

EDITORIAL**Islam, Women and Fertility in Sudan****Ahmed Hamad Alnory*****ABSTRACT**

The paper analyses the Western perception about women, Islam and Fertility. A perception that has been embodied in what is termed "the Islamic Hypothesis. The arguments for and against the hypothesis are critically presented. The assertions of the hypothesis are then tested using Sudan data from different sources, but it is to be noted that much of data used pertain to the time period where the Islamic hypothesis began to appear in the literature. The paper concludes that both arguments of the advocates of the Islamic hypothesis and their opponents are invalid for the case of Sudan.

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الإسلام والمرأة والخصوبة

الملخص

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اشتملت الورقة على تحليل المفهوم الغربي و مفهوم بعض المستشرقين فيما يختص بالمرأة والإسلام والخصوبة. لقد ارتبط هذا المفهوم بما يسمى بالفرضية الإسلامية. أما الرؤى الفكرية لمؤيدي الفرضية الإسلامية ومعارضيه، فقد تم تقديمها بأسلوب نقدي ومن ثم تم إخضاعها للاختبار الامبريقي باستخدام بيانات من السودان من عدة مصادر. معظم المصادر التي استخدمت تتعلق بالفترة الزمنية التي ظهرت فيها الفرضية الإسلامية في الأدبيات العالمية. وتوصلت الورقة إلى أن الأفكار الواردة في مصادر الفرضية الإسلامية أو معارضيتها ليس لها وجود في أرض الواقع بالنسبة إلى السودان.

1. Introduction

There is a widespread belief in the western socio -demographic literature that the demography of the Arab World and Muslim countries deviates from the theoretical framework defined by the theory of demographic transition. These countries are reported to have fertility levels that are higher and health status indicators that are lower than might be expected given the levels of socio –economic development.

In the explanation of what is termed unusual demographic features of these countries, two lines of argument emerged .The first represents the advocates of the Islamic hypothesis, which is based on three propositions: that Muslim countries do poorly in terms of

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demographic indicators, that this is due to Islam and that the impact of Islam operates through the way in which it defines a low status of women.

The opponents of the Islamic hypothesis advocate the second line of argument .These represent mainly Muslim scholars, demographers, and sociologists who are not impressed by the theory of demographic transition.

Their conclusion is that simplistic hypotheses linking Islam, fertility and the status of women can not provide a satisfactory explanation for observed demographic patterns.

In this paper, we review the arguments implied in the Islamic hypothesis and the arguments of its opponents. We then consider the situation in the Sudan as it pertains to fertility. The paper shows that the fertility transition that has already started in the Sudan renders both arguments invalid.

2. Islam and fertility

2.1. The Islamic Hypothesis:

The association between Islam and higher fertility has been investigated by several demographers and sociologists. Lutz (1987) stated that religious factors are significantly associated with fertility, even when socio-economic status is controlled. Nagi (1984) draws similar conclusions about the role of Islam as a factor in higher fertility. Yousif (1971) found that of the crucial elements that influence fertility Islam is the most important factor.

Islam is described as militantly pronatalist, characterized as well by ignorance and fatalism and providing implicit conditions that are conducive to high natality. This has been echoed by Bear (1964), Kirk (1968) and Patai (1973).

Underlying the Islamic hypothesis is the idea that, through its effect on the status of women, the influence of Islam is translated into demographic patterns. In the western literature the idea of Muslim women evokes two contradictory images. On the one hand there is the exotic image which portrays a Muslim women as a creature dedicated to a life of luxury and sensuous pleasure in the service of man her lord and master . On the other

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hand, there is the image of the silent and invisible burden of childbearing and heavy household duties. See for example, Kirk, 1992.

The Orientlists have contributed to the exotic image while Christians have emphasized the burden image. Chapter headings in books of women and Islam regularly include veiling, mutilation, sexual abuse, virginity, abortion and female circumcision.

According to the Islamic hypothesis lower status of women means restricted access to education and paid employment, allegedly the two major determinants of lower fertility. In fact, a certain fascination has attached to the way in which Islam condoned sexual enjoyment.

To a certain extent images of the *harim* still colour western perceptions of Islamic marriages with an emphasis of the man right to take up to four wives and on his unilateral and arbitrary right to divorce his wife. In addition, polygyny and divorce as regulated by Islam are argued as being important contributors to high natality.

2.2 Opponents of the Islamic Hypothesis:

The opponents of the Islamic hypothesis are divided into two groups. The first represents demographers and sociologists who could not confirm the link between Islam and fertility through empiricism. The second group represents the apologists for Islam who are mainly Muslim scholars and theologians

2.2.1 Empiricism Scientists:

According to this group, the examination of Islamic hypothesis revealed that the Islamic doctrine does not directly explain the high fertility of Muslim countries. Several scholars have investigated the validity of the Islamic hypothesis in explaining the existing demographic situation in this group of countries.

The most important empiricism was made by Obermeyer (1991). In her paper "Islam, women and politics – the Demography of the Arab countries" p24, she examined the three propositions that underlie the Islamic hypothesis interpretations (see introduction.). She argues that the claim that the fertility of Muslim women can be explained with reference to

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the strength of Islam has an obvious appeal. It offers a broad explanation for patterns that have otherwise resisted fitting prevailing models. It is also in line with the increased attention in the demographic literature to cultural factors.

Most of the evidence supporting the Islamic hypothesis has been based on simple correlation analysis. Finding from these and other studies have been used to support the claim that the demographic transition in Muslim countries is a unique process. However, Obermeyer argues that: “given the diversity of demographic transitions both historical and contemporary, there is no reason to expect countries to conform to a uniform model of change , and it should come as no surprise that socio- economic factors do not fully account for demographic indicators”. p 25. Clearly, correlation analyses based on cross sectional data are of limited usefulness when attempting to understand demographic change and it’s necessary to consider trends over time.

The status of women is a controversial issue that is often at the center of the confrontation between Islam and the West. It is argued that Islam defines a lower status of women. The argument pertains to three major areas: men have been given a preeminent position in religion: sons are to receive twice as much as daughters, and a man’s testimony in court is worth twice that of a woman. According to the Islamic hypothesis these are inegalitarian statements.

However, the Islamic texts emphasize the equality of all believers before God and everyone is judged according to merit. There are differences in the translation of the Koran statements. Statements traditionally taken to justify women subordinate position are interpreted by Muslim scholars in a more egalitarian manner.

In any case, the question of women status is a very complex issue. Mason (1989) found that the concept of women status is often measured in a unidimensional way, ignoring the multiplicity of roles that women play. She argues that the status of women has three distinct dimensions- prestige, power and autonomy- that need to be measured separately.

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This is complicated by a pervasive conclusion relating two aspects of inequality: those related to class and those related to gender.

In contemporary Islamic societies, the Western notation of the non-egalitarian status of women is based on the lower comparative statistics on gender indicators. Muslim women lack the ability to make decisions about education, employment and health care, Caldwell (1989). But female education can affect fertility by several routes, which may not be directly indicative of women status. Education may not lead to a change in status if the girls who are sent to school in the first place come from families with less discrimination (Sather et al., 1988) moreover, where few women work out of choice and for those who do have stringent economic needs, employment is often associated with lower status. According to Cornelius (1988), studies of women status and fertility in Arab countries have not always yielded the expected inverse association between education, employment and fertility.

It becomes clear that the status of women is a very complex issue. But whatever definition assigned to the status of Muslim women there exists a need for the establishment of its validity. It might be necessary to investigate the issue of women status in the historical context of the emergence of Islam. Much of the arguments forwarded for the answer of this question are presented by Muslim theologians. But Obermeyer (1990) summarized the issue in the following argument.

“Information on social conditions and gender relations in per-Islamic Arabia is sketchy. In orthodox muslim thinking, per-Islamic times are refereed to as all –jahillyya (the age of ignorance), and all that came before Islam is interpreted as infidelity and chaos. Islamic tradition claims that there was a time when female infanticide was widely practiced, sexual unions were capricious and the break down of traditional laws has left widows and orphans without recourse. By redefining men’s responsibilities towards women, Islam is seen as protecting the rights of women and raising their status”.

On the other hand, an Arab feminist perspective focuses on examples of independent and outspoken women in the jahillyya, one evidence of the opposition of some women to

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Islam in the seventh century, and on early social evolutionist claims for the existence of matriarchy in pre-Islamic Arabia. For the feminists the pre-Islamic society represents a genuine tradition of freedom and equality where women could be priestesses , warriors , nurses , poets and caravan owners- a tradition that is seen as having being thwarted by Islam . Each of these views is in fact based on idealized notions of the Jahillyya period.

Watt (1956) argues that both the ideology of Islam and its practical system may be better understood if the conditions prevailing before the emergence of Islam are analyzed. These conditions represent the seventh century Mecca mercantile economy and its communal tribal ideology. According to Merriness (1985) the success of Islam was a function of Mohammed's ability in connecting communal and self-serving tendencies into the most cohesive social order Arabia had ever seen.

2.2.2 Muslim Apologists:

Muslim scholars and theologians oppose the Islamic hypothesis on two grounds: the misconception of lower women status and the claim that family planning is impermissible.

Omran (1992) argues that the status of women in Islam is seriously misunderstood .It is wrongly implied that the behavior of individual Muslims and Muslim communities invariably reflects the laws and orthodoxy of Islam. This compounded by misconceptions about the status of women in Islam or ignorance of Islamic family laws among some uniformed Muslim groups. Also one should not discount the factor of underdevelopment that is associated with low status of women in both Muslim and non-Muslim societies in some countries of the Third World.

On the other hand, some Muslim writers are guilty of reversed bias. In their zeal to prove Islam's modernity, they select the components that are seen as egalitarian by the west. This is a distortion that shows only a part of the totality of the Islamic culture.

Muslim scholars argue that contrary to common beliefs, Islam raised the status of women and gave them humane, civil and economic rights never previously given to women. It is believed by all Muslims that Muslim women has an independent personality

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, equal to man in religious duties , in the right to education , in reward for her deeds as well as defending her beliefs . She is free to choose her marital partner and has the right to demand the power of divorce plus the power at the time of the marriage contract to disallow polygyny by her husband .Furthermore , she can keep her maiden name after marriage , if she so wishes .

However, according to Islamic texts, the rights given justly to women are to be exercised in the decency of Islamic behavior. They are furthermore matched with duties to the husband, to parents and to the community. They are never to be used (or abused) as a basis of reversing roles with men or changing their prescribed family values.

The description of Muslim women in the popular – and sometimes in scholarly western literature- illustrates sexual inequality and the unfairness of the system to women but Muslim scholars charge that such opinions are part of a general attempt by the West to subjugate their societies. In defense they point to statements in Islamic texts recommending fairness in dealing with women, and to examples of women who both in the days of Prophet Mohammed and in later centuries achieved position of power. (Omran, 1992).

Concerning family planning, Muslim theologians emphasize the basic precepts of Islam in dealing with the issue. It is frequently argued, as indeed is the case, that Islam is not merely a religion. It is also a social system, a culture and a civilization. As such, it has values, ideals and goals, which it regards as the culmination of the human perfection in all spheres of life. In other words, Islam regulates moral behavior, social interaction and business dealings as well as legislation, taxation, family formation, community development, societal structure and international relations.

Several general precepts of Islam provide a convenient context for the proper formation of the Muslim family in a changing society and lend support to the principles of family planning wherever possible. This is of course an endorsement of the specific provisions on family planning in Islamic jurisprudence.

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The Islamic literature contains a body of precepts or characteristics that are particularly relevant to the issue of family planning. These characteristics include reasoning, moderation, equity and social planning. Omran (1992) argues specifically that Islam caters for two patterns of family formation. First, there is the pattern of high fertility and large family size. He calls this the pre-modern pattern. The second pattern is of lower fertility and small family size (the modern pattern). In both patterns, there is family planning, the difference being in the extent of its use.

There is historical evidence in the Hadith (prophet saying) indicating that withdrawal *Azl* was practiced since during Mohammed's time and he did not discourage his followers from the practice. Islamic societies (including those at the time of the prophet) used *Azl* to avoid economic hardship. The *Azl* has been a contraceptive method of Muslim families both in past and present.

The traditional position which was developed by the withdrawal method during medieval times, have been reiterated to apply to modern methods as is clear from several religious opinions (*fatwas*) issued by a number of famous *Muftis*. An implicit *fatwa* by Sheik Hassan Mammon, a former grand man of AL-Azhar explains:

Other *Muftis* have issued the same kind of statements in different Islamic countries. *Ayatollah Mahallati* of Iran issued a *fatwa* stating that from the standpoint of divine law—the utilization of drugs or contraceptive device, especially if it is temporary, to control human fertility does not seem illegal if this practice does not lead to damage of the female's fecundity and make her barren;(Bahaya, 1965).

The *Sunni* and *Shiat* position on the issue of birth control are in substance the same. They derive mainly, from the writings of AL-Ghazali, the most celebrated medieval theologian of Islam. His works established the reason for which birth control may be allowed (see Obermeyer, 1990). Differences of opinion among the four *mahdahib* (Islamic schools of thought) is expressed in the case of a abortion. But except for the prohibition by the

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Malikis of abortion at any stages of the fetus formation ,most schools allow it up to four month of pregnancy .

3. Islam and women in Sudan:

Islam entered the Sudan from Egypt through the Nile and from Saudi Arabia through the Red sea .It encompassed people of different tribes and different Languages, customs and religions, and encountered variety of legal systems. Given the lack of hierarchical structure in Islam, no effort was made to change the laws, as long as they did not conflict directly with Shari's. Today the Sudan encompasses 51 ethnic groups considered Muslims although they exhibit distinct lifestyles.

Like all Muslims, the Sudanese interpret religious text, the Koran and The Hadith in ways ranging from liberal reformism to puritan fundamentalism. Opinions vary according to the degree to which analogy (*qias*) and consensus (*ijma'a*) are emphasized.

In the Sudanese culture, there is no direct evidence to support the fascination that has been attached to the way in which Islam condoned sexual enjoyment. Such fascination is a result of the western perception of Islamic marriage, with the emphasis of the man right to take up to four wives, and on his unilateral and arbitrary right to divorce his wife. Muslims argue that polygyny is constrained by the necessary obligation to treat all wives equally, and it has, actually, been the privilege of the few to support more than one wife. In Sudan polygyny is practiced by a comparatively small minority, probably less than 8% (SFS, 1979). One can safely conclude that polygyny is not an important contributor to high natality in the Sudan.

As for divorce, the frequency with which it happens does not exceeds 5% for the Sudan as a whole , and the percentage of divorce within twenty years of marriage is around 12% (SFS, 1979) and it has actually declined in 2008 to just 5% . In any case, there is no empirical evidence anywhere in the world to establish the positive association between divorce and high fertility levels. .Divorce may reduce fertility because while a woman is divorced, she is not exposed to the risk of childbearing.

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It is true that in the Sudan there is limited female access to education and paid employment. However, such limitation is not confined to Muslim women only. In fact non-Muslim Sudanese females in southern and western Sudan suffer more from restriction to education and paid employment.

In the Africa context, it does not appear that there exist a difference in women status between Muslim and non-Muslim states. The majority of African women are regarded as having a low status as a result of the sex stratification that leads to acute gender inequalities irrespective of religion, Ntozi & Kebara (1992). Women are delegated a large share of work that remain invisible and unpaid. The labor burden that falls on women makes children an attractive source of cheap subsistence labor. Despite religious affiliation, it is a well-established fact that African women have been trained to expect that only through sons they may eventually gain a voice in policy matters and in the community.

A consideration of trends in indicators of women in sub-Saharan Africa suggests that Sudan as a Muslim country is in fact doing better than most of the countries in the region. Table (1) shows estimated percentage of female enrollment by level of education in the Sudan compared with sub-Saharan Africa. It is obvious from the table that Sudanese females show continuous progress in school enrollment. Female education witnessed its sharpest rise during the last five years from 46% to 59% for the first level and from the 31% to 41% for the second level and from 28% to 33% for the third level.

The enrollment of women in higher education institution indicated large increases between 1997 and 1985 (table2). In fact, the ratio of females to males in higher education institutions witnessed an unprecedented rise during the 1990's. For example at Gezira University for the academic year 1991\92 this ratio jumped to over 50%.

Concerning females labor force participation figures are not available, or when found are unreliable because of the inconsistency with which agricultural work is reported, and because the job that women combine with household duties are not included in the statistics (AL Noury, 1984). However, anthropological field and sociological field studied of women

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in Africa document rich variation in women’s economic activities, their relationship to one another to their children and to men. Careful anthropological field work has questioned the myth of the passive subordination of women and has revealed the contradiction between the ideologically legitimated authority of men and the power and autonomy that women have despite the very system of male dominance, which defines sexual segregation. See, for example, Ala-eldin K.2002.

When it comes to labor market and wage -salary employment, the Sudanese constitution guarantees equal rights and opportunities for every citizen. However there are anomalies that prevent women from enjoying the benefits that they are entitled to under the constitution. Although currently there are more women employed as professionals, clerical and production workers, the proportion of female labor forces still low in relation to men. This is true for both Muslim and non Muslim communities.

It is a fact that the Islamic process shaped the Sudanese family, legitimated men authority and sanctioned their responsibilities to provide for women, yet women were assigned relative economic independence .They were given right to inherit and keep their own property .Sudanese women have legal status equal to men in work laws, political rights and education and civil rights (civil act,1973).

Table (1): percentage Female Enrollment by education level in Sudan and Sub Saharan Africa for the period (1970-1990)

Years	First level		Second le		Third le	
	Sudan	Sub- sah Africa	Sudan	Sub- sah Africa	Sudan	Sub- sah Africa
1970	39	28	30	18	22	12
1975	41	33	34	28	26	18
1980	43	41	35	35	27	25
1985	44	19	35	39	28	29
1990	46	59	35	41	28	33

Source: UNISCO, statistical yearbook 1991

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University or College	(1977)	(1985)
Khartoum University	17	42
Gezira University	7	44
College of fine Arts	8	10
College of Secretarial studies	50	96
College of Commercial studies	3	6
College of Nursing	100	100
Ahfad University College	100	100
Juba University	4	27
Institute of Music and Drama	10	19
Omdurman Islamic University	25	25
Institute of land survey	0	2

Source: National Council for higher Education, Khartoum, 1986.

4. Demographic trends in Sudan:

Sudan is the largest countries in Africa with a total population estimated as 39 millions in 2008. Ethnically it is divided in tow regions: Northern Sudan with overwhelming Arabic and Islamic culture and Southern Sudan with Nilotic and Negroid tribes among which are Christian, Muslims and pagans .The country has extremely high rate of growth averaging just fewer than 2.5 annually ,and very young population with around 45% under the age 15 year (Census,2008).

Sudan economy is based on agriculture with cotton and gum Arabic as the major exports .The per capita CNP calculated for 2005 at 1989 prices is \$1930.Level of urbanization is around 33% with 67% of the population living in the rural areas ,(UNICEF1991).On average about the third of the age group 15-18 are enrolled in secondary schools.

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Total fertility rate was high reaching 6.4 children per women in 1985, but it declined to 5.7 in 1993 and 4.8 in 2008. The Sudan fertility survey 1979 indicated that marriage is early and almost universal and childbearing begins early and continues throughout the reproductive years, but this picture has changed dramatically in 2008 giving simulate mean age marriage at about 29 years. Family planning is not widespread. Current use of contraceptive is as low as 9% according to SDHS 1990. The SDHS provided more recent data which indicated an unexpected decline in fertility, between 1983 and 1993 from 6.4 to 4.96. The 2008 census gives TFR as 4.7.

The 1993 census statistics on mortality shows a crude death rate of 19.0 per thousand and a life expectancy averaging 52 years. Infant mortality rate was estimated in 1993 as 108 per thousand live births (UNICEF, 1993). Both these indicators show some decline in census, 2008.

In order to examine the claim that the demographic transition in the Sudan is a unique process, the above static picture of the population profile is not adequate, and one would necessarily need to consider trend over time.

Data from the birth histories collected in the SDHS make it possible to analyze fertility trend over along period. Table 3 shows age-specific fertility rate for successive five-year periods preceding the survey. Note that fertility rates are truncated due to that the fact SDHS covered only women who were under 50 years of age at the time of the survey.

Partially truncated rate are shown in brackets. Information in this table should be treated with caution due to the possible omissions of births or incorrect dating of events, especially by older women, for the more distant time periods.

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Table (3): Age-specific fertility rates (per thousand women) for five-year periods preceding the survey, by age of mother at the time of birth, Sudan DHS 1989-1990.

Age-specific fertility rates for five-year periods				Number of year preceding survey			
Age at birth	0-4	5-9	10-14	15-19	20-24	25-29	
30-34							
15-19	69	112	134	188	218	203	156
20-24	183	246	303	329	314		347
25-29	240	310	339	362			409
30-34	236	277	296				327
35-39	157	199					237
40-44	82						96
45-49							25
Total fertility rate							
15-34	3.6	4.7	5.4				5.9
Note: Figure in square brackets is partially truncated rates.							

Source: Sudan SDHS 1989-1990

Table (3) indicates that fertility has been declining gradually during the 20 to 35 years preceding the survey. The decline is most pronounced in the ten-year period preceding the survey, particularly for women 15-34. For example, women would had an average of 5.9 children by e age of 35 during the period 15-19 years preceding the survey, the rate was5.4 for the period 10-14 years preceding the survey, and 4.7 for the period 5-9 years preceding the survey ,the decline accelerated between the period 5-9 and 0-4 years prior the survey, when fertility dropped from 4.7 to 3.6 children , a decrease of 23 percent.

Another approach in considering fertility trends is to compare the SDHS rates with those obtained from the Sudan Fertility Survey (SFS) conducted in 1979. Table (4) presents the age-specific and total fertility rates for both surveys. Note that the SFS and SDHS rates are both based on information derived from complete birth histories and refer to the five years preceding the surveys.

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Comparison of data from the two surveys further supports a major decline in fertility during the last ten years. The TFR has declined by one birth in the inter-survey period, dropping from 6.02 children per women in the SFS to 4.96 children in the SDHS.

Table (4): Age-specific fertility rates (per thousand women) and total fertility rate for women 15-49, Sudan

Fertility Survey (SFS) 1979 and Sudan DHS 1989-90

<i>Comparison of age-specific fertility rates, SFS and SDHS</i>		
<i>Age</i>	<i>SFS</i>	<i>SDHS</i>
	1979	1989-90
15-19	114	69
20-24	264	183
25-29	283	240
30-34	251	236
35-39	149	157
40-44	108	82
45-49	35	25
Total fertility rate	6.02	4.96
Note: Figures are calculated for all women (ever-married and never married) 15-49 using information on women's age and maternal status for the household questionnaire and on the number of births from the women's questionnaire. The procedure assumes no births occurred for never-married women. Rates refer to the five years preceding the survey.		

Source: Sudan (1982) ministry of National planning, Department of statistics, *The Sudan Fertility Survey 1979, principal Report. vol.I, Table 5.18*

The rapid decline in the TFR in Sudan is due to many factors, but can be attributed mainly to major changes in the marriage patterns: increasing age at first marriage, a sharp drop in the proportion ever married among women 20-29, and a slight increase in polygyny since the SFS, especially among women over 40. Among all of the countries of Africa that conducted DHS surveys, the rise in the median age at first marriage between women age 35-39 and 25-29 was sharpest in Sudan. The age at first birth has also increased substantially since the SFS. Although contraceptive use has almost doubled in the last ten years, use of modern contraceptive methods among married women is still low; therefore, changes in contraceptive use have not had much impact on the fertility. It cannot be ruled

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out that fertility control among married couples may be more prevalent than reported in the SDHS, but there is no evidence to support the argument. Other factor, which may have had an impact on the fertility decline in Sudan are: an increase in urbanization, a rapid increase in male and female education, and the temporary migration of husbands to work in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf states. Despite remittances from labor migrants, Sudan has experience severe economic conditions for more than ten years (partly due to drought and civil war in the south). It is known that economic factors can affect fertility desires and behavior; it is possible that economic conditions have contributed to the fertility decline. Future investigation is needed to clearly delineate the causes of fertility decline in Sudan.

5. Conclusion:

Consideration of recent trends in indicators of women position calls into question the validity of the statement that the Sudan provides a unique demographic model. The statistics confirm rapid changes in these indicators over the last twenty years or so. The 1993 census indicated that life expectancy for women are higher than that for men by three years. More specifically, with respect to mortality below age five, mortality ratios by sex clearly showed female advantage (SFS, 1979 and SDHS 1990). The ratio of females to males enrolled in primary school has increased from 28% in 1970 to 59% in 1990.

The Islamic hypothesis as expressed in terms of women status together with its demographic correlates does not explain the fertility patterns of the Sudanese women. In our opinion, the challenge awaiting the Sudanese demographers is the investigation of the determinants of the fertility trend that has already started. It is not important to try finding a link between such trend and the theory of demographic transition. The most urgent need is the detection of the factors underlying the trend and channels them in to a cohesive policy program in order to reduce the rate of population growth to a level compatible with the current level of socio – economic development.

This may not prove to be an easy task. It would require amore multi-disciplinary approach to provide a political framework for analyzing demographic change. Hence the

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need to focus on the political, economic and demographic interrelationships calls for the development of a model in the area of political economy of fertility.

A Sudanese political economic model of fertility should be envisaged as to work from top down, beginning with an understanding of the historical developed national forces (probably starting from Mahdia period) that shape local demographic regimes and those identifying the ways these impinge on local institutional environments and finally tracing their effects on individual fertility behavior. Such framework would provide a method that would link structural characteristics of political entities to demographic policy and reproductive behavior.

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