

Grass-roots Human Security: Bringing the Local Civil Society Dimension into Peacebuilding in the Sudan

Increasingly it has been asserted that post-conflict peacebuilding processes are the most effective ways to bring about long-term peace in the aftermath of conflict. Indeed, the liberal international peace paradigm, which assumes that a liberal democratic style government and the promotion of a free-market economy are the most effective ways to realize peace, has become the dominant frame of reference used to respond to many contemporary conflicts.

In 2005 a peace process, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, was implemented in the Sudan 'officially' ending the 22 year civil war between the Sudan People's Liberation Army/Movement (SPLA/M) and the Government of Sudan in Khartoum.

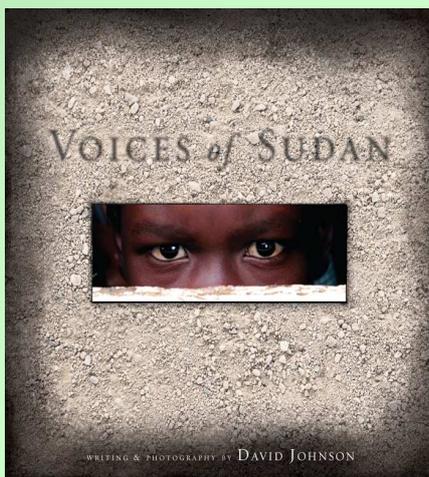
Recent scholarly debate has raised questions, however, concerning whether the liberal international paradigm is an effective, or legitimate, framework in which to engage in peacebuilding in the 21st century. Liberal internationalism has come under criticism for being overtly prescriptive and a 'one-fits-all' approach to peace and security that privileges democratic and free-market values, systems and actors and asserts the hegemonic superiority of 'Western' culture, while overlooking the needs, interests, and identities of local populations.

Despite calls for the development of better understandings of local dynamics in conflict, relatively few studies have sought to 'un-pack' the dimensions of this argument and to inquire in an empirical way into the local experience.



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This thesis explores the question of how can the activities and experiences of local civil society actors in post-conflict peacebuilding in the Sudan be understood using a Grass-roots Human Security approach.



Using case study analysis, the thesis examines the peacebuilding activities and experiences of women's local civil society groups in South Sudan and the 'Three Areas' of Abyei, Blue Nile and Southern Kordofan, and considers how they navigate within the peace process in attempting to realize their objectives. The thesis also investigates what security and peace means to them, and their perceptions of their agency and ability to achieve goals inter- and independently of the formal peace process.

Although it has been acknowledged that civil society actors can help realize peace in regions beset by conflict, local and women's civil society are often excluded from the formal structures of power and relegated to the margins rather than figuring centrally in peacebuilding. By reframing the conflict through a Grass-roots Human Security lens both peace and security are brought outside the realm of exclusively the state to advance a 'bottom-up', people centered process. This calls attention to the inter-linkages between Human Security, Development and Human Rights as well as the gendered aspects of security. It also enables a more in-depth investigation into the experiences and activities of actors that operate outside the purview of dominant discourses.

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