual patient infected with HIV which contradict with their argument about homosexuality and AIDS spreading, the dangerous about these statements is that it came from a health program that is supposed to be objective and shouldn't discriminate against any group in order to promote early voluntary examination among community.

Shadows from the Past

For me, fundamental Islamic teachings wasn't enough to explain all that hatred and discuss felt and the discrimination practiced at both official and popular levels against homosexuals , so I have searched for the missing part in the past and only then the picture started to became clearer to me.

Mr. Shawgi Badri, a popular Sudanese writer and historian well known of his bold style in writing. Although he displays a frank negative attitude toward homosexuality and considers it as a problem, yet (opposite to the public main stream) he acknowledges both its presence and historic existence in the Sudanese community. This attitude has brought him many accusation of being "non loyal to the country" and "non modest man who passed the seventh decade" (the reader can only imagine if this what a man who himself disapprove homosexuality had to face because he spoke freely about it, if this is the case what do homosexuals have to face on daily bases?!).

In a post in (sudaneseonline.com) website⁷, Badri wrote a brief glance about the history of homosexuality since the Fonj Sultanate in Sinnar until the 80s passing through the era of "Almahadia" in the late 18th century and the years of British colonization and the period after independence. He referred to global historical figures who many people tend to believe that they were gay like Alexander the Great, Richard the Lion's heart, 1st Earl Kitchener and Leonardo da Vinci and compared them to homosexuals in Sudan using the following statement which I think is the key statement in his article "For those people there were choices, however what is practiced in Sudan is a process of enforcement and humiliation" and he put the following examples:

His schoolmaster used to force some of his classmates to have sex with him before he was caught, also in many areas in the capital Khartoum were not safe for boys and young men to walk in after dark fall and even in the daytime some

kids were harassed or even raped (Badri wrote that he himself was subjected to harassments and many attempts but his strong physical structure and his aggressive behavior during adolescence protected him from these attempts). Some of these harassments took a “class hatred” nature being carried out by some men of low socio-economic status against kids from families of high socio-economic status just to break their spirits and be “well remembered by them when they grow up”.

Another very alarming statement made by him which is relevant to the status quo was “ Sudanese youth in high schools and universities who were harassed or forced under fear, stimulation or threatening to have sex they found a shelter in the Islamic Brotherhood Organization which embraced them and offered them protection. Some of those were filled with hatred against the society and the others because they did not perform these acts by their own will and that might explain their dark behaviors when they reach power”. Badri once heard the mother of one of his classmates complaining to their neighborhood grocery man “What shall we do if the Minister of the Interior parks his car beside our house, climbs it and cries out for our kid from behind the wall”!

It is obvious from what is mentioned above that homosexual acts in the minds of many Sudanese are linked to sexual harassment, child abuse, class hatred and marital infidelity as Badri summarized it at the beginning “Process of enforcement and humiliation”. I failed to find one known example of a man to man or a woman to woman relationship described as being based on mutual love and respect between the two partners. If this is the case, no wonder from where all this anger and discuss came from, who knows, perhaps the men who are today eagerly chasing LGBT individuals are the children of yesterday whom their innocence was brutally taken from by the past monsters. It made me ask myself the following question: to what extent the reality today differs from the past? Well, I am still in the process of finding out the answer.

Links:

- 1- <http://www.alhadag.com/press1.php?id=185>
- 2- <http://freedomsudan.webs.com/>

- 3- <http://www.facebook.com/group.php?gid=101188971603#!/group.php?gid=101188971603&v=wall>
- 4- <http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=101983556249&topic=13711#!/group.php?gid=101983556249>
- 5- <http://www.facebook.com/topic.php?uid=101983556249&topic=13711#!/group.php?gid=12066703710>
- 6- <http://suphof.com/vb/showthread.php?t=4146>
- 7- http://www.sudaneseonline.com/ar/article_12045.shtml

Definitions:

*(National Conference Party), the ruling party in Sudan since 1989 which was back then named the (National Popular Party) before the split of the Dr. Hasan Alturabi (mastermind behind the 1989 coup d'état) and his supporters in 2000

** Shari'a or Sharia: is the code of conduct or religious law of Islam. Most Muslims believe Sharia is derived from two primary sources of Islamic law: the precepts set forth in the *Qur'an*, and the example set by the Islamic Prophet Muhammad in the *Sunnah*. Fiqh jurisprudence interprets and extends the application of Sharia to questions not directly addressed in the primary sources by including secondary sources. These secondary sources usually include the consensus of the religious scholars embodied in *ijma*, and analogy from the Qur'an and Sunnah through *qiyas*. Shia jurists prefer to apply reasoning ('aql) rather than analogy in order to address difficult questions.

(Definition taken from wikipedia.org)

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