

Media Monitors Network

The Sudanese civil war has generated a vast amount of propaganda and disinformation. The intervention in Sudan by foreign powers, especially the United States, and by civil groups with partisan religious and political motivations, has exacerbated and prolonged a tragic conflict by the deliberate and cynical manufacture of blatantly manufactured distortions, lies and hoaxes.

A recent and archetypal example of this process was the manipulation of the image of Sudan for personal and propaganda purposes in the campaign surrounding a woman calling herself Kola Boof. (1) The author of "Long Train to the Redeeming Sin: Stories of African Women", Ms Boof's "sudden" appearance on the Internet "several months ago" was noted by "The New York Times" in December 2002. (2) Ms Boof came to prominence when she claimed that she had been made the subject of a Sudanese government fatwa issued by a Sudanese diplomat in London, Mr Jamal Ibrahim, and Dr Hasan Turabi, the former speaker of the Sudanese Parliament, allegedly sentencing her to death for being opposed to the Khartoum government and blaspheming Islam. Ms Boof claimed that she had been sentenced to be beheaded. These claims were carried by several media outlets. (3) She claimed that the fatwa had been issued in September 2002 by the Sudanese government, and that this had been conveyed to her by the SPLA, who in turn claimed to have had it confirmed by a Mr Tanzim Wasti, Mr Ibrahim's secretary and by Islamist activist Sheikh Omar Bakri.

On the basis of these and other previous claims Ms Boof quickly emerged as a darling of the anti-Sudan campaign, and was embraced by activists such as Joe Madison and Maria Sliwa of "FreeWorldNow". (4) The "New York Times" revealed how impressionable members of African-American society came forward to help her campaign because of having read her claims as publicised on the Internet. Demonstrations were held in her name. The Association for Women's Rights in Development (AWD), for example, arranged simultaneous demonstrations in New York city, Los Angeles and Washington-DC on 7 November 2002 to "protest" the "Sept. 26th death sentence from Sudan ordering that Black womanist writer Kola Boof is to be beheaded". The AWID protest literature spoke

Sudan and the Kola Boof hoax

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Monday, 04 October 2004 01:25 -

of "our beloved Queen Kola". (5)

Building on her anti-Khartoum theme, Ms Boof also stated in interviews for example: "I am a political activist, a soldier in Dr. John Garang's Sudanese People's Liberation Army". (6) It subsequently emerged that she had made a number of other interesting claims. She claimed, for example, that she was the daughter of an Egyptian archaeologist and a Somalian princess, and that she had lived in Omdurman, Sudan, until she was 10 or 11, in 1978. Ms Boof claimed that in 1978 "my parents...were murdered for speaking up against slavery and the brutish Islamic government of Sudan". (7) She claimed that "muraheen" tribesmen had killed them in front of her. She claims that her Egyptian grandmother then put her up for adoption and that through UNICEF she travelled to London and was taken in by an Ethiopian family who eventually gave her up because, she said, they thought she might be a witch. She says she was then adopted by a black family in Washington-DC in 1980. (8)

Ms Boof also claimed that the Sudan People's Liberation Army was in existence as early as 1977, and that as a little girl she had attended SPLA meetings.

The Mundane Truth

Every one of these claims unravelled under examination. The facts were far less interesting. Mr Jamal Ibrahim, the deputy chief of mission at the Sudanese embassy in Britain, wrote an article critical of Ms Boof and claims that she had previously made, an article published in "Al- Sharq Al-Awsat" in September 2002. In this article he criticised her "falsehood and dishonesty" in previous claims. Ms Boof subsequently claimed that this article was in fact a fatwa, inaccurately stating that fatwa is "a contract for assassination". (9)

Unlike Ms Boof, "The New York Times" took the trouble to confirm the claims made to her by the SPLA in London. The newspaper spoke to Sheikh Omar Bakri, a senior judge of the Islamic sharia court in London, and someone noted for his forthright views. Ms Boof claimed that Bakri had been party to the fatwa. He stated that "nobody issued a fatwa against Kola Boof". (10) The Islamic judge went on to state: "I know she was criticized by a Muslim official in London, but he isn't in a position to issue a fatwa." This was confirmed by

Sudan and the Kola Boof hoax

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Monday, 04 October 2004 01:25 -

Mr Ibrahim himself, who said the claim was "bizarre and baseless" and that: "My own view is that she wants to make use of this to help her in selling her books. It is a bizarre exercise in public relations." (11) Mr Ibrahim did criticise Ms Boof in his article, and there would appear to be considerable grounds for legitimate criticism, but as "The New York Times" observed "criticism isn't the same as a fatwa". It would appear that the SPLA in London deliberately misrepresented the issue.

Unraveling the Lies

Ms Boof's claims about her early life are similarly flawed. She alleged that murahleen tribesmen killed her parents in Omdurman. These horsemen are only found in southern Kordofan, several hundred miles away from Omdurman. It is the equivalent in American terms of being attacked in a Washington-DC suburb by a band of Oklahoma cattlemen. She also claimed that the SPLA were in existence in 1977. It is also a simple matter of record that the SPLA was founded only in late 1983. (12) Ms Boof's claim that her father was murdered in 1978 for speaking "up against...the brutish Islamic government of Sudan" similarly jars with reality. In 1978 Sudan was resolutely secular, governed by President Jaafar Nimeiri, a close American ally whose government was one of the largest recipients of international American economic and military assistance. The present Islamic government in Sudan only came to power in 1989.

Ms Boof made a number of other claims about herself. In August 2002, she claimed to have been shot at outside Los Angeles by Arab Muslim gunmen, and that she shot back. Boof further claimed to be under FBI protection. The "New York Times" reported that the FBI "had no knowledge of Ms. Boof". (13)

Ms Boof was also said by "The New York Times" to have "told flamboyant stories about her life in Egypt and Morocco, where, she said she was a B-movie actress and a high level prostitute, operating in luxury hotels..." It was during this time in Morocco that Ms Boof also claimed to have had an affair with Osama bin Laden in 1996. She elaborated on this alleged affair in a January 2003 statement when she claimed that it was a four month sexual relationship in Morocco. She had met bin Laden in a Senegalese restaurant "which was the only place in Marrakech where they knew how to cook lion's

Sudan and the Kola Boof hoax

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Monday, 04 October 2004 01:25 -

meat" (one of her "favorite" dishes). She claimed that she subsequently became "Osama's mistress" and that she had "lounged about in silk and diamonds". (14) One of the most watched men in the world, there is no record whatsoever of bin Laden being in Morocco in 1996.

Boof has also made other jarring claims, speaking, for example, about "rich Palestinians who have black women slaves working in their kitchens, their tongues cut out of their heads." (15)

Ms Boof's somewhat elaborate claims began to be actively challenged by the end of 2002. The "New York Times" examined her allegations in some depth. (16) In an interview with the newspaper, Ms Boof admitted to being manipulative: "I can't deny that I'm a conniving person...I have to manipulate the system, and I don't mind if you publish that..." The newspaper discredited the fatwa claim. Ms Boof was dropped by her publisher at the end of 2002. And, despite having been warmly embraced and extensively publicised by the anti-Sudan lobby within the United States and elsewhere, Ms Boof's claims soon became even too outrageous for all but the diehard fringe. The SPLA has distanced itself from Ms Boof. The "New York Times" reported that the SPLA "embraced her and then backed away, as Ms. Boof's personal, if not literary credentials have been called into question."

Deng Ajak, secretary-general of the anti-government Sudan Commission for Human Rights, stated that he was initially supportive of Ms Boof "but when she said in one of her own e-mails to me that she had a brief encounter of dating Osama bin Laden, I said to my colleagues that we need to pull the plug on this one". He stated that "This could be one of the most impressively spun and choreographed pieces of fiction that one could imagine". Nevertheless, Ms Boof claimed that "the Southern Blacks of my homeland" have accorded her the title of "Queen Kola". (17)

The "New York Times" reported that Ms Silwa has also "distanced" herself from Kola Boof's claims, quoting her as stating: "I don't think it behooves our human rights interest to connect ourselves with someone who is inconsistent and can't prove her identity." (18) Joe Madison continues to publicise Ms Boof.

Conclusion

Sudan and the Kola Boof hoax

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Monday, 04 October 2004 01:25 -

Ms Boof and her claims provide a clear example of how patently false and self-serving lies about Sudan have been accepted at face value and publicised by the anti-Sudan industry. She has sold more of her books as a result of these claims. Ms Boof has deliberately sought publicity, both personal and commercial on the basis of these assertions.

The pattern is a sad one. Outrageous claims are manufactured and disseminated widely. Eventually allegations are exposed as either exaggerated or utterly groundless, or collapse in the face of their own absurdity and self-contradictions. All but the most bigoted or partisan of their disseminators retreat into a discrete silence - but never have the honesty or integrity to admit their complicity in a hoax, or to publicise the falsity of their previous articles. The miasma of defamatory claims against Sudan is once again added to, and only a short time elapses before yet another hoax or lie is launched and credulously disseminated by a media that never seems to learn the lessons of its previous blunders.

Notes:

1. There appears to be some doubt as to her original name. On one of her websites, she says that her name is Naima Bint Harith ("The Woman is Dangerous: Biography of Kola Boof", at <http://www.kolaboof.com/dangerous.htm>). On another of her websites, she gives her name as "Naima Alu Kolbookek" ("Kola Boof", at http://authors.aalbc.com/kola_boof.htm). In an interview with "The New York Times" she states that her given name is Naima Bahri (Julie Salmon, "Mystery Enshrouds Kola Boof, Writer and Internet Persona", "The New York Times", 11 December 2002). In her 2003 book, "Diary of a Lost Girl", Ms Boof says that she calls herself Kola Boof "in honour of Clara Bow and Betty Boop - I'm a silent movie buff, you see" (http://authors.aalbc.com/kola_boof.htm).

2. Julie Salmon, "Mystery Enshrouds Kola Boof, Writer and Internet Persona", "The New York Times", 11 December 2002.

3. See, for example, "'Anti-Islam' Books Spark Fatwa: Author Speaks Out Despite Warning From Bin Laden", News Article by World Daily Net, 9 November 2002. This article claimed that Sudanese diplomat Jamal Ibrahim had issued a fatwa calling for her to be beheaded. It also claimed that Ms Boof was "under the protection of U.S. government agents". On 7 November 2002, CNSNews.com claimed in an article

Sudan and the Kola Boof hoax

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Monday, 04 October 2004 01:25 -

entitled "Islam, Religion of Peace: Sudan's Threat to Behead Author Sparks US Protests", that there was a "Sudanese government death warrant calling for the beheading of best-selling author Kola Boof", and that this had prompted anti-Sudanese demonstrations in Washington, New York and Los Angeles. An article in "The Washington Times" claimed that Ms Boof was "sentenced to death for denouncing the oppression of women under Islamic law and the enslavement of non-Muslim black Africans in Sudan" ("Eminem's Raunchy Rap", "The Washington Times", 15 November 2002). The "Village Voice" has also echoed her claims stating, for example, that "Prominent Sudanese writer Kola Boof has recently taken refuge in the US after death threats in Sudan, "Taslima Nassrin Speaks (Still)", "The Village Voice" (New York), 13-19 November 2002. The Russian newspaper, "Pravda" also repeated Ms Boof's claims ("Kola Boof, Some Lady", "Pravda", Moscow, 26 July 2002).

4. Madison, for example, provided Ms Boof with considerable coverage on his radio program, a program already noted for its anti- Sudanese propaganda.

5. "Kola Boof Fights Back!", Press Release by The Association for Women's Rights in Development, November 2002.

6. "Kola Boof Surrenders", Interview by Nathan Lewis, at http://www.nathanlewis.com/artist_o.../body_kola_surrenders-interview.htm

7. Ibid.

8. "'Anti-Islam' Books Spark Fatwa: Author Speaks Out Despite Warning From Bin Laden", News Article by World Daily Net, 9 November 2002.

9. The "New York Times" correctly pointed out that far from being a murder contract, a fatwa "is a juristic opinion issued by a Muslim scholar to address a specific problem, that can be related to political, economic or social issues", ("Mystery Enshrouds Kola Boof, Writer and Internet Persona", "The New York Times", 11 December 2002).

10. Julie Salmon, "Mystery Enshrouds Kola Boof, Writer and Internet Persona", "The New York Times", 11 December 2002.

11. Ibid.

Sudan and the Kola Boof hoax

Written by Westside ID146

Monday, 04 October 2004 01:25 -

12. See, for example, the 1983 SPLM Manifesto, published in "Horn of Africa", Volume VIII, Number 1, New Jersey, 1985

13. Julie Salmon, "Mystery Enshrouds Kola Boof, Writer and Internet Persona", "The New York Times", 11 December 2002.

14. "Who's Afraid of Kola Boof?". Statement by Kola Boof, 3 January 2003, available at <http://poetwomen.50megs.com/custom2.html>

15. Ibid.

16. Julie Salmon, "Mystery Enshrouds Kola Boof, Writer and Internet Persona", "The New York Times", 11 December 2002.

17. "Statement by Kola Boof", "North African Book Exchange", 11 December 2002.

18. Julie Salmon, "Mystery Enshrouds Kola Boof, Writer and Internet Persona", "The New York Times", 11 December 2002. Ms Sliwa does, however, continue to publicise a number of similarly discredited claims about Sudan, including allegations of "slave redemption" still made by groups such as Christian Solidarity International.

Source: [The DrumCollective](#)