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WOMEN, RELIGION, AND PEACEBUILDING IN AFRICA: A CASE ANALYSIS OF SUDAN

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(U19378514)

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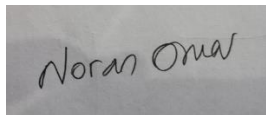Pretoria, South Africa

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DECLARATION

STUDENT NUMBER: U19378514

I declare that —**Women, religion, and peacebuilding in Africa: a case analysis of Sudan** is my work and that all the sources that I have used and quoted are indicated and acknowledged through complete references.

I further declare that I have not previously submitted this work, or part of it, for examination at the University of Pretoria for another qualification, or at any other higher education institution.

Noran Omar

_____   16th March 2021

Signature / Noran Atteya   **Date**

DEDICATION

To Leila

May this thesis be an inspiration to you one day to do anything you put your mind to, and may your beautiful mind never stop yearning to learn.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

ABSTRACT

The roles of women and religion in peacebuilding have been subjects of extensive research in recent years. Scholarly evidence has underscored the importance of including women in peace processeses to ensure the sustainability of peace in conflict-affected communities. There is also a rich body of literature on the role of religion in both perpetuating and transforming conflict, rooted in traditional norms and values of peace and reconciliation, which has come to be known as religious or faith-based peacebuilding. However, not much has been written on the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding and how this plays out in specific conflict contexts.

Stemming from Third World Feminism—which combines both African and Islamic feminisms—as the theoretical framework for its analysis, the thesis contributes to bridging the gap in literature on the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding. It builds on the scant literature on the role of women in religious or faith-based peacebuilding and explores the role religion—being one of the major factors shaping the culture and identity of societies—plays in enhancing or obstructing the role of women in the various forms of peacebuilding processes.

To this end, the study adopted a research design rooted in feminist epistemology that highlights the specificities of the context within which the relationship between religion and women peacebuilding roles is analysed. Both the qualitative research and case study approaches were combined given the nature of the research objectives and questions, which required the collection and analysis of qualitative data from both primary and secondary sources to examine the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan. This accommodated an in-depth examination of this relationship in the case of Sudan by focusing on civil society organizations and actors working on peacebuilding issues in the country as units of analysis. It also allowed for reflecting the voices and agencies of ordinary Sudanese women, as African and Muslim agents, through capturing their insights and perspectives on their various roles in peacebuilding, the challenges militating against their participation, and the impact of religion on their participation and inclusion in the informal and formal peacebuilding domain. In-depth interviews and a focus group discussion with international and local organizations and actors working on issues related to women and peacebuilding in Sudan were employed. Both secondary and primary data were analysed using a combination of content

analysis and thematic analysis techniques, which allowed room for a deeper understanding of the relationships between the main research variables and contributed to bridging the gap in literature between "women and peacebuilding" and "religion and peacebuilding".

Based on its findings, the study concludes that in societies such as Sudan where religion plays a dominant constitutive role in social existence, its impact on women's participation and representation in peacebuilding processes is profound and needs to be theorized. The case is therefore made for a Global South feminist theoretical perspective that takes historical and cultural contexts into account, including the multiplicity of actors and processes involved in peacebuilding and conflict transformation, while reflecting the agency and voices of women in Africa and the Global South, and making them the starting point of the research, rather than its objects.

Keywords: Feminism, Peacebuilding, Religion, Sudan, Women.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AACC	All Africa Conference of Churches
AU	African Union
AUHIP	African Union High-Level Implementation Panel on Sudan and South Sudan
AUPSC	African Union Peace and Security Council
AMIS	African Union Mission in Sudan
BC	Beja Congress
CAD	Civil Affairs Division
CEDAW	Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women
COOPI	Cooperation International
CPA	Comprehensive Peace Agreement
DDDC	Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultations
DDPD	Doha Document for Peace in Darfur
DPA	Darfur Peace Agreement
DCPSF	Darfur Community Peace and Stability Fund
EF	Eastern Front
ESPA	Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement
FFC	Forces of Freedom and Change
FGM	Female genital mutilation
GBV	Gender-based violence
GEST	Gender Expert Support Team
HCFA	Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement
ICC	International Criminal Court
ICG	International Crisis Group
IDPs	Internally displaced persons
IDSR	Institute of Development Studies and Research

IGAD	Inter-Governmental Authority on Development
INC	Interim National Constitution
IPTI	Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative
JEM	Justice and Equality Movement
LJM	Liberation and Justice Movement
MANSAM	Sudan's Women, Political and Civil Groups
NCP	National Congress Party
NDA	National Democratic Alliance
NIDAA	Sudanese Development Call Organization
NIF	National Islamic Front
NWGPD	Nuba Women's Group for Peace and Development
OHCHR	Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights
OLS	Operation Lifeline Sudan
POA	Public Order Act
RIGDPR	Regional Institute of Gender, Diversity, Peace and Rights
SCC	Sudan Council of Churches
SCP	Sudanese Congress Party
SEF	Sudan Ecumenical Forum
SIHA	Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa
SIRC	Sudanese Inter-Religious Council
SLM/A	Sudan Liberation Movement/Army
SLA-AA	Sudan Liberation Army–Abdul Wahid Nur
SLA-MM	Sudan Liberation Army–Minni Minawi
SOPAT	Sudanese Organization for Peace and Cultural Trends
SPDF	Sudan People's Democratic Front
SPLA	Sudan People's Liberation Army
SPLA-N	Sudan People's Liberation Army–North

SPLM	Sudan People's Liberation Movement
SPLM-N	Sudan People's Liberation Movement–North
SPLM-N (Aqar)	Sudan People's Liberation Movement North–Malik Aqar
SPLM-N (Hilu)	Sudan People's Liberation Movement North–AbdelAziz El-Hilu
SRF	Sudanese Revolutionary Front
SuWEP	Sudanese Women's Empowerment for Peace and Development
SWVP	Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace
TMC	Transitional Military Council
UP	Umma Party
UN	United Nations
UNAMID	African Union/United Nations Peacekeeping Mission in Darfur
UNAMIS	United Nations Advance Mission in the Sudan
UNESCO	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation
UNCT	UN Country Team
UNDP	United Nations Development Program
UNFPA	United Nations Population Fund
UNIFEM	United Nations Development Fund for Women
UNISFA	United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei
UNITAMS	United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan
UNMIS	United Nations Mission in Sudan
UNPBC	United Nations Peacebuilding Commission
UNPBSO	United Nations Peacebuilding Support Office
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UNSLFs	United Nations State Liaison Functions
UNSEC RES1325	United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security
UN Women	United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women
USCIRF	United States Commission on International Religious Freedoms

WCC	World Council of Churches
WFP	World Food Program
WU	Sudanese Women's Union

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1. 1 BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

The unanimous adoption of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security represented a landmark in the area of women and peacebuilding. Not only did it highlight the historical exclusion of women from peace processes despite the importance of their roles within the context of conflict; it also stressed the importance of enhancing the inclusion of women in all aspects of peace and conflict resolution to achieve sustainable peace in conflict-ridden societies. Ever since the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325 and the resolutions that followed it, much attention—in terms of both research and practice—has been given to the role of women in post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding. A lot of literature has been devoted to analysing the different ways women—being among the most vulnerable victims of conflict—are affected, their role in mediation and peacemaking, and their role in the processes and activities that bring about lasting peace within their communities. Parallel to the increase in importance given to the role of women in peacebuilding, more attention has been given to the role of religion in peacebuilding, given the increasingly religious and ethnic nature of conflicts (Coward & Smith, 2004; Omer, 2012; Schreiter, 2011) and the important role religious leaders play in mediation and enhancing peace processes (Coward & Smith, 2004; Dubois, 2008).

However, despite the ample amount of academic research that has been dedicated to the roles of women and religious actors in peacebuilding processes, a limited amount of research have been done on the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding. Both the roles of women religious actors or women inspired by their faith in peacebuilding, as well as the role of religion—according to its specific interpretation in a given society—in promoting or limiting the participation of women in peacebuilding processes remain largely ignored (Hayward, 2015; Hayward & Marshall, 2015). And with the underrepresentation of women in peace and transitional processes (Paffenholz et al., 2016: 55), the persistence of this literature gap will lead to failures not only in fully understanding the nature of many conflicts where religious considerations are central, but also in exploring potential avenues for resolving such conflicts and building sustainable peace. This challenge requires close investigation of the possible cultural and societal factors impacting women's inclusion in post-conflict processes, and whether

religion—being one of the main cultural constructs shaping the identity and social existence of many societies—has a significant impact in that regard.

Building on the aforementioned, this study aims to contribute to bridging the gap in literature between the fields of women and peacebuilding on one hand, and religion and peacebuilding on the other, through the case study of Sudan. It discusses the roles played by women actors and organizations in peacebuilding in Sudan, and the impact of religion on the scope given to women in assuming their peacebuilding roles. Within this context, the study analyses the relationship between two variables that have been largely ignored in peacebuilding literature, and how this particular relationship should be taken into account while designing processes that aim to enhance peace within religious societies.

After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005, a post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction process started in Sudan, commencing with the deployment of the United Nations Mission in Sudan (UNMIS) in 2005, and leading to the establishment of the United Nations Integrated Transition Assistance Mission in Sudan (UNITAMS) in June 2020 (UN, 4 June 2020; UNMIS, 2020). However, despite the growing attention to the role of women in public life in general, and peace processes in particular, peacebuilding and post-conflict resolution mechanisms in Sudan remain male-dominated to a great extent (Ahmed, 2014; ElSawi, 2011; ICG, 28 June 2006; Itto, 2006). Although Sudanese women played a pivotal role in the recent 2018 revolution, and despite their long history of exclusion and subjugation under the different political regimes, they remain largely absent from peacebuilding efforts especially at the formal levels (The Sudanese Newspaper for Change, 3 September 2020).

This "tradition of exclusion" has been a defining factor perpetuated in all formal Sudanese peace negotiations, despite the great contributions made by Sudanese women to peacebuilding efforts at the local and more informal levels of peacebuilding. Both the Comprehensive Peace Agreement negotiations and the Darfur peace negotiations exhibited a stark absence of women from the negotiation table, and neither of them provided guarantees for women's participation in the implementation processes (Ahmed, 2014: 165; ElSawi, 2011: 11; ICG, 28 June 2006: 5). Moreover, the Roadmap negotiation process between the government of Sudan and the Sudan Call Coalition witnessed a similar exclusion of women from the official meetings (Bigio, April 2018). More recently, women were completely side-lined during the negotiations between the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) and the Transitional Military Council

following the revolution, and were largely absent from the peace process in Juba (The Sudanese Newspaper for Change, 3 September 2020).

Within this context, the role of religion as a dominant aspect of the Sudanese cultural identity cannot be dismissed in any attempt to understand the factors affecting the participation (or non-participation) of Sudanese women in peacebuilding processes. Religion has always been a defining factor in the Sudanese cultural and legal systems and has played an important role in peace and conflict throughout its history. And with the gap in research on the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding, the thesis examines the different roles of Sudanese women in peacebuilding processes in Sudan, the role of religion and religious actors in these processes, as well as the impact of religion on women's full participation and inclusion in peacebuilding initiatives.

1.3 RESEARCH PROBLEM

The thesis analyses the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding; a relationship that has not received much scholarly attention, whether on the level of the role of women within religious or faith-based peacebuilding or on the level of the impact of religion itself on such a role. Through studying the question of women and peacebuilding from a cultural-contextual perspective in the case of Sudan, the thesis moves beyond the traditional study of the role of religion in conflict and peace and analyses its potential impact as a cultural and societal construct on the inclusion of women in peacebuilding initiatives. It examines the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding by highlighting the significant impact of religion on women's participation in peacebuilding and the means through which it could be potentially utilized to consolidate peacebuilding initiatives by increasing women's participation and inclusion.

In doing so, the thesis contributes to bridging the gap in literature between the fields of women and peacebuilding and religion and peacebuilding, as well as providing a reference for peacebuilding initiatives in societies where religion plays a dominant constitutive role. Moreover, it overcomes the current deficit in research on women and peacebuilding in Sudan by providing a comprehensive account for scholars and practitioners that would contribute to designing context-specific peacebuilding initiatives in Sudan.

1.4. RESEARCH AIM

The thesis analyses the intersection between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Africa using the case of Sudan.

1.5 RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

In doing so, the thesis intends to fulfil a number of theoretical and empirical objectives as follows:

1. Analyse the multiple roles women play in peacebuilding in Sudan and the main challenges faced in this regard.
2. Analyse the role of religion in peacebuilding in Sudan.
3. Explore the impact of religion on women's participation in peacebuilding processes in Sudan and Africa generally.

1.6 RESEARCH QUESTIONS

In its attempt to answer the core question of "What is the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan?" the thesis examines the following questions:

1. What are the roles and challenges of women in peacebuilding in Sudan?
2. What role does religion play in peacebuilding in Sudan?
3. How does religion impact women's participation in peacebuilding processes in Sudan and Africa in general?

1.7 JUSTIFICATION FOR THE RESEARCH

The research builds on the inter-disciplinary conversation between the fields of "women and peacebuilding" and "religious peacebuilding" that aims at examining the role of religion in motivating or impeding women's peacebuilding roles and agency in either secular or faith-based peacebuilding contexts. It highlights the significant role of context in peacebuilding initiatives, and the importance of understanding the specificities of different contexts when designing peacebuilding initiatives that aims at incorporating women among its primary actors. It contributes to existing feminist perspectives on peacebuilding by making the case for a Global South feminist theory of peacebuilding, which takes into account different historical and cultural contexts. This helps us look beyond the roles of women in peacebuilding that have been identified in mainstream literature on women and peacebuilding. Moreover, it asserts women's peacebuilding agency by highlighting the less-acknowledged and under-documented traditional and informal roles upon which peacebuilding initiatives could be built and expanded to include more actors—including women and religious actors.

The thesis focuses on Sudan as the case study for its research and analysis, given its long history of conflict and peace, the significant role of religion in its cultural identity and political tradition, as well as the intersection of African and Islamic identities in its social make-up. This made it a relevant choice for the study of women, religion, and peacebuilding. Moreover, the current deficit in research on Sudanese women's roles in peacebuilding, and the challenges militating against their participation and inclusion in formal peacebuilding processes, makes Sudan an ideal area of research, which aims at reflecting women's agency and voices in issues related to peace and conflict, and examining the socio-cultural dynamics impacting their participation or non-participation in this regard.

1.8 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Given the importance of the cultural and historical context with regard to the particular case of Sudan, the thesis approaches the issue of the relationship between the role of women and religion in peacebuilding in Sudan through the lens of Third World feminism. Taking into account the diversity of the context, and the intersection of the African and Islamic identities of Sudanese women, it applies a combination of African and Islamic feminisms in its analysis of the role of Sudanese women in peacebuilding and the impact of religion—whether institutional or as a societal and cultural construct—on the level of their inclusion.

Through adopting the broader framework of Third World feminism as its departing point, the thesis combines both African and Islamic feminisms and their relationship to peacebuilding as its theoretical framework in its analysis of the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan. This theoretical approach allows the investigation of the existing—though largely unacknowledged—roles played by Sudanese women in peacebuilding given the historical and cultural specificity of Sudan, and helps in understanding the complexities of the cultural and societal challenges impeding women's full inclusion in peacebuilding initiatives. Moreover, it allows the examining of the impact of religion on women's peacebuilding roles, as well as building on its potential positive aspects in increasing women's participation and inclusion in peace processes in Africa and the Global South[1].

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[1] Although the study stems from an overarching Third World feminist theoretical framework, which combines both African and Islamic feminisms in its analysis of the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan, the researcher prefers the term "Global South" as an alternative to "Third World" given the latter's underlying political and colonial connotations. The term "Third Wpeacemorld", however, will be used in reference to the Third World feminist movement and

1.9 OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

1.9.1 Research design and justification

In studying the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Africa with a focus on Sudan, the thesis adopts a combination of both qualitative research and case study approaches—integrated in a feminist epistemological and theoretical framework—in its research design and methodology.

The nature of the study and the importance it gives to context in examining the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan, and the impact of religion on women's participation in peacebuilding initiatives, necessitated the adoption of a research design that allows for a degree of flexibility in its methods and approach. Moreover, it required a research design that highlights the specificities of the context in which the relationship between religion and women peacebuilding roles is analysed, and allows for an in-depth investigation of the impact of religion as an integral part of this context on women's participation and inclusion. Thus, the combination of both qualitative research and case study approaches as the adopted research design proved to be ideal for the nature of the thesis research questions and objectives, which required the collection and analysis of qualitative data from both primary and secondary sources to examine the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan. In addition, it allowed for the in-depth study and examination of this relationship within the case study of Sudan by focusing on organizations and actors working on peacebuilding issues in Sudan as the unit of analysis. This helped in examining a variety of local and international actors working on issues of both women and peacebuilding in Sudan, with the objective of understanding their views on the roles of women within their activities and the impact of religion as an identity marker and societal and cultural construct on the participation and inclusion of women in this regard.

1.9.2 Data collection and data analysis methods

Building on the above, and stemming from a feminist epistemological approach which highlights the differences in women's roles and experiences, and places them at the centre of the research, the thesis adopted in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion in collecting primary data on the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan. The in-depth interviews included 42 respondents

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in the disucssions related to "Third World feminism" and "Third World women" in the conceptual review and theoretical framework chapters. Women belonging to the countries of this region will be referred to as "women in Africa and the Global South" in the rest of the Study.

in total representing different local and international governmental and non-governmental organizations working on issues related to women and peacebuilding in Sudan. The focus group discussion included six ordinary Sudanese women involved in peacebuilding initiatives in local communities in Khartoum.

Primary data were reviewed vis-à-vis the secondary data obtained through extensive desk research of well-researched books, journal articles, research reports, and the review of the main literature dedicated to the fields of women and peacebuilding, and religion and peacebuilding. As such, secondary data were used to confirm and consolidate aspects of primary data related to the roles of women and religion in peacebuilding. On the other hand, the primary data were used in consolidation of the limited literature linking both women and religion to peacebuilding, both in theory and in practice, ultimately contributing to bridging the gap in research between the two fields, and analysing the impact of religion as a cultural and societal factor on the participation of women in peacebuilding initiatives.

Both primary and secondary data were analysed using a combination of content analysis and thematic analysis techniques. This entailed closely inspecting the collected data, categorizing them into codes congruent with the adopted conceptual framework, and ultimately classifying them into themes that were derived from both the literature review of the fields of women and peacebuilding and religion and peacebuilding, and the theoretical framework of the study. Relationships between the main themes were then identified and described with the aim of exploring the relationship between the three main variables of the study—women, religion, and peacebuilding—and contributing to bridging the gap in literature between women and peacebuilding on the one hand, and religion and peacebuilding on the other.

1.9.3 Sampling procedure

The thesis adopted a combination of "snowball" and "theoretical" nonprobability sampling techniques in its selection of the in-depth interviews and focus group participants. The selection of respondents for the initial set of in-depth interviews, conducted during the first field visit to Sudan (14–23 December 2019), was primarily based on the criteria the researcher specified for her research sample as well as referrals and recommendations she received from key informants/respondents to other organizations and individuals. However, the second set of in-depth interviews and the focus group discussion, conducted during the second field visit to Sudan (28 February – 6 March 2020), were largely guided in the selection

of their respondents by the data collected during the first field visit, prompting a more purposeful theoretical selection of respondents who are most relevant to the research questions and objectives.

1.9.4 Sample size and composition

Drawing from a *sample population* of local and international organizations and actors working on issues related to women and peacebuilding in Sudan, the research *sample size* included a total of 48 respondents divided among three main groups:

- The first group included 19 international peace and security practitioners in Sudan. The group was primarily comprised of the main international governmental organizations working in Sudan; representatives of international partners and donor organizations related to issues of peacebuilding; as well as officers from international non-governmental organizations operating in Sudan.
- The second group included 23 representatives of local governmental and civil society organizations involved with women and peacebuilding issues in Sudan. This included Sudanese women activists and members of peace networks; members of local development governmental and non-governmental organizations; academics; gender advisors to international organizations; as well as politicians representing the main political parties and armed groups participating in the peace process.
- The third group of respondents, the focus group, was composed of six Muslim Sudanese women from the same age group (23–27), representing different professional and educational backgrounds, sharing the commonality of participating as volunteers or recipients of peacebuilding programmes in their local communities.

1.10 RESEARCH STRUCTURE

The thesis studies the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan through seven chapters, divided as follows:

Chapter One provides a brief introduction and background to the study, including the research problem, research aim and objectives, and research questions. It also includes a brief review of the adopted theoretical framework of the study, the research methodology, as well as the structure of the research.

Chapter Two presents a background on Sudan as the case study of the thesis. It provides an overview of the socio-political dynamics in Sudan, its history of conflict and peace, as well as the main formal post-

conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts conducted in the country since the end of the Second Sudanese Civil War in 2005. It sets the stage for understanding the peacebuilding context in Sudan, as well as the different dynamics impacting the role of Sudanese women in peacebuilding processes.

Chapter Three provides a conceptual framework for the three central concepts to the study—gender, religion, and peacebuilding—as well as a thematic literature review on their intersection. In addition, it operationalizes the three concepts as well as their linkages to the case study of Sudan, demonstrating the existing gap in research and literature on the convergence between women, religion, and peacebuilding, and the impact of religion on women's participation in peacebuilding.

Chapter Four presents a discussion of the theoretical framework of the study. Through adopting Third World feminism as the overarching theoretical framework of the thesis, the chapter probes into the particularities of African and Islamic feminism as two strands of Third World feminism, and their perspectives on peacebuilding, as the theoretical foundation for the thesis in its analysis of the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan.

Chapter Five presents an overview of the research methodology of the thesis: the adopted research design, the epistemological foundations of the research, data collection and analysis methods, sampling techniques and criteria for the selection of respondents, as well as the ethical considerations and limitations of the research. In addition, it highlights the relevance of the adopted research methodology in line with the theoretical and epistemological foundations of the thesis and the overall research objectives.

Chapter Six includes the presentation and analysis of the main findings that emerged from the field research, using a combination of both in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion on a sample of 48 respondents from international and local governmental and non-governmental organizations and actors working on issues related to women and peacebuilding in Sudan. The findings are presented and analysed using a combination of content analysis and thematic analysis methods, and discussed in congruence with the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the thesis, as well its research questions and objectives.

Chapter Seven is the concluding chapter. It discusses the different gaps in literature, both in and between, the fields of women and peacebuilding and religion and peacebuilding with regard to the roles of women in peacebuilding and the factors influencing their full participation and inclusion. Moreover, it proposes a

new theoretical framework for examining the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding, which takes into account the multiplicity of actors and processes involved in peacebuilding and highlights the significant role of context in influencing women's roles in this regard.

CHAPTER 2: A BACKGROUND ON CONFLICT AND PEACE IN SUDAN

2.1 INTRODUCTION

The peacebuilding context in Sudan cannot be fully understood without consideration of the many conflicts and peace processes Sudan has witnessed in its post-independence history. With conflicts in the south, east, and west of the country, Sudan still suffers from the repercussions, which have severely impacted its economy, infrastructure, and political stability over the years (Ahmad, 2010; Sørbø, 2005).

After the signing of the Sudan Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 and the deployment of the UNMIS, a post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction process started in Sudan (UNMIS, 2020). This was complemented in 2006 with the signing of the Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA), and the deployment of the African Union/United Nations Peacekeeping mission in Darfur (UNAMID) in 2007, mandated by the UNSC to maintain stability in the war-torn Darfur region while peace talks between the Government of Sudan and the armed groups continued (UNAMID, 2015).

Years later, and with the ouster of President "Omar Hassan Al-Bashir" in April 2019 and the signing of the "Constitutional Document for the Transitional Period" between the Sudanese Transitional Military Council and the Forces of Freedom and Change (FFC) in August 2019, peace came to the forefront as the first priority of the transitional period declared by the Constitution (Forti, December 2019). As a result, the Juba Peace Process was launched in September 2019 with the aim of achieving a breakthrough in the formerly deadlocked negotiations between the government and the armed groups (Casola, May 2020). Moreover, based on an official request submitted by the Government of Sudan, the UNITAMS was established in June 2020 by the UNSC to provide political and peacebuilding support to the Sudanese Government during the transitional period (UN, 2020).

Departing from the aforementioned, this chapter presents a background on Sudan, as the case study of the thesis. It provides an overview of the socio-political dynamics in Sudan, its history of conflict and peace, as well as the main formal post-conflict reconstruction and peacebuilding efforts conducted in the country since the end of the Second Sudanese Civil War in 2005.

2.2 THE SOCIO-POLITICS OF SUDAN: A HISTORY OF CONFLICT AND PEACE

2.2.1 Introducing Sudan- Contextualizing the Case Study

Sudan, or the Republic of the Sudan, is the third-largest African country and third-largest Arab country in the world. Situated in Northeast Africa, its geography covers an area of 1 886 068 square kilometres (728 215 square miles), extending from north to central Africa (The World Factbook, NA). Sudan is bordered by Egypt and Libya in the north, by the Red Sea, Eritrea, and Ethiopia in the east, by the Central African Republic and Chad in the west, and by South Sudan in the south (Spaulding, NA). It shares with other basin countries the Nile river, which is considered the most important source of livelihood in the country (Badri, 2005: 2).

Being one of the largest countries in Africa (and the largest before the secession of South Sudan in 2011), Sudan is characterized by vast geographical diversity, reflected in the cultural and ethnic multiplicity of its population (Badri, 2005; Ahmad, 2010). The Sudanese population, which is estimated to number around 42.8 million (UN 2019 estimate), is considered among the most diversified in the world, with more than 250 local tribes and languages (Badri, 2004: 2). Despite difficulty in attaining an exact census count of the number of tribes and ethnicities in Sudan[2], especially after the secession of South Sudan, Sudan is estimated to include more than 500 ethnic identities (ElSawi, 2011: 1).

The ethnic profile of Sudan corresponds to the Sudanese diversity patterns and can be classified into five main groupings. These include the descendants of Arab-Africans, mainly in Northern and the Central Sudan; Africans of Nuba mountains origin; the Beja of Eastern Sudan; Africans of West African origin living mostly in Darfur in West Sudan; and other Arab nomadic groups living mainly in Darfur and Kordofan (Badri, 2005: 2; Hussein, 2013: 342).

This natural and ethnic diversity is accompanied by cultural, linguistic, religious, and social diversity (El-Battahani, 2008; Badri, 2005; Hale, 2001b). There are more than 110 dialects in Sudan, 26 of which are actively spoken languages (El-Battahani, 2008: 2; Hale, 2009: 1). The vast majority of Sudanese are multilingual, with Arabic being both the "lingua franca" (Badri, 2005: 2) spoken by most of the population and the official language, and English, to a lesser extent, as the second language (Spaulding, NA). The

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[2] The last official population and housing census in Sudan was conducted in 2008, after the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Government of Sudan and the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement of the South prior to the secession of South Sudan in 2011.

diversity is also manifested in religion, with Islam, Christianity, as well as other traditional or indigenous religions being followed by different sections of the population (Ahmed, 2014; Badri, 2004; 2005).

Another important aspect of the diversity of Sudanese society is the differences in "familial connections, social structures, cultural outlooks, value systems and gender statuses" (El-Battahani, 2008: 2). Sudanese society is generally dominated by a strong family/kinship lineage system that "stratifies people according to descent, age, and gender" (Ahmed, 2014: 78). The diverse cultural systems, however, influence the specific nature of these social structures, tribal organization, economic activities, and gender relations in the different regions (ElSawi, 2011: 1).

These social and cultural diversities also have a significant impact on the legal system, notions of identity, as well as the political structures in Sudan (El-Battahani, 2008; Hale, 2001b; 2009). According to Hale (2001b):

> The social heterogeneity of Sudan is staggering. For example, northern Sudan is at once "Arab/Nubian" and African, with the complexity that entails in terms of ethnicity and identity politics. Even the legal system is pluralistic: Shari'a (Islamic religious law), civil, and customary law have coexisted for nearly a century. There are also pluralistic political traditions. Coexisting with religious and sectarian movements is a recent but well-developed socialist tradition, from which originated a vigorous leftist women's movement (p. 90).

In addition to this, a variety of political structures have evolved in the different regions throughout the history of Sudan. Historical and anthropological studies reveal the existence of both local (tribal) authorities, as well as quasi-territorial and more centralized forms of rule (Sultanates) in Sudanese history. These already existing forms of rule were consolidated—and, in the case of tribal authorities, manipulated—by the highly centralized authoritarian colonial (Ottoman, Anglo-Egyptian) and post-colonial (Islamic, parliamentary democracies, military, Islamist-military) political structures that ruled Sudan within the last two centuries (El-Battahani, 2008: 2; Hale, 2001b: 90).

2.2.2 The political history of Sudan

The history of politics in Sudan is a history of conflict and peace, military coups and temporary democracies, political instability, and resistance. Even though the Republic of Sudan was the first country in sub-Saharan Africa to gain independence in 1956, it was also the first to suffer a military coup in 1958

and witnessed the longest civil war in the history of the continent (An-Naʿim, 2006: 135). Since independence, Sudan has been ruled by three military regimes (1958–1964; 1969–1984; 1989–2019), three democratically elected governments in 1956, 1964 and 1985 (each ending abruptly with military takeovers), and the current transitional political regime—following the ouster of President Al-Bashir in April 2019—headed by a sovereign council and a civilian cabinet (Hussein, 2013: 342; Forti, December 2019: 17).

Modern Sudan was historically unified by a centralized Ottoman-Egyptian colonial administration between 1821 and 1885, which was ended by a nationalist/religious revolution led by the national religious leader Mohamed Ahmed Al Mahdi, who took control of most of the country by 1884 (Ahmed, 2014; An-Naʿim, 2006). The Mahdist state came to an end 13 years later by a joint British-Egyptian colonial administration (Condominium) in 1889 that ruled Sudan until it gained independence on 1 January 1956 (Ahmed, 2014; An-Naʿim, 2006).

Shortly after independence, in November 1958, Sudan witnessed its first military coup led by General Ibrahim Abboud, who suspended the 1956 transitional constitution and ruled by decree. He was later ousted through a civilian uprising in 1964, which restored the constitution—as the transitional amended constitution of 1964—and re-established a civilian government under a democratically elected parliament (An-Naʿim, 2006: 133; Badri, 2005: 2–3, Fluehr-Lobban, 1981: 76).

A second military coup led by Colonel Jaafar Numeiri took place in May 1969 and established a single-party system through the "Permanent Constitution" of 1973. The military regime was overthrown by another popular civilian uprising in April 1985, followed by a short-lived democratic government that was overthrown by a third military coup led by the National Salvation Front,[3] headed by General Omar Hassan Al-Bashir in 1989, leading Sudan to decades of wars, sanctions, and political turmoil (An-Naʿim, 2006: 133; Badri, 2005: 2–3).

The Islamist-military rule of Omar Hassan Al-Bashir came to an end in April 2019, after a popular uprising which started in December 2018, and rapidly spread throughout the different Sudanese governorates, headed by the Forces of Freedom and Change, a coalition comprised of the main political and civil opposition groups in Sudan (Forti, December 2019: 17–18; Tossel, 2020: 1). After months of negotiations mediated by the African Union (AU) and the Ethiopian government, the Constitutional Document for the

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[3] The military wing of the National Islamic Front (NIF) or the former Muslim Brotherhood.

Transitional Period was signed in August 2019 between the Forces of Freedom and Change and the Sudanese Transitional Military Council. The document established transitional governance for three years headed by a joint military-civilian Sovereign Council and a Civilian Cabinet (Forti, December 2019: 18; Tossel, 2020).

2.2.2.1 Overview of peace and conflict in Sudan

The post-independence political history of Sudan cannot be fully understood without consideration of the civil wars that dominated most of the country's contemporary history, along with other conflicts in East Sudan, Darfur, South Kordofan and the Blue Nile.

2.2.2.1.1 The Sudanese Civil Wars (1955–1972/1983–2005)

The first phase of the civil war between North and South Sudan, which occurred between 1955 and 1972, began as a local rebellion in southern Sudan against the British colonial policies which aimed at keeping northern and southern Sudan politically, socially, and developmentally separate and unequal (Ahmed, 2014; An-Naʿim, 2006; Badri, 2004). It later developed into a full-scale civil war led by the Anya-Nya movement, after Sudan's independence in 1962 (Badri, 2004: 2).

The war was ended by the Addis Ababa Accord of February 1972, which "paved the way for stopping the war and establishing regional autonomous rule in the south, marking the most important achievement of the military rule headed by Jaafar Numeiri" (Ahmad, 2010: 8–9). However, coinciding with the discovery of oil in southern Sudan in the late 1970s, President Numeiri undertook a number of unilateral actions in violation of both the 1972 accord and the 1973 constitution, culminating in the imposition of Shari'a (Islamic) law in September 1983. As a result, the civil war led by the Sudanese People's Liberation Army (SPLA) erupted again. For more than two decades, the Government and the SPLA fought over resources, power, the role of religion in the state, and self-determination up to the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005 (Ahmed, 2014: 10; An-Naʿim, 2006: 135; Badri, 2004: 2–3).

The CPA[4] managed to end what is deemed the longest civil war in the history of the African continent, establishing a power-sharing deal for the entire country until national elections were held in 2009, and

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[4] Signed on 9 January 2005, the CPA began with the Declaration of Principles in 1988 in Koka Dam, Ethiopia, moving on to Abuja, Nigeria, and Machakos, Kenya, before being concluded in Naivasha, Kenya, and officially signed in Nairobi in January 2005. The most significant of these was the Machakos Protocol signed in 2002 under the auspices of IGAD, where the parties reached

granting the people of South Sudan the right to choose between unity with North Sudan or independence. The referendum, which was held six years later on 9 January 2011, resulted in the secession of South Sudan, with the overwhelming majority of participants (98.3%) voting for independence (UNMIS, 2020). On 9 July 2011, Sudan was split into two countries: Sudan and the Republic of South Sudan (Ahmed, 2014: 10; Hanson, June 2007).

However, despite the end of the civil war between North and South Sudan, ongoing political unrest continued between the two countries. Disputes around oil revenue sharing, the shared border, the status of Abyei (the biggest oil-rich city), and citizenship—which CPA held over for further discussions—further complicated the situation (Ahmed, 2014: 11). Moreover, "issues related to marginalization of the peripheries, state violence, religious, and racial biases that relegated a large part of the citizenry to a position of second-class citizenship" (Jok, 2015: 4) led to the outburst of multiple regional conflicts in different parts of the country, exacerbating the domestic political unrest in Khartoum. According to Jok (2015):

> It is safe to say that the CPA has been a massive failure: it has triggered new wars within the geographical north before the split, the western region of Darfur—which exploded into violence on the eve of the CPA—and the border regions South Kordofan (Nuba Mountains) and Southern Blue Nile, which plunged into intensified war with Khartoum in the wake of South Sudan's independence, while the Eastern territories continue to simmer on. Violence also raged within South Sudan, mainly militia wars against the government in Juba, ethnic-based violence or cattle rustling, all of which caused massive destruction and death (p. 5).

2.2.2.1.2 The war in Darfur

The war in Darfur (West Sudan) erupted in early 2003 between the Government of Sudan and the government-backed local Arab militias "Janjaweed" on one hand, and the main Darfuri armed groups, the Sudan Liberation Movement/Army (SLM/A) and the Justice and Equality Movement (JEM) on the other (UNMIS, 2020; UNAMID, 2015). The war, which was centred on issues of marginalization and local land disputes (Casola, 22 May 2020), led to the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Darfuris and the

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specific agreement on a broad framework, setting forth the principles of governance, the transitional process and the structures of government, as well as the right to self-determination for the people of South Sudan in terms of state and religion (UNMIS, 2020). However, the whole peace process was the result of relentless efforts by a number of regional and international organizations (IGAD, AU, UN), as well as foreign governments (United States, United Kingdom, Norway).

displacement of more than two million. Widespread atrocities were committed during the span of the conflict, leading to the indictment of President Omar Hassan Al-Bashir by the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2009 for war crimes and crimes against humanity (Eberhard, NA*).*

International diplomatic and mediation efforts led by the African Union to settle the conflict in Darfur culminated in the signing the DPA—also known as the Abuja Agreement—on 5 May 2006 between the Government of Sudan and the SLA faction led by Minni Minawi (SLA-MM). However, the agreement was rejected by both the Justice and Equality Movement and the SLA faction headed by Abdul Wahid Nur— the other main armed groups in Darfur (Hanson, June 2007; Kessler, 5 May 2006; UNAMID, 2015). A joint AU-UN mediation effort aiming at bringing more Darfuri groups to the negotiation table took place in Doha, Qatar, throughout 2010 and 2011. As a result, the Doha Peace Agreement—or the Doha Document for Peace in Darfur (DDPD)—was signed in July 2011 between the Government of Sudan and the Liberation and Justice Movement (LJM) (comprised of 11 rebel factions), with the rejection of the JEM as well as the two main factions of the SLA (Zapata, 10 January 2012; UNAMID, 2015).

2.2.2.1.3 The East Sudan conflict

In the east of the country, another conflict was also steadily intensifying. For years, the people of Eastern Sudan have suffered from political, economic, and social marginalization, with the government of Sudan failing to provide them with basic services, undermining their traditional authorities, and excluding them from the political sphere (Eberhard, NA; Young, May 2007). These historical grievances led the Beja Congress (BC) (a political group in East Sudan) to join the National Democratic Alliance (NDA)[5] and launch an armed struggle in the early 1990s. However, with the signing of the CPA in 2005 and the withdrawal of the SPLM/A from the alliance, the NDA did not last long enough to achieve its goals and the eastern rebellion was largely disintegrated (Young, May 2007: 11).

After the withdrawal of the SPLM/A, the Beja Congress joined the Rashaida Free Lions to form the Eastern Front (EF) in early 2005 to continue its armed struggle against the Government of Sudan. However, "weak leadership, lack of a clear political program, poor organization, and dependence on

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[5] The National Democratic Alliance was formed in 1989 following the military coup that brought Omar Hassan Al-Bashir to power in Sudan. It is an umbrella organization formed of a number of Sudanese political parties committed to ending Al-Bashir's regime and bringing about a 'New Sudan' free of marginalization.

Eritrea contributed to the failure of the military campaign" (Young, May 2007: 9). Eritrean mediation succeeded in bringing the two warring parties to the negotiation table, and the Eastern Sudan Peace Agreement (ESPA) was signed between the Government of Sudan and the Eastern Front on 14 October 2006 (Gettleman, 15 October 2006; International Crisis Group (ICG), 26 November 2013). However, despite the power and wealth-sharing arrangements defined in the ESPA, the partial implementation of its provisions has led to the flaring of violence and conflict throughout the following years, threatening the stability of the region (Eberhard, NA; ICG, 26 November 2013).

2.2.2.1.4 The Two Areas and Abyei

In Sudan's "new South"—South Kordofan and the Blue Nile states, collectively referred to as the "Two Areas"—a new, vicious war erupted shortly after a period of relative calm following the signing of the CPA (De Alessi, August 2015; Eberhard, NA). The conflict, which is deeply rooted in decades of ethno-religious cleavages, socio-economic marginalization and political exclusion, erupted in South Kordofan-and later expanded in the Blue Nile in the months leading up to the secession of South Sudan in 2011 (Casola, 22 May 2020; De Alessi, August 2015).

According to De Alessi (August 2015):

> Despite their crucial participation in the SPLM/A-led rebellion, the demands of the peoples of the two strategic areas on the North–South border were not properly addressed during the CPA negotiations. While the agreement included two protocols to resolve the local political, security, and economic dynamics at play in Blue Nile and South Kordofan, the CPA generally compromised the needs of the northern constituencies for a national solution to the problem of Sudan (p. 13).

The long-standing grievances of social, economic, and political oppression and marginalization, and the failure of the CPA to address the demands of the population of the Two Areas (exacerbated by the secession of South Sudan without the implementation of the proposed popular consultation), led to an extended conflict between the government and the Sudan People's Liberation Army–North (SPLA-N)[6]. This has resulted in huge flows of refugees, internal displacements, and a fast-deteriorating

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[6] The military arm of the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement–North, the opposition party created by the northern cadres of the SPLM, situated in South Kordofan and the Blue Nile states (the Two Areas).

humanitarian situation in the southern region (Casola, May 2020; De Alessi, August 2015: 13–14). The situation in the south was further exacerbated by the breakout of renewed fighting in the contested Abyei region in March 2011, following a failure to carry out the agreed-upon referendum to determine the future of the contested region as stipulated in the CPA (Eberhard, NA; UNMIS, 2020).

In late 2011, in response to the government's military campaigns in the Two Areas and Darfur, the Sudan People's Liberation Movement–North (SPLM-N) joined forces with the Sudan Liberation Army–Minni Minnawi (SPLA-MM), the Sudan Liberation Army–Abdul Wahid Nur (SLA-AA), and the Justice and Equality Movement, and established the Sudanese Revolutionary Front (SRF). The alliance, which was joined by ex-combatants from the Eastern Front at a later stage, aimed at coordinating military action in conflict areas to topple Al-Bashir's regime (*Aljazeera*, 13 November 2011; *Sudan Tribune*, 3 October 2013).

Unlike in Darfur and Eastern Sudan, regional and international diplomatic attempts at resolving the on-going conflict in the Two Areas failed to culminate in a peace agreement between the Government of Sudan and the rebels in the south. In February 2012, a tripartite proposal by the UN, the AU, and the League of Arab States for the delivery of humanitarian assistance in the Two Areas failed after the Government of Sudan rejected its implementation and continued the obstruction of aid delivery to the conflict areas (De Alessi, August 2015: 46; Eberhard, NA). In addition to this, rounds of negotiations between the Government of Sudan and the SPLM-N—mediated by the African Union High-Level Implementation Panel on Sudan and South Sudan (AUHIP), headed by former South African President Thabo Mbeki—failed to bring the ongoing conflict to a conclusion (De Alessi, August 2015: 64–66; Casola, May 2020; Sudan Democracy First Group, 17 February 2017).

The AUHIP[7] initially succeeded in mediating a framework agreement between the Government of Sudan and the SPLM-N on the political and security arrangements in the Blue Nile and South Kordofan States in June 2011 (*Sudan Tribune*, 29 June 2011). However, the agreement was rejected by President

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[7] The AUHIP was originally established by the African Union Peace and Security Council in October 2009 with a mandate to provide support to the Sudanese parties in their implementation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement and the Darfur Peace Agreement. This included supporting the preparations for South Sudan's referendum in January 2011, and facilitating the post-referendum and post-secession negotiations between Sudan and South Sudan, including issues related to the two areas of South Kordofan and Blue Nile State.

Omar Al-Bashir days after it was signed, ending attempts to find a political solution to the conflict prior to its escalation (De Alessi, August 2015: 14).

2.2.2.1.5 The AUHIP Roadmap process

After a period of failed attempts at bringing the fighting parties together, the AUHIP—with the support of the Inter-Governmental Authority on Development (IGAD)—succeeded in mediating direct negotiations between the Government of Sudan and the SPLM-N for the first time since the failed Framework Agreement in April 2013. However, with the signing of AU Peace and Security Council Communiqué 456 on 15 September 2014, the "two tracks" process for negotiations between the Government of Sudan and the armed groups in both Darfur and the Two Areas was established and formed the basis upon which the AU-sponsored negotiations resumed[8] (De Alessi, August 2015: 64; AUPSC, 2014).

In March 2016, the AUHIP proposed a "Roadmap Agreement", which included an agreement on the cessation of hostilities and security arrangements, as well as the delivery of humanitarian assistance to the conflict areas, leading to a comprehensive political solution that would be discussed at the National Dialogue (De Alessi, August 2015; Sudan Democracy First Group, 17 February 2017). The Roadmap Agreement was first signed unilaterally by the Government of Sudan in March 2016, and later by the Sudan Call Alliance[9] (including the armed movements in Darfur and the Two Areas) in August 2016 (*Sudan Tribune*, 9 August 2016; Roadmap Agreement, 2016). However, within months of its signature, the Roadmap process reached a dead-end on issues pertaining to the delivery of humanitarian assistance as well as other security arrangements, which gave the Sudanese Government the excuse to fast-track the political process without reaching an agreement with the armed movements (Sudan Democracy First

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[8] The demands of the armed groups in Darfur and the Two Areas included addressing local political and security dynamics in direct talks with Khartoum, including a cessation of hostilities for humanitarian purposes, before joining the government's comprehensive National Dialogue process initiated by President Al-Bashir in 2014. However, the Government demanded a ceasefire (with immediate rebel disarmament) ahead of any possible political agreement. The SPLM-N's demand for a local political arrangement includes the political and socio-economic autonomy of the Two Areas, based "on the kind of the Addis Ababa Agreement concessions to the southern region in 1972", with the integration of the SPLA-N into a reformed national army (through a proper security sector reform programme). Failing that, self-determination remains an option (De Alessi, August 2015: 65–66).

[9] On 3 December 2014, members of the armed and political opposition joined in the "Sudan Call" (labelled "a political declaration on the establishment of a state of citizenship and democracy"). Signatories included the SRF, the National Consensus Forces coalition of Sudanese political (unarmed) opposition parties, and the Civil Society Initiative (De Alessi, August 2015: 66).

Group, 17 February 2017). This was exacerbated by the split within the SPLM/A-N in mid-2017[10], which stalled the negotiation process leading to its indefinite suspension in December 2018 (Casola, May 2020; *Dabanga Sudan*, 14 December 2018).

2.2.2.1.6 The Juba Peace Process

With the overthrow of President Al-Bashir in April 2019, optimism regarding a comprehensive, lasting peace in Sudan flared up. The Constitutional Document for the transitional period signed between the Forces of Freedom and Change and the Transitional Military Council in August 2019, consolidating their power-sharing mechanism during the transitional period, defined "achieving a just and comprehensive peace"[11] as the first priority of the 39-months transitional period (Constitutional Document). This was further consolidated by the Juba Declaration of Principles signed between the transitional government, the Sudanese Revolutionary Forces (SRF), and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement–North (Hilu) (SPLM-N (Hilu)) on 12 September 2019 with South Sudanese mediation, laying down the foundations for the launch of a comprehensive peace process (Casola, May 2020; *Dabanga Sudan*, 12 September 2019; Forti, December 2019: 22). In addition, the Supreme Peace Council and the Peace Commission[12] were established a month later (*Sudan Tribune*, 12 October 2019).

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[10] Since March 2017, the SPLM-N was split into two factions: the SPLM-N (Aqar) headed by Malik Aqar, and the SPLM-N (Hilu) headed by Abdel-Aziz ElHilu. The Latter later withdrew from the SRF.

[11] Article 7 (1) of the Constitutional Document states that During the transitional period, state agencies should "Work on achieving a just and comprehensive peace, ending the war by addressing the roots of the Sudanese problem, treating its effects, taking into account the provisional preferential measures for war-affected regions, underdeveloped regions and the most affected groups."
Articles 67-69 under the title "Comprehensive Peace Issues" further details the peace process as follows:
-   Article 67 b) states that a peace agreement should be completed within six months of the signing of the Draft Constitutional Declaration.
-   Articles 67 (c) and (d) require women to participate in all levels of the peace procedure and for United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 to be applied, while guaranteeing their rights through conducting legal reforms.
-   Articles 67 (e) (f) (g) list mechanisms for implementing the comprehensive peace process (stopping hostilities, opening humanitarian assistance corridors, prisoner releases and exchanges; amnesties for political leaders and members of armed opposition movements; transitional justice and accountability for crimes against humanity and war crimes and trials in national and international courts.
-    Article 68 defines the pillars for peace negotiations.
-   Article 69 states that the comprehensive peace agreements signed between the transitional authority and the armed movements shall be included in the Constitutional document in accordance with its provisions (Constitutional Document).
[12] The Supreme Peace Council is comprised of members of the Sovereign Council, the Prime Minister, the Minister of Cabinet Affairs, the Minister of Justice, and the Minister of Federal Government, as well as three experts.

The Juba Peace Process, which started in October 2019 between the Government of Sudan and the SRF and SPLM-N (Hilu) separately, is considered a shift from the past conventional piecemeal approach adopted by the previous Sudanese governments in dealing with conflict in Sudan. It relies on a more comprehensive methodology that deals with all the contentious issues in parallel geographical tracks (the Darfur track, the Two Areas track, the Eastern track, the Central track, and the Northern track). It was further carried out in a context of a "general cease-fire" decree issued by the Sudanese sovereign council as a confidence-building measure from the government to push the negotiations forward (*Dabanga Sudan*, 16 December 2019).

The launching of the Juba negotiations achieved a great breakthrough between the government and the armed groups on multiple issues. However, the process is considered to have fallen short of achieving "comprehensive" peace due to the absence of the SLA-AA from the Darfur track negotiations; the faction withdrew from the SRF and boycotted the negotiations until "peace is restored in Darfur" (*Dabanga Sudan*, 18 May 2020). This was further complicated by the deadlock between the government and the SPLM-N (Hilu) regarding the latter's long-standing position on the cancellation of Shari'a law and the establishment of a secular state in Sudan (Casola, May 2020; *Dabanga Sudan*, 27 December 2019; 14 January 2020; 18 May 2020; 3 July 2020). In addition to this, internal disputes on the part of Eastern Sudan track negotiators due to issues related to lack of coordination and consultation led to the prolonging of the peace process, which was finally concluded almost a year later (*Dabanga Sudan*, 28 February 2020; 6 July 2020; 8 July 2020; 8 July 2020; Dahir, 31 August 2020).

The Sudanese Comprehensive Peace Agreement was signed in Juba on 31 August 2020 between the Government of Sudan and the SRF, in the absence of both the SPLM-N (Hilu) and the SLA-AA (Dahir, 31 August 2020; *Sudan Tribune*, 31 August 2020). A few days later, on 3 September 2020, the Sudanese Prime Minister signed a "Joint Agreement" with the SPLM-N (Hilu) in which the parties agreed to continue the cessation of hostilities. The agreement also included maintaining the armed status of the SPLM-N (Hilu) until security arrangements could be agreed upon by the parties to the conflict, and until "separation between religion and state" is actualized (*Dabanga Sudan*, 4 September 2020; *The New York Times*, 4 September 2020). To date, the SLA-AA—mainly located in Central Darfur—is refusing to join any peace negotiations with the government.

2.2.2.2 Post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts in Sudan

Despite the various agreements aimed at ending the multiple conflicts and achieving political stability in Sudan, the country represents a challenging environment for peacebuilding. The conflicts in Sudan are complex, interrelated, deeply rooted in social and historical grievances, and largely influenced by complex regional and international dynamics (Ahmad, 2010: 1; Sørbø, 2005: 1).

Following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in 2005, a post-conflict peacebuilding process commenced in Sudan led by the United Nations and the African Union in partnership with a large number of international and local non-governmental organizations working in Sudan. The process focused in its first phases on providing immediate humanitarian assistance and reconstruction to the conflict-affected areas, and gradually moved to more comprehensive, longer-term developmental and peacebuilding projects and initiatives that focused on consolidating peace and civil stability in the different regions (interviews with international peacebuilding officers, Khartoum, December–March 2020).

The first major UN involvement in Sudan started with "Operation Rainbow" during the Second Sudanese Civil War in 1986, supported by several donor governments and managed by the World Food Program (WFP) to provide humanitarian aid to both sides of the civil war in Sudan. However, due to obstacles encountered from both parties of the conflict, the operation failed to achieve its mandate and was eventually aborted (Ojaba, Leonardo & Leonardo, 2002: 670). This was followed in 1989 by "Operation Lifeline Sudan" (OLS), which was launched following a tripartite agreement between the UN, the Government of Sudan, and the SPLM/A to provide humanitarian assistance to both sides of the conflict. The OLS—which functioned on the basis of northern and southern sectors—was managed by UN agencies and included more than 40 other international aid organizations (Ojaba, Leaonardo & Leonardo, 2002: 670–671; Maxwell, Santschi & Gordon, 2014: 3).

With the progress made in the IGAD-led peace talks between the Government of Sudan and the SPLM/A in 2004, the UNSC issued Resolution 1574 (2004) establishing a special political mission in Sudan—the United Nations Advance Mission in the Sudan (UNAMIS) (S/RES/1574 (2004)). UNAMIS was mandated "to facilitate contacts with the parties concerned and to prepare for the introduction of an envisaged UN

peace support operation" following the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement, and to provide support for the African-led mediation efforts[13] (UNMIS, 2020).

Parallel to the escalating crisis in Darfur, the role of UNAMIS in Sudan expanded to provide political support to the AU mediation process. In addition, it provided technical and financial support for the deployment and management of the African Union Mission in Sudan (AMIS), established by the AU Summit in 2004 to monitor the implementation of the Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement (HCFA) between the conflicting parties (UNMIS, 2020; Human Rights Watch, 2006).

After the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement in January 2005, the UNSC—based on the recommendation of the Secretary-General—established a multidimensional peace support mission mandated to support the implementation of the CPA, as well as focus on areas of security, governance, and humanitarian and development assistance (UNMIS; S/RES/1590 (2005)). Based on the UNSC Resolution 1590 adopted in March 2005, the UNMIS was established, comprised of military, police, and civilian components, with headquarters in Khartoum and a Joint Monitoring Coordination Office in Juba (UNMIS, 2020; Breidlid & Stensland, 2011).

In addition to its overall political mandate of providing good offices and support to the conflict parties in their implementation of their CPA commitments[14], the UNMIS played a role in peacebuilding in the conflict areas (UNMIS, 2020; Breidlid & Stensland, 2011). Being an integrated mission, the UNMIS worked closely with the UN Country Team in Sudan in coordinating and planning programmes and initiatives aiming at consolidating peace at the national level. In addition to this, the Civil Affairs Division (CAD) of the mission played a significant role in providing support to authorities and local communities in areas relating to local peacebuilding— "including conflict management and reconciliation, political analysis, and support to political space and governance structures at the sub-national level" (Breidlid & Stensland, 2011: 20).

However, due to issues related to lack of access to remote locations, as well as its non-implementing mandate, the UNMIS became largely dependent on government authorities as well as on UN and non-UN

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[13] The Secretary-General's Special Representative for the Sudan was appointed as the head of UNAMIS to lead the UN support to the IGAD-mediated talks on the north-south conflict, and the AU mediated talks on the conflict in Darfur.

[14] Particularly with regard to the redeployment of forces, reaching an agreement over the disputed Abyei region, and preparing for the national elections of 2011 and the 2011 referendum.

partners in the implementation of peacebuilding initiatives. This has largely reduced the UNMIS conflict management and peacebuilding work to reporting, monitoring, providing logistical support, and responding to CPA violations, rather than preventing conflict (Breidlid & Stensland, 2011: 32–33).

With the escalating crisis in Darfur, the UNSC adopted Resolution 1706 on 31 August 2006, expanding the UNMIS mandate to include its deployment to Darfur to support the implementation of the Darfur Peace Agreement and the Humanitarian Ceasefire Agreement, and the resolution to protect civilians and internally displaced persons (IDPs) (UNMIS, 2020; S/RES/1706(2006)). However, the deployment of UNMIS to Darfur could not be implemented due to the opposition of the Sudanese government, which decided to terminate the mission following the conclusion of the referendum in January 2011 and the secession of South Sudan on 9 July 2011 (UNMIS, 2020).

Aiming to overcome the rejection of the Sudanese government for deploying a UN-based mission in response to the growing atrocities in the Western Darfur region, the UNSC and the AU Peace and Security Council (AUPSC) worked together on supporting the already existing African mission on the ground (AMIS). This included increasing its military strength, as well as the introduction of civilian police, human rights and humanitarian affairs components, and expanding its mandate to an "enhanced observer mission" (Human Rights Watch, 2006: 17–22). However, with the escalation of the conflict, the mission's limited mandate and operational resources fell short of fulfilling its growing responsibility to protect civilians. And with the Sudanese government's continued opposition to the reconfiguration of the AMIS into a UN peacekeeping mission, subsequent negotiations culminated in the creation of the first hybrid AU-UN mission in Africa (Forti, December 2019: 2–4; UNMIS, 2020).

The African Union/United Nations Hybrid Mission in Darfur was officially established by UNSC Resolution 1769 (2007), with a mandate to protect civilians, facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and support the political process through mediating between the Government of Sudan and the armed movements in Darfur (S/RES/1769 (2007); UNAMID, 2015). Shortly after that, in response to the breakout of conflict in Abyei following the failure to carry out a referendum determining the future of the contested region as laid out by the CPA, the UNSC established the United Nations Interim Security Force for Abyei (UNISFA) on 27 June 2011. The UNSC resolution 1990 (2011) mandated the UNISFA to monitor the borders between North and South Sudan, facilitate the delivery of humanitarian assistance, and protect civilians

and humanitarian workers in Abyei (UNISFA, 3 September 2014)[15]. In addition to its peacekeeping mandate, the UNISFA engaged in local peacebuilding in the Abyei region through a number of community-based peace initiatives aiming at strengthening inter-communal relationships; maintaining stability; fostering inter-communal reconciliation; and supporting the ongoing efforts of non-governmental organizations engaging in peacebuilding (UNISFA 3 September 2014).

Meanwhile, with the successive failures of mediation efforts attempting at achieving an inclusive peace agreement in Darfur, and the Sudanese government's successive military victories against the armed groups, the AUPSC and the UNSC initiated the withdrawal/transition[16] of UNAMID as set out in UNSC Resolutions 2368 (2017) and 2429 (2018) (Forti, December 2019: 1).

According to the two resolutions, the UNAMID transition focused on reducing the size and scope of the mission's military peacekeeping operations in Darfur, with a potential exit in June 2020. Moreover, it prioritized collaboration between UNAMID and the UN Country Team (UNCT) through the creation of "UN State Liaison Functions (SLFs)[17]", with the aim of implementing peacebuilding programmes in Darfur states from which UNAMID has withdrawn, as well as providing sustainable solutions to the critical drivers of conflict as part of conflict prevention efforts (Forti, December 2019: 7–8; UNAMID, 2019). However, with the overthrow of President Al-Bashir in April 2019, discussions regarding the future role of UNAMID during the transitional period culminated in the adoption of UNSC resolution 2525—on 4 June 2020—extending UNAMID's mandate until 31 December 2020, while maintaining its current troop and police ceilings during this period (UN, 4 June 2020).

Parallel to this extension, the UNSC, in response to an official request from the Government of Sudan, adopted Resolution 2524 on 4 June 2020, establishing the UNITAMS (S/RES/2424 (2020)). The new mission is mandated to assist the transitional government in meeting the objectives set out in the Constitutional Document; support the implementation of peace agreements in conflict affected areas; assist in national-led peacebuilding efforts and strengthening of human rights and rule of law institutions; as well as facilitate

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[15] On 14 May 2020, UNSC resolution 2519 (2020) extended the mandate of the UNISFA for an additional six months (UN).

[16] Transition from a peacekeeping mission to a peacebuilding mission.

[17] The SLFs establish a link between peacekeeping and peacebuilding and contribute towards preventing a disruption of the peace continuum, especially in states where active conflict has ceased. It focuses the work of the UN to preserve and build upon peacekeeping gains and offers an opportunity for development partners to invest in Darfur's development through a joint UN conflict analysis and planning (UNAMID).

international support to economic reform (UN, 4 June 2020). The UNITAMS was expected to complete its deployment no later than 1 January 2021 (UN, 2020).

In addition to the regional and international governmental peacebuilding efforts, a large number of international and local non-governmental organizations—including faith-based organizations—have been working on peacebuilding and reconstruction in Sudan. Their work ranges from providing humanitarian relief and assistance to conflict-affected and conflict-prone areas, to longer-term projects that aim at sustaining peace and political and social stability in the various regions in Sudan (Ati, 2006; Assal, 2016; Mans & Ali, October 2006).

2.3 CONCLUSION

The background on Sudan reflects a history riddled with conflict and instability. The post-independence history of Sudan has witnessed destructing conflicts that have had long-lasting effects on its territorial integrity and development. Against this backdrop, Sudanese women have been largely excluded from peace processes and formal peacebuilding structures. This "tradition of exclusion" has been a defining character perpetuated in all formal/official Sudanese peace negotiations, irrespective of the great contributions made by Sudanese women to peacebuilding efforts at the local and more informal levels, or the impact of the conflict on their livelihoods. Within this context, the role of religion as a dominant aspect of the Sudanese cultural identity cannot be dismissed in any attempt to understand the factors affecting the participation (or non-participation) of Sudanese women in peacebuilding processes. Religion has always been a defining factor in the Sudanese cultural and legal systems, and has played an important role in peace and conflict throughout its history.

Thus, through providing a brief overview of the socio-political dynamics in Sudan and its history of conflict and peace, this chapter sets the stage for understanding the peacebuilding context in Sudan, as well as the different dynamics impacting the role of Sudanese women in peacebuilding processes.

CHAPTER 3: CONCEPTUAL/LITERATURE REVIEW ON WOMEN, RELIGION, AND PEACEBUILDING

3.1 INTRODUCTION

Women and religion are key concepts in peace and conflict studies. The fields of "women and peacebuilding" and "religious peacebuilding" have developed in parallel with the adoption of the UNSC Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, and the international developments highlighting the important role of religion and religious actors in both conflict and peace. Scholarship in both fields has addressed the critical roles of both women and religion in peace processes, calling for their involvement and inclusion in the different stages of peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

However, the convergence between the two fields remains largely lacking. The "women and peacebuilding" field has ignored religious dynamics in studying the impact and the roles of women in peace processes. Similarly, the field of "religious peacebuilding" has been blind to the various contributions women religious actors—or women inspired by their faith—make to building sustainable peace in conflict-affected areas. An intersectional analysis between the two fields will enhance both fields' understandings of the drivers of conflict, as well as potential avenues for its resolution and transformation (Steffansson, 2018).

Building on the above, this chapter provides a conceptual framework for the three central concepts to the study (gender, religion, and peacebuilding), as well as a thematic literature review on their intersection. Moreover, the chapter operationalizes the three concepts as well as their linkages to the case study of Sudan with the aim of demonstrating the existing gap in research and literature on the convergence between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan and the impact of religion on the peacebuilding agency and roles of Sudanese women.

3.2 CONCEPTUAL REVIEW

Prior to understanding the linkages between women and religion and their impact on peacebuilding processes, the chapter conceptualizes the key elements of gender, religion, and peacebuilding, and their application within the context of Sudan.

3.2.1 Gender

"Gender is not a synonym for women" (Carver, 1996). It rather refers to the socially ascribed and learnt behaviours and expectations attributed to masculinity and femininity. As such, it is differentiated from "sex", which refers to the biological characteristics that distinguish between men and women (Runyan & Peterson, 2014: 2).

According to the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN Women):

> Gender refers to the social attributes and opportunities associated with being male and female and the relationships between women and men and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and those between men. These attributes, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. They are context/time-specific and changeable[18] (UN, NA).

However, the concept of gender, as now understood in social sciences, was the subject of an extensive academic debate during the 20th century, before being officially integrated in feminist studies as a distinct analytical category in the 1970s. The emergence of the concept of gender in academic debate can be traced back to the early 20th century. With the emergence of theories of social construction, social scientists questioned theories of biological determinism and the categories on which it relied, not only with regard to sex, but also race, ethnicity, national character, sexuality, criminality and mental illness (Meyerowitz, 2008: 1353).

In *Sex and temperament in three primitive societies*, Margaret Mead (1935) raised the rather revolutionary idea that concepts of gender were cultural, not biological, and could vary in different environments. However, with the dominance of biological views on the study of male and female behaviour in the 1940s and 1950s, her views were regarded as outdated (Conway, Bourque, & Scott, 1987: XXII).

By the mid-20th century, the idea of gender as a social and cultural construct began to resurface in different fields of social sciences. In Anthropology and Sociology, "sex roles" were used to refer to the "culturally determined expected behavior of women and men", whereas "sexual status" was used to refer

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[18] https://www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/conceptsandefinitions.htm

to the different social rankings accorded to men and women in different cultures. In psychology, the phrases "psychological sex" and "sex-role identification" were used in reference to a person's sense of self as male of female (Meyerowitz, 2008: 1354).

During this time, the gender debate was largely dominated with questions regarding the "location" of gender -i.e. whether individuals are inherently gendered, or whether gender is a social and cultural construct. Discussions on gender were mostly divided between "essentialists" and "social constructionists" (Marriage and Family Encyclopedia, NA). Essentialists argued that the behavioural differences between men and women are fundamental and rooted in biological sex differences. They used biological and evolutionary evidence to support their assumptions regarding the inherent differences between men and women and did not differentiate in their findings between "sex" and "gender" (Anselmi & Law, 1998). Social Constructionists, on the other hand, situated gender differences in cultural expectations for what are appropriate behaviour and characteristics for male and female. They analysed the conditions that are associated with similarities or differences between men and women and differentiated between "sex" as a biological category and "gender" as a social category (Anselmi & Law, 1998).

With the widespread of women's movements in the 1970s, Western feminists appropriated the term "gender" adding an additional interest in research on women's experience to the traditional concern of social historians to understand the lives outside official power structures. They rejected the essentialist views that accounted for natural or biological reasons to explain gender roles and differences; developed theoretical approaches to understand "how perceptions of sex differences operated in language, psyche, and symbolic order"; and questioned whether gender and gender roles were "necessary" or "good" (Conway, Bourque, & Scott, 1987; Meyerowitz, 2008: 1355). Gender became largely known as Joan Scott defined it: "a constitutive element of social relationships based on perceived differences between the sexes", as well as a "primary way of signifying relationships of power" (Scott, 1986: 1067).

However, this feminist debate was largely criticized on the very theoretical foundation it was based on. Many Third World scholars rejected the use of the term gender by Western feminists and academics as a universal concept. They contended that Western feminists adopted a reductionist approach in their treatment of gender as a homogeneous category of analysis, subjected to the same forms of oppression regardless of the different historical and cultural contexts. They also criticized the focus of western

feminism on "gender" and "gender inequality" as the main sources of oppression women are subjected to, largely ignoring other forms of oppression Third World women are subjected to (Crowley, 1991; Gilliam, 1991; Herr, 2014; Johnson-Odim, 1991; Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991; Narain, 2004; Waylen, 2005).

Within the African context, African feminists also rejected the "false universality" of the Western feminist conception of "gender", and its treatment as a homogeneous category that can be applied cross-culturally. They argued that the difficulty of applying Western feminist concepts to express and analyse African realities is the central challenge of African gender studies, presenting evidence from various models from African societies in which social relations and roles were not based on the male/female dichotomies inherent in Western gender categories (Amadiume, 2005; Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005; Njambi & O'Brien, 2005; Oyewumi, 2002).

The above criticisms gave rise to a body of feminist literature on the socio-cultural construction of gender and its implications for feminist and gender studies. Judith Lorber (1997) differentiates between three broad categories of feminist perspectives with regard to their theories of gender equality and the gendered social order: reform feminisms, gender- resistant feminisms and gender -revolution feminisms. She contends that the main point feminists across the three categories stressed about with regard to gender inequality is that it is deeply ingrained in the structure of societies, and thus social and not individual solutions are required to achieve the aspired equality (Lorber, 1997).

Contemporary gender studies recognize the different manifestations of the concepts of gender and sex, which are impacted by the variations in ethnicity/race, class, sexuality, and other cultural and identity categories, which largely shape gender roles and identities. According to Runyan and Peterson (2014: 3):

> Because the particular characteristics associated with femininity and masculinity vary significantly across cultures, races, classes and age groups, there are no generic women and men (or other sexes or genders). Our gender identities, loyalties, interests and opportunities are intersected and crosscut by countless dimensions of "difference", especially those associated with ethnicity/race, class, national, and sexual identities.

Moreover, given the diversity in gender and gender roles and behaviours, it cannot be analysed separately from the context in which it operates. Gender is a socio-culturally specific construction, in which the socio-

cultural and historical contexts of a given society play a significant role in shaping its roles, identities, and expectations.

In addition to this, the social, cultural, and historical conditions that impact the expected gender roles and identities in a given context are not constant. They are largely determined by the diversity and complexity of the interactions between "a wide range of economic, social, political and religious institutions", resulting in differing gender categories that are both time- and space-bound (Conway, Bourque, & Scott, 1987: XXII).

Another category that needs to be taken into consideration when analysing the concept of gender is the role of individuals vis-à-vis their socially assigned gender roles. Individuals' interpretation and reaction to their expected roles, and their perceptions of their own gender identity are significant factors that can significantly impact those socially and culturally proscribed roles and expectations and push gender boundaries. Such boundaries "like those of class, are drawn to serve a variety of political, economic and social functions"; they are "often movable and negotiable" (Conway, Bourque, & Scott, 1987: XXIII).

Building on the above discussion, the thesis—in examining the roles of women in peacebuilding processes in Sudan and the impact of religion, as an integral part of Sudanese culture and identity, on their participation—adopts a definition of gender as a socio-cultural concept. According to this definition, the concept of gender refers to the social and cultural acquired roles and behaviours associated with men and women, taking into account the specific historical and cultural context of Sudan and its impact on social and gender roles and dynamics within Sudanese society, as well as the role religion plays in this regard. However, rather than analysing the different gender roles in peacebuilding within Sudanese society, the thesis confines the focus of its research to the role of Sudanese women—largely influenced by religion and culture—in the peacebuilding domain.

Moreover, adopting a conception of gender as a socio-cultural construct gives an insight into Sudanese society itself, and the significant role of religion in its culture, political and legal structure, as well as its trajectory of conflict and peace. In addition, studying gender (women's) roles in peacebuilding helps us understand the role of conflict in changing gender roles in different parts of Sudan, and the extent to which religion has impacted those socially assigned—and in some instances, shifting—roles.

3.2.2 Religion

The debate and the critique of the concept of religion have among other things highlighted the problems of subjectivity and biased preconceptions in scholarly work. They have made us aware of how our theories, and our implicit prejudices and preconceptions, can influence and restrict what we as scholars define as religion. And questions have been raised as to the issues of power involved in who gets to decide what counts as religion (Lindberg, 2009:86).

The concept of "religion" is considered one of the most debated concepts in social sciences. Attempts to conceptualize religion have undergone substantive academic discussions resulting in different and contesting definitions of the concept that led to its rejection altogether in some cases, and being deemed impossible to define in others (Beyers, 2017; Gunn, 2003; Lindberg, 2009). However, despite the lack of a general theory of religion, definitions of religion typically cover at least one of the three principal theories about religion: "religion in its metaphysical or theological sense; religion as it is psychologically experienced by people; and religion as a cultural or a social force" (Gunn, 2003: 193–194).

Two definitions are much referred to in this regard. The first is E. B. Tylor's (1970) definition of religion as a "belief in spiritual beings" (Lindberg, 2009: 91). The second is Clifford Geertz's (1976) definition, which considers religion as "a system of symbols which acts to establish powerful, pervasive and long-lasting moods and motivations in men by formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and clothing the conceptions with such an aura of factuality that the moods and motivation seem uniquely realistic" (Beyers, 2017: 3). And while the first definition highlights the central characteristic of religion in its metaphysical form, the second addresses the psychological impact of religion on its followers and situates it in a cultural and social context (Lindberg, 2009: 92).

The above examples fall into the categorization of the definitions of religion into two main approaches: the substantive approach and the functional approach to understanding religion. According to this categorization, the substantive approach is primarily concerned with the content of a certain religion and the principles and norms it articulates, while the functional approach focuses on the role of religion and both its social and psychological functions with regard to its group of followers (Lindberg, 2009; Nsubuga, 2013; Van Gaalen, 2015).

Substantive definitions of religion have also been referred to as "essential" definitions. As such, according to this approach, "what religions share are certain patterns in the essence or content of all religious systems but not any non-religious world views" (Van Gaalen, 2015: 2). On the other hand, a functional definition of religion "is based on how religion operates in terms of its place in the social/psychological system", meaning the way religion impacts the mental and emotional lives of the believers, as well as the way it influences the society (Van Gaalen, 2015: 1).

Though largely criticized for being too inclusive and blurring the demarcating lines between religion and other phenomena, the functional approach to understanding religion developed as a reaction to the critique directed at substantive studies and definitions. Critics argued that the focus in literature on the content of religious beliefs—in addition to its false assumed universality—led scholars to ignore important aspects of religious expressions. This focus on the study of belief resulted in its detachment from religious practices and their interaction with socio-cultural conceptions on the one hand and denied the study of religion from capturing the diversity of religious practices and characters in contemporary and historical times on the other (Lindberg, 2009; Van Gaalen, 2015). Lindberg (2009: 88) explains this argument as follows:

> A one-sided focus on belief and belief systems served to detach belief from practice, raising an artificial boundary between religious beliefs and religious activities, and further veiling the interrelatedness of on the one hand cultural conceptions and religious beliefs, on the other social conditions and religious practices.

With this critique of substantive definitions, more emphasis has been directed towards studying religion as a "dynamic process" in a continuous interaction with cultural and societal conceptions, as well as to its role and functions—whether social or psychological—in the society (Lindberg, 2009; Van Gaalen, 2015).

As a counterpoint to scholarly attempts at defining the concept of religion, another trend that emerged from the academic debate regarding the concept of religion focused on the deconstruction of the concept. Literature that falls under this trend questions the concept of religion altogether. A number of scholars claimed that religion is merely an ideological social construction, situated in a particular historical period, and is part of a Western cultural conception, and thus should be ignored (Schilbrack, 2012), others criticized it on the basis of its non-universality and its inability to be applied as a general category (Lindberg, 2009:

89). This questioning of the concept of religion has been largely influenced by post-colonial theories, which considered religion as an "academic construction" that is both context-bound and influenced by "ethnocentric and Eurocentric biases", thus negating the possibility of a universal or ahistorical definition of the concept (Lindberg, 2009: 89).

In addition to the conceptualization and deconstruction of the concept of religion, the relationship between religion and culture has constituted a much-debated theme in the academic literature surrounding the concept of religion. According to a large number of scholars, the reciprocal interaction between religion and culture cannot be ignored: at the same time that religion is determined or influenced by culture, culture is also largely influenced by religion (Beyers, 2017: 2). The impact of culture on religion has been discussed in much literature under the concept of "religious acculturation". According to this concept, the interaction of religion with host culture(s) impacts the interpretation and practice of religion within a given society, consequently requiring a thorough consideration of the cultural and historical contexts of these interpretations and practices when analysing any given religion and its impact on the society (Gerami, 1996; Saadallah, 2004).

On the other hand, religion—as one of its functional aspects—plays a significant role in constructing identity and influencing the culture of a given society. Linda Woodhead differentiates between religion as belief and religion as identity marker. "Religion as belief refers to a religious interest in dogmas, doctrines and propositions. Whereas religion as identity marker refers to religion as a source of identity, either socially or as personal choice" (Beyers, 2017: 5). Within this context, religion and ethnicity—as important expressions of identity—are also strongly connected. People can be viewed in terms of their religion rather than their ethnicity, and religion can act as a powerful cultural identity marker of a certain race/nationality (Beyers, 2017: 7). According to Waggoner, religion no longer resides in the subjective consciousness of individuals but within culture or a social system, which requires a change in focus of the study of religion to "finding the location of the religion in the exterior to the subjective" (Beyers, 2017: 6).

Building on the above discussion, the thesis adopts a functional approach in studying the role of religion in peacebuilding, and its impact on the participation of women in peacebuilding processes. The thesis views religion from a constructivist standpoint, which takes into account the role of religion in impacting the social and politics dynamics within a given society, as well as in identity construction. In defining

religion, "constructivism draws on social theory and cultural anthropology to theorize secularism as an analytical category and explain how (religious) ideas and actors shape political outcomes" (Menchik, 2017: 564). It acknowledges the heterogeneous and context-specific nature of what constitutes religion, and thus the difficulty of offering a universal, comprehensive definition of the concept. It overcomes the rigidity of some definitions of religion, which assumes the constancy or universality of its content, through studying the conditions under which some aspects of a religious tradition become adopted or discarded. And most importantly to the thesis at hand, it identifies the interests of religious actors within their specific local context, as well as the impact of the specific interpretation of religion on the identity of the society (Menchick, 2017: 564–566).

The thesis takes into account the strong influence of religion in Sudanese society and the critical role it has played in shaping the political tradition of Sudan and its course of conflict and peace, as well as the role religion plays—as an integral part of the Sudanese culture—in influencing the gender roles and dynamics in Sudanese society. In examining the intersection of religion with women and peacebuilding in Sudan, the thesis focuses on the Islamic religion as a major component of Sudanese culture and identity, and the impact of its specific interpretation and integration within the Sudanese society on the different conflicts in Sudan, and on the inclusion of women and their participation in peacebuilding processes.

3.2.3 Peacebuilding

The practice of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction, as now known in peace and conflict literature, is argued to have been a common phenomenon in international politics since the end of the Second World War. However, the concept gained ample literary and theoretical attention after being introduced by the United Nations' "Agenda for Peace" document in 1992, which put the concept of peacebuilding on the international agenda and led to its becoming "one of the most discussed concepts in the fields of international politics, peace and conflict research and development studies" (Ryan, 2013: 26).

Despite being largely associated with the UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali and his "Agenda for Peace", the concept of peacebuilding was first coined by Johan Galtung in 1976 in his article "Three approaches to peace: peacekeeping, peacemaking and peacebuilding." Galtung (1976) regarded peacebuilding as a component of a tripartite conflict resolution structure composed of peacekeeping, peacemaking, and peacebuilding, in which mechanisms that "remove causes of wars and offer alternatives

to war in situations where wars might occur" must be found and built into the structure as a "reservoir for the system itself to draw upon" (Galtung, 1976: 298). He further built his conception of peacebuilding based on the distinction between "negative" and "positive" peace. According to this, peace was regarded as not just the mere absence of violence, but rather the achievement of social justice through maintaining "equal opportunities, fair distribution of power and material resources and equal protection by and in the face of the rule of law" (Chetail & Jütersonke, 2015: 1).

Departing from the above, the "Agenda for Peace" (Boutros-Ghali, 1992) linked the concept of peacebuilding to preventive diplomacy, peacemaking and peacekeeping as the four main areas of activities through which the United Nations and the international community would respond to contemporary conflicts. "Post-Conflict Peacebuilding" was defined as "an action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict. Preventive diplomacy seeks to resolve disputes before violence breaks out; peacemaking and peacekeeping are required to halt conflicts and preserve peace once it is attained. If successful, they strengthen the opportunity for post-conflict peace-building, which can prevent the recurrence of violence among nations and people" (par. 21).

This UN conception of post-conflict peacebuilding, as introduced in the agenda, was expanded in the "Supplement to an Agenda for Peace" (Boutros-Ghali, 1995) to also include conflict "prevention" mechanisms. The document also stressed the need for more attention to the "timing and modalities" of returning peacebuilding functions to local actors to preserve the gains or progress that have been achieved (Ryan, 2013: 29). Following the Supplement to the Agenda for Peace, a number of other UN documents (an Agenda for Development; an Agenda for Democratization; the Brahimi Report) further consolidated the concept of peacebuilding around four main pillars: security, development, democratization, and human rights (Ryan, 2013: 29–30). This was further materialized into the inauguration of the UN's "Peacebuilding Architecture" in 2005, including a Peacebuilding Commission (UNPBC), a UN Peacebuilding Support Office (UNPBSO), and a UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) (Chetail & Jütersonke, 2015: 1; Ryan, 2013: 30–31).

However, a number of criticisms were directed to the UN conception of post-conflict peacebuilding, as introduced in the "Agenda for Peace" and perpetuated in other UN documents. First, the framework of

sequential responses proposed by the agenda was criticized for conceptualizing peacebuilding exclusively as a "post-conflict" mechanism, which entails an unrealistic view of conflict as a recurrent phenomenon and promotes a limited definition of peacebuilding and what it means. Moreover, it gives a false impression of peacebuilding as inherently linked to peacekeeping and international external interventions in violent conflicts, thus failing to recognize instances where peace processes were locally led (Lederach, 1997; Ryan, 2013).

Second, the UN conception was criticized for adopting a state/structure-centric approach, which puts emphasis on formal structures and mechanisms, ignores the roles of NGOs and other forms of civil society organizations in peace processes, and blurs peacebuilding with state-building (Pugh, 2013; Ryan, 2013). In doing so, it was argued to give more attention to structural change as opposed to conflict-transformation, as well as underestimate the impact of the top-bottom approach of peacebuilding in causing potential conflict through its attempt to change the existing political and economic structures in deeply divided societies (Lederach, 1997; Pugh, 2013; Ryan, 2013).

Finally, the liberal underpinnings of the concept of peacebuilding, with its linkage to the failures and instabilities of capitalism and its exacerbation of the subaltern status of war-torn societies, came under attack (Pugh, 2013: 22; Ryan, 2013: 31–33). It was criticized for its focus on Western liberal mechanisms and structures, and its failure to consider the cultural specificities and normative distinctions of different societies (Steinberg, 2013: 36–38).

According to Chetail and Jütersonke (2015: 2), the concept of peacebuilding "remains a rather ambiguous affair", with very little agreement in literature on what it actually entails. While a number of authors adopted a socio-psychological/relational approach in defining peacebuilding that centralizes the role of relations to peacebuilding and conflict transformation (examples are Amisi, 2008; Galtung, 1976; Isike, 2009; Lederach, 1997), others attempted to institutionalize it by defining it in a strict operational mandate fashion (UN documents on peacebuilding; AU Peacebuilding Framework) (Chetail & Jütersonke, 2015: 2). And while an ample amount of literature in the field of peacebuilding is dedicated to addressing the definition of the concept, the main thematic issues surrounding it, and the challenges faced in its implementation, a number of studies attempted to categorize the literature dedicated to peacebuilding and the different approaches to studying it.

Michael Pugh (2013) offers two categories among which peacebuilding literature can be reviewed: the "problem solving" approach and the "foundational" critique. He argues that while practitioners and policy makers are mostly concerned with the problem-solving approach to peacebuilding, aimed at enhancing the effectiveness and functionality of peacebuilding mechanisms, academics are divided among studying the theoretical underpinnings of the concept and questioning the foundations and the framework of ideas upon which the system and practice of peacebuilding is based (Pugh, 2013: 11).

Similarly, Cousens, Kumar, and Wermester (2001) identify "deductive approaches" versus "inductive approaches" in the analysis of peacebuilding. Deductive approaches describe the peacebuilding tools and capacities available to the organized international communities, where the content of peacebuilding can be deduced from the existing capacities and mandates of international agencies and organizations. Inductive approaches describe the particular conflict in question, its nature, intensity, and so on, where the content of peacebuilding is determined by the particular matrix of needs and capacities in individual cases (Cousens, Kumar, & Wermester, 2001: 5).

Departing from the foregoing discussion, the thesis adopts a broader understanding of "peacebuilding" based on John Lederach's conception, which views peace as a "dynamic social construct" and defines peacebuilding beyond post-accord reconstruction. According to him:

> Peacebuilding is understood as a comprehensive concept that encompasses, generates, and sustains the full array of processes, approaches, and stages needed to transform conflict toward more sustainable, peaceful relationships. The term thus involves a wide range of activities that both precede and follow formal peace accords (Lederach, 1997: 20).

Lederach suggests an integrated framework of peacebuilding that aims at a constructive transformation of conflicts through the building of new patterns, processes and structures. He argues that conflict transformation is a context-sensitive approach that responds to the changes caused by conflict on the "personal, relational, structural, and cultural dimensions" (Lederach, 1997: 83); and develops responses that promote peaceful change within them. Moreover, Lederach contends that a peacebuilding infrastructure based on this concept of conflict transformation" is made up of a web of people, their relationships and activities, and the social mechanisms necessary to sustain the change sought at all levels of the society (Lederach, 1997: 83–84).

Similarly, Isike (2009: 30) defines peacebuilding as:

> The processes and activities involved in normalizing relations and reconciling the latent differences between the disputing sides in a conflict with a view to enabling sustainable peace. It is an overarching concept that includes conflict transformation, restorative justice, trauma healing, reconciliation, development, and good leadership, which all have implications for conflict prevention.

His view, like that of Lederach, is based on a relational understanding of peacebuilding, which acknowledges the importance of relational, personal, and cultural dimensions in peacebuilding and conflict transformation, and thus allows for examining the impact of such factors in peace and conflict beyond the formal peacebuilding structures and mechanisms.

With regard to the thesis, applying a relational understanding of peacebuilding that encompasses all processes and activities entailed in transforming conflict and sustaining peace helps one to look beyond the limited participation of Sudanese women in formal peace processes and takes into account the "largely unacknowledged" informal peacebuilding initiatives Sudanese women are involved in. Moreover, through its centralization of relational, personal, and cultural dimensions in conflict transformation, this understanding of peacebuilding allows for studying the impact of religion—as an integral feature of the Sudanese culture and political tradition—on the level of participation and inclusion of women in these endeavours.

Based on this definition and the above categorization of approaches to defining peacebuilding, the peacebuilding processes referred to in this thesis include all the processes that aim at transforming conflict and consolidating peace, ranging from activism and mass action to formal peace negotiations and agreements. Thus, in its attempt to study the role of Sudanese women within these processes, the thesis adopts a relational conception of peacebuilding, which analyses peacebuilding based on a context-specific analysis of conflict and peace in Sudan, and the impact of the cultural and religious factors on women's peacebuilding efforts within this context.

3.3 GENDER, RELIGION, AND PEACEBUILDING

Upon combining the three main concepts under investigation, relevant literature could be categorized into three main themes; literature addressing the issue of women and peacebuilding, literature analysing the

role of religion in peacebuilding, and literature combining both women and religion in its analysis of peacebuilding.

3.3.1 Gender/women and peacebuilding

The unanimous adoption of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security in 2000 represented a landmark in the area of women and peacebuilding. Not only did it highlight the historical exclusion of women from peace processes despite the importance of their role within the context of conflict; it also stressed the importance of enhancing the inclusion of women in all aspects of peace and conflict resolution to achieve sustainable peace in conflict-ridden societies. Ever since the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325 and the resolutions and reports that followed it[19], which highlighted the various contributions women make to peace processes, much attention has been given to the role of women in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction processes. An ample amount of literature has been devoted to analysing the different ways women are affected by conflict, their roles in mediation and peacemaking, and finally the various roles they play in the processes and activities that bring about lasting peace within their communities. However, despite the increased attention, women remain to be inadequately included in these processes.

A review of the existing literature on women and peacebuilding reflects the division of research on women's contribution to peace processes into three main themes: the victimization of women and the impact of gendered violence on women; the participation of women in peacebuilding processes; and the challenges facing women's full inclusion in peace processes.

3.3.1.1 The victimization of women and peacebuilding: the impact of gendered violence on women, peace and conflict

Literature examining women's participation in peace processes has long focused on the victimization of women in war contexts and the impact of gendered violence on their exclusion from post-conflict reconstruction processes (Agbalajobi, 2010; Adrian-Paul, 2012; Anderlini, 2007; Cockburn, 2012; Cheldelin & Eliatamby, 2011; Jenkins & Reardon, 2009; Olonisakin, Barnes, & Ikpe, 2011; Runyan & Peterson, 2014; Schnabel & Tabyshalieva, 2012a; Schirch, 2012; Urdal & Che, 2015).

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[19] In addition to UNSC 1325, there are about seven other UNSC resolutions—UNSCR 1820 (2008), UNSCR 1888 (2009), UNSCR 1889 (2009), UNSCR 1960 (2010), and UNSCR 2106 (2013)—collectively constituting what has come to be known as the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda.

Scholars have given much attention to the different forms of violence women are subjected to in conflict and post-conflict contexts, as well as the differential gendered impact of conflict on women. Women were found to be the targets of different types of atrocities during conflict that included sexual violence, rape, sexual slavery, forced pregnancy, forced abortion, forced prostitution, and forced eviction, in addition to poverty and deteriorating health conditions (Agbalajobi, 2010: 236–237; Adrian-Paul, 2012: 237–238; Schirch, 2012: 56–57; Urdal & Che, 2015).

In the aftermath of conflict, women still suffered from different forms of gender-based violence and exploitation—both by warring parties and peacekeeping forces—largely compounded by changing gender roles and increased social responsibilities. In addition to this, women were found to constitute the largest groups of refugees and internally displaced persons, subject to high levels of interpersonal violence resulting from the wide spread of small arms after conflict. Moreover, they were found to be the most prone to a wide range of health problems including sexually transmitted diseases, decrease in maternal health and survival, as well as increase in alcohol and drug abuse, which are quite prevalent in post-conflict environments (Runyan & Peterson, 2014: 173; Schirch, 2012: 57–58; Schnabel & Tabyshaieva, 2012b: 14–15; Urdal & Che, 2015).

However, despite evidence of the differential impact of conflict and post-conflict violence on women, Barnes and Olonisakin (2011) note that the nature of "security as a gendered concept" is rarely recognized on the level of peace operations. This, according to Adrian-Paul (2012) and Schirch (2012), leads to a gap in their protection and their receiving of humanitarian assistance, increasing the potential for further violence and sexual harassment, as well as the reinforcement of pre-war forms of structural violence that give priority to men over women (Adrian-Paul, 2012: 238; Schirch, 2012: 58).

The different forms of violence women are subject to, as well as the impact of patriarchal dynamics on conflict, have also been the subject of further examination by scholars in the context of examining women's roles in peacebuilding. In her discussion of women's differential victimhood, Lisa Schirch (2012) proposes an analytical framework for studying the different types of violence against women. Taking into consideration the common analytical frameworks of violence that distinguish it into either private or public violence, or direct and structural violence, she categorizes the types of violence women are subject to into non-war violence, war violence, and post-war violence (Schirch, 2012: 54).

In addition to the different forms of violence women suffer from in conflict and post-conflict contexts, Schirch argues that women in non-war contexts are subject to different forms of structural violence imbedded in the different political, economic, religious, and educational structures and policies, which discriminate against women and "inhibit their abilities to meet their human needs" (Schirch, 2012: 54). Women are also subject to different forms of direct violence, including different forms of sexual violence, domestic violence, as well as psychological or mental violence in non-conflict environments (Schirch, 2012: 55–56). This "silent ongoing war against women and girls", according to her, impacts the stability of the community and its ability to respond to conflict and post-conflict crises (Schirch, 2012: 56).

This relationship between structural violence against women/patriarchy and conflict has been further examined by a number of scholars (Anderlini, 2007; Cockburn, 2012; Jenkins & Reardon, 2009; Runyan & Peterson, 2014). Cynthia Cockburn (2012) argues that patriarchal relations are among the causes of war and conflict. She proposes the concept of "the continuum of violence" to analyse the indirect link between gender violence and war, and the contribution of patriarchal dynamics to war through its focus on increased militarization and defence spending, contending that the achievement of peace must include a change of gender relations.

Similarly, Jenkins and Reardon (2009) argue that conflict transformation would not be possible without "recognizing, dismantling and forswearing various institutions and habits of patriarchy that we perceive as integral to the present global culture of violence", in which the multiple forms of gendered violence women are subject to in times of conflict and peace are interconnected (Jenkins & Reardon, 2009: 209). However, they depart from the above argument to argue that the impact of patriarchal dynamics on men has been largely absent from any discussions of this "gender war", and that an inclusive gender perspective—incorporating both men and women—is needed for the achievement of a sustainable peace (Jenkins & Reardon, 2009: 220–221).

Another strand of literature has criticized the excessive focus in academia and research on women's victimhood and its negative impact on both women and men (Agbalajobi, 2010; Anderlini, 2007; Cheldelin & Eliatamby, 2011). According to Cheldelin and Elitamby (2011), although women and children are adversely affected during conflict, the focus on women's victimhood in conflict and post-conflict contexts leads to misconceptions concerning men as victims of conflict, which highlights essentialist notions of

hyper-masculinity and ignores the vulnerability and suffering of men. In addition to this, it reinforces the idea that women's roles are limited to that of the victim (Cheldelin & Eliatamby, 2011).

Similarly, Anderlini (2007) and Cheldelin (2011) argue that the victim narrative, which has been associated with women in conflict and post-conflict situations, overlooks the resilience and agency demonstrated by women and the multiple formal and informal roles they play beyond their victimhood to consolidate peace and stability in their communities.

3.3.1.2 The role(s) of women in peacebuilding

With the increased national and international attention on the contributions of women to peace processes, an increasing amount of literature has focused on the different roles played by women in peacebuilding. Within this context, much attention has been directed at justifying the importance of including women in peacebuilding efforts, the role of women in peacemaking and formal peace processes, and the multiple roles they play in informal peacebuilding on the local and community levels.

3.3.1.2.1 The importance of women's inclusion in peacebuilding

To address concerns about the importance of including women in peacebuilding processes, a fair amount of research in this area has been concerned with establishing and justifying the importance of women's inclusion. Discussions around this issue have been broadly either essentialist or social constructionist in nature, with essentialist views arguing that women need to be included in peacebuilding initiatives because they are naturally more peaceful, and social constructionist arguments focusing on the different identities and experiences women can bring to these processes, making their contributions uniquely important (Adjei, 2019: 8).

Ann Tickner (2001) argues that the association of men with violence and conflict and women with peace "reinforces gender hierarchies and false dichotomies that contribute to the devaluation of both women and peace" (quoted in Schnabel & Tabyshalieva, 2012b: 20–21). Cheldelin and Eltiamby (2011) and Kronsell and Svedberg (2012) build on Tickner's notion of false dichotomies, arguing that it reinforces misconceptions of men's victimhood and non-violent masculinities. They contend that the socialization processes that place women in inferior and disadvantaged positions in many cultures largely contribute to women's capacity for peacemaking and peacebuilding, as well as shaping their conceptions of conflict and peace.

Similarly, Schirch (2012) contends that women are not equally peaceful. She argues that understanding women's capacity for peace "requires a more complex understanding of the social construction of gender and its interaction with ethnic, class and other forms of identity" (Schirch, 2012: 60). According to her, women's capacities for peacebuilding differ from men's in the ways women are differently socialized, the types of concerns and issues they bring to peacebuilding, the variety of social networks they are part of, and how their gender identities allow them to do peacebuilding activities while being regarded as more neutral and less political (Schirch, 2012: 62–65).

Schnabel and Tabhyshalieva (2012b) and Parashar (2012) argue that the association of women with peace and anti-war strategies has led to overlooking important aspects in the discourse on women and conflict and limited the understanding of women's subjectivity and agency in war and violent contexts. According to them, in addition to their roles in military institutions, women play a critical role in perpetuating conflict and intolerance in many instances, refuting such essentialist views of being inherently peaceful. Jenkins and Reardon (2009), on the other hand, adopt a different approach in their justification of the importance of women's inclusion in peacebuilding. They combine the essentialist and social-constructionist notions of the conception of gender, arguing that differences in behaviours and inclinations of women towards war and peace suggested by social-constructionist research could be biologically based (Jenkins & Reardon, 2009: 215–216).

In addition to the "essentialist versus social constructionist" debate concerning the inclusion of women in peacebuilding, a number of studies have adopted a more functional approach—related to the effectiveness of women's inclusion—in justifying the importance of women's participation in peacebuilding (Agbalajobi, 2010; Anderlini, 2007; Olsson & Gizelis, 2015; Schnabel & Tablyshalieva, 2012b; UNSC, 2010). The UN Secretary-General's report titled "Women's participation in peacebuilding" (2010) considers women as "crucial partners in shoring up three pillars of lasting peace: economic recovery, social cohesion, and political legitimacy" (UNSC, 2010: 3). The report contends that enabling women to contribute to peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction strategies is an integral factor in strengthening a country's resilience and ability to sustain peace efforts, and it calls for more gender-mainstreaming in peacebuilding and reconstruction efforts, as well as an increased role for women in decision-making processes (UNSC, 2010).

Building on the above, Schnabel and Tablyshalieva (2012b) contend that peace processes provide a unique opportunity to address the inherent inequalities and injustices that have contributed to the conflict, as well as to alter prevalent patterns and dynamics that governed gender relations and roles in the society. They argue that women's participation—which constitutes "a significant proportion in a society's future peace and conflict architecture"—is critical for achieving sustainable peace and stability, as well as lowering risks of continued gendered violence in post-conflict contexts (Schnabel & Tablyshalieva, 2012b: 3–4). Anderlini (2007) and Agbalajobi (2010) make similar arguments. According to Anderlini (2007), supporting the full and active participation of women in decision-making, particularly in countries emerging from conflict, is a key indicator of a shift away from the status quo that, in many instances, catalysed the conflict (Anderlini, 2007: 3–4). Agbalajobi (2010), on the other hand, contends that including women at the forefront of peacebuilding processes helps to break down traditional stereotypes in patriarchal societies and ensure that perpetrators are held accountable for violence committed against women and children (Agbalajobi, 2010: 239).

3.3.1.2.2 The roles of women in peacemaking and formal peacebuilding structures

Despite the growing literature on women's contributions to peace processes, little attention has been given to their roles in peacemaking and other formal peacebuilding structures. Research in this field has mainly focused on the exclusion of women from formal peace processes and the impact this has on peacebuilding (Anderlini, 2007; Bjarnegård & Melander, 2015; Ellerby, 2015; Karamé, 2012).

According to the UN Secretary-General's 2019 report on women, peace and security, women continue to be largely excluded from peace negotiations. In 2018, among six active UN-led or co-led processes, women were included in 14 out of 19 delegations (UNSC, 9 October 2019: 6). UN Women also supports this argument. According to its 2018 report on women's meaningful participation in peace processes, it was found that, between 1992 and 2018, women constituted only 13% of negotiators, 3% of mediators, and only 4% of signatories in major peace processes (UN Women, 2020).

Anderlini (2007) addresses a number of "excuses" for women's exclusion from formal peace processes. In addition to reasons related to fears of complicating the peace negotiations by adding more parties and issues to the peace table, as well as concerns pertaining to the absence of women from leadership positions, Anderlini argues that the exclusion of women, particularly those representing civil society

organizations, results from systemic flaws in the structure and process of peace negotiations. According to her, peace processes are modelled on traditional processes to end interstate wars, and thus lack the capacity and mechanisms to include additional actors to the warring parties (Anderlini, 2007: 58–63).

Schnabel and Tabyshalieva (2012b) and Karamé (2012) address the impact of women's exclusion from peace processes on the overall peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction structures. They contend that the absence—and purposeful exclusion—of women from post-conflict peace negotiations largely impacts post-conflict peacebuilding priorities and makes them less relevant to women and society at large. Moreover, according to Schirch (2012), the absence of women from peace talks and post-conflict settlements leads to the reinstatement of discrimination and marginalization, as well as the different forms of structural violence that were prevalent before the conflict, and has largely contributed to it, thus impacting the sustainability of peace processes (Schirch, 2012: 58).

Bjarnegård and Melander (2015) offer an opposing view in this regard. According to them, the correlation between women's inclusion and increased chances of peace needs to be re-examined in terms of what representation implies in different contexts. They argue that maintaining the focus of literature on the rights-based approach to justifying women's inclusion in decision-making structures, rather than the positive impact of their inclusion pertaining to peace, is central in this regard. Anderlini (2007), Peterson and Runyan (1999) and Schirch (2012), on the other hand, contend that women's increased participation in formal processes impacts the types of issues discussed on the agenda, as well as the dynamics that apply when negotiations are conducted (Anderlini, 2007: 74–75; Schirch, 2012: 63).

Other literature addresses the impact of women's participation in peace processes beyond the quantitative standpoint (Ellerby, 2015; Paffenholz et al., 2016). Paffenholz et al. (2016) provide a framework for analysing the participation of women in peace processes—beyond the inclusion/exclusion dichotomy—by offering a wider range of modalities where women leaders and organizations can have an influence on peace processes without necessarily being directly represented at the negotiations table. Unlike other literature in the field, the study explores the degree of women's participation in peace processes and the factors affecting their inclusion, on the sustainability of such processes, rather than focusing on their inclusion from a quantitative standpoint. It asserts that where women were able to exercise strong influence on a negotiations process, the chances of agreements being reached and

implemented were much higher than when women's groups exercised moderate, weak, or no influence (Paffenholz et al., 2016).

Ellerby (2015), on the other hand, notes that the number of agreements with provisions for women is constantly increasing, with more agreements focusing on elements of gendered-security and protection from sexual violence. She differentiates in this regard between "mere" and "actual" representation of women in peace negotiations, and the impact of these forms of representation with regard to increased gender mainstreaming in peacebuilding processes (Ellerby, 2015: 187).

3.3.1.2.3 The multiple roles of women in peacebuilding

Research on women and peacebuilding has also focused on the informal peacebuilding roles women play at the local level. Anderlini (2007) criticizes the prevailing narratives about the impact of violence and conflict on women, which focus on women's victimhood within the context of conflict while ignoring the different roles they assume throughout its different stages as agents and drivers of change. She explores the different aspects of women's engagement in cases of violence and conflict that go beyond the usual disposition of gender roles, and analyses the contributions women make at the grassroots and international levels in the areas of conflict prevention and peacebuilding.

In the same vein, Cheldelin and Eliatamby (2011) contend that women play active roles in all aspects of war and peacebuilding "as perpetrators, combatants, and sustainers of peace" (Cheldelin & Eliatamby, 2011: 11). They argue that women's roles in peacebuilding are not monolithic, and that their engagement in peacebuilding is a complex, context-specific phenomenon, whose nuances must be understood through a gendered lens.

Agbalajobi (2010) and Schirch (2012), in their analysis, go beyond the simple demonstration of the multiplicity of roles played by women in peacebuilding. They provide an analytical framework for studying women's roles, which divides them into four main categories: advocating for structural change; reducing direct violence; transforming relationships; and building structural capacity. According to these authors, women engage in policy advocacy and non-violent tactics to raise public awareness of violence, end conflict, promote human rights and increase women's participation. They participate through civil society organizations in providing assistance and relief aid to war victims and provide different psychological, physical, and social services to conflict-affected areas. They also play important roles at both formal and

grassroots levels to build relationships that heal trauma, address the root causes of conflict, and strengthen or rebuild community relationships. In addition to this, they engage in long-term programmes and projects for structural change in their communities, which aim to build the capacity of individuals and communities to prevent further violence and increase its resilience to any future conflict (Agbalajobi, 2010: 239; Schirch, 2012: 68).

Building on the above, Barnes and Olonisakin (2011) argue that local initiatives to promote peace within conflict-affected contexts are often overshadowed by UN-led peace operations. This, according to them, has resulted in inadequate attention being paid to the interaction between "formal" peacebuilding processes that exist within UN structures and the "informal" parallel processes carried out by women and other actors. They contend that "without conscious effort to foster and incorporate the alternative strategies that women use to advance gender-related objectives, valuable knowledge and insight is lost" (Barnes & Olonisakin, 2011: 10).

3.3.1.3 Challenges hindering women's full inclusion in peacebuilding processes

A number of studies on the role(s) of women in peacebuilding tackled the challenges facing women's peacebuilding agency and limiting their inclusion in peace processes (Adrian-Paul, 2012; Agbalajobi, 2010; Anderlini, 2007; Barnes & Olonisakin, 2011; Ellerby, 2015; Nakaya, 2011; Schnabel & Tabyshalieva, 2012b).

On the local level, both Agbalajobi (2010) and Schnabel and Tabyshalieva (2012b) point to a number of challenges and obstacles to women's post-conflict roles and participation in peacebuilding. According to them, women's participation is hindered because of the difficulties they suffer as a result of conflict, which impact their security and well-being and increase their economic and social burdens and responsibilities. Moreover, women are more likely to be subject to cultural pressures that hinder them from engaging in public arenas. The insufficient understanding of local culture and proper engagement with traditional institutions by external actors—as well as the role of religion and the politicization of gender issues—can in fact exacerbate gender inequalities in post-conflict situations and lead to an increased exclusion and marginalization of women from peacebuilding processes. In addition to this, local women's organizations and movements usually suffer from lack of capacity and resources, as well as absence of well-established monitoring and evaluation mechanisms that would allow them to actively participate in peacebuilding and

promote a gender-sensitive agenda in post-conflict reconstruction processes (Agbalajobi, 2010: 245–246; Schnabel & Tabyshalieva, 2012b: 16–18).

Another challenge referred to in this regard is the negative role of international assistance programmes and missions. According to Schnabel and Tabyshalieva (2012b), in many instances development and assistance programmes tend to ignore women, based on stereotypical and traditional perceptions of social roles of men and women in the local community. These dynamics—some of which are rooted in funding constraints, unrealistic mandates, or inadequate understanding of the local culture—lead to the exacerbation of exclusionary patterns against women and their marginalization from peacebuilding initiatives (Schnabel & Tabyshalieva, 2012b: 23).

Barnes and Olonisakin (2011) and Schnabel and Tabyshalieva (2012b) point to the complex nature of peacebuilding efforts and the lack of coordination on part of international actors, as well as the absence of coordination between international peacebuilding efforts and local peace initiatives. According to them, this has led in many instances to increased duplication and bureaucratization of peace initiatives, as well as their failure to address gender-sensitive issues in a systematic manner across all involved actors and initiatives (Barnes & Olonisakin, 2011: 10; Schnabel & Tabyshalieva, 2012b: 25). Nakaya (2011) builds on the above argument. She states that the bureaucratic institutionalization of gender issues, through the establishment of gender units in peace missions or national women's organizations, have led to the marginalization of gender and women-related issues in peacebuilding initiatives by "creating a weak agency without adequate authority, capacity or expertise." Moreover, according to her, it alleviated the responsibility of all other relevant institutions to incorporate women needs within their mandates and activities (Nakaya, 2011: 165).

On the international level, a number of studies have examined the impact of UNSC Resolution 1325 and the resolutions that followed on the inclusion of women in peacebuilding. Adrian-Paul (2012) and Anderlini (2007) point to a number of gaps in the resolution, which largely impact its implementation. In addition to the lack of mechanisms to enforce its implementation in member states, the resolution does not include "mechanisms for dealing with the needs of women living in unrecognized territories or mechanisms for civil society groups to monitor implementation or assess impact". Moreover, according to them, "there is a lack of early warning and early response mechanisms and no mention of peace education or of internally

displaced persons and mechanisms for their protection. Finally, the resolution also does not address issues of justice- a prerequisite for sustainable peace" (Adrian-Paul, 2012: 245; Anderlini, 2007: 196). Consequently, the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 has been largely slow and sporadic and has not clearly resulted in increased inclusion of women in peace initiatives, nor has it led to an increase in gender provisions in peace agreements (Adrian-Paul, 2012; Anderlini, 2007; Ellerby, 2015; Schnabel & Tabyshalieva, 2012b).

Furthermore, Schnabel and Tabyshalieva (2012b) and Adrian-Paul (2012) refer to the debate concerning UNSC Resolution 1820, focusing on women as victims of sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations. According to them, while the resolution primarily aimed at focusing on the crimes of gender-based violence women are subject to in conflict and post-conflict situations, it has been seen by many as a retraction of its predecessor (UNSC Resolution 1325), through its focus on women's victimhood. Consequently, the resolution risks distracting attention efforts from "the urgent need for the type of systematic change demanded by SCR 1325 in the form of promoting women's leadership and full participation in all matters of peace and security" (Adrian-Paul, 2012; Schnabel & Tabyshalieva, 2012b: 23).

3.3.2 Religion and peacebuilding

Parallel to the increasing attention directed to the field of women and peacebuilding, a relatively new field of study that aimed at exploring the role religion and religious institutions/leaders play in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction processes emerged by the end of the 1990s under the title of "religious or faith-based peacebuilding".

The increased sensitivity to the role of religion in international politics, especially the increased attention on its relation to conflict and violence, has raised questions concerning the role of religion in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. This increased attention has translated since 2000 into an expanding body of literature analysing the potential role of religion in peacebuilding initiatives, and an increased visibility of local religious peacebuilding initiatives at the international level (Bouta, Kadayifci-Orellana, & Abu-Nimer, 2005; Hayward & Marshall, 2015; Hertog, 2010).

Academic literature dealing with this convergence between religion and peacebuilding has offered a more balanced understanding of the role of religion in both peace and conflict, moving beyond earlier

reductionist views that primarily linked religion to contexts of violence. Studies in this regard could be classified into three overarching themes: the role of religion in conflict (debunking theories linking religion to violence and conflict); the role of religion and religious actors in peacebuilding; processes; and the strengths and limitations of religious peacebuilding.

3.3.2.1 Religion and conflict: debunking misperceptions

The relationship between religion and violence/conflict gained a lot of attention in international relations with the rise of Islamism at the end of 1970s. The debate was largely divided between scholars rendering religion as a cause of violence and conflict, those dismissing it as an "epiphenomenon" masking other underlying factors, and a third group analysing whether specific religions are "more violent" than others (Omer, 2012: 7).

Research on the role of religion in peacebuilding addressed these "reductionist" views of religion through expanding the debate on the role of religion in international relations and exploring the various roles religion can play in both conflict and peace. Fox (2004) describes four ways in which religion can exacerbate conflict. According to him, religion can play a role as an identity marker for the opposing parties; it could constitute the content of conflict (like religious discrimination); religious institutions could partake in conflict directly through disseminating messages of violence and war; and both sides can use religion to legitimize their actions, as in a "holy war".

Omer (2012) expands on this analysis by exploring the complex relationship between religion and other identity markers—particularly nationalism—and its role in driving conflict. According to her, analyses of the role of religion in the formation and reformation of nationalism, and the interconnectedness between religion and national identity, offer a more balanced outlook on the different roles religion can play in conflict, without dismissing its relevance to peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction (Omer, 2012: 6–9). Based on this discussion, she contends that "religion can inspire militant violence and non-violence to similar degrees of intensity" (Omer, 2012: 16).

Abu-Nimer (2013) also reflects on the complex relationship between religion and identity in relation to conflict. He argues that identity politics has produced various local communities that view their relationship with others through "the lens of the religious identities" and articulate the justification of their conflicts in terms of religious paradigms (Abu-Nimer, 2013: 70). According to him, such an

understanding of the role of religion in conflict, in its relationship with identity, necessitates the engagement of religious leaders and institutions in peacebuilding initiatives (Abu-Nimer, 2013: 70).

Appleby (2015), on the other hand, argues that the relative lack of understanding of the different roles of religion in peace and conflict has led to what he terms the "exoticizing" of religion and its conflation with fundamentalism and terrorism (Appleby, 2015: 33). Appleby classifies scholarship on the question of religion and conflict (or violence) into three categories. The first, which he terms "strong religion", clusters theoretical works that presume that religion is a source or justification for deadly violence and conflict. The second, "weak religion", refers to studies that present religion as a dependent variable in violence and conflicts. And the third is "pathological religion", which refers to studies linking religious fundamentalism, or extremist religious modes of behaviour, to psychological deviance and violence. According to Appleby, the aforementioned orientations reflect a variation in the meaning and content of religion, and the multiplicity of its roles in the contexts of conflict and peace. However, he refutes the automatic identification of fundamentalism with violence and deviance, as argued by the "pathological religion" literature, which he considers reductionist as well as failing to explain the majority of instances were religious fundamentalism does not lead to violent conflict (Appleby, 2015: 47).

Springs (2015) highlights the role of religion within the contexts of structural and cultural violence. He argues that the debate on the impact of religion on violence and conflict needs to be expanded from its preoccupation with deadly violence to a more complex, multidimensional analysis on how religious leaders and structures relate to structural and cultural forms of violence. According to him, analysing the role of religion in these forms of violence—even in instances when they do not lead to or trigger direct violence—expands our understanding on peacebuilding and conflict transformation, and the significant role religion could play in this regard. Departing from the forgoing, Dubois (2018) states that religions are not monolithic entities. She contends that "Religion can be a source of peace or violent conflict, and its importance and potential strength lies in this ambiguity" (Dubois, 2018).

3.3.2.2 Role(s) of religion in peacebuilding and conflict transformation

Building on the different roles played by religion within contexts of conflict, scholars working on the convergence between religion and peacebuilding focused their research on the potential role of religion in promoting long-term sustainable peace, as well as the different roles religious actors can play in

peacebuilding and conflict transformation. Literature in this regard focused on conceptualizing "religious peacebuilding" and examining its relevance to peace and conflict studies; exploring the multiple roles played by religious actors in the different stages of peacebuilding and conflict transformation; and extracting appropriate peacebuilding approaches/paradigms from different religious traditions.

3.3.2.2.1 The conceptualization and relevance of religious peacebuilding

One of the pioneering works in the field of religious peacebuilding, upon which most literature falling under this theme is grounded, is Scott Appleby's (2000) "The Ambivalence of the Sacred" and his phenomenological approach[20] to studying religion. Appleby (2000) makes a strong argument for the prominent role of religion in peace and conflict transformation. He departs form a non-reductionist view of the role of religion in international politics, arguing that religion can generate different "ambivalent" phenomena ranging from non-violent to violent militancy (Hertog, 2010; Omer, 2012; 2015a). Grounded in a recognition of the internal pluralities of religious traditions and the multiplicity of their roles in contexts of conflict and peace, Appleby (2000) highlights the instrumental role of religion, religious leaders and institutions in peacebuilding processes. He contends that religion and religious leaders—through their moral credibility and ability to promote behavioural shifts in communities—offer an added value to peace, both in terms of its complementarity to other peacebuilding efforts, as well as in terms of its own unique discourse (Hertog, 2010: 26–27; Omer, 2015a: 3–4).

Similarly, Hayward and Marshall (2015) argue for the importance of incorporating religious peace initiatives into mainstream peacebuilding. They contend that peacebuilding initiatives need to tap into the potential and power of religion, and the moral authority and legitimacy of religious leaders, to mobilize people, prevent and bring an end to conflicts, and bridge the gap between communities and warring parties through reconciliation and a shared commitment to just peace.

They outline four main characteristics, which religious peace initiatives share, that justify the importance of their inclusion. According to them, religious peacebuilding initiatives aim to promote both inter-religious and intra-religious dialogue and understanding, which help in addressing conflict. They also aim to develop the capacities of religious actors and institutions to carry out multiple roles in conflict prevention and transformation. In addition to this, and particularly where religious issues play an active

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[20] A form of qualitative research that focuses on the study of an individual's lived experiences within the world.

role in exacerbating conflict, religious peacebuilding seeks to challenge and transform the prevalent narratives by emphasizing religious values that support peace and co-existence. Finally, religious peacebuilding aims to increase the active involvement of religious institutions and networks in contexts where international organizations and the state may not have adequate access (Hayward & Marshall, 2015: Kindle Edition).

Omer (2012) illustrates the dynamic and complex roles played by religion in contexts of peace and conflict. She argues that just as religion plays a role in the dynamics of conflict, through its role in the formation of nationalism and identity as well as its role in national conflicts and politics, it plays a significant role in peace and peacebuilding. She adopts a broad definition of religious peacebuilding that constitutes the engagement in inter-faith dialogue; the work of peacemakers and peacebuilders, who derive their motivation from their particular understanding of religious tradition; and the activities carried out by religious, faith-based, and/or non-governmental organizations with the aim of conflict transformation in various contexts (Omer, 2012: 3–4). She agrees with Hayward and Marshall's argument regarding the significance of religion in peacebuilding and conflict transformation. According to her, religion plays a critical role in peacebuilding by providing motivation and inspiration for people to act in peaceful no-violent ways; institutional infrastructure for mobilization and networking; and resources for reinterpreting ethno-religious definitions of nationhood that result in exclusionary practices and violent conflicts (Omer, 2012: 17).

Other scholars have highlighted the importance of including religion in peace processes stemming from a relational approach to peacebuilding that highlights the significance of cultural specificities in different contexts of conflict. Lederach (1995; 1997) argues for the importance of religious peacebuilding within the context of a conflict transformation approach that is both culturally sensitive and relationship-centred (Dubois, 2008; Hertog, 2010: 20; Omer, 2015a: 6). Similarly, Carter and Smith (2004) and Hertog (2010) call for more spiritually inspired peacebuilding approaches that would overcome the misunderstandings and missed opportunities caused by the failure to recognize the role of religion in the dynamics of conflict transformation, and the reliance of the field of peace studies on secular values and concepts (Carter & Smith, 2004: 280; Hertog, 2010: 20).

Building on the same relational approach, Little and Appleby (2004) define religious peacebuilding as "the range of activities performed by religious actors and institutions for the purpose of resolving and transforming deadly conflict with the goal of building social relations and political institutions characterized by an ethos of tolerance and nonviolence" (Little & Appleby, 2004: 5). They argue for the significant role religious actors play in peace processes, stemming from their moral authority, credibility, and long-term existence in conflict-affected communities (Little & Appleby, 2004: 2).

Departing from this argument, Bouta et al. (2005) and Steele (2011) contend that religious and faith-based actors have contributed positively to peacebuilding and reconciliation in various contexts of conflict. According to them, the relevance of religious peacebuilding is not only confined to conflicts with a religious nature or where religion played a critical role as a driver of the conflict. Rather, it targets beneficiaries from different religious and non-religious communities and includes a wide range of peacebuilding activities that work in complementarity with secular peacebuilding and conflict transformation initiatives (Bouta et al., 2005: ix–x).

Dubois (2008) argues that religion, being a "powerful constituent of cultural norms and values" is deeply implicated in individual and social conceptions of peace. She argues that determining the relevance of religious peacebuilding initiatives, particularly to conflict contexts, should be based on a typology of its methodology; the origins of its legitimacy to parties of the conflict; and its connection to the philosophical and cultural contexts of the conflict, as well as the personal, communal and institutional networks. According to her, religious peacebuilding, with its capacity for multi-layered, long-term work in conflict zones, conforms with current academic definitions of peacebuilding, which are more relational and long-term oriented, and emphasize the need for more locally inclusive, contextualized conflict transformation processes.

3.3.2.2.2 The multiple roles of religion in peacebuilding and conflict transformation

Building on the relevance of religious peacebuilding in religious as well as non-religious conflict contexts, scholars have also explored the multiple roles played by religion and religious actors in peacebuilding and conflict transformation processes (Bouta et al., 2005; Hayward & Marshall, 2015; Little & Appleby, 2004; Tønnessen & Roald, 2007; Schreiter, 2011; Steele, 2011).

Schreiter (2011) points to the important role of religion in peacebuilding processes. He highlights the roles of religious peacemakers and peacebuilders—as well as peacebuilders inspired by their religious

motivation—in building alternative social formations, offering different forms of rituals and activities to help transform relationships and bridge gaps, and instilling a culture of peace for more sustained longer-term peacebuilding processes. He contends that by doing so, religious peacemakers and peacebuilders play active roles as providers of motivation, educators, and mediators, finding new connections between practices of peace and religious traditions of conflict-affected societies (Schreiter, 2011: 31–34).

Hayward and Marshall (2015) demonstrate the different roles assumed by religious actors and leaders in supporting peacebuilding efforts. According to them, religious leaders play the roles of *witnesses/observers* assessing the state of conflict/violence in their communities and the impact of peace initiatives; *educators* instilling religious values of peace in the community and raising awareness about human rights and humanitarian issues; *advocates* for peace; *mediators* between warring parties; as well as *direct actors* involved in peacebuilding initiatives.

By the same token, Little and Appleby (2004) categorize the various peacebuilding roles played by religious actors in the different stages of conflict. They expand on the conflict prevention and conflict management roles described by Hayward & Marshall by including the roles of religious actors in structural reform processes carried out in the post-conflict reconstruction phase of the peacebuilding and conflict transformation process. According to them, religious actors can serve as social critics, educators and institutional builders, among other roles, in addressing the structural and institutional causes of conflict and replacing institutions that foster ethno-religious hostility and violence with others that promote nonviolence and peace (Little & Appleby, 2004: 13).

Bouta et al. (2005) and Steele (2011) also highlight the roles of religious actors in post-conflict peacebuilding processes, particularly their roles in transitional justice and conciliation and dialogue mechanisms. According to them, religious actors have been active in truth-seeking and truth and reconciliation initiatives aiming to address conflict atrocities and abuse. Moreover, religious actors have engaged in inter-faith and intra-faith dialogue mechanisms that aim at building relationships between parties to conflict and reaching a mutual understanding of peace and conciliation between the different communities (Bouta et al., 2005: 7–8; Steele, 2011: 60–61).

Building on the above, scholars have also addressed the contributions of the various roles played by religious actors in the peacebuilding process. According to Little and Appleby (2004), religious actors and

communities have been successful in bringing disputing parties together and mediating peace negotiations on the local and community-based levels. They contend that religious actors have contributed positively to mediation and reconciliation efforts that brought about conflict resolution in different context with their deep understanding of context, their legitimacy and moral authority, and their ability to develop a long-term vision of peace for the conflicting societies (Little & Appleby, 2004: 11).

Similarly, Tønnessen and Roald (2007) argue that religious actors, through the different roles they assume throughout the various stages of conflict, contribute to peacebuilding processes in a distinctive manner. According to them, the structures and networks possessed by religious actors, and their capacity to draw upon and redefine religious traditions, enable them to mobilize their communities and promote confidence-building measures that contribute towards achieving a long-term sustainable peace (Tønnessen & Roald, 2007: 1–2).

Bouta et al. (2005) offer a more comprehensive analysis of the contributions of religious actors to peacebuilding initiatives. Through analysing the roles and activities of 27 Christian, Muslim, and multi-faith institutions working on peacebuilding in different conflict contexts, they concluded that religious actors have succeeded in:

1. Altering behaviours, attitudes, negative stereotypes and mind frames of Christian, Muslim and non-faith-based participants;
2. Healing trauma and injuries as well as re-humanizing the 'other';
3. Contributing to more effective dissemination of ideas such as democracy, human rights, justice, development and peacebuilding;
4. Drafting committed people from a wide pool because of their wide presence in society and broad community base;
5. Challenging traditional structures, such as the perceived role of women in society;
6. Reaching out to governments, effecting policy changes, and reaching out to youth;
7. Mediating between conflicting parties;
8. Encouraging reconciliation, inter-faith dialogue, disarmament, demilitarization and reintegration; and

9. Connecting—via international faith-based networks—like-minded faith-based communities in other countries, as well as faith-based actors who are not like-minded, for support (Bouta et al., 2005: 35–36).

3.3.2.2.3 Retrieval of peacebuilding approaches from religious texts

Departing from the foregoing discussion on the multiple roles played by religious actors and its relevance to peacebuilding initiatives, literature concerned with religious peacebuilding has also focused on the retrieval of resources within various religious traditions that promote peace and form the basis of viable peacebuilding approaches. Marc Gopin's work is instrumental in this regard. Gopin (2002) focuses on the integration of religion into the field of conflict resolution, providing an initial framework for religious peacebuilding by highlighting the role of religious values and traditions in emotional training, interpersonal relations, respect and appreciation of mourning and healing processes, as well as forgiveness and honour.

Schirch (2005; 2015) focuses on the role of religious rituals and symbols in peacebuilding processes. According to her, religious rituals play a critical role in reframing problems, transforming relationships and social structures, bringing back a sense of spiritual wholeness, and generating joint identities, which help in bridging gaps and achieving peace and reconciliation between conflicting communities.

Philpott (2015) articulates "an ethic of peacebuilding" grounded in the Abrahamic religious traditions. Drawing on the concept and practice of reconciliation from the case studies of South Africa and Sierra Leone, among others, he suggests a peacebuilding and reconciliation model that is deeply rooted in religious traditions and the creative hermeneutical work of theologians and religious actors. According to him, this reconciliation model, which emphasizes forgiveness as a paradigm of peacebuilding, is instrumental for transitional justice processes dominated by the liberal peace theory.

Lederach (2015), on the other hand, offers the concept of "quality of presence" as a key to transformative processes that are based on religious and spiritual practices. According to him, grounding peacebuilding processes in the spiritual disciplines and practice of vulnerability, honesty, humility, and compassion enables peacebuilders to achieve a quality of being and presence in conflict-implicated contexts that allows for engaging the conflicting parties in dialogue and reconciliatory mechanisms and creating a conducive environment for sustainable peacebuilding processes.

Hertog (2010) offers an approach to religious peacebuilding that is centred on the specificity of the socio-political and religious contexts of given conflict situations. According to this approach, indigenous religious leaders would be able to develop concepts and practices derived from their own religious traditions with the aim of resolving conflicts and building a culture of peace, justice and non-violence in their community (Hertog, 2010: 87). The work of Mohamed Abu-Nimer falls into this category. Abu-Nimer articulates a tradition of nonviolent problem solving in Islam as a venue for conflict transformation in Muslim societies, especially in the Middle East (Omer, 2012: 16).

Alternatively, Carter and Smith (2004) offer a peacebuilding approach based on a collective conception of peace derived from the ethical foundations of the world's major religions. They draw from peace paradigms derived from various religious traditions to present a framework of principles and recommendations for measures that political, religious and non-governmental actors can use to promote peace and develop a global "culture of prevention" (Carter & Smith, 2004: 280).

3.3.2.3 The strengths and limitations of religious peacebuilding

In addition to exploring the role of religious values and religious actors in peacebuilding and conflict transformation processes, a number of scholars have also discussed the strengths and weaknesses of religious peacebuilding and the challenges facing its implementation and integration in mainstream peacebuilding paradigms.

Dubois (2008) argues that religious peacebuilding has a number of strengths that make it relevant in different contexts of conflict transformation. According to her, religious peacebuilding offers the means to help conflict-affected communities properly address the spiritual aspects of their conflict experience, as well as counter manifestations of violence that are deeply rooted in the religious and/or national identity of the community. Moreover, religious peacebuilding, according to her, offers a legitimate alternative during times of conflict and instances of collapse or incredibility of state institutions. In addition, it offers the potential for internationalizing peacebuilding and conflict resolution practices through its networking capacities and multi-level presence across various societies. Bouta et al. (2005) expand on the aforementioned. They argue that religious peacebuilding has a number of strengths that are typical of faith-based or religious actors. According to them, in addition to inspiring strong spiritual motivation for peacebuilding and conflict transformation, and its long-term presence and leverage in

conflict-affected societies, religious actors possess moral and spiritual authority and a capacity to mobilize societies for promoting peace and mitigating conflict. Moreover, religious peacebuilding, according to them, creates a "transcendental environment" that promotes overcoming differences and sustaining peace processes (Bouta et al., 2005: 39–40).

With regard to the limitations of religious peacebuilding, Bouta et al. (2005) and Dubois (2008) agree on a number of inherent weaknesses that limit the impact and success of religious peacebuilding processes. According to them, religious peacebuilding initiatives often lack professionalism and the required skills and knowledge of peacebuilding theory and practice. They risk being rejected or unwelcomed by the parties to the conflict or perceived as a mask for proselytizing activities aiming at attracting or increasing religious membership. Moreover, according to them, religious actors often represent incoherent views with regard to human rights, as well as their perceptions regarding the participation of women in society and/or religious institutions (Bouta et al., 2005: 40–41; Dubois, 2008).

Departing from the above, Abu-Nimer (2013) discusses the main challenges that prevent the field of religious peacebuilding from becoming more mainstream in peace and conflict studies and gaining access to policy-making and academic centres of power. He discusses a number of challenges related to common misperceptions within the peace and conflict studies field regarding the role of religion in peace initiatives, as well as challenges inherent in the religious peacebuilding subfield itself. According to Abu-Nimer, the Western cultural assumption of the necessity of excluding religion from the public sphere, and its misperception regarding the significant role of religion in contexts of peace and conflict, have largely impacted the incentive of practitioners to focus on religious peacebuilding and prohibited religious peace actors from gaining a role in policy circles. In addition, other challenges include the lack of tools and mechanisms to measure the impact of religious peacebuilding initiatives; the limited presence in academic institutions and programmes; the absence of women from religious initiatives; the lack of media exposure; the non-translation of inter-faith dialogue programmes into concrete actions; the lack of coordination and networking with non-religious peace movements; and the lack of professionalism (Abu-Nimer, 2013: 72–80).

3.3.3 Gender/women, religion, and peacebuilding

While the fields of study of "women and peacebuilding" and "religion and peacebuilding" witnessed a relative boost in the amount of research and literature directed to both their theoretical and operational

aspects in recent years, a literature gap in combining the two fields persists. Despite significant progress in understanding the various roles of women and religious actors in peacebuilding processes and their overall impact on sustainable peace in conflict-affected communities, adequate attention to the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding has remained largely lacking.

On the level of the "women and peacebuilding" field, scholarship on the roles of women in conflict and peace has focused little on religious dynamics hindering or facilitating women's full participation and inclusion in peacebuilding processes. On the other hand, literature on "religious peacebuilding" and the role of religion and religious actors in supporting peace and reconciliation efforts has been primarily viewed from "a male prism", failing to appropriately address the gender dynamics of religious peacebuilding and the role women play in this regard (Hayward, 2015; Kwamboka, 2014; Marshall et al., 2011). This failure to encompass religious and gender dynamics adequately in studying peacebuilding has limited our understanding of the nature of conflict as well as the different potential avenues for building a sustainable peace (Kwamboka, 2014; Marshall et al., 2011).

Scholarship on the convergence of women, religion, and peacebuilding—though very limited—can be categorized into three main themes: the role of religious patriarchy in hindering women's roles in peacebuilding; religion as a motivation for women's participation in peacebuilding; and the various roles religious women peacebuilders, or women inspired by their faith, play in peacebuilding processes.

3.3.3.1 The role of religious patriarchy in hindering women's participation in peacebuilding

Literature addressing the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding has highlighted the role of religion as a hindering factor to women's agency and participation in peacebuilding processes. Le Roux and Palm (2018) argue that the multiple and ambivalent roles of religion with regard to peace and conflict are also reflected in its impact on gender issues, particularly the exclusion of women from peace processes, as well as violence against women. They identify three primary ways in which religion can hinder women's full inclusion in peacebuilding processes: the use of an "androcentric approach" that fails to see gendered harms; the patriarchal nature of religious institutions; and the entanglement of religion and culture (Le Roux & Palm, 2018: 8–9). According to them, religious traditions in many instances contribute to the reinforcement of gender blindness and stereotyping through the selective recognition of violations, and the portrayal of women only as peacemakers. They can also contribute to the reinforcement of patriarchal

practices through the marginalization of women from the leadership of religious institutions and the promotion of narrow, male-dominated agendas in their interpretations of sacred texts, as well as their practices and structures. Moreover, religion—through its interwoven relationship with culture—can contribute to the reinforcement of discriminatory cultural or social norms that could largely limit women's roles in peacebuilding and reverse the gains they made over the conflict period (Le Roux & Palm, 2018: 9).

In the same vein, Ogega (2014) argues that religion has not always played a positive and undifferentiated role in women's peacebuilding experiences. According to her, religion plays a significant role in gender identity and role(s) formation. It has "deep intergenerational gender-based structures—institutions, cultures, relations, resources, and practices—that affect the roles women and men can or cannot play in peacebuilding" (Ogega, 2014: 65). In addition to this, she contends that religion can hinder women's agency through its different roles in conflict, as an identity marker or as a driver of conflict, to the detriment of women and their interests (Ogega, 2014: 66).

Hayward (2015) also refers to the role of religion in shaping norms of acceptable gender roles and behaviours, particularly in the aftermath of conflict. She argues that religion provides the ideological infrastructure for social, political and economic systems in which women are marginalized. Moreover, in many post-conflict settings, religious institutions and leaders have played an antagonistic role towards the public roles of women during conflict (Hayward, 2015: 320).

Schnabel and Tabyshalieva (2012b) and Steffansson (2018) expand on the hindering role of religion during conflict. According to them, ethnic and religious identities are strengthened during conflict, "evoking neo-traditional beliefs in a purported "golden age" of patriarchal social rule, which tend to enhance archaic forms of gender discrimination" (Schnabel & Tabyshalieva, 2012b: 17). In such contexts, religion is strongly connected to patriarchy, and religious identities have more leverage over gender identities, which weakens women's leadership and potential to defend their agency (Steffansson, 2018: 22–23).

The marginalization of women from religious structures and the impact this has on women's religious peacebuilding roles has also been highlighted by a number of scholars (Hayward, 2015; Hayward & Marshall, 2015; Marshall et al., 2011). Hayward (2015) contends that while women have been marginalized from peacebuilding generally, the field of religious peacebuilding has been particularly challenging for women, with formal religious leadership and authority largely confined to men in most

major religious traditions (Hayward, 2015: 312–313). Marshall et al. (2011) share Hayward's view, contending that the patriarchal nature of many religious traditions prevents women from acquiring leadership or authority within religious structures, thus preventing them from receiving the recognition accorded to male religious leaders (Marshall et al., 2011: 3). This, according to Hayward and Marshall (2015), tends to reinforce patriarchy and gender injustices, inhibiting the inclusion of women in peacebuilding and peacemaking.

Kadayifce-Orellana (2015a) also refers to the patriarchal readings of religious texts and their impact on women's roles in peacebuilding. Examining the role of Muslim women peacebuilders, she argues that patriarchal readings of Islamic texts, which reflect male interests in social, political and legal issues, has legitimized the exclusion of women from public structures. This, according to her, has largely curtailed women's peacebuilding initiatives and has confined them to the local and grassroots level. Moreover, women have been particularly excluded from formal or official peacebuilding mechanisms, and their needs have been largely neglected (Kadayifce-Orellana, 2015a: 77–78).

3.3.3.2 Religion as a motivation for women's participation in peacebuilding

Beside its role as a factor hindering women's engagement and full inclusion in peacebuilding processes, scholars have addressed the role religion plays as a motivation for women's participation in peacebuilding. Kwamboka (2014) and Marshall et al. (2011) point to the significant role religion plays in inspiring women to carry out peacebuilding activities. According to them, for many women, the motivation to be involved in peace processes despite challenges they face is closely linked to their religious faith (Kwamboka, 2014: 75; Marshall et al., 2011: 11).

According to Ogega (2014), women religious peacebuilders or women peacebuilders inspired by their faith find support in their religious traditions in two different ways: they can be motivated by their religious faith to act as agents of peace, even despite opposition; or they can be supported by religious structures and institutions in their peacebuilding efforts (Ogega, 2014: 64). She argues that faith and spirituality may act as a "domain of power" for women in different religious contexts, although their roles vary under the influence of different religious traditions (Ogega, 2014: 68). Nonetheless, she contends that women have drawn on religious values and traditions to achieve social and political change and promote their peacebuilding agency in their communities (Ogega, 2014: 81).

Hayward and Marshall (2015) state that, particularly at the local or community level, women participate in peacebuilding in ways that are deeply connected to their religious beliefs and affiliations. They argue that even in the secular peacebuilding realm, many women's work is linked to their beliefs, traditions, and communities. According to these authors, religious beliefs provide an important resource for women peacebuilders in three critical dimensions of peacebuilding: resilience, forgiveness, and reconciliation (Hayward & Marshall, 2015: Kindle Edition). In the same vein, Kadayifci-Orellana (2015a) argues that many Muslim women are empowered by their religion in their struggle for justice, peace and equality in their communities. They draw upon Islamic teachings and principles of peace—*tawhid* (unity of being), *fitrah* (original constitution of human beings), *adl* (justice), *afu* (forgiveness), *rahmah* and *rahim* (mercy and compassion), *khilfah* (stewardship), *sabr* (patience), and *hubb* (love)—as a motivation for their involvement in peacebuilding, despite the cultural and structural challenges they face (Kadayifce-Orellana, 2015a: 78–79).

In addition to this, literature on women, religion, and peacebuilding has also referred to the role religion plays in asserting women's agency and legitimating their different roles in peacebuilding. According to Hayward (2015), in addition to drawing on their religious traditions and teachings in their peacebuilding work, religious women peacebuilders also frequently refer to the theological and textual resources of their religions to legitimate their agency and empower them to assume active peacebuilding roles (Hayward, 2015: 318). By doing so, Hayward argues, religious women peacebuilders challenge both the traditional/conservative structures within their religious traditions, as well as outside actors who regard religion as inherently limiting to women's progress. Moreover, they contribute to transforming structural gender inequalities—both within and outside religious institutions—thus contributing to building sustainable peace in their societies (Hayward, 2015: 319).

Similarly, Appleby (2015) and Hayward and Marshall (2015) contend that through positioning their peacebuilding agency and roles in their religious traditions, women religious peacebuilders play more active roles in shaping religious attitudes and behaviours as well as redefining social norms in their societies, including those that are "violent or exclusionary" (Hayward & Marshall, 2015: Kindle Edition).

3.3.3.3 The roles of women religious actors in peacebuilding

Scholars have also addressed the different roles religious women peacebuilders (or women peacebuilders inspired by their faith) play in peacebuilding processes, and the challenges they face in this regard. Drawing from the aforementioned different roles women play in peacebuilding on one hand, and the various ways religious actors contribute to peace processes on the other, Hayward (2015) highlights five main fields in which religious women peacebuilders play an active role: cross-boundary work advocacy, psychosocial and spiritual support to survivors, mediation, and community development. According to her, women of faith play significant roles in reaching beyond religious, political, and ethnic divides and building transformative interpersonal relationships between warring communities. They engage in influencing political decision-making to promote peace on behalf of their communities. They provide psychological and spiritual support to victims of conflict through trauma healing and spiritual guidance. They mediate between conflicting parties particularly at the local or grassroots level. And finally, they approach peacebuilding from a broad-based developmental perspective that takes education, health, humanitarian relief, as well as other aspects into account for a longer-term, sustainable peace in their communities (Hayward, 2015: 314–317). In addition to this, Marshall et al. (2011) point to women's roles in inter-faith and intra-faith dialogue and relationship building, reconciliation, as well as engagement with religious texts to assert women's roles and agency in peacebuilding, as among the various ways religious women peacebuilders contribute to sustaining peace in their communities (Marshall et al., 2011: 3).

Similarly, Kadayifce-Orellana adopts Cynthia Sampson's (1997) categorization of the role of faith-based actors in examining the roles of Muslim women in peacebuilding. She contends, that in addition to the aforementioned roles in inter-faith–intra-faith dialogue, advocacy and mediation, as well as in transitional justice, religious (Muslim) women peacebuilders also play important roles as observers and educators (Kadayifce-Orellana, 2015a: 86–89).

Literature on the role of women in religious peacebuilding has also addressed the challenges religious women peacebuilders face in carrying out their work. According to Hayward and Marshall (2015) and Marshall et al. (2011), despite the various roles played by these women in peacebuilding, their work has remained largely invisible. This oversight of the roles of women in religious peacebuilding has resulted in a lack of international support, including resources and training. Moreover, their exclusion from religious

institutions has led to their being overlooked by policymakers from formal initiatives aiming to engage religious actors and leaders (Marshall et al., 2011: 15). Hayward (2015) argues that in addition to issues related to lack of funding, training and support, the lack of recognition of the roles of women in religious peacebuilding (or the roles of religious women in peacebuilding) translates to inadequate documentation of their work, as well as an exclusion of women's insights and concerns in formal religious peacebuilding practice (Hayward, 2015: 320).

As a result of this lack of attention to the convergence between women, religion, and peacebuilding, scholars have highlighted the importance of appropriately engaging both gender and religious dynamics in peacebuilding discourse and practice. Steffansson (2018) argues that both the fields of "women and peacebuilding" and "religious peacebuilding" could benefit from engaging an intersectional analysis, which would result in new possibilities for action in different contexts. According to him, through intersecting with the field of religious peacebuilding, the field of women's peacebuilding would benefit from a broadened view of agency, which would properly incorporate the different roles of religion in relation to women's participation in peacebuilding. On the other hand, the field of religious peacebuilding would benefit from a broadened view of women as agents of change whose roles need to be highlighted and recognized (Steffanson, 2018: 56). Hayward (2015), on the other hand, contends that adopting gender-inclusive religious peacebuilding processes that include women's participation in their design and implementation would play critical role in transforming social and cultural norms regarding violence, gender, and power, as well as providing a more comprehensive understanding of the drivers of conflicts and the avenues for their resolution (Hayward, 2015: 322).

Similarly, Le Roux and Palm (2018) call for a gender-relational approach to conflict transformation in which religious groups and leaders play a prominent role in confronting their own norms and practices that reinforce discriminatory dynamics against women. Moreover, it provides support for women—especially within religious institutions—to play an active role in peace processes in their communities and have their gendered needs voiced at the different levels of conflict transformation and sustainable peacebuilding (Le Roux & Palm, 2018: 11).

3.4 WOMEN, RELIGION, AND PEACEBUILDING IN SUDAN

With regard to the case study of Sudan, literature addressing the linkages between women, religion, and peacebuilding can be classified into two main themes: the role of women in peacebuilding processes, and the role of religion in peacebuilding in Sudan. In light of this, the thesis studies the intersection of the main concepts of gender, religion, and peacebuilding, bearing in mind the operationalization of the three concepts in the case study of Sudan previously discussed in the conceptual framework section of this chapter.

3.4.1 Women and peacebuilding in Sudan

Sudanese women have played important roles in the trajectory of conflict and peace in Sudan. Ample literature has focused on the civil war between North and South Sudan, and the different roles of South Sudanese women in supporting the peacebuilding processes in South Sudan after its secession. However, very little attention has been given to the roles Sudanese women play in both formal and informal peacebuilding structures in different conflict areas in Sudan. Literature on women in Sudan has primarily focused on the status of Sudanese women under the Islamist regime and the Shari'a laws. Other literature has discussed the Sudanese women's movement and its role in attaining political, economic, and civil rights for Sudanese women throughout the different political regimes (see Ahmed, 2014; Badri, 2005; Hale, 1986; 1992; 2001b; Habbani, 2017; Tønnessen & Al-Nagar, 2013; Tønnessen & Kjostvedt, 2010; Tønnessen & Roald, 2007; Osman, 2014).

Departing from the above, literature on the intersection between women and peacebuilding in Sudan can be divided into two categories: literature discussing the impact of conflict on women in Sudan, and literature discussing the different roles played by Sudanese women in conflict and peace.

3.4.1.1 Impact of conflict on women in Sudan

Reports on the impact of conflict on women in Sudan highlight the vulnerability of Sudanese women to the spread of violence and conflict in the different regions of the country. The report of the UN Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences (Office of the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR), 2016) states that prolonged and protracted conflicts in the different parts of Sudan have severely affected the lives of Sudanese women for decades. As well as facing significant levels of instability, insecurity, rule of law challenges, poverty and underdevelopment, women in conflict areas

in Sudan have been disproportionately affected by conflict through being subjected to displacement, disempowerment, and marginalization and exposed to different forms of violence and human rights violations. According to the report, women and children, especially those in conflict-affected regions, are the most vulnerable groups in Sudan (OHCHR, 2016: 17). Their vulnerability is further aggravated by decades of armed conflict in Sudan, which has intensified "pre-existing patterns of oppression and subordination, different manifestations of violence against women and girls, and multiple forms of discrimination" (OHCHR, 2016: 5).

Ahmed (2014) and ElSawi (2011) point to the severe impact of the two civil wars between North and South Sudan on the lives of women in both regions. According to them, in addition to the massive number of deaths and casualties among civilians, including women and children, the wars resulted in millions of internally displaced persons and refugees, the majority of whom were women (ElSawi, 2011: 1–2). This had a significant impact on existing traditional gender roles—which have been changed with the increase in women's workload and their newly assumed responsibilities as single parents/heads of households—and has severely affected health conditions and education levels among women and children (Ahmed, 2014: 169; ElSawi, 2011: 2). In addition, women in IDP and refugee camps have been subject to abduction as well as different forms of gender-based violence, as a common inter-tribal conflict tactic, which increased risks of infection with sexually transmitted diseases and compounded the already fragile health conditions in these camps (ElSawi, 2011: 2). In the north, protracted conflict had a negative impact on basic infrastructure and the overall level of development. Women were subject to extreme poverty and dire living conditions, leading to high rates of prostitution, forced servitude, and other strategies for basic survival (ElSawi, 2011: 3).

The impact of conflicts in other regions of Sudan on women has also been highlighted in a number of reports. According to the report of the UN Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Sudan (OHCHR, 2018), the ongoing conflict between the Government of Sudan and the armed movements in the Two Areas has led to a protracted humanitarian crisis in the region, in which women and children are considered to be the most vulnerable (OHCHR, 2018: 10).

With regard to the conflict in Darfur, the reports of the UN Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Sudan (OHCHR, 2018) and the Inclusive Peace and Transition Initiative (IPTI) (September 2018)

contend that the conflict has had a significant impact on women in the region[21]. Like their counterparts in Sudan and South Sudan, women in Darfur have also taken on new roles as household leaders and cultivators, with little to no impact on their social standing and their role in decision-making. They have been subjected to gender-specific attacks, and sexual assaults have been increasingly common among women and girls in IDP camps, rendering it a "pervasive" feature of the conflict in Darfur, as reported by UNAMID (IPTI, September 2018: 2–3; OHCHR, 2018: 8).

Violence against Sudanese women outside the context of conflict was also brought to the forefront in the literature. According to the UN Independent Expert on the situation of human rights in Sudan (OHCHR, 2018), "security forces use violence, intimidation and other forms of abuse to silence women across the country" (OHCHR, 2018: 7). Before its repeal in November 2019, the public order law was largely used as a tool for discriminating against women and limiting their role and movement in public life. Under the pretext of preserving public morality, women were subject to arrest, detention, and humiliating corporal punishments that violate international human rights norms (OHCHR, 2018: 7; UN Women Sudan Country Office, 2016: 13). The reports of the UN Secretary-General on women, peace and conflict (UNSC, 9 October 2019) and on conflict-related sexual violence (UNSC, 3 June 2020) also highlight the atrocities Sudanese women were subject to during the 2018 uprising which led to the ouster of former President Omar Al-Bashir. According to the two reports, sexual assault was largely used against women as a form of political violence during the protests. In June 2019, Sudan's security forces were reported to have utilized excessive force—including the use of sexual violence—to disperse protestors. "Rapes and gang rapes of protesters, women's human rights defenders and women medical personnel working in hospitals, as well as other forms of sexual violence and intimidation, were widely reported" (UNSC, 9 October 2019: 12; UNSC, 3 June 2020: 18).

3.4.1.2 Women's roles in conflict and peace in Sudan

In addition to the critical impact of conflict on Sudanese women, literature on women and peacebuilding in Sudan has highlighted the various roles Sudanese women play in conflict and in peace, that go beyond their widely perceived identities as mere victims of war.

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[21] The conflict in Darfur is reported to have led to more than 200,000 deaths and the forcible displacement of more than two million people.

3.4.1.2.1 Women's roles in conflict

Ahmed (2014), ElSawi (2011), and Itto (2006) address the centrality of Sudanese women in different conflicts in Sudan. They contend that women's roles in conflict range from instigators, to active combatants, to providers of support to the combating forces. During the Second Sudanese Civil War, women from both the North and the South actively participated in the conflict. The Sudanese Women General Union, established in 1991 by the Islamist regime, played a key role in promoting the "Jihad" culture and mobilizing support around it (Ahmed, 2014; ElSawi, 2011; Itto, 2006). According to El-Sawi:

> The SWGU members would gather to sing songs in support of the soldiers, spontaneously give their gold to support the war with a campaign named the "mountain of gold", organized food for the *mujaheddeen*, the soldiers of the holy war. Women were also encouraged to send their sons to war and the death of young men would be celebrated in the "wedding of martyrs" ceremony (ElSawi, 2011: 6).

Moreover, they joined the Popular Defence Forces, established by the Islamist regime to mobilize people for "Jihad", and participated in the military training camps established by the government in the mid-1990s (Ahmed, 2014: 114). In the South, women and girls held many posts in the Sudan People's Liberation Army. They played different roles as "fighters, messengers, and war supporters with both funds and information" (Ahmed, 2014: 114). They also played an important role in mobilization and recruitment by encouraging their sons to join the SPLA in their fight against the Sudanese government (Itto, 2006: 57).

In Darfur, Adam (2016) and Mohamed (2004) refer to the role of the *Hakamat*[22] in the inter-ethnic conflict and violence in the region. According to them, the *Hakamat* have played an important role in instigating conflict as well as participating in and encouraging the different forms of violence committed by the Arab militias (known as Janjaweed). Moreover, the *Hakamat* played a role in supporting the Sudanese government's propaganda against the armed groups during the conflict. They composed songs—incorporating religious aspects and praise for the regime—that helped mobilize the communities against the armed movements and have further ignited the conflict (Adam, 2016: 159–160).

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[22] Hakamat are women who compose and sing songs that emphasize and transmit the tribe's value system. They have a significant impact on their communities and have traditionally been known to sing men into battle.

3.4.1.2.2 Women's roles in peacebuilding processes

In addition to their roles in conflict, a number of studies have highlighted the integral role of Sudanese women in peacebuilding processes in Sudan. ElSawi (2011) and Itto (2006) point to the different roles played by Sudanese women in peace processes at the local level. According to these authors, Sudanese women have employed various strategies to maintain the societal fabric and contribute to peace, ranging from persuading their family members to stop fighting to defying decisions of male members of the community to go to war. They have also engaged in creating links for resolving inter-ethnic conflict, risked dangerous peace missions across enemy territories, and used marriage to reconcile warring parties (Itto, 2006: 56–57). Moreover, they have challenged cultural and religious traditions and prevalent gender roles/perceptions, through engaging in informal consultations with their male family members over peace matters and influencing peace accords and conflict resolution mechanisms in an indirect manner (ElSawi, 2011: 4).

Similarly, Adam (2016), Badri (2005), and Mohamed (2004) point to the influential role Sudanese women have played in local peace processes through their role as *Hakamat*. Despite being largely associated with conflict and violence in Darfur, a number of non-governmental organizations and UN agencies have implemented programmes in Darfur directed at changing the traditional roles of *Hakamat* from instigating conflict to promoting peace. Through changing the nature of their songs to embody concepts of peace and justice, the *Hakamat*, according to them, are currently considered an important local peacebuilding actor in Sudan (Adam, 2016; Badri, 2005: 5; Mohamed, 2004).

A number of studies have also shed light on the role of Sudanese women's peace networks in lobbying for increased participation by women in decision-making bodies and their influence on the peace negotiations in Sudan. According to Ann Itto (2006: 58):

> These activist networks (including the Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace, New Sudan Women's Federation, and New Sudan Women's Association) went all over the world advocating peace and drawing attention to what was then referred to as 'the forgotten war' (*in reference to the Sudanese civil war*). In Washington DC, the UN Headquarters in New York, the Hague and Beijing, women lobbied the international community to pressure Sudan's warring parties to end the war.

Ahmed (2014) and ElSawi (2011) highlight the peacebuilding role of the Sudanese Women's Empowerment for Peace and Development (SuWEP), established in 1997 during the Second Sudanese Civil War as an umbrella group bringing women's groups from the North and the South of Sudan together for the first time[23]. According to these authors, since its inception, SuWEP engaged in a number of peacebuilding activities that included holding public hearings; providing training in conflict resolution and mediation; awareness-raising and information-sharing regarding issues of peace; preparing of position papers (The Hague Appeal for Peace, 1999, and the Minimum Agenda for Peace, 2000); as well advocacy and publicity. It also lobbied for peaceful resolution of the conflict and the inclusion of the women agenda in all the negotiations that preceded the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) in 2005. Following the signing of the CPA, SuWEP focus shifted to empowering women to participate in peacebuilding and developmental processes, and increasing women's representation and inclusion (Ahmed, 2014: 162–168; ElSawi, 2011: 7–10).

The role of SuWEP, as well as other women's peace initiatives—like the Sudanese Coalition for Peace and Sudanese Women Waging Peace—are also highlighted in a report by the Institute of Development Studies and Research (IDSR) on models of women alliances for peace and political participation in Sudan. The report (IDSR, March 2017), which aims to document the roles of different women's networks in peacebuilding efforts in Sudan, highlights the significant role played by these networks in advocating for peace in Sudan, as well as influencing the peace agenda to incorporate gender issues and concerns.

The ICG (28 June 2006) report also highlights the role of the Gender Expert Support Team (GEST) formed in 2006—with the support of the AU and the United Nations Development Fund for Women (UNIFEM)—during the Abuja Darfur Peace Process to represent women in the seventh round of the

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[23] SuWep included nine women's groups from both the North and South of Sudan. The five groups from the North of Sudan, known as Northern Sector, were: Sudanese Women Empowerment for Peace and Development Network (a network of Sudanese women's NGOs and civil society organizations); National Democratic Alliance groups (representing opposition political parties); National Working Committee for Peace (representing members of the government); Nuba Women's Group for Peace and Development (NWGPD); and Southern Women's Group for Peace (which included women from the South of Sudan who lived in Khartoum).
The groups from the South included women who lived in Nairobi and was known as Southern Sector. It was comprised of: women's group from the Sudanese People's Liberation Movement; women's group from the Sudanese People's Democratic Front (SPDF); nonpartisan women's groups; and Sudanese Women's Voice for Peace (SWVP) (Ahmed, 2014: 161–162; ElSawi, 2011: 7).

negotiations. According to the report, the group, which included women from different tribal and ethnic backgrounds representing all the Darfur states, succeeded in creating a unified women's agenda that would be incorporated into the Darfur Peace Agreement. Moreover, following the signing of the DPA, the GEST continued its work to articulate women's priorities and ensure that women were not side-lined in the implementation of the DPA, particularly the Darfur-Darfur Dialogue and Consultations (DDDC) (ICG, 28 June 2006: 6; Refugees International, August 2006; UN Women, 2012: 10).

Women's exclusion from Sudanese peace negotiations was also highlighted in a number of studies. However, literature found in this regard discusses the level of women's participation in the Comprehensive Peace Agreement process and the Darfur Peace Process. Research on the participation of women in the Roadmap negotiations and the recent Juba Peace Process were found to be largely lacking.

Ahmed (2014), ElSawi (2011), Itto (2006) and Tønnessen (2014a) address the exclusion of Sudanese women from the negotiations leading up to the Comprehensive Peace Agreement between the Sudanese government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement (SPLM) in 2005. They argue that despite years of peacebuilding activism and the growing international awareness of the need to include women in peace processes, women were denied participation in official negotiations. According ElSawi (2011), when the negotiations began in Machakos in 2002, women's groups from the SuWEP network formed a delegation of ten women (two from each SuWEP group) to represent them in the negotiations and voice women's demands. However, they were denied participation in the negotiations, which were largely considered a "men's affair". During the Naivasha negotiations in 2005, women's position papers were accepted; however, their concerns were not included in the recommendations (ElSawi, 2011: 11). Itto (2006) and the ICG (28 June 2006) analyse the impact of women's exclusion on the provisions of the CPA document and its constituent parts (the Machakos protocol, the Power Sharing Protocol, and the Protocol on Security Arrangements). They contend that owing to the physical and substantive absence of women from the negotiations, the documents were considered largely "gender-neutral", lacking clear timelines or targets for monitoring progress on women's inclusion and limiting the effective utilization of women's experiences, expertise, and perspectives in decision-making in the post-conflict period (ICG, 28 June 2006: 4–5; Itto, 2006: 59).

With regard to the Darfur Peace Process, studies reflect a variance in women's involvement between the Abuja peace negotiations held in 2006 and the Doha peace process held in 2011 (ICG, 28 June 2006; IPTI, September 2018; Itto, 2006; Tønnessen, 2014a). According to the ICG (28 June 2006), women were entirely excluded during the first six rounds of the AU-led Abuja negotiations. However, during the seventh round, the Gender Expert Support Team was formed and represented the Darfur women during the negotiations (ICG, 28 June 2006: 6; Tønnessen, 2014a: 1). During the negotiations, the GEST presented a paper titled "Women's priorities in the peace process and reconstruction in Darfur", which included women's views regarding issues of power and wealth sharing, as well as security arrangements (ICG, 28 June 2006: 7). As a result, women were able to achieve some progress through including gender-specific issues in the Darfur Peace Agreement. The agreement, which includes provisions on the participation of women in decision-making bodies, as well as gender-based violence and peacebuilding mechanisms, is considered to be quite impressive with regard to its attention to gender issues, especially when compared to the CPA (ICG, 28 June 2006: 6–7).

The IPTI (September 2018) reports that during the Doha Peace Process, a small number of women participated in the negotiations as delegates of both the government and the Liberation and Justice Movement—although the precise number is not available. In addition, the report states that women heavily participated in the various consultations and workshops organized throughout the different phases of the process (IPTI, September 2018: 5–7). They succeeded in establishing a unified pro-women agenda that was largely reflected in the provisions of the agreement and its mechanisms of implementation. As a result, the DDPD, which included many articles stipulating the protection of women and girls from different forms of violence and their representation in decision-making institutions, is considered by many as a "milestone" in addressing gender issues (IPTI, September 2018: 11–12).

3.4.1.2.3 The impact of UNSC resolution 1325 on women and peacebuilding in Sudan

In addition to the foregoing discussion on the roles of Sudanese women in peace processes, a number of studies have also addressed the impact of UNSC Resolution 1325 on women, peace and security on peacebuilding efforts in Sudan (Eltahir-Eltom, 2011; Nilsen, 2016; Osman, 2014; Tønnessen, 2014a). Osman (2014) and Tønnessen (2014a) contend that in the post-CPA period, the large international presence in Sudan following the peace agreement, and the steady influx of donor interest and funding to

support women's activism following the adoption of UNSC Resolution 1325, had a significant impact on women's civil society organizations in Sudan. International organizations and donors provided activists with capacity-building, funds, as well as regional and international exposure. As a result, a new generation of women activists—comprised of students, human rights defenders, graduates, lawyers, cultural workers, trade unionists, journalists and peace activists—joined the women's movement, and new issues related to conflict and peacebuilding and their impact on women were brought to the forefront of women's activism (Osman, 2014: 53; Tønnessen, 2014a: 2).

According to Tønnessen (2014a), UNSC Resolution 1325 has not been a central theme in the advocacy and activism of Sudanese women. However, it has impacted the field of interest of Sudanese women's civil society organizations to include issues related to protection against gender-based violence (GBV), as well as raising awareness with regard to women's civic and political rights and the importance of their increased participation and inclusion (Tønnessen, 2014a: 3). Eltahir-Eltom (2011) expands on the above argument, contending that despite efforts to implement UNSC Resolution 1325 in Sudan, a gap between policy and practice persists. She highlights the lack of awareness and comprehension of the provisions of the resolution among the main stakeholders in Sudan, and the reluctance of the Sudanese government to adopt a national action plan for its implementation.

Nilsen (2016), on the other hand, examines the influence of the UNSC Resolution 1325 on the peace-building processes in Sudan through analysing the theoretical assumptions entailed within the resolution about the role of women in peace processes. According to her, the resolution entails essentialist views of gender, which has contributed to further deepening the structural gendered divides within Sudanese society, and instead of increasing the role of Sudanese women in peace and security issues, has ultimately contributed to what she calls the "gendered silence" within the conflict.

3.4.2 Religion and peacebuilding in Sudan

Similar to literature on women and peacebuilding in Sudan, very little attention has been given to the intersection between religion and peacebuilding efforts in the country. Religion in Sudan has been frequently studied in terms of its role in the political and legal composition of the Sudanese state, its

discriminatory impact on women and minorities, as well as its role as a driver of the civil wars between the North and South of Sudan[24].

Literature on the convergence between religion, conflict, and peace in Sudan can be divided into studies examining the role of religion in the different conflicts in Sudan and those examining its role in peacebuilding processes.

3.4.2.1 The role of religion in conflict in Sudan

A number of studies have analysed the role of religion in Sudanese conflicts, with a special emphasis on the First and Second Sudanese Civil Wars (1955–1972/1983–2005) between the predominantly Muslim North and the Christian-Animist South (An-Naʿim, 2006; Assefa, 1990; Badri, 2004; Fluehr-Lobban, 1990; Köndgen, 2018; Nsubuga, 2013; Ronen, 2005; Tønnessen & Roald, 2007). These studies give a historical overview of the conflict in Sudan, tracing the role of religion in the civil wars to the "holy wars" waged against the Turkish occupation in 1884 by Mohammed Ahmed Al-Mahdi. Assefa (1990) and Ronen (2005) argue that Islam played a significant role in shaping nationalism and identity in the North of Sudan, eventually developing into a criterion of power in the north that was effectively used by northern elites throughout Sudanese history to exclude and marginalize the non-Muslim, non- Arab "others" (Assefa, 1990: 255–256; Nsubuga, 2013: 9–10; Ronen, 2005: 81).

Examining the role of religion as an inherent part of the Sudanese culture and the political and legal tradition of Sudan, as well as its role in conflict, these studies argue that religion, though not the sole cause of conflict, functioned as both a "catalyst" and an "identity marker" of the different warring parties during the civil wars. While the northern political leadership used Islamization as a strategy to maintain control over separatist movements in the south, religion was also used as the rallying point, uniting the different non-Muslim southern political factions, and helped them gain regional and international support for their cause. According to them, this religious allegiance, although not founded on doctrinal underpinnings, shaped the nature of the conflict and unified the different groups in the south in their fight against political, economic and social exclusion and marginalization (Assefa, 1990: 256; Berkley Center for Religion, Peace

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[24] For a comprehensive background on the role of religion in Sudan, see An-Naʿim, 1991; 2006; Badri, 2005; Bob, 1990; Fluehr-Lobban, 1981; 1990; Hale, 1986; 1992; 2001a; 2001b; Hussein, 2013; Kramer et al., 2013; Köndgen, 2018.

and World Affairs, August 2013: 4; Bob, 1990: 203; Nsubuga, 2013: 9–10; Tønnessen & Roald, 2007: 3; Tønnessen, 2008: 458).

In addition, other studies have examined the role of religion in other conflicts in Sudan, particularly the conflict between the government of Sudan and the SPLM-N in the South Kordofan and Blue Nile states (the Two Areas), where the role of religion has been more visible. Casola (2020), De Alessi (2015), and Hassan (2020) contend that religion has constituted a stumbling block to attempts at resolving the conflict between the Government of Sudan and the SPLM-N in the Two Areas since the secession of South Sudan in 2011. A consistent demand of the SPLM-N has been the secularization of the Sudanese state and the abolishment of Shari'a as a source of legislation. According to them, this demand, which has been revoked in the recent Juba Peace Process following the ouster of former President Al-Bashir, is the reason behind the deadlock in negotiations between the government and the SPLM-N and could act as a spoiler in any future negotiations.

3.4.2.2 The role of religion in peacebuilding in Sudan

Besides examining the role of religion in exacerbating the conflict in Sudan, literature on religion, conflict, and peace in Sudan has also studied the role religion and religious organizations have played in peacebuilding processes. The available literature, however, reflect a focus in research and documentation on the role of Christian organizations in peace processes in South Sudan Equal reference is not given to specific Muslim organizations and their role in the mediation and the negotiation processes, nor in the post-conflict peacebuilding and reconstruction processes in Sudan.

Assefa (1990), Agensky (2019), and Ronen (2005) examine the different roles played by Christian organizations like World Council of Churches (WCC), All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC), and the Sudan Council of Churches (SCC) during the two Sudanese civil wars. They argue that the religious umbrella played an important role in raising international awareness of the conflict, as well as providing for the much-needed humanitarian assistance and relief aid during both civil wars. On the other hand, religious actors played a role in mediating between the two conflicting parties, as well as participating in the peacemaking processes that ended the civil wars in 1972 and 2005 respectively. Their credibility and political objectivity made religious actors more accepted by both the Government of Sudan and the

southern rebels in the mediation and negotiation processes (Agensky, 2019: 289; Assefa, 1990: 259; Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, August 2013: 9; Nsubuga, 2013: 12).

Agensky (2019) and Breidlid and Stensland (2011) highlight the role of religious institutions in the post-conflict period. They contend that religious actors—both international and local—played a critical role in peacebuilding and conflict resolution by contributing to building governance capacity, providing civic education and other social services, as well as managing international humanitarian/developmental funds in southern Sudan (Agensky, 2019: 290–291; Breidlid & Stensland, January 2011).

Similarly, Mans and Ali (2006) analyse the role of religious actors or faith-based organizations in peacebuilding efforts in Sudan post the signing of the CPA. Contrary to other studies that focus on the role of Christian organizations in peacebuilding processes in the south, Mans & Ali offer a comprehensive landscape of the main national faith-based institutions (Muslim and Christian) operating in both the North and the South of Sudan, classifying their contributions to the peace process and the nature of their roles vis-à-vis their political affiliations. They classify these organizations according their involvement in the peace process, into active promoters, constrained contributors, silent supporters, and potential spoilers. They conclude that sustainable peacebuilding efforts in Sudan cannot ignore the role of religious actors and their impact on peace and political processes in the country.

3.5 CONCLUSION: CONVERGING WOMEN, RELIGION, AND PEACEBUILDING IN SUDAN

The review of literature on the intersection of gender/women, religion, and peacebuilding reveals a gap in literature between the fields of "women and peacebuilding" and "religion and peacebuilding". Similarly, the review of existing literature on women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan reflects a scarcity of scholarship on the roles of both women and religious institutions/actors in peacebuilding in Sudan. The convergence of women and religion in Sudan has been primarily addressed in terms of the role of religion in the political and legal composition of the Sudanese state and the status of Sudanese women under the Islamist regime. However, little attention has been given to the roles of Sudanese women in peacebuilding or the impact of religion on their participation and inclusion.

Based on the above discussion of the concepts of gender, religion, and peacebuilding, the linkages between the three concepts in mainstream peacebuilding scholarship, and the operationalization of these

concepts and their linkages with regard to the case study of Sudan, the thesis in the following chapters discusses the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan.

In this regard, the thesis examines the largely undocumented roles played by Sudanese women in peacebuilding processes, the impact of religion—both as a hindering factor and as a motivator—on their peacebuilding work, and the potential role of religion in promoting increased inclusion of Sudanese women in formal as well as informal peacebuilding processes. Accordingly, the thesis contributes to bridging the gap in literature on the convergence between women, religion, and peacebuilding, by offering an insight into the different ways religion can impact women's peacebuilding roles in Sudan and its potential for advancing the participation and inclusion of women in future peacebuilding processes.

CHAPTER 4: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK: A CONVERGENCE OF AFRICAN AND ISLAMIC FEMINISMS

4.1 INTRODUCTION

The roots of feminist scholarship can be traced back to women's activism and demand for women's rights in late 18th-century Europe. It was largely inspired by Western Liberalism and its emphasis on individualism as the basis of equal citizenship. However, the history of feminism—or Western feminism, as it later came to be known—reflects a diversity of feminisms that differ according to their approach, emphasis and theoretical underpinnings, while sharing the common goal of advancing the status of women through achieving their emancipation and equality (Osborne, 2001; Hawthorne, 2007).

Western feminism can be classified according to the various forms of feminist thought, into liberal, Marxist, socialist, radical, psychoanalytic, and post-structural feminisms. It can also be classified according to its historical development into first-wave, second wave and third-wave feminisms (Hawthorne, 2007; Tisdell, 2012). First-wave feminism, which is usually dated from the mid-1850s to the beginning of the Second World War, focused its feminist activity on the achievement of the full citizenship rights of universal suffrage, self-determination, access to higher education, and ownership of property. Second-wave feminism, dated from the end of WWII until the 1990s, expanded its scope to include issues of female solidarity, demands for equal pay, reproductive rights, as well as a more substantive scholarship on means of patriarchy (Hawthorne, 2007: 539–540).

However, despite the consensus among feminists regarding the status of women within society and their common goals of emancipation and equality, second-wave feminism began to be increasingly criticized in the 1970s and 1980s for its focus on white, middle-class women, and its failure to address the multiple forms of oppression non-Western women are subjected to. As a result, third-wave feminism emerged in the 1990s as a culmination of the wide spread of feminist perspectives informed by post-structural and postcolonial theories—among others—which critiqued the feminist liberal conception of gender as homogeneous and universal (Hawthorne, 2007: 540; Mann & Huffman, 2005). Within this broader context of third-wave feminism, theories of Third World feminism, African feminism and Islamic feminism can be found.

Given the importance of the cultural and historical context with regard to the particular case of Sudan, the thesis approaches the issue of the relationship between the role of women and religion in peacebuilding in Sudan through the lens of Third World feminism. Taking into account the diversity of the context, and the intersection of the African and Islamic identities of Sudanese women, it applies a combination of African and Islamic feminisms to its analysis of the role of Sudanese women in peacebuilding and the impact of religion—whether institutional or as a societal and cultural construct—on the level of their inclusion.

Through adopting the broader framework of Third World feminism as its departing point, this chapter further probes the particularities of African and Islamic feminisms and their relationship to peacebuilding as the adopted theoretical framework of the thesis and its analysis of the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan. The first part of this chapter gives an introduction to Third World feminism as a branch of feminism that emerged in opposition to mainstream Western, or second-wave feminism. The second part discusses feminism from the African perspective, or African feminism as a distinct part of Third World feminism. The third part discusses Islamic feminism, a branch of feminism, which emerged in a number of Muslim countries, including African countries, founded on the Islamic worldview, and the fourth part converges and relates both African and Islamic feminisms to peacebuilding and the contributions of women to peace.

4.2 THIRD WORLD FEMINISM

Third World Feminism initially emerged in opposition to mainstream second-wave Western feminism, which dealt with the oppression of women as a "monolithic" and a "universal" phenomenon shared by women around the world by virtue of their gender/sex. This theoretical premise came under attack in the late 1970s and early 1980s by feminists of colour—residing in the West—who rejected the "false universality" of Western feminism, considering it to be largely "essentialist" and "culturally reductionist" in its views. Through its focus on gender inequality as the primary concern of women all over the world, and its negligence of the different racial, economic, colonialist, cultural, and historical struggles of women and women's movements in different parts of the world, Third World feminists found second-wave feminism to be largely lacking in its international relevance (Crowley, 1991; Herr, 2014).

Through their deconstruction and critique of second-wave Western feminism, feminists from Third World countries provided valuable insights on Third World women stemming from their cultural and historical contexts, as well as reflecting their specific struggles against various and multifaceted forms of oppression (Herr, 2014; Mohanty, 1991a). Third World feminists deliberately use the contested term "Third World"—as opposed to post-colonial or developing countries—to refer to countries and regions that are or have been impacted by colonialism, as well as to nationals from these countries/regions who are resident in First World countries (Mohanty, Russo, &Torres, 1991; Johnson-Odim, 1991). The term "Third World", in this sense, "does not merely indicate a hierarchical cultural and economic relationship between 'first' and 'third' world countries; it intentionally foregrounds a history of colonization and contemporary relationships of structural dominance between first and third world peoples" (Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991: X).

Criticism directed at second-wave Western feminism in the writings of Third World feminists addressed two major shortcomings within Western feminist theory. The first is the reductionist outlook adopted by Western feminists in their treatment of "women" as a homogeneous category of analysis—subjected to the same forms of oppression regardless of race, culture, class, religion, etc.—and their consequent treatment of "Third World women" as objects of the same oppression, exacerbated by the "backwards", "under-developed" conditions in which they are located. The second is the primary focus of Western feminist writings on "gender" and "gender inequality" as the main sources of oppression women are subjected to.

A. *Women as a homogeneous category of analysis in Western feminist scholarship*

Many second-wave Western feminists treated the notion of "women", the unit of analysis for feminist research and theoretical endeavours, as a "homogeneous entity" which represents the same interests and concerns, and shares the same sources of oppression, based merely upon the one commonality of their sex/gender. Such a "naïve" theoretical premise made it both possible and unproblematic for Western feminism to make general assumptions about all women and their interests. Moreover, it also meant that generalizations made about white, middle-class, Western women would be applicable to "black, working class, and Third World women" (Narain, 2004; Waylen, 2005: 8).

Robin Morgan's concept of "global sisterhood", introduced in 1984, represents an example of this outlook (Nairan, 2004; Waylen, 2005). Morgan bases her concept on the classification of "women as a constituency unified by their common experience of the oppressive structures of 'Big Brother' i.e. Patriarchy" (cited in Narain, 2004: 241). She contends that the common oppression women are systematically experiencing in different parts of the world results in shared attitudes and commonalities that unite women despite the differences in race, class or sexuality that might be dividing them (Nairan, 2004; Waylen, 2005).

According to Third World feminists, this paradigm constitutes a number of problematic theoretical implications. First, it implies that all men—regardless of their class, race or location—are complicit in this form of "universal patriarchy", homogeneously oppressing all women. Second, it suggests that all women are equally and similarly oppressed, regardless of the degree of their involvement in dominant (imperialist) power structures. Third, it treats Third World women as objects, or passive victims of oppression, "in need of rescue by Western feminism" (Nairan, 2004: 242; Waylen, 2005).

This reductionist view of women as a singular, homogeneous entity, and the view of Third World women as passive objects, were critiqued in many of Third World feminist writings. Chandra Mohanty (1991b) offers a number of important insights in this regard. According to her, the treatment of women as a homogeneous unit of analysis is problematic because "it assumes an ahistorical, universal unity between women based on a generalized notion of their subordination", regardless of their socio-cultural contexts (Mohanty, 1991b: 64). This, consequently, leads to the equation of sexual difference, with female subordination and oppression and the reinforcement of "binary divisions between men and women" (Mohanty, 1991b: 64).

Applying this view on Third World women, Mohanty (1991b) argues that Western feminist writings on Third World women are an extension of Western hegemony and imperialism. In her view, "feminist writings discursively colonize the material and historical heterogeneities of the lives of women in the Third World, thereby producing/representing a composite, singular 'Third World women'" (Mohanty, 1991b: 53), and "It is in this process of discursive homogenization and systemization of the oppression of women in the Third World, that power is exercised in much of recent Western feminist discourse" (Mohanty, 1991b: 54).

She suggests that through the representation of women as a coherent entity bound by their common oppression, and the simplistic methodological treatment of sexual difference and patriarchy as cross-cultural notions that can be applied universally, the image of "an average Third World woman", denied her political and historical agency. is produced:

> This average Third World woman leads an essentially truncated life based on her feminine gender (read: sexually constrained) and her being "Third World" (read: ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family oriented, victimized, etc.). This, I suggest, is in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions (Mohanty, 1991b: 56).

Other Third World feminists offer similar critiques. Urna Narayan contends that the "colonial encounter" has led to "problematic pictures" or "totalizations" of both Western and non-Western cultures that resulted in the elision of their diversity and "made them appear as natural givens rather than as inventions or constructions" (Mann & Huffman, Jan 2015: 67). Gayatri Spivak refers to the tendency to confuse essentialism with empiricism in Western feminist discourse (Mann & Huffman, January 2015: 67). Jasbir K. Puar argues that the "process of othering Third World women" in development and women's studies had to led to overlooking Third World feminisms, as well as the specific historical, social and economic contexts in which they developed, and consequently ignoring their distinct priorities and agendas (Puar, 2005: 76).

Mohanty (1991a) offers an opposing perspective on what constitutes "Third World women", as the analytical and political unit of analysis of Third World feminism. She contends that while it is difficult to make broad generalizations about Third World women and treat them as a singular entity, it is rather their opposition to sexist, racist and imperialist structures that constitutes their potential commonality. And while any analysis of Third World feminism must take into account the historical, political, and cultural specificities of the different contexts, "it is the common context of struggles against specific exploitative structures and systems" that determines this oppositional alliance of Third World women (Mohanty, 1991a: 6–7).

To avoid the trap of essentialism, Mohanty proposes the idea of "imagined communities of women with divergent histories and social locations, woven together by the political threads of opposition to forms of domination that are not only pervasive but systemic" (Waylen, 2005: 21). She thus argues that it is possible to "retain the idea of multiple fluid structures of domination which intersect to locate women differently at particular historical conjunctures, while at the same time insisting on the dynamic oppositional agency of individuals and their engagement in 'daily life'" (Waylen, 2005: 21).

B. Gender Inequality as the primary source of oppression of women in Western feminism

Third World feminists also criticized the focus of second-wave Western feminism on gender equality as the primary objective of feminism. They argue that similar to its treatment of women as a homogeneous entity, the focus of Western feminism on gender inequality as the main source of oppression women are subjected to arises from the cultural and historical blindness of its discourse and its focus on the white, middle-class, Western woman. This, according to Third World feminists, renders the Western feminist movement to be largely "lacking" in terms of its representation of the interests, needs, and struggles of women of other parts of the world, and in terms of its universal or international claims (Gilliam, 1991; Crowley, 1991).

Mohanty (1991a) notes that the major analytical difference between writings of white, middle-class, Western feminists and those of feminists of colour is "the contrast between a singular focus on gender as a basis for equal rights, and a focus on gender in relation to race and/or class as part of a broader liberation struggle" (Mohanty, 1991a: 11). She argues that defining feminism purely in gendered terms ignores aspects of race, class, nation, and sexuality that are critical to this definition. According to her, "Ideologies of womanhood have as much to do with class and race as they have to do with sex" (Mohanty, 1991a, 12–13).

Cheryl Johnson-Odim (1991) builds on Mohanty's analysis. She argues that while gender equality is a major goal on which all feminists can agree, it does not constitute the sole or primary source of women oppression, especially Third World women. Thus, she considers this form of feminism which highlights eradication of gender discrimination as "route to ending women's oppression", to be "narrowly focused" and "insufficient" for redressing the marginalization and oppression of Third World women" (Johnson Odim, 1991: 315). According to her, "If the feminist movement does not address itself also to issues of

race, class, and imperialism, it cannot be relevant to alleviating the oppression of most of the women of the world" (Johnson-Odim, 1991: 321–322).

C. The significance of context in Third World feminist analysis

To overcome these aforementioned issues of irrelevance and lack of representation of Third World women's agendas, Third World feminists argue that a unified, broad base to women's issues must be adopted. This broad base, while acknowledging gender as potential bond between women, must recognize that racism and economic exploitation are major sources of oppression of most women in the world, and that women themselves participate in these sources of oppression. It must respect the agency of Third World women and reflect their cultural and political specificities, which in turn shapes and influences their specific needs (Gilliam, 1991: 216; Johnson-Odim, 1991: 325).

Building on the above, two primary constitutive ideas—among others—are highlighted in Third World feminists' scholarship. The first is that attempts to theorize about Third World women must examine their historical and context-specific struggle against oppression while taking into account the aspects of gender, race, class, ethnicity, and nationality in their analysis. The second is the importance of acknowledging Third World women's political and historical agency, as well as reflecting it, free of any preconceived notions of forms of struggle or activism (Herr, 2014: 5).

The specificity of Third World women's struggle and activism is reflected in research done on Third World women's movements. Studies on Third World women reveal that struggles against women oppression were an integral part of national resistance movements. It also shows that Third World women tend to adopt a gradual approach in resisting patriarchal domination, as well as opting to collaborate with their male counterparts to enhance the livelihoods of women as part of their communities, rather than explicitly demanding gender equality or radical social restructuring (Crowley, 1991: 54; Herr, 2014: 5; Jayawardena, 1986: 8–10).

However, the exclusivity attributed to Western feminism led to the marginalization of the experiences of many Third World women. According to Haleh Afshar, "Western feminisms negated Third World women's choices of paths of political activism which used the local prevalent ideologies and were often located within religious or maternal discourses" (Afshar, 2005: 1). Crowley (1991), on the other hand, argues that

the specific nature of Third World women's resistance to capitalist and patriarchal domination—although different from that of Western feminists— "may ultimately serve their interests much more efficiently than an overt challenge to the existing system" (1991: 54).

Within this context, Third World feminists assert that theorizing about Third World women must respect the diversity in their perceptions and modes of resistance and activism and identify them without imposing specific feminist preconceptions. They adopt a feminist theory which "encompasses feminist perspectives on Third World women, that generate more reliable analyses of and recommendations for addressing Third World women's multidimensional and complex oppression through careful examinations of their local conditions in their historical specificity; and respect the agency and voices of Third World women engaged in diverse forms of local activism (Herr, 2014: 6).

4.2.1 African feminism

> We define and name ourselves publicly as feminists because we celebrate our feminist identities and politics. We recognize that the work of fighting for women's rights is deeply political, and the process of naming is political too. Choosing to name ourselves feminists places us in a clear ideological position. By naming ourselves as feminists we politicize the struggle for women's rights, we question the legitimacy of the structures that keep women subjugated, and we develop tools for transformatory analysis and action. We have multiple and varied identities as African feminists. We are African women—we live here in Africa and even when we live elsewhere, our focus is on the lives of African women on the continent. Our feminist identity is not qualified with "Ifs", "Buts" or "Howevers". We are Feminists. Full stop[25] (African Feminist Charter, Preamble).

Within the context of Third World feminism, a huge body of literature on gender issues emerged from the African continent in what has come to be defined as African feminism. According to Filomina Steady (2005), African feminism is a branch of feminism that is "transformative" in human and social terms. It "operates within a global political economy in which the issues of sexism and gender inequality cannot be

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[25] Preamble to the Charter of Feminist Principles for African Feminists: http://www.africanfeministforum.com/feminist-charter-preamble/

isolated from the larger socio-economic and political processes that led to the exploitation, marginalization and oppression of both men and women" (Steady, 2005: 329).

The term African feminism initially emerged in the 1970s with the writings of African female writers and the African women's movements that came to the forefront in their fights for democracy and human rights. Like Third World feminists, African feminists rejected the implied "universality" of Western feminism and its proposed applicability to different contexts. They considered Western feminism—in its false and sometimes lacking representation of African women—as an extension to Western colonialism and a solidification of its ideas (Ahikire, 2014; Eze, 2006; Mekgwe, 2006; Mikell, 1995). A number of African feminists even went to the extent of rejecting the term "feminism" as whole and substituting it with other terms that they found more context-relevant and culturally sensitive. In *Re-creating ourselves. African women and critical transformations*, Ogundipe-Leslie (1994) offers the term STIWANISM (Social Transformation Including Women in Africa) as an alternative which overcomes the negative cultural connotations implied in the concept of "feminism", while putting an emphasis on the question of social and economic equality between African men and women (Mekgwe, 2006: 18).

4.2.1.1 Defining African feminism: a contentious issue

The relationship between African feminism and Western feminism has constituted a core issue in the very definition of the term African feminism and the writings of many female African scholars and practitioners. While some African feminists considered African feminism as a continuation to global feminism with a specific focus on the African reality, others defined the essence of African feminism in terms of what Western feminism is not.

In her critique of the academic debate surrounding the concept of African feminism, Mekgwe (2006) refers to Steady's definition of African feminism, which does not negate its relation to the global feminist movement, but rather emphasizes the issues that are related to African cultures. According to her, African feminism emphasizes "female autonomy and co-operation; nature over culture; the centrality of children, multiple mothering and kinship; as well as the liberty of all African people" (Mekgwe, 2006: 16). She contends that the reactionary stance to Western feminism adopted by most African feminists causes the theories of African feminism to fall short of offering a theoretical model that would complement and enhance efforts on the ground. In her view, due to its emphasis on an "elusive notion of a common history

of colonialism for definition" and its failure to define Africa independently of the West in what she calls "the colonial trap", African feminism has failed to move beyond "hinting the vision of a more liberated future" (Mekgwe, 2006: 21–22).

Eze (2006) joins Mekgwe in her critique of the definition of African feminism, suggesting that through its focus on providing alternatives to Western feminism, "the defense of Africa as a collective" as an objective becomes superior to the African woman as an individual (Eze, 2006: 107). She asserts that, "In this largely reactionary attitude to reality, it is evident that the will to live lacks. The African woman is made to believe that her desires, dreams, feelings of pleasure and pain are inextricably tied to the collective" (Eze, 2006: 112). G. Mikell (1995), on the other hand, relates to the anger shared by many African feminists towards Western feminism, though not from the premise of fighting colonialism or defending the African collective. She rather identifies the peculiarity of African feminism in terms of its negation of the "extreme individualism, militant opposition to patriarchy and hostility to males", largely related to Western feminism (Mikell, 1995: 406). She further contends that African feminism, through its emphasis on African cultural traditions which "legitimate female organizations and collective actions by women in the interest of women", also negates the ideological dichotomy promoted by Western feminism between the educated/elite women on one end and the ordinary/rural women on the other (Mikell, 1995: 406–407).

4.2.1.2 The "false universality" of the Western conception of gender as a social construct

African feminists also rejected the "false universality" of Western feminist discourse and its treatment of the concepts of "women" and "gender" as homogeneous categories that can be applied cross-culturally. They argued that the conception of gender needs to be embedded in the cultural and historical contexts in which it emerges and presented numerous models from African societies in which social relations and roles were not based on gender, as known in the West.

Oyewumi (2005b) analyses the ideological underpinnings of the Western conception of gender. She argues that the concept of gender, which has been the main focus of mainstream Western feminist scholarship, has been a product of the ideology of biological determinism, which constitutes the main pillar in Western systems of knowledge. She contends that even though the idea of gender as a social (not biological) construction—i.e. based on social and societal roles rather than natural attributes—featured in the early years of second-wave Western feminism, "social constructionism and biological determinism have been

two sides of the same coin". Thus, applying the Western concept of gender to other cultures is, according to her, not only problematic with regard to its inability to explain certain societal roles and relations that do not take one's gender or biology into its consideration, but is also self-contradictory with its very foundation of social constructionism (Oyewumi, 2005b: 9–10). Moreover, she argues that the universal subordination of women assumed in Western feminist discourse negates the notion of gender as a social construct rooted in the social relations of a given cultural and historical context. According to her, "gender, being a social construction, is also a historical and cultural phenomenon" (Oyewumi, 2005b: 11). Building on this argument, Oyewumi points that the very notion of "patriarchy" as a form of "social organization" emerged in Western history on the basis of differentiation between men and women that is rooted in biology, and thus cannot be universally applied without taking the cultural and historical aspects of its construction into consideration. She consequently concludes that the deployment of "patriarchy" and "gender" as universal notions in Western feminist discourse is a mere manifestation of Western hegemony over other cultures that needs be "critically revised". According to her, "social categories should be defined and grounded in the local milieu, rather than based on 'universal' findings made in the West" (Oyewumi, 2005b: 15).

Ifi Amadiume (1987) argues that biological categories in studying sex and gender can be misleading, since either sex can assume different social roles as male or female (Steady, 2005: 320). Highlighting the example of the Igbo women in Eastern Nigeria, she contends that the nature of social relations, which is marked by a "flexible gender system", allowed the Igbo women to assume roles of power and wealth that would normally be the preserved of men (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005: 265). Moreover, she argues that the study of origins of social forms—especially the institutions of kinship and the state—has been largely dominated by a Eurocentric paradigm that left out contradicting evidence from the African context (Amamdiume, 2005). She builds on the works of Cheikh Anta Diop (1987; 1989), which challenge the scientific reconstruction theories of human origins presented by European scholarship, to contend that there was no transition from matriarchy to patriarchy in pre-colonial Africa. She argues that matriarchy, in the sense of female rule and female transmission of property and descent, was in fact the traditional form of African social structures (Amadiume, 2005: 85).

Similarly, Oyewumi (2005c) builds on her previously discussed argument of gender as a historical and cultural concept in her analysis of the social relations within the Yoruba society of southwestern Nigeria. She points that "seniority" rather than "gender" formed the base of kinship categories and social institutions within the Yoruba community, and that nouns used to refer to males and females (who had multiple identities before the colonial state) were gender-free. Negating the very premise of Western feminism of the universality of women's subordination and patriarchy, she further argues that any analysis of gender must not only take the "what-ness" of gender but also the "who-ness" into consideration. In other words, it is not enough to define what is being constructed—in this case, "gender as a social construct"—but one must also identify who is carrying out the construction (Oyewumi, 2005c: 116).

In the same vein, Njambi and O'Brien (2005) examine the woman–woman marriages in the Gikuyu community in Kenya. They claim that this form of social relations, prevalent among Gikuyu women, challenges the application of the term "gender" as a cross-cultural concept in Western feminist discourse, as well as the imposition of the "nuclear family" as a universal ideal that renders any other form of family structure, when compared to it, as "primitive" and "bizarre" (Njambi & O'Brien, 2005: 148). They argue that "masculinity" and "femininity", and their connection to the roles of "husband" and "wife", are not as clearly defined in many societies as they are in the West. They reject attempts of some Western authors to incorporate the woman–woman marriage within the universality of the nuclear family structure, questioning the term "female husband", which suggests that the woman who initiates this type of marriage plays the role of the husband and can be counted as masculine or male. They contend that within the Gikuyu woman–woman marriages, the so-called female husbands do not identify their roles with maleness, and thus cannot be analysed within the realm of the male/husband and female/wife dichotomy, nor according to functionalist views which tend to explain these forms of partnerships in terms of strict homosexual or socio-economic factors (Njambi & O'Brien, 2005: 162).

On the other hand, Nfah-Abbenyi (2005) analyses the separation of gender from sex roles by shedding light on women in the Beba community in Cameroon. According to her, women in this community have established their own exclusive spaces/rituals in the public sphere that men cannot invade. She argues that the separation of gender from sex roles—though an opposing idea to the sexual asymmetry and biological determinism of the concept of gender prevalent in Western discourse—"provides unique

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spheres, spaces and locations from which women can constitute and construct identities" (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005: 266).

4.2.1.3 The misrepresentation of African women in Western feminist scholarship

The portrayal of African women in Western feminist discourse and its translation into research and knowledge production has also been a subject for critique by many African feminists. Nnaemeka (2005) examines the hierarchical power structures constructed within feminist scholarship that have largely contributed to the fragmentation of the feminist movement under calls for "Global Sisterhood". She argues that the Western feminist paradigm has been underpinned by binary divisions of self and other, subject and object, and centre and periphery, which led to a one-dimensional treatment of Third World women in general and African women in particular in Western feminist literature, that must be thoroughly scrutinized. She states that this one-dimensional construction of African women in Western feminist discourse is intensified with the focus in Western media and scholarship on issues such as female genital mutilation (FGM), polygamy and arranged marriages. Such examples are highlighted in Western feminist writings to illustrate the oppression of African women, wrongly imposing Western notions and conceptions on such issues that are equally condemned and addressed by African women and feminists within their specific contexts, while consciously ignoring issues of paramount importance to African women that are directly related to their wellbeing and livelihood. She states that African women should be the ones identifying their priorities and agendas according to their cultural and historical contexts (Nnaemeka, 2005: 57).

Building on the critique of how the "other" is portrayed in Western feminism, Lazreg (2005) notes that Western feminists, in dealing with women from other cultures, tend to reduce their "otherness" to instances of colour, religion, or nationality, which replicates and reproduces stereotypical social categorizations and prejudices that are prevalent in the larger society (Lazreg, 2005: 68). She argues that Third World women have also contributed to this reductive otherness through conforming to labels such as "women of colour", which recycles labels of former negative connotations and enforces the "imperialistic" right of the dominant group (i.e., white) (Lazreg, 2005: 69). Moreover, through the platforms provided by Western feminists to their Third World counterparts, Third World feminists, according to her, contribute to confirming this image of "oppressed objectified other" through being

portrayed as the oppositional voices representative of millions of women in their societies (Lazreg, 2005: 70–71).

Departing from the foregoing, Nfah-Abbenyi (2005) contends that, unlike the prevalent image of African or Third World feminists in Western feminist discourse as "scholars who cannot and do not theorize" (2005: 264), African writers and critics are makers of theories. She calls for a concerted effort to outline and define the theoretical foundations of African feminism in order to overcome the reductionist perspective of it in Western scholarship (Nfah-Abbenyi, 2005). Similarly, Steady (2005) argues that the one-dimensional and over-simplified representation of women in Africa in feminist discourse is due to the continued hegemony of Eurocentric paradigms on the study of gender in Africa. She notes that this Western hegemony is further reflected in donor-driven research and policy orientations that have proven to be quite ambivalent to the lived realities of the research subjects on the one hand, and reinforcing of the re-colonization of African social science on the other (Steady, 2005: 322–324). She calls for revising the prevalent research paradigms with the aim of developing gender-focused frameworks of analysis that would reflect the cultural, social and historical diversity of African women while maintaining their specific priorities (Steady, 2005: 329).

In the same vein, Bakare-Yusuf (2003) argues that African feminism requires a theoretical account that moves away from "monolithic constructs" and "sterile dichotomies" towards a framework that grounds gender differences in the complexities of African women's lived experiences and reflects the diversity and plurality of their struggles and points of commonality embedded in their specific historical and cultural contexts. According to him:

> Opportunities for opening up African feminist thought and action arise from focusing on lived experiences and the intricacies, nuances, contradictions and potentialities or everyday life. Only once we begin to move in this direction (whether under an existential phenomenological rubric or not), can we begin to furnish "thick" descriptions that analyze African women's identities in all their rich complexity. The task ahead is to develop and extend the work of researching into and analyzing what it means to be an African woman (Bakare-Yusuf, 2003: 22).

Building on the aforementioned, through addressing their contested relationship with Western feminism and emphasizing the diversity of African women's realities, African feminists provide unique perspectives that challenge the Western hegemony of knowledge production and demand that "Africa must be studied in its own terms, and African knowledge, must be a factor in the formulation of social theory" (Oyewumi, 2005a: XIV).

4.2.2 Islamic feminism

While both Third World feminism and African feminism highlight the importance of context in feminist scholarship and bring the issue of racial/cultural/historical/national/ethnic specificity to the forefront, they have been somewhat silent on the issue of religious difference. Religion in Third World and African feminist discourse has been treated as part of the larger framework of "cultural diversity" without taking into account religious differences within the same communities or the various religious interpretations, which can differ from one society/community to another, and its profound impact on culturally and traditionally embedded perceptions of gender roles. According to Mahmood (2012), "The vexing relationship between feminism and religion is perhaps more manifest in discussions of Islam" (Mahmood, 2012: 1). She attributes this to the "the historically contentious relationship" between Muslim societies and the West and the "the challenges that contemporary Islamist movements pose to secular-liberal politics of which feminism has been an integral (if critical) part" (Mahmood, 2012: 1).

In the words of Margot Badran (2002), Islamic feminism is "a feminist discourse and practice articulated within an Islamic paradigm." However, contrary to what the term might suggest, Islamic feminism does not merely describe a branch of feminism that stems from countries with Muslim majorities. It is a more revolutionary form of feminism that emerged in the late 20th century as a reaction to the growing influence of political Islam in the Middle East. It challenges the patriarchal readings and interpretations of Islam with regard to the status of women in public and private domains and asserts gender equality, utilizing feminist tools and methods to re-interpret the Quran and other Islamic texts from a gender-sensitive feminist lens. Islamic feminism has been misunderstood, misrepresented, highly contested, yet still firmly embraced by many Muslim women around the world (Badran, 2002; 2005; Mir-Hosseini, 2010; Saadallah, 2004).

Islamic feminism began to surface towards the end of the 20th century as a new feminist discourse in parts of the Middle East, as well as other regions with Muslim communities around the world. Unlike Third World feminism and African feminism, which emerged in direct opposition to colonialism and Western hegemony, Islamic feminism first emerged as a reaction to the accelerated Islamism and the spread of political Islam movements in various parts of the Middle East, as well as the increasing portrayal of Muslim women as the "oppressed other" in Western discourses. It appeared in a moment of "late post-coloniality" and a deep dissatisfaction with Middle Eastern countries' inability to achieve political stability and economic growth for their people (Badran, 2005: 8; Tønnessen, 2014b).

A number of factors contributed to the rise of Islamic feminism in the Middle East, with Iran and Egypt among the earliest locations. The spread of conservative readings of Islam by Islamist movements led to a growing concern within the spheres of both secular and religiously oriented women and catalysed the need for a countering progressive Islamic voice. For the women within Islamist movements, the second-class status given to them by their movements and their realization of their dispensability once goals were achieved, led them to look for an alternative that preserves their dignity and equality within the Islamic discourse. And for the secular women in different parts of the Middle East, the calls for retreat to the household and the other restrictions imposed on their daily lives in the name of Islam were quite alarming (Badran, 2005: 9).

According to Ziba Mir-Hosseini:

> The Islamists' defense of patriarchal rulings as 'God's Law', and as promoting an authentic and 'Islamic' way of life, brought the classical jurisprudential texts out of the closet, and exposed them to increasing criticism; their very agenda— 'return to Sharia'—and their attempt to translate into policy the patriarchal gender notions inherent in those texts provoked many women to greater activism (Mir-Hosseini, 2010: 2).

In addition to this, the later decades of the 20th century witnessed the wide spread of education among women as well as an increasing access of women in some parts of the Middle East to the highest levels of education in religious sciences. As a result, Muslim women became well-equipped with the required education and necessary tools to react to this accelerating Islamism by offering a more progressive discourse, calling for gender equality and justice that, unlike secular feminism, is embedded in the Islamic

paradigm and uses the same religious language (Badran, 2005: 9). Mir-Hosseini (2010: 2) best captures this trend when she argues that:

> A growing number of women came to question whether there was an inherent link between Islamic ideals and patriarchy and saw no contradiction between their faith and their aspiration for gender equality. Using the language of political Islam, they could free themselves from the straitjacket of earlier anti-colonial and nationalist discourses and sustain a critique of the gender biases in Islamic law in ways that were previously impossible.

However, despite the growing literature challenging the patriarchal readings of the Quran and Islamic texts in a quest for gender equality and empowerment within the Islamic paradigm, Islamic feminism is largely confused with other "feminisms" prevalent in countries with Muslim majorities. Moreover, the convergence of both Islam and feminism has spurred much debate (Kynsilehto, 2008; Mir-Hosseini, 2010; Saadallah, 2004).

4.2.2.1 Islamic feminism(s)

Research on the prevalent feminist discourses in contemporary Muslim societies reveals the distinction between three forms of feminism within these societies: secular feminism, Islamist feminism, and Islamic feminism (Badran, 2002; 2005; Saadallah, 2004; Wadud, 2006). Secular feminism emerged in the Middle East during the early 20th century and materialized in strong feminist movements demanding the advancement of the status of women in the society. Though considerably influenced by the Islamic modernist discourse—as one of the identifying features of Muslim societies—secular feminism separates religious and feminist discourses and rather engages with the international instruments of human and women's rights for the achievement of gender equality (Badran, 2005; Saadallah, 2004).

Islamist feminism, on the other hand, is the feminism emerging from Islamist movements, which gained a huge influence in the Middle East in the late 1970s with the Islamic revolution in Iran. Islamist feminists such as Zeinab Al-Gazali and Safeenaz Kazem believed that women's quest for equality with men is the main source of their oppression, placing them in "unnatural" and "unfair" situations that take away from their integrities and dignities as women (Saadallah, 2004: 218). They called women to return to a "purer and more authentic domestic life" away from the public life (Badran, 2005: 9). And even though their

conclusions regarding the roles of women in public life were considered by many as largely "anti-feminist", Islamist women embraced these notions as a form of agency and defiance to the monopoly of interpretation of religious texts by male clergies and the Western/secular cultural domination in their Muslim societies (Badran, 2005; Hayward & Marshall, 2015; Mahmood, 2012).

Departing from the rights-based approach deployed by secular feminists and the more conservative outlook on gender equality and women's status adopted by Islamist feminists, Islamic feminism bases its quest for gender equality and social justice within the Islamic paradigm. It relies on the re-interpretation of the same religious texts employed by Islamist feminists to call for the advancement of women's status in society and departs from the "gender-complementarity" approach adopted by secular feminists with regard to the role of women in the private sphere to demand full and complete gender equality in both the public and private (family) domains.

> The Islamic feminist formulation of gender equality is more radical than that of Muslims' foundational secular feminism which argued for full gender equality in the public sphere, excepting the religious part of the public sphere, while acquiescing in the notion of gender complementarity or gender equity in the private sphere and in so doing accepted a patriarchal model of the family (Badran, 2008: 32–33).

Contrary to the model of different and complimentary—but also hierarchical—gender roles in the family privileging male authority accepted by secular feminism, Islamic feminism insists on the practice of social justice. Social justice, according to Islamic feminists, cannot be achieved in the absence of full equality of men and women across the public–private spectrum, including gender equality in the religious part of the public sphere (in the religious professions and in public religious ritual). As a result, they assert that women may be heads of state, leaders of congregational prayer, judges, and muftis (Badran, 2002; 2005: 14; 2008: 32).

In this context, Amina Wadud (2006) contends that Islamic feminist movements, in their adoption of tools from within the Islamic heritage to achieve gender equality (like Sisters in Islam (S.I.S.) in Malaysia) proved to be of more relevance to Muslim societies. Their goals and perspectives distinguished them from Muslim secular feminist movements, which relied on arguments and rationales from outside the Islamic tradition, ultimately reducing their effectiveness due to their failure to identify with concerns of women within these

societies over their Muslim identity. It also distinguished them from the "status quo-ist" Islamist feminist movements which held more conservative views with regard to the role and status of women and relegated "Muslim women's organizations to the status of auxiliaries to larger Muslim male-led initiatives" (Wadud, 2006: 116–117).

4.2.2.2 Religious acculturation and gender equality in Muslim societies

The basic argument of Islamic feminism is that Islam as a religion asserts principles of gender equality and social justice between all human beings, the practice of which principles has been impeded by patriarchal norms and practices in Muslim societies. Islamic feminists refute popular perceptions of Muslim women, which are often grounded in the assumption that Islam is oppressive of women. They argue that such reductionist generalizations obscure the diverse and complex experiences of Muslim women and their multiple roles as agents of change in their communities, inspired by their religious traditions. They contend that the oppression and marginalization experienced by Muslim women in certain contexts is rather founded on patriarchal interpretations of Islamic texts, and not Islam (Badran, 2002; Kadayifci-Orellana, 2015a; Saadallah, 2004; Saikia & Haines, 2015).

Like other Third World feminists, Islamic feminists highlight the importance of historical and cultural contexts in understanding gender dynamics within given societies. They argue that, in addition to the Quran, whose interpretation has long been male-dominated, the Islamic Jurisprudence,—which has informed the various contemporary formulations of "Shari'a" and Shari'a laws in many Muslim societies— was itself heavily affected by prevalent patriarchal thinking and behaviours of the point of history when it was consolidated. Moreover, the Hadiths, the reported (but not always authentic) sayings and actions of the Prophet Mohamed, have also been subjected to instances of misinterpretation that aimed at asserting certain patriarchal ideas and power dynamics without relevance to the contexts in which they originated. Thus, the process of re-reading and re-interpreting Islamic texts by Islamic feminists is in essence an attempt at dismantling structural and hierarchal dynamics of religion, culture and power within Muslim societies, or, as Sherin Saadallah puts it, "dismantling the status quo of male-dominated Islamic interpretation and acculturation which serves to reinforce women's subjugation" (Badran, 2002; Sadallah, 2004: 219).

The concept of "religious acculturation"—previously referred to in the conceptual framework section—is key to understanding the challenges Islamic feminists face in their attempts at changing the status quo. The concept of religious acculturation can be understood within the broader context of the reciprocal relationship between religion and culture, which influences both religion and culture and makes them largely interconnected (Beyers, 2017: 2). According to Islamic feminists, the interaction of religion (Islam, in this case) with host cultures impacts its interpretation and practice within a given society. This interplay of cultural, socioeconomic and political contexts, and their influence on how religious texts are understood, has led to a large degree of variance in religious interpretations across different Muslim societies, making the understanding of the contexts in which religious texts were interpreted of critical importance (Gerami, 1996; Kadayifci-Orellana, 2015a; Saadallah, 2004).

Islamic feminists argue that despite the principles of gender equality and social justice asserted by the Quran, Islam has become more conservative with regard to the role of women due to a history of male-dominated interpretations that consolidated women's confinement and inequality. However, this was primarily related to the historical and cultural contexts in which such processes were taking place and the cultural specificities that determined ideological and political models throughout Islamic history. These specificities were reflected in the secondary religious texts that enforced a rather submissive status of women (Saadallah, 2004: 222).

This interaction between the text, the interpretation (male-dominated), and the context or cultural practice, is what forms the process of religious acculturation which produces a particular understanding of religion. And it is this process of religious acculturation that determines the manner in which gender and sexual attributes and roles are assigned in a given society. The interaction between religion and culture and its impact on the conceptualization of religion is of paramount importance in shaping the paradigm of religious interpretations and practices, which could adopt certain notions of gender roles within Muslim societies and consequently reinforce patriarchal power dynamics and models (Gerami, 1996; Saadallah, 2004).

Within these dynamics and parameters of religious acculturation, Islamic feminists seek to achieve change and bring about empowerment of women and gender equality in Muslim societies (Gerami, 1996; Saadallah, 2014). Asma Barlas (2001) stresses the importance of questioning the contextual realities that

influenced the understanding of the original Islamic texts and their interpretation. She argues that the Quran was revealed into an existing patriarchy and has been interpreted by adherents of patriarchies ever since, and she calls on Muslim women to challenge its patriarchal exegesis. She further argues that the association between the misinterpretation of the Quran and women's oppression "serves as the strongest argument for inequality and discrimination among Muslims since many people either have not read the Quran or accept its patriarchal exegesis unquestioningly" (Barlas, 2001: 3). She therefore concludes in this regard that "inequality and discrimination derive not from the teachings of the Quran but from the secondary religious texts, the *Tafsir* (Quranic exegesis) and the *hadith* (narratives purportedly detailing the life and praxis of the Prophet Muhammad)" (Barlas, 2001: 3).

4.2.2.3 Re-interpretation of Islam from a female-inclusive perspective

Further underscoring the contextual and historical nature of Islamic patriarchy, Omaima Abou-Bakr (2013) stresses the importance of Islamic feminism as an "indigenous form of feminism" that aims to apply feminist consciousness to understanding the gap between Islam's original message and its translation on the ground through "committed Muslim women". Bakr (2013: 4) argues that:

> Doors of *ijtihad* (independent reasoning) are to be open in order to facilitate to Muslim women producing an Islamic knowledge that revives and emphasizes gender justice, equality, and partnership—a knowledge alternative to the processes of exclusion and sense of male superiority we find in most traditional discourses.

Wadud (1999; 2006) also highlights the paramount importance of introducing an alternative interpretation of the Quran from a female-inclusive perspective for achieving gender reforms in modern Muslim societies. She states that the record of Islam's historical intellectual development reveals that women were absent from the formation of Islam's paradigmatic foundations. She further argues that even though the Quran and Hadith are accepted as the divinely inspired sources that form the foundations of Islam, actual contexts and cultural perspectives and practices affect their interpretations and application.

According to Wadud, it is the influence of these specific social and cultural contexts, as well as the absence of gender as an aspect of analysis or consideration, that led to the production of such narrow or conservative paradigms with regard to the status and role of women (Wadud, 2006: 115). She argues that the absence of gender as a category of thought was not considered "sexist" at the time of revelation, that

is patriarchal, isolated seventh-century Arabia. She contends that whatever sexism might be found in the words of the Quran is a reflection of the historical context of revelation, and unless these verses are examined vis-à-vis this particular context, the universal meanings intended by the Quran would be lost by their modes of articulation (Wadud, 2006: 194, 205).

The importance of examining the Quran in light of its context is also discussed by Barbara Stowasser (1984). She asserts that when studying the Quran against the background of pre-Islamic society, it becomes evident that the Quran improved the social status and legal rights of women at that time. However, she points out that comparing the original "Quranic legislation" with the secondary texts of interpretations and commentaries produced throughout the later ages highlights the process of "progressive exclusion" and increasing restrictions imposed on women in Muslim societies (Saadallah, 2004: 221). In the same vein, Mir-Hosseini (1996; 2004) points out that Islamic law is still the monopoly of male scholars whose knowledge of women and gender derives from secondary texts exclusively produced by men and reflects the realities of their specific contexts and interests. She asserts that this monopoly can only be broken when Muslim women actively participate in a process of knowledge production that would ultimately lead to a "much-needed" paradigm shift in Islamic law that would have important epistemological and political consequences in Muslim societies (Mir-Hosseini, 2004: 4). She argues that Islamic feminism, as a "brand of feminism" that takes Islam as its source of legitimacy without falling into the trap of the universal claims of Western feminism and its reductionist views of non-Western women, offers great potential to change patriarchal interpretations of Islamic texts and achieve gender equality and emancipation for women in Muslim societies. Otherwise, she claims, "Muslim women's quest for equality will remain a hostage to the fortunes of various political forces and tendencies, as was the case in the twentieth century" (Mir-Hosseini, 2010: 3).

Similarly, Mernissi and Lakeland (1991) argue that the "problem" of women's rights for some modern Muslim societies does not stem from the Islamic tradition, but rather the issue of how these rights conflict with certain patriarchal power dynamics within these societies, whose elites render the submission of women as "sacred" and "religiously legitimate". Mernissi—whose work focuses on the Prophet's hadiths—examines a number of controversial hadiths that addressed the role and status of women in Muslim society by tracking the line of transmitters and witnesses of these hadiths, taking into account their

historical and societal contexts, to prove their authentication from a feminist perspective. According to her, the manipulation of sacred texts has been a structural characteristic of power dynamics in Muslim societies, which were largely legitimated by religion from the seventh century onwards. She refers to the history of the early Islamic period and highlights the strong and different roles played by women in the society, contending that the need to protect the political interests of men within the Muslim community gave precedence to certain exegeses (*tafsir*) over others and contributed to marginalizing the roles of women within Muslim societies. She asserts the need to practice "re-doubled vigilance" when using sacred texts as arguments and calls for more gender-sensitive interpretations and analyses of Islamic texts (Mernissi & Lakeland, 1991: 61).

In the same vein, Leila Ahmed (1992) differentiates between the "ethical code" provided by Quran for the organization of Muslim society and the "legal code" of Islamic law, which was developed over centuries and across different Islamic empires. She argues that "The specific content of laws derivable from the Quran depends greatly on the interpretation that legists chose to bring to it and the elements of its complex utterances that they chose to give weight to" (Ahmed, 1992: 88). She notes that even though these legal codes—developed throughout the centuries—resulted in regulating a social order that had the ethical protection of women at its foundations, "contemporary politics and praxis bear witness to a strong conservative strain within contemporary Muslim societies, which obviates the rights allowed to women according to the Quran and the Sunna" (Saadallah, 2004: 223).

Building on the above discussions, this religious acculturation—or the interplay between sacred texts, socio-political, historical and cultural contexts, and interpretations—and its translation into Islamic jurisprudence and laws impacting the roles and status of women in Muslim societies is part of the status quo Islamic feminists are challenging by introducing their own interpretations and understanding of Islamic texts. Like other Third World feminists, they situate their arguments and positions within their indigenous Islamic paradigm with the aim of highlighting cultural patriarchal rulings and practices through a feminist understanding of original texts, "to enhance structural change that will translate into realistic goals" (Saadallah, 2004: 223–224).

In light of the above discussion, Islamic feminists can be divided into three main groups. Some focus their work and research exclusively on the re-interpretation of Quran (Amina Wadud). Others apply their re-

readings of the Quran to the analysis of the various formulations of the Shari'a. And the third group focus on examining the hadith vis-à-vis their historical contexts as well as re-tracing the lines of witnesses and transmitters to prove their authentication and meaning from a feminist perspective (Fatima Mernissi) (Badran, 2002; 2005). Finally, while the basic methodologies of Islamic feminism are the classic Islamic methodologies of *ijtihad* (independent investigation of religious sources) and *tafsir* (interpretation of the Quran), its analyses are not confined to Islamic methods and tools. Islamic feminists use other tools and methods of social sciences (linguistics, history, literature, sociology and anthropology), and secular discourses of rights and justice—as in the case of *Zanan* magazine in Iran and the Sisters in Islam organization in Malaysia (Badran, 2002; Mir-Hosseini, 1996; Wadud, 2006).

4.2.2.4 Islam, Feminism and Islamic feminism: between convergence and incompatibility

The concept of Islamic feminism has been the subject of theoretical debate and controversy since its emergence at the end of the 20th century. It has been rejected by both feminists and Muslims alike, who refused the convergence between Islam and feminism as two inevitably incompatible concepts (Tønnessen, 2014b; Seedat, 2013). Moreover, many authors of "Islamic feminism" texts adamantly objected to being labelled Islamic feminists (Badran, 2008: 32). According to Seedat (2013), scholarship on the convergence of Islam and feminism can be divided into four main categories. The first denies the possibility of convergence of Islam and feminism as two incompatible ideas or concepts. The second considers this convergence as inevitable for achieving gender equality in Muslim societies and labels it "Islamic feminism." The third challenges this convergence by resisting the easy application of the term "feminist" to their work. And the fourth allows for the convergence by taking Islam, and the idea that "consciousness for gender issues have always existed in the Muslim culture", for granted in the application of feminist analysis. Seedat argues that even though a degree of overlapping may occur in these distinctions, they reflect the complexity and diversity of gender analysis in Muslim women's scholarship on gender equality (Seedat, 2013: 7–8).

As with the case of African and other Third World feminists, the debates surrounding Islamic feminism largely stem from the rejection of the hegemony of mainstream Western feminism, and its claim for universality in addressing gender issues. As Seedat points out, this has led Muslim women scholars to shy away from and even resist the feminist identity because they did not want to be linked to the political

associations of historical liberal feminism (Seedat, 2013: 10–11). She argues, however, that maintaining the distinction between the hegemonic aspects of feminism and its "gender consciousness" has allowed Muslim scholars to employ feminist methods, while rejecting its politics, and opened the door for others to embrace other forms of convergence between Islam and feminism without necessarily being labelled "Islamic feminists" (Seedat, 2013: 11).

In addition to the debates surrounding the concept of Islamic feminism and the rejection by many Muslim women scholars of its label, Islamic feminism, as a project aiming to achieve gender equality in Muslim societies, has also been rejected by many Muslims who considered it as anti-Islamic. As Wadud (2006: 96, 189) argues:

> Women who advocate the necessity for gender reform within an Islamic framework are challenged by patriarchal and narrow conservative standards on what it means to be Muslim. To disagree with the idea that men are superior can be projected as anti-Islam! …Rather than finding encouragement from others with prior privilege in engaging in textual analysis, they are castigated for their efforts at contributing, however, inconclusively, to new understandings of the Quran.

One could take the examples of the adoption of the principle of Khul'[26] in the Egyptian personal status law, and the reforms that have been introduced to the family and personal status laws in Morocco and Tunisia, among others, as instances of success for Islamic feminism. However, the process of establishing gender justice in Muslim societies, according to Islamic feminists, is neither easy nor straightforward (Saadallah, 2004; Tønnessen, 2014b; Wadud, 2006).

As Wadud points, "the idea of alternative interpretation of the Qur'an from a female-inclusive perspective is by itself insufficient to bring about all gender reforms necessary for the multiple dimensions of Muslim men's and women's lives" (Wadud, 2006: 188). Rather, a "comprehensive intra-Islamic transformation" through a "radical synthesis of strategies" is needed for any discussions of Muslim women's full equality to seem possible (Abou-Bakr, 2013; Mernissi & Lakeland, 1991; Wadud, 1999; 2006). However, she asserts

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[26] Khul' is the right of women to initiate divorce by economically forfeiting themselves.

that, no matter how challenging, attempts to bring about gender reforms in Muslim societies should be founded in the Islamic historical tradition and the specific contexts of these societies (Wadud, 2006: 113).

4.3 THIRD WORLD FEMINISM(S) AND PEACEBUILDING

Feminist scholarship in the areas of conflict resolution and peacebuilding has been rapidly increasing over the past decades (i.e.1990s-2020). Feminists offered their perspectives and critiques on peacebuilding theories and how the role of women is addressed in peacebuilding literature. According to Confortini (2010) and González (2016), although feminists have historically provided significant contributions to the theory and practice of peace, studies on armed conflict, international relations, and peacebuilding have been "gender blind" for many years, ignoring the presence of women in conflict-affected contexts and marginalizing issues of central concern to feminists. However, since the 1980s, women writing on international relations and peace research made women in conflict and peacebuilding visible (González, 2016: 1).

Feminist scholarship on peacebuilding varied between examining the roles of women as both victims and agents of war; analysing the "gendered" concepts of peace and violence and highlighting the varied repercussions of conflict on men and women; and advocating for increased participation and inclusion of women in peacebuilding processes (Adeogun & Muthuki, 2018; Confortini, 2010; González, 2016; Weber, 2006). Feminists also used gender as an analytical tool to unravel the concept of power and analyse the distinction between the public and private spheres in liberal political theory, as one of the underlying causes of the marginalization of women and their exclusion from peace processes (Pankhurst & Pearce, 2005; Rai, 2005; Sharoni, 2010; Waylen, 2005). Critical writings by women in liberation movements in Latin America, Africa, and Asia, as well as the critique of Third World feminists to Western feminism's perception of peacebuilding, have further shaped the discussion (Weber, 2006).

In this section, the thesis departs from the review of the field of women and peacebuilding discussed in the conceptual review chapter. It gives a brief overview of feminists' perspectives on peacebuilding, discusses the Third World feminists' critique of Western feminism's perception of peacebuilding, and considers the views of African feminists and Islamic feminists on issues of peacebuilding and conflict transformation. In doing so, the thesis builds on the particularities of African and Islamic feminisms— embedded in the larger framework of Third World feminism—and examines their convergence with

peacebuilding, as the adopted theoretical framework of the thesis in its analysis of the intersection between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan.

A. Examining the roles of women in peacebuilding

Feminist research criticized the prevailing narratives about the impact of violence and conflict on women, which focuses on women's victimhood within the context of conflict while ignoring the different roles they assume throughout its different stages as agents and drivers of change (Anderlini, 2007; Cheldelin & Eliatamby, 2011; González, 2016; Schnabel & Tabyshalieva, 2012a).

On one hand, feminist literature on the concept of "violence" pointed to the relevance of structural violence—the social, political, and economic aspects of violence—suffered by women during armed conflicts, as well as the insufficiency of the institutional transitional justice mechanisms in addressing the consequences of armed conflicts for women (Confortini, 2010: 17; González, 2016: 1). On the other hand, feminist research highlighted the multitude of roles played by women during and after armed conflict by looking at the ways in which they participate through their involvement in armed movements: their work in defence industries, as nurses on the battlefield, or as patriotic mothers (Anderlini, 2007; Cheldelin & Eliatamby, 2011; Confortini, 2010; González, 2016). In this context, feminist studies have claimed that "the military and political establishments rely on women for their war-making and war-preparing efforts, which could not be undertaken without the willing, unwilling, or reluctant contribution of women" (Confortini, 2010: 21).

The notion of "women as natural peacemakers" has also been strongly contested in a number of feminist writings. While some of them focused on accounts of women's participation in armed conflicts as instigators, members of armed movements, or members of the military (Cheldelin & Eliatamby, 2011), others criticized it as an essentialist notion confirming the stereotypical "victimhood" of women, as well as negating their active, conscious effort in peacebuilding by confining them to their "biological instinct" (González, 2016: 1–2).

Within this this context, Third World feminists posed a number of critiques to mainstream Western feminism. As mentioned earlier, Third World scholars refuted Western feminism's reductionist image of Third World women as "victims", which treats them as a homogeneous oppressed entity and deprives them of their agency and struggle within their particular contexts (Mohanty, Russo, & Torres, 1991; Weber,

2006). Moreover, they have refuted the essentialist views of a number of Western feminists who justify women's inclusion and participation in peacebuilding in terms of their inherently pacific nature. According to them, such views are not only essentialist but also imply a universalistic claim by focusing on gender while excluding other forms of difference such as race and class (Waylen, 2005: 16–17).

In addition, Third World feminist research on the participation of women in liberation movements and conflict in Third World countries posed a number of challenges to the discourse of feminist peace and conflict theory pertaining to its claims on women's peacefulness and victimhood. According to Weber (2006: 4):

> The experience of female fighters in Nicaragua, Africa, and Vietnam made a deep impact in the feminist peace discourse. In the wake of acknowledging women's experiences in war, both as active fighters as well as victims, the question of inherent peacefulness and maternal thinking, were shattered. Aggression and submission as gendered adjectives conditioning men and women were reflected anew.

B. Analysing the concept of violence and its impact on women

Feminist scholarship on peacebuilding also highlighted the concept of "the continuum of violence", previously referred to in the conceptual framework chapter (Confortini, 2010; González, 2016; Sharoni, 2010). The concept, which is built on a more complex analysis of the various forms of violence suffered by women during the different phases of conflict, highlights a "continuity" between the different types of violence and the various actors who are involved in its infliction (González, 2016: 2). In this context of continuity between personal and structural forms of violence, feminist scholars highlight the role of patriarchy and its impact on the role of women in peacebuilding. According to feminists, patriarchy plays a role, on one hand, as a structural form of violence that is enacted as personal violence directed at women. On the other hand, it plays a role in strengthening the institution of war through its domination over political decision-making and its contribution to structural violence that is ultimately related to war and conflict (Confortini, 2010: 4–6).

Third World feminists also criticized the mainstream Western feminist conception of violence and its impact on Third World women. They argued that scholarly attention to violence against women in the Third World is selective, that it falsely homogenizes the diverse experiences of Third World women and

objectifies them by singling out certain acts of violence (Confortini, 2010; Mohanty, 1991b). According to Third World feminists, this reductionist representation of Third World women positions Western women in contrast to them and creates a false conception of their emancipation that overshadows the significance of acts of structural/personal violence that they themselves are subjected to. They contend that any analysis of violent practices against women in the Third World must take into account the historical and cultural contexts of the Third World and their manifestations in domestic patriarchal structures, as well as the impact of contemporary forms of imperialism on women (Confortini, 2010: 20).

Moreover, Third World feminists criticized the Western language of "universal" women's rights that focuses on anti-discrimination as basis for gender equality and ignores socio-economic forms of structural violence that Third World women are subjected to—manifested in economic globalization and neo-imperialist policies—which put additional burdens on women while disregarding their agency and knowledge (Confortini, 2010: 20).

C. Gender as an analytical tool in peacebuilding

The importance of using gender as an analytical tool to reflect the unequal distribution of power and its relation to the escalation of conflict has also been addressed by feminist scholarship (González, 2016; Pankhurst & Pearce, 2005; Rai, 2005; Sharoni, 2010; Waylen, 2005). According to this understanding, the separation of the public and the private, which underlies the political theories of Western liberal democracy and liberal democratic theory, is based on the implicit premise that the public is dominated by men, while the private is designated to women, who are subsumed within the households headed by men (Waylen, 2005: 8). The significance of this distinction, according to feminists, is that on the one hand, it equates the political with the masculine, which makes it difficult to include women in the political sphere, and on the other hand excludes many of the activities that women are involved in as "not political" (González, 2016: 4; Waylen, 2005: 8).

In this context, feminists argue that with the traditional discipline of "High politics"[27] being male-dominated, war is considered to be the exclusion from decision-making, which particularly affects women (Waylen, 2005: 7; Weber, 2006: 4). It is the unequal distribution of power and exclusion of women from

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[27] High politics refers to wars, peace negotiations, treaties, etc.

decision-making, according to them, that escalates to conflict (González, 2016; Sharoni, 2010; Waylen, 2005; Weber, 2006).

Third World feminists, however, criticized Western feminists' conception of exclusion from power and its relation to conflict. They argue that the Western feminist discourse emphasizes women's exclusion in a way that ignores mechanisms of exclusion and marginalization, other than those of gender relations, which lead to conflict in the Third World. Moreover, they argue that reintegrating women as actors in the study and practice of conventional politics is simply not enough to achieve peace. They rather contend that there is a need to also examine the different roles played by different groups of women outside conventional politics, which can accommodate specificity, diversity and heterogeneity (Pankhurtst & Pearce, 2005: 45; Rai, 2005: 25; Waylen, 2005: 9). This means, according to Waylen (2005), "an approach which can look at the complexity of women in the Third World from a perspective of multiplicity of difference rather than 'otherness'" and take into account the different roles they play in the area of peacebuilding (Waylen, 2005: 9).

4.3.1 African feminism and peacebuilding

Stemming from their rejection of the universality of Western notions and their applicability in their local contexts, African feminists, in dealing with the concept of peacebuilding, depart from the traditional accounts offered by Western feminist scholars and offer interesting perspectives on the importance and relevance of developing African models of peacebuilding where women's roles are central.

African feminists argue that, contrary to the reductionist images of African women in Western feminist discourse, African women's role in decision-making and peacebuilding is not a new phenomenon. It is rather a phenomenon that is "as ancient as their experience of violence, and transcends cultures, civilizations, historical epochs, political divides, and geographic space" (Shulika, 2016: 10). According to these scholars, women in pre-colonial Africa undertook diverse influential roles and were at the centre of peace processes in different African societies. Pre-colonial African women were quite proactive in influencing community governance and decisions, as well as being involved in mediating and preventing conflict within and between societies (Isike & Uzodike, 2011; Shulika, 2016).

These diverse roles played by women in pre-colonial Africa in the areas of peacebuilding and conflict resolution were reinforced by old and stereotypical perspectives that equated aggression and violence

with men and considered women as natural peacemakers (Isike, 2017; Isike & Uzodike, 2011; Shulika, 2016). Women were often regarded as the transmitters of cultural values of peace, tolerance, and anti-war tradition in the society and as the mediators of communal and societal conflicts through their roles as wives and mothers and the status they had as elderly women in pre-colonial African societies (Isike, 2017: 352–353; Isike & Uzodike, 2011: 42–44).

According to a 2003 study by the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) on the traditional conflict resolution practices in Africa, African women engaged in peacebuilding through positive childcare, responsible mothering, and nurturing of children in ways that prepared and socialized them toward peaceful co-existence. Their peacebuilding roles included being bridge-builders, caregivers, peace mediators, arbitrators of conflict, and peace promoters in the family and community. Generally, women were seen as symbols of unity between different families, clans, communities, and ethnic groups through the institution of marriage (Isike, 2007; Isike & Uzodike, 2011; UNESCO, 2003).

These positive values associated with women in pre-colonial Africa and their central roles in the peacebuilding of their societies have been corrupted, according to African feminists, with colonialism, which played a role in radically masculinizing and feminizing the roles of men and women in African societies. Amadiume (1987) contends that the introduction of Western education systems, legislation, Christianity, and the modern state system negatively impacted the socio-economic and political status of pre-colonial African women (Shulika, 2016: 15). Isike and Uzodike (2011) argue that the colonial disruption of Africa's socio-cultural nature led to the "marginalization, tokenization and de-feminisation of women in political and peace processes in post-colonial Africa" (Isike & Uzodike, 2011: 35). Building on the aforementioned, they contend that this exclusion of women from peace processes resulting from colonial corruption of gender relations weakens the existing conflict resolution approaches and mechanisms that ignore "the human factor and human security bases of these conflicts". Moreover, the de-feminization of women and their traditional roles renders women's participation and representation in politics—when present—ineffective (Isike & Uzodike, 2011: 35).

In the same context, Hudson (2016) argues that even though post-colonial feminist writing on peacebuilding is well developed, gender and de-coloniality in relation to peacebuilding remains

underrepresented and under-theorized. She agrees with Isike and Uzodike's argument with regard to the ineffectiveness of women's participation and representation due to the colonial disruption of gender relations in pre-colonial Africa, stating that de-colonial peacebuilding processes should respect the agency and diversity of African women (Hudson, 2016: 6). On the other hand, Adeogun and Muthuki (2018) argue that despite the abundance of literature on women's peacebuilding roles in post-conflict areas in Africa, the focus has been mainly dedicated to African women's roles at the grassroots level. Limited attention has been directed to how the inclusion of women at the decision-making levels can complement women's grassroots roles in building peace in conflict-affected areas, as well as contributing to achieving gender equity in peace processes (Adeogun & Muthuki, 2018: 2).

Building on the aforementioned, African feminists advocate for the need to develop an African feminist theory of peacebuilding (Gasa, 2007; Hudson, 2009; 2016; Isike, 2007; Isike & Uzodike, 2011; Shulika, 2016). Hudson (2009) affirms that "considering gender fully through mainstreaming, inclusion, and transformational strategies" is pivotal for more effective and more representative peacebuilding processes in Africa (Hudson, 2009: 318). Gasa (2007) contends that the variety of "historical and contextual realities" must be translated into approaches and frameworks that respond to their specificities. While confirming that the latter view doesn't constitute "a negation of any feminist tradition", she states that it will help in "understanding our location, developing tools of analysis that are appropriate to our own situation, and applying them in a way that illustrates and illuminates rather than obscures our real and lived experiences and their multiple meanings" (Gasa, 2007: 228).

Departing from the above, Isike and Uzodike (2011:33) argue that one way to overcome the socio-cultural variables impeding women's political participation and making their representation ineffective is through developing "An African feminist paradigm of peacebuilding that can be appropriated as a practical conflict prevention and resolution model in the continent". Built on the still persistent "feminist ethic of care" appropriated by women in pre-colonial Africa to maintain peace and societal harmony, they contend that this indigenous feminist paradigm of peacebuilding "can be utilized as an ideological rallying point to transform politics and create a suitable environment for development in the continent" (Isike & Uzodike, 2011: 35).

4.3.2 Islamic feminism and peacebuilding

With the increasing attention given in peacebuilding literature over the last two decades to the role of religion and religious actors in peacebuilding, the impact of religion on inspiring women's peacebuilding work has also increasingly come under question. In examining the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding, Hayward and Marshall (2015) argue that many women, across the world and in various religious traditions, engage in peacebuilding efforts in their societies motivated by their religious faith and beliefs. Though largely unrecognized in formal peacebuilding initiatives and neglected in mainstream gender and peacebuilding literature, these women have grounded their work in their respective religious traditions and have used their invisibility as a catalyst for more creative means of peacebuilding that have eluded others (Hayward & Marshall, 2015).

Like other strands of Third World feminism, Islamic feminism's scholarship on women and peacebuilding stems from its rejection of the false reductionist Western image of the weak, submissive Muslim woman, as well as the misrepresentation of Islam as a religion that is inherently oppressive and misogynistic. Islamic feminists, through engaging in the re-reading and re-interpretation of Islamic texts, contend that despite the prevalent image, Islam advocates for full equality between men and women in the private and public spheres, including peacebuilding processes. They legitimize their participation in peacebuilding processes in the Islamic conception of social justice, which is only achieved—according to them—through maintaining full gender equality across the private–public spectrum (Badran, 2002; 2005: 14; 2008: 32).

Similar to African feminists, Islamic feminists argue that Muslim women have played different roles in peacebuilding since the early days of Islam, undeterred by long traditions of patriarchal interpretations that have consolidated women's marginalization and exclusion from public life. They have rooted their peacebuilding in an Islamic paradigm of peace[28] that has shown remarkable agency in different historical and socio-political contexts (Cooke, 2015; Kadayifci-Orellana, 2015a; Saikia & Haines, 2015). Mernissi and Lakeland (1991) give examples of two of the Prophet Mohamed's wives (Aysha and Um Salama), as well as his granddaughter, to reflect the multiple roles women can play in peacebuilding in their communities. According to these authors, Muslim women can negotiate their status and position within the community

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[28] The Islamic paradigm of peace is based on principles of *tawhid* (unity of being), *fitrah* (original constitution of human beings), *adl* (justice), *afu* (forgiveness), *rahmah* and *rahim* (mercy and compassion), *khilfah* (stewardship), *sabr* (patience), and *hubb* (love) (Abu-Nimer & Yılmaz, 2010; Kadayifici-Orellana, 2015a: 83)

and have their voices heard. They have played important roles in both war and peace, as well as in the transmission and interpretation of religious texts. Ahmed (1992) also addresses the influential roles played by women in early Islamic societies through her examination of the male–female power dynamics and the prevalent gender systems in the Middle East before and after the rise of Islam. She discusses the various roles played by women in early Muslim communities and the ways in which the interpretation of Islam both improved and curtailed the freedoms of women in its earliest days.

Moving to more contemporary Muslim contexts, studies examining the impact of Islamic feminism on the roles of women in contemporary Muslim societies reflect that progressive interpretations of Islam through a feminist lens have contributed in increasing the roles of Muslim women in politics and peacebuilding (Ahmad & Rae, 2015; Kadayifci-Orellana, 2015a; Hayward & Marshall, 2015; Saikia & Haines, 2015; Spahić-Šiljak, 2013; 2017). In her study of the role of Islamic feminism in peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Spahić-Šiljak (2013; 2017) argues that combining the languages of religion and feminism has proven to be a useful tool for promoting peacebuilding and dialogue within the community. She points out that a large number of women involved in peacebuilding in Bosnia and Herzegovina were inspired in their activism by the Islamic traditions. She also notes that, with the large contribution of Islamic feminist discourse towards increasing women's participation in peace processes, secular human rights organizations involved in peacebuilding efforts started engaging with female theologians and employing religious discourse in their peacebuilding initiatives (Spahić-Šiljak, 2013; 2017).

According to Spahić-Šiljak, one of the useful tools used by Islamic feminists during the war in Bosnia and Herzegovina was the issuance of a decree (Fatwa) stating that "raped women should be considered heroines", while urging family members and society "to accept these women and help them heal their traumas." This tool, though largely symbolic, played a critical role in reducing the shame and trauma of Muslim women who were subjected to sexual violence during the war, and in achieving peace and reconciliation in the society (Spahić-Šiljak, 2013: 181).

Within the African context, Kadayifci-Orellana (2015a) refers to the example of the Somali "sixth clan" movement (the pan-Somali women's movement), which has adopted an advocacy strategy built on an Islamic feminist conception of gender equality that resulted in women's representation in the Somali peace process on an equal footing with men. According to her, the movement's religious background and

alliances with moderate Muslim groups gave it credibility among opposition groups who could not criticize them for being un-Islamic or threatening the prevalent Islamic identity. As a result of their efforts, a number of gender-related provisions were adopted in the peace agreement, and women's voices were heard in the negotiations process (89–90).

Analysing the role of Islamic feminism in promoting women's participation in peacemaking and peacebuilding in Arab societies during the Arab Spring, Ahmad and Rae (2015) argue that Muslim women, inspired by the intellectual evolution of Islam with regard to gender equality, played various roles during the uprisings. They claim that through the assertion of Islamic feminism of the important roles women can play as agents of change during conflict and peacetime, Muslim women found a source of liberation within Islam and were encouraged to assume leadership roles during this critical period.

> Women not only led demonstrations and gave speeches, but they also adopted traditional caretaker and nurturing roles by feeding and housing protesters and treating the injured and wounded, especially those too fearful to seek professional medical attention. Women also organized resistance through collective prayer, and reconstituted jihad to defend against coercive acts of the state and to bear witness through martyrdom (shahada) (Ahmad & Rae, 2015: 317–318).

They contend that through its positive impact on the participation of women in the Arab Spring, Islamic feminism proved to be of paramount importance in bringing about change to the roles and status of women in Muslim societies. They argue that "by operating under an Islamic framework that embraces the role of women in positions of leadership, more women are able to find a voice and be heard, as they speak about resistance, change, and peace". The authors point out the need to build a greater understanding of the role of Islamic feminism and its potential as a catalyst of the much-needed change in Muslim countries (Ahmad & Rae, 2015: 319).

The above-mentioned examples reflect that, though not fully integrated in the mainstream/official religious discourses in Muslim countries, Islamic feminism offers great potential in playing a pivotal role in increasing the roles of women in peacebuilding. Through its re-interpretation and appropriation of religious texts to assert the important role of women in the different political and peace processes, women in Muslim societies would be encouraged to fully participate in initiatives to bring about peace and social

justice that stem from their specific cultural and historical contexts. Given the constitutive role that Islam plays in the culture and identity of Muslim societies, as well as its role as the primary source of legitimacy, an understanding of its sources is critical to attempts aiming at transforming gender relations and increasing women's roles in the public life. Through locating its ideas and activism in an Islamic paradigm, Islamic feminism can prove to be a powerful tool in legitimizing women's roles in peacebuilding, as well as making their peace work more relevant and acceptable to different segments of Muslim communities (Cooke, 2015; Kadayifci-Orellana, 2015a; 2015b).

Through employing both traditional Islamic methodologies and feminist tools to analyse the Islamic texts that are employed by conservative and patriarchal structures to justify the exclusion of Muslim women from political processes, including peace processes, Islamic feminism empowers women with arguments and examples that assert their roles and agency within their communities. Moreover, it provides them with the tools to entrench these roles on the bases of their religious tradition and Islamic aspirations.

4.4 CONCLUSION—CONVERGING AFRICAN AND ISLAMIC FEMINISM IN ANALYSING THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING IN SUDAN

The convergence of African and Islamic feminisms—as two different yet complementary forms of feminist discourses emerging in the Global South—holds much relevance to the analysis of the role of women in peacebuilding in the case study of Sudan. The specific cultural and historical context of Sudan, which combines both African and Arab/Muslim aspects in its identity, the impact of colonization on its socio-political structure, and the important role Islam plays as an integral part of its culture, make the convergence of both African and Islamic feminisms in the study of religion (Islam) and its relation to the peacebuilding question in Sudan of paramount importance to the thesis.

The adopted theoretical framework departs from the reductionist universalistic claims of mainstream Western feminism regarding the victimhood of women in Africa and the Global South and their portrayal as the "oppressed other". It asserts the role and agency of these women in building peace within their societies and highlights their unique forms of activism embedded in the historical and cultural contexts in which they arise. Moreover, through its convergence of African and Islamic feminisms in its analysis of the role of women in peacebuilding in Africa, it allows for examining of the role of colonialism in African/Muslim societies and the impact of its policies on traditional gender dynamics within these

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societies. Furthermore, it examines the relevance of religion as a primary aspect of women's cultural contexts in influencing their role in peacebuilding, as well as its potential in advancing their participation and inclusion.

Building on the above, in analysing the roles women play in peacebuilding (both formally and informally) and exploring the actual and potential roles of religion in achieving women's full participation and inclusion in the public sphere (including peace initiatives), the thesis adopts a combined theoretical approach that addresses the issue of women and peacebuilding from a specifically historical-cultural perspective. This theoretical approach allows the investigation of the existing, though largely unacknowledged roles played by Sudanese women in peacebuilding, given the historical and cultural specificity of Sudan, and helps in understanding the complexities of the cultural and societal challenges impeding women's full inclusion in peacebuilding initiatives. Moreover, it allows for an examination of the impact of religion on women's peacebuilding roles, as well as building on its potential positive aspects in increasing Sudanese women's participation and inclusion in peace processes.

CHAPTER 5: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

5.1 INTRODUCTION

Stemming from a Third World feminist framework, which combines both African and Islamic feminisms in understanding the roles of women in peacebuilding and highlights the specificities of the cultural and historical contexts on the assumption of these roles, the thesis contributes to bridging the gap in literature on the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding, using the case of Sudan.

With this objective in mind, the thesis followed a research methodology that aimed at reflecting the voices and agencies of Sudanese women, as African Muslim agents, through capturing their insights and perspectives on their various roles in peacebuilding and the impact of religion on their participation and inclusion in the peacebuilding domain.

This chapter gives an overview of the research methodology of the thesis: the adopted research design, the epistemological foundations of the research, data collection and analysis methods, sampling techniques and criteria for the selection of respondents, as well as the ethical considerations and limitations of the research. Justifications for the different aspects of the research methodology are also discussed in line with their relevance to the issue under investigation and the overall research objectives.

5.2 RESEARCH DESIGN AND JUSTIFICATION

In studying the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Africa with a focus on Sudan, and exploring the impact of religion on Sudanese women's role and participation in peacebuilding processes, the thesis adopted a combination of qualitative research and case study approaches, integrated in feminist epistemological and theoretical frameworks, in its design and methodology. This section includes a brief discussion of both approaches, as well as their relevance and application to the thesis.

5.2.1 Qualitative research

The field of qualitative research, as we currently know it, was not developed as a popular field of inquiry until the late 20th century (Brinkmann, Jacobsen, & Kristiansen, 2014; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016). Its underpinnings can be traced back to the works of Wilhelm Dilthey and other German scholars in the late

19th century, who aimed at understanding the human experience through separating social sciences from natural sciences. It gained grounds in the late 1970s and 1980s and witnessed a steady proliferation in a variety of disciplines (Mills & Birks, 2014; Weinberg, 2002). The term "qualitative research" was rarely used in the field of social sciences until the 1970s, which saw an increasing number of publications aiming at understanding the qualitative form of inquiry and the adoption of qualitative methods of research beyond the traditional disciplines of anthropology and sociology (Brinkmann, Jacobsen, & Kristiansen, 2014: 19; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 7). This development of the qualitative research discourse occurred against the backdrop of what has been called "the paradigm wars", which began in the mid-20th century and witnessed increasing disputes around the dominant positivist paradigm—largely linked to quantitative research. This has led to the consolidation of qualitative research tools and methods as an opposing and equally relevant field of inquiry founded upon non-positivist theoretical approaches (Brinkmann, Jacobsen, & Kristiansen, 2014: 20; Mills & Birks, 2014: 7).

Qualitative research, however, is not simple to define. Differences in meaning and definitions of qualitative research stem from the different philosophical, disciplinary and historical influences on its emergence and development (Given, 2008; Merriem & Tisdell, 2016). In addition to variances attributed to the philosophical and epistemological underpinnings upon which qualitative research approaches are founded, its proliferation among various disciplines and fields has led to the incorporation of different theoretical perspectives and interpretations upon which such disciplines base their research and inquiry (Berg, 2008: 827).

Attempts at conceptualizing qualitative research have usually defined it in terms of what it is not: a research approach that employs methods and tools that are not quantitative in nature. The term has been long used to refer to an alternative to quantitative research and as a description of the criticism directed to the premises of the positivist research culture (Flick, 2018a: 2; Berg, 2008). Braun and Clarke (2013) define qualitative research in terms of its distinction from quantitative research. According to them, qualitative research uses "words as data collected and analyzed in all sorts of ways", while quantitative research "uses numbers as data and analyzes them using statistical techniques" (Braun & Clarke, 2013: 3–4). Similarly, Flick (2018a) builds his definition on the notion that qualitative research uses text instead of numbers as "empirical material" (Flick, 2018a: 2). He departs from this distinction to contend that

qualitative research is based on the "social construction of realities under study" and "is interested in the perspectives of participants, in everyday practices and everyday knowledge referring to the issue under study" (Flick, 2018a: 2). However, this definition of qualitative research in terms of its opposition to quantitative research, and the simplistic division of research into either qualitative or quantitative, was largely rejected by scholars on the premise of its inability to reflect the multiplicity of research designs entailed in qualitative research (Mills & Birks, 2014).

In addition to attempts at defining qualitative research in terms of what it is not, scholars tried to conceptualize qualitative research on the basis of what it actually is. A number of scholars define qualitative research in terms of its adopted methods and practices. Denzin and Lincoln (2005; 2013) describe qualitative research as "a situated activity that locates the observer in the world" (Flick, 2018a: 2; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 14). According to them, qualitative research consists of "a set of interpretive, material practices" that "turn the world into a series of representations, including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings, and memos to the self". Thus, it allows researchers to study things in their natural settings with the aim of "interpreting phenomena in terms of the meanings people bring to them" (Flick, 2018a: 2). Van Maanen (1979), on the other hand, defines qualitative research as "an umbrella term covering an array of interpretive techniques which seek to describe, decode, translate, and otherwise come to terms with the meaning, not the frequency, of certain more or less naturally occurring phenomena in the social world" (quoted in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 15). In the same vein, Saldaña (2011) defines it as "an umbrella term for a wide variety of approaches to and methods for the study of natural social life…that document human experiences about others and/or one's self in social action and reflexive states" (Saldaña, 2011: 3–4).

Others defined qualitative research in terms of its research objectives. Brinkmann, Jacobsen, & Kristiansen (2014) argue that qualitative research is "much more than just methods, procedures, and techniques" but rather "an entire world view" (Brinkmann, Jacobsen, & Kristiansen, 2014: 20). According to them, qualitative research entails "an understanding of human beings and the world that is fundamentally different from quantitative research" (Brinkmann, Jacobsen, & Kristiansen, 2014: 20). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) state that qualitative research is interested in understanding "how people interpret their experiences, how they construct their worlds, and what meaning they attribute to their experiences"

(Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 6). In the same vein, Merriam and Grenier (2019) contend that qualitative research aims at "knowing how people understand and experience their world at a particular point in time and in a particular context" (Merriam & Grenier, 2019: 4). Building on the above definitions, Flick (2018a) differentiates between a moral approach and a pragmatic approach to defining qualitative research. According to him, while the moral approach holds that "qualitative research is explicitly political and intends to transform the world with its practices", the pragmatic approach to qualitative research regards it as "an extension of the tools and potentials of social research for understanding the world and producing knowledge about it" (Flick, 2018a: 7).

Other approaches to conceptualizing qualitative research are aimed at defining its main features or characteristics. According to Miles, Huberman and Saldaña (2013), most qualitative research has a number of characteristics in common: "It is conducted through intense contact within a 'field' or real-life setting; the researcher's role is to gain a 'holistic' or integrated overview of the study, including the perceptions of the participants; themes that emerge from the data are often reviewed with informants for verification; and the main focus of research is to understand the ways in which people act and account for their actions" (quoted in Gray, 2014: 162). Berg (2008) also defines a number of common characteristics among qualitative research approaches. According to him, all qualitative methods "examine experiences of individuals under study", "seek to explain meanings", and are not restricted "to any particular social scientific field of study of discipline" (Berg, 2008: 831).

Similarly, Merriam and Grenier (2019) and Merriam and Tisdell (2016) delineate four major characteristics identified by most scholars as key to understanding the nature of qualitative research. According to them, in addition to its focus on process and how people give meaning and understanding to their world, in qualitative research, "the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection and analysis"; "the process is inductive" with the aim of building concepts and theories; and "the product is richly descriptive" (Merriem & Gernier, 2019: 5–6; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 15–18). Merriam and Tisdell (2016) expand on the aforementioned by arguing that qualitative research is also characterized by being flexible in its design and responsive to changes in the study in progress; usually—but not always—following non-random, purposeful, and small samples in its sample selection; and often includes an intense interaction with participants in the field (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 18). According to Brinkmann, Jacobsen, and Kristiansen

(2014), qualitative research is not "monolithic", but rather "a vibrant and contested field with many contradictions and different perspectives (Brinkmann, Jacobsen, & Kristiansen, 2014: 17).

5.2.2 Case study

Case studies are considered one of the most common qualitative research methods or approaches. Like other forms of qualitative research, qualitative case studies also share major characteristics of qualitative inquiry. These include the focus on the understanding of the meanings and interpretations people give to their worlds and experiences; the researcher being the primary tool for data collection and analysis; being an inductive endeavour aiming at building concepts and hypothesis; and being richly descriptive (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 37).

Case studies draw their origins in social sciences from anthropology, sociology, and psychology. However, with the development of qualitative research towards the end of the 1970s and into the 1980s, the case study approach gained prevalence from a methodological perspective (Blatter, 2008: 68; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 37). Recently, the case study approach has witnessed a resurgence in most social science disciplines, as well as an "unprecedented methodological reflection" that highlighted its emphasis on individual perceptions as well as the importance of context in social processes (Blatter, 2008: 68).

Similar to the qualitative research approach, defining the case study approach has proven to be a confusing endeavour, and there has been no consensus on it basic characteristics. This confusion stems in part from the fact that the case study approach is not restricted to social sciences research and can employ both quantitative as well as qualitative methods. In addition to this, definitions of case study have conflated the process of case study "with both the unit of study (the case) and the product of this type of investigation" in many instances (Blatter, 2008: 68; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 37).

In terms of the research process, Yin (2009; 2014) defines the case study as "an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context, especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context may not be clearly evident" (Yin, 2009: 13; Gray, 2014: 266; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 37–38). Similarly, Creswell (2013) defines case study research as a "qualitative approach in which the investigator explores a bounded system or multiple bounded systems over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving *multiple sources of information* and reports a case *description*

and case-based themes" (Creswell, 2013: 97). Eisendardt (1989) defines it as a "research strategy which focuses on gaining an understanding of the dynamics present within single settings" (quoted in Gray, 2014: 266).

In terms of the end product or the outcome of research, Gray (2014) contends that case studies explore "where relationships maybe ambiguous or uncertain". He argues that, unlike other qualitative methods, case studies go beyond describing phenomena or situations with the objective of attributing causal relationships between the phenomenon and the context in which it occurs (Gray, 2014: 266–267). Blatter (2008) agrees with Gray and contends that case study research is concerned with causal questions "but usually takes the descriptive-interpretive elements more seriously". Moreover, according to Blatter, in their focus on causal relationships, "case studies are often concerned with pinning down the specific mechanisms and pathways between causes and effects rather than revealing the average strength of a factor that causes an effect" (Blatter, 2008: 69).

With regard to the object of research, a number of definitions of the case study approach have focused on the unit of analysis, or the case. Merriam and Tisdell (2016) define the case as single entity or a unit with boundaries fencing the issue of research. According to them, the case "could be a single person who is a case example of some phenomenon, a program, a group, an institution, a community, or a specific policy" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 38). Miles, Huberman, and Saldaña (2014) define it as "a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context" (quoted in Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 38).

Saldaña (2011), on the other hand, argues that cases may be chosen either purposefully because of their unique character, or strategically because "they represent the most typical of its kind", or chosen in terms of their convenience (Saldaña, 2011: 9). He contends, however, that even within single settings "there are diverse participants with diverse experiences and diverse perspectives" and that "there is no single theme that perfectly captures how every individual within a group or organization thinks and feels" (Saldaña, 2011: 9).

In addition to this, scholars have distinguished between different types or forms of case studies. According to Merriam and Tisdell (2016), case studies can be historical, biographical, or comparative (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 40). Stake (2005) distinguishes between three types of case study: "Intrinsic, to better understand a particular case; Instrumental; to provide insight into an issue or create a generalization; and

Multiple or collective, when a number of cases are studied jointly to investigate a phenomenon, population or general condition" (quoted in Gray, 2014: 272).

Yin (2009), on the other hand, distinguishes between four main types of case study design: single/holistic, single/embedded, multiple/holistic, and multiple/embedded, arguing that each of these needs to be selected according to specific conditions. According to him, the single/holistic case study is the type where a single case is examined at a holistic level and is usually chosen to test a hypothesis or a theory, or when the case study represents a unique or extreme case, or a pilot to further or multiple studies. The single/embedded case study is chosen when there are multiple units of analysis or subunits embedded in the single case study. Similarly, he argues that the multiple/holistic case study and the multiple/embedded case study are chosen in cases when the multiple case approach is needed—to improve reliability or generalizability of the study, for instance—either from a holistic level or where multiple units of analysis are identified (Gray, 2014: 274–276).

The case study approach, however, has been subject to a number of critiques by scholars and researchers with regard to its poor level of generalizability and the complications related to the amount of time and documentation it requires. However, proponents of the case study approach have argued against these criticisms. Yin (2009) argues that the issue of generalizability can be increased by basing the case study on multiple cases of the same issue of phenomenon (Gray, 2014: 268). Saldaña (2011), on the other hand, contends that "any suggestion of the case study's generalizability or transferability is up to the researcher's logical and interpretive persuasiveness, and/or the reader's ability to draw inferences of how the case speaks to a broader population or issue" (Saldaña, 2011: 9). He expands on the above by arguing that, unlike studies that aim at gathering data representing broader spectrum of perspective, "the case study in and of itself is valued as a unit that permits in-depth examination" (Saldaña, 2011: 8). Similarly, Gray (2014) argues that case study research can be important in building theory when the issue of research is relatively new, or when a well-known theme needs to be refurbished (Gray, 2014: 269).

5.2.3 Justification and relevance to the study

Building on the above discussion, a combination of the qualitative research and case study approaches, as the adopted research design, has proven to be ideal for the thesis. On the one hand, the qualitative research approach allows for an understanding of the meanings, perceptions, and interpretations that

participants or subjects under investigation give to their lived experiences and how they construct them in relevance to their specific contexts. It examines the emerging patterns from the collected data with the aim of discovering and better understanding those meanings vis-à-vis their specific contexts and situations (Berg, 2008: 827–828; Gray, 2014: 161–162). On the other hand, the case study approach allows for the in-depth examination and study of the researched phenomenon or the unit of analysis while taking into consideration the particularities of the context in which it occurs. It is best suited to studies in which the phenomenon's variables cannot be separated from the context and where the phenomenon under study is relatively new, allowing for the attribution of causal relationships between the phenomenon and its context as well as building theories and hypotheses in this regard (Gray, 2014: 266–269; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 38; Yin, 2009).

Building on the aforementioned, the nature of the study and the importance it gives to the context in examining the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan, and the impact of religion on women's participation in peacebuilding initiatives, necessitated the adoption of a research design that allows for a degree of flexibility in its methods and approach. Moreover, it required a research design that highlights the specificities of the context in which the relationship between religion and women's peacebuilding roles is analysed, and allows for an in-depth investigation of the impact of religion as an integral part of this context in terms of women's participation and inclusion.

Thus, the combination of both qualitative research and case study approaches as the adopted research design proved to be ideal for the nature of the thesis research questions and objectives, which required the collection and analysis of qualitative data from both primary and secondary sources to examine the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan. In addition, it allowed for the in-depth study and examination of this relationship within the case study of Sudan by focusing on organizations and actors working on peacebuilding issues in Sudan as the unit of analysis. This helped in examining a variety of local and international actors working on issues of both women and peacebuilding in Sudan, with the objective of understanding their views on the roles of women within their activities and the impact of religion as an identity marker and societal and cultural construct on the participation and inclusion of women in this regard.

Moreover, the adopted research design is in line with the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the thesis, which build on the notion of social construction of the concepts of gender, religion, and peacebuilding, and highlight the roles and agency of women in Africa and the Global South within their specific historical and cultural contexts, reflecting their perceptions and views on peacebuilding in their communities.

Therefore, both the qualitative research and case study approaches—with their specific focus on context, their interaction with the views and perceptions of the communities under research, and in their attempt to understand a new phenomenon within their specific settings—were quite relevant to studying the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Africa, analysing the case of Sudan.

5.3 EPISTEMOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE RESEARCH

Complementary to the theoretical framework of the thesis, which approaches the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan from an overarching Third World feminist perspective (combining both African and Islamic feminisms, as two different yet complementary forms of feminist discourses emerging in countries of the Global South), the thesis adopts feminism as the epistemological foundation for its research.

Building on the definition of epistemology as a "theory of knowledge" which includes a "set of assumptions about the social world" (Hesse-Biber, 2012: 5), adopting a feminist epistemology as the philosophical/epistemological foundation for the research impacts both the methodology of the thesis as well as the methods adopted for gathering and analysing data. This section gives an overview of the foundations of the feminist epistemology; its different strands/discourses; its implications on methodology and research methods; and its relevance to the thesis.

5.3.1 Feminist epistemology

Feminist epistemology initially developed as a critique of traditional epistemology and its androcentric, or male-centric bias against women (Brooker, 2002; Tisdell, 2012). With the expansion of feminist scholarship and activism in the 1960s and 1970s, feminist scholars started re-examining the philosophical and theoretical foundations of mainstream epistemology with the aim of creating new approaches to research that would provide knowledge about women's lives (Zalewski, 2003: 114; Spencer, Pryce, & Walsh, 2014: 92). Feminist scholars criticized traditional or mainstream epistemology for being male-centred in its

process of knowledge construction. According to them, traditional epistemology has focused its knowledge on men's lives and values, deeming women's lives, activities, and interests as irrelevant or inferior to their male counterparts. Moreover, according to them, it largely excluded women from the process of knowledge production, regarding them as inadequate or non-credible producers of knowledge (Spencer, Pryce, & Walsh, 2014: 92; Zalewski, 2003: 114). In addition, feminist scholars refuted the ontological foundations of traditional epistemology regarding the position of knowledge and its generalizability. They rejected the traditional epistemology's view of knowledge "as existing independently of the person(s) who produced it", as well as its assumptions regarding its generalizability "from its context of discovery to a variety of contexts of use" (Brooker, 2002; Stanley & Wise, 1993: 191).

However, "unlike traditional epistemology, the term feminist epistemology does not have a single referent" (Brooker, 2002). Feminist scholars have used the term feminist epistemology in many different ways to refer to "women's experiences" or "ways of knowing" (Brooker, 2002). Harding (1987), for instance, equates feminist epistemology with "feminist ways of knowing" or "feminist critiques of traditional accounts of ways of knowing" (quoted in Brooker, 2002). Stanley and Wise (1993), on the other hand, define feminist epistemology as a "framework or theory for specifying the constitution and generation of knowledge about the social world; that is, it concerns how to understand the nature of reality" (Stanley & Wise, 1993: 188). Similarly, Tisdell (2012) defines feminist epistemology as a theoretical foundation which "brings together the usual epistemological concerns such as what constitutes knowledge and how it is constructed with the central issues of feminist theory: gender as an analytic category" (Tisdell, 2012: 331).

Thus, feminist epistemology is an overarching framework for integrating women's knowledge, voices and experience. However, "there is no single feminist epistemology or methodology" (Hesse-Biber, 2012: 5). Different approaches and perspectives inform feminist research, but they all recognize the importance of women's lived experiences and share "the consideration of the role of gender in determining how knowledge is constructed, both by individual knowers and by social and cultural groups of women and men" (Hesse-Biber, 2012: 3; Tisdell, 2012: 331).

Epistemologically, feminist research considers women's lives and experiences as legitimate sources of knowledge and places them at the centre of social inquiry. Moreover, it examines "the gender context of

women's lives", highlights the different forms of oppression and inequalities women are subject to, and seeks to achieve social change by advancing the status of women and improving the reality of their lives (Hesse-Biber, 2012: 3–4; McHugh, 2014: 137; Spencer, Pryce, & Walsh, 2014: 92).

5.3.2 Different types/strands of feminist epistemology

Building on the aforementioned, discussions of epistemology by feminist scholars usually reflect a wide range of perspectives, from those that embrace positivist methodology and working to enhance the objectivity of mainstream research by adding women, to those that challenge and disrupt existing epistemologies by placing women's lives and experiences at the forefront (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Schwandt, 2007). Harding (1987) identifies three different—but not mutually exclusive—strands of feminist epistemology that have been widely adopted by feminist theorists: feminist empiricism; standpoint feminism or feminist standpoint; and feminist postmodernism (Maruska, 2017: 10; McHugh, 2014: 140; Schwandt, 2007: 111).

5.3.2.1 Feminist empiricism

"Feminist Empiricism adopts the scientific method as the way to understand or know the world" (McHugh, 2014: 140). Feminist empiricists, throughout the 1960s to the 1980s, raised awareness of the sexism and androcentric bias within social sciences and research. They argued that these biases have resulted from "bad science" and claimed that the only way to rectify them is by applying the norms of social scientific enquiry more strictly and adding women's voices and experiences to the different stages of research (Brooker, 2002; Hesse-Biber, 2012: 6). Adopting the positivist-empiricist model, which believes in the scientific method as the only valid means of knowledge production, feminist empiricists embarked on projects to correct biases within research and have employed experimental and observational data to refute sexism and provide evidence for gender equality (Schwandt, 2007: 111; Maruska, 2017: 10; McHugh, 2014: 140–141).

Feminist empiricism was largely criticized for its reliance on the inherently androcentric positivist model of inquiry. However, through recognizing of the relevance of the researcher's social identity on the validity of produced knowledge, and highlighting the sexist biases within the processes and norms of scientific inquiry, feminist empiricists have challenged the methodological assumptions associated with the

positivist-empiricist epistemology (detached objectivity, neutrality, etc.) (Brooker, 2002; Hesse-Biber, 2012: 10; Schwandt, 2007: 111; Zalewski, 2003: 114).

5.3.2.2 Feminist standpoint

With the increasing criticism directed to science as inherently sexist, feminist scholars drawing on Marxist and neo-Marxist notions—particularly the impact of the material and lived experiences of individuals on their understanding of their realities—began developing feminist standpoint theory (Hesse-Biber, 2012: 13; Schwandt, 2007: 11; Zalewski, 2003: 115). Standpoint feminists argue that women's oppressed location (or standpoint) within society provides them with a "more complete and less distorted vision of real social relations" unavailable to the dominant group, men, and thus they have more potential to produce less-distorted knowledge (Hesse-Biber, 2012; Schwandt, 2007: 111; Tisdell, 2012; Zalewski, 2003). They stress the necessity of feminist research to start from women's lives (Brooker, 2002; Hesse-Biber, 2012). According to them, centring the research around the standpoint and experiences of women as a socially oppressed group allows the researcher to reach understandings that are theoretically and empirically more adequate and "gain a more complex and theoretically richer set of explanations of the lives of the oppressors and the oppressed" (Brooker, 2002; Hesse-Biber, 2012: 13).

Similar to feminist empiricists, standpoint feminists accept the existence of a reality. However, they believe that different positions within the social system heavily impact the way different social groups view and understand that reality (McHugh, 2014: 142). They argue that the use of traditional research methods has typically ignored women's experiences and perspectives, and have deemed them as an invalid source of research questions and knowledge production, ultimately serving the purposes of the researcher rather than the researched (Brooker, 2002; McHugh, 2014: 142).

Critics of standpoint feminism have argued that through privileging knowledge produced by women's lives as less distorted or more objective than that produced by traditional research methods, standpoint feminists largely contradict the concept of the social construction of knowledge, which "suggests that one story about women's lives may be just as 'true' or 'false' as another" (Zalewski, 2003: 116). Moreover, they argued that standpoint feminism ignores the different and varied experiences of women, which vary according to differences in race, class, sexual preference, national identity, etc., by collapsing them into a single universal experience or standpoint (Hesse-Biber, 2012: 13).

In response to these criticisms, standpoint epistemology has undergone many different developments over time, including the introduction of the concept of "multiple standpoints", which recognizes the multiplicity of factors or standpoints (race, culture, sexuality, class, etc.) that impact one's understanding of reality (Hesse-Biber, 2012: 13; Maruska, 2017: 11; McHugh, 2017: 143). Nevertheless, standpoint epistemology remains largely challenged by postmodern and post-structural feminists (Zalewski, 2003: 116).

5.3.2.3 Feminist postmodernism

With the increasing interaction between feminism and post-colonialist, poststructuralist, and postmodernist theories, feminists became more aware of the diversities of women and the multiple forms of oppression to which they are subjected. A growing amount of feminist scholarship began highlighting the various issues of "difference" and "otherness" from different theoretical and analytical perspectives (Hesse-Biber, 2012: 13–15). In this sense, Feminist postmodernism refers to a "catchall phrase for an incredibly rich variety of perspectives" ranging from critical theory to post-structural theory to postmodern theories (Schwandt, 2007: 92). Feminist postmodernism adopts the notion of multiple feminist standpoints, focusing its research on exploring the interconnectedness between the various categories of difference in women's lived experiences in terms of gender, class, ethnicity, race, national identity, sexuality, etc. (Hesse-Biber, 2012: 15–16; Maruska, 2017: 11). From this perspective, a growing number of feminists of colour and Third World feminists have challenged mainstream Western feminist scholarship and "the conceptualization of feminist standpoint epistemology by asking the question: Which women?" (Hesse-Biber, 2012: 16). Feminist postmodernists rejected the view of women as an identity adopted by empiricist and standpoint feminists, accusing them of essentialism. According to them, not only does this reduction of women to a single identity not recognize the diversity and complexity of women's voices and experiences; it ignores the variety of factors included in the social construction of the concept of gender (McHugh, 2014: 144).

Building on the above, feminist postmodernists challenge the traditional views on truth and reality, and the possibility of producing value-neutral knowledge. According to them, realities or truths are socially constructed and viewed through one's positionality or social location based on gender, race, religion, class, sexual orientation, and the intersections of these categories, rendering objectivity "impossible" (Tisdell,

2012: 333–334). They examine the social construction of concepts and meanings, analyse the links between knowledge and power, and highlight the importance of context in studying the struggles against different forms of oppression (McHugh, 2014: 143; Schwandt, 2007: 111). However, as Hesse-Biber (2012) notes, much of the scholarship under this epistemological perspective remains largely fragmented, negatively impacting our "understanding of the workings of racism, imperialism, and neocolonialism across historical and cultural contexts" (Hesse-Biber, 2012: 18).

5.3.3 Implications for methodology and research methods

Adopting a feminist epistemology has important implications for research methodology and data collection and analysis methods. Feminist epistemology highlights the role of gender in knowledge construction and places it at the centre of all research methodology considerations, including the choice of data collection and analysis methods (Tisdell, 2012: 331). Understanding the intertwining nature of epistemology, methodology, and methods is crucial for recognizing the impact of feminist epistemology on the "research that evolves from its basic assumptions" (Brooker, 2002).

Stanley and Wise (1993) argue that a feminist epistemology, around which feminist methodology is developed and research methods can be employed, is a pre-requisite for conducting proper feminist research that directly challenges non-feminist frameworks (Stanley & Wise, 1993: 189). Building on this, a feminist methodology—theory and analysis of how the research should proceed—is primarily connected to the theoretical and philosophical assumptions of feminist epistemology, which challenges traditional epistemologies and brings women's lives, experiences, and "different ways of understanding reality" to the forefront (Brooker, 2002; Harding, 1987).

Thus, feminist methodology, evolving from the epistemological assumption that "women's experiences provide the new resources for research" (Harding, 1987: 7), "proposes alternative theories of knowledge that legitimate women as knowers" (Brooker, 2002). Work guided by feminist epistemology often aims to apply qualitative methodologies in which women's voices and experiences are central to the process of knowledge production and in which sexist biases and power imbalances—including those between the researcher and the researched—are reflected (Spencer, Pryce, & Walsh, 2014: 92). However, even though there is a general preference among feminist theorists for post-positivist qualitative methodologies, many

feminist researchers have argued that quantitative and empiricist techniques and methodologies can also be relevant to research based in feminist ontology and epistemology (Maruska, 2017: 12).

With regard to research methods, "the broad-based nature of feminism as an intellectual movement", and the epistemological foundations of feminist research, which are centred around the multiplicity of women's voices and experiences, have allowed feminist research to employ a wide range of methods in an attempt to "answer complex and often novel questions" (Brooker, 2002; Hesse-Biber, 2012: 20). However, similar to their preference for qualitative methodologies, feminist scholars have a general preference for employing qualitative methods in their research and inquiries (Kitzinger, 2004; Travers, 2001b: 133). According to Kitzinger (2004), qualitative methods, particularly in-depth interviews and focus groups, which allow participants to reflect their voices, feelings, and perspectives, "remain the chosen methods for feminist researchers" (Kitzinger, 2004: 115). Qualitative approaches and methods are considered to be well suited for capturing the variety of emotions, experiences and interactions in the daily lives of women, which are otherwise ignored by positivist methods (McHugh, 2014: 145; Spencer, Pryce, & Walsh, 2014: 93). However, the preference for certain methods in feminist research is largely determined by the adopted conceptualization of qualitative research and the epistemological assumptions upon which the research is based (Maruska, 2017: 15; Travers, 2001b: 136).

Departing from the above, feminist research has been characterized by a number of common features that distinguish it from other forms of traditional research. Feminist research has challenged traditional research and knowledge by *asking new questions* that acknowledge and highlight women's different voices and experiences and "expose the power dynamics of knowledge building" (Hesse Biber, 2012: 21; Kitzinger, 2004: 115).

In addition, feminist researchers *emphasize issues of power, authority, ethics, and reflexivity* in the practice of social research. They highlight issues of power and authority in the different stages of the research process and reject hierarchical power dynamics between the researcher and the researched, placing them on an equal footing in the research by disclosing the impact of their own positionality (gender, race, sexual orientation, nationality, etc.) on the research process, while respecting the different experiences and perspectives of the participants (Brooker, 2002; Hesse-Biber, 2012; McHugh, 2014; Spencer, Pryce, & Walsh, 2014; Tisdell, 2012). They put emphasis on reflexivity throughout the research process by paying

attention to the influence of their personal experiences, positions, emotions, and worldview on the conducting of research, and the "disclosing their values, attitudes, and biases in their approaches to particular research questions", with the aim of enhancing the objectivity of the research (Hesse-Biber, 2012: 12; McHugh, 2014; Travers, 2001b).

Finally, feminist research *seeks to achieve social change and transformation* through providing explanations and analyses that would help women better understand their "gendered world" with the aim of changing it for the better (Brooker, 2002; Hesse-Biber, 2012; Tisdell, 2012). In this sense, "the personal is very much political" (Brooker, 2002).

5.3.4 Relevance to the study of women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan

Building on the above discussion, the thesis adopts a postmodernist feminist epistemological approach in studying the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan. Adopting this approach as the epistemological foundation of the thesis emphasizes the simultaneous existence of multiple feminist standpoints in examining the role of Sudanese women in peacebuilding and studies the intersection of these standpoints—particularly religion, ethnicity, and gender—in its analysis of the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan. Moreover, it highlights the notion of social construction of concepts and truths/meaning and the significant role of context in the process of their socialization and construction, which is in line with the adopted conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the thesis that highlights the significant role of context in constructing concepts of gender, religion, and peacebuilding.

With regard to the research methodology, the adopted research design, which combines qualitative research and case study approaches, is well suited to the feminist epistemological foundation that aims at highlighting the voices and roles of women as a marginalized group in the society and brings their agency and experiences to the forefront. Moreover, the use of qualitative research methods, particularly in-depth interviews and focus group discussions, further brings focus to their different perspectives, feelings, views and how they construct meanings around peace and conflict, as well as how religion impacts their roles in this regard.

Finally, it complements the theoretical framework of the study, which puts emphasis on the voices and agency of Sudanese women, as African Muslim women, with their specific experiences and various

standpoints of oppression and marginalization, thus challenging mainstream feminist research, which views women as a homogeneous entity, and contributing to the better understanding of the specific context of Sudanese women, with the aim of enhancing their roles in peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

5.4 DATA COLLECTION METHODS

Building on the above, and stemming from the feminist epistemological approach, which highlights the differences in women's roles and experiences, and places them in the centre, or rather the starting point of the research, the thesis adopted in-depth, semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions in gathering and collecting primary data about the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan. Primary data were reviewed vis-à-vis the secondary data obtained through extensive desktop research and the review of the main literature dedicated to the fields of "women and peacebuilding" and "religion and peacebuilding", with the intent of bridging the gap between the two fields and reaching a causal relationship between the two variables. Both primary and secondary data were analysed using a combination of content analysis and thematic analysis methods with the aim of identifying patterns and themes on the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan and analysing the impact of religion on women's participation in peacebuilding initiatives.

5.4.1 In-depth interviews

"Interviewing is currently *the* central resource through which contemporary social science engages with issues that concern it" (Rapley, 2004: 16). Qualitative interviews—whose development as a qualitative data collection method can be traced back to the field of sociology in the 1920s—remain a primary data source for qualitative research studies, although the term has been used with different meanings and for different research purposes in a variety of disciplines (Roulston & Choi, 2018: 233–234).

Interviews are instrumental tools for collecting rich data aiming at understanding people's views, attitudes, perspectives, and the meanings they make of their lived experiences. They are used as methods for collecting primary data on people's views and attitudes, as well as for testing hypotheses, creating relationships between variables, and following up on issues (Gray, 2014: 382–383; Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016: 102).

Stemming from a range of theoretical and epistemological traditions that place the voices of social actors at the centre of inquiry, interviews, as a qualitative research method, have a number of common features. They are purposeful; centred around rich descriptions provided by participants about their worlds or lived experiences; and aim at providing interpretations and contributing to knowledge construction about these experiences or phenomena (Bauman et al., 2002: 226; Brinkmann, 2014: 288; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 108).

Despite the above, scholars have categorized different types of interviews in qualitative research. Roulston (2010) differentiates between interviews according to the philosophical orientations to which they adhere. According to her, qualitative interviews can be clustered according to neo-positivist, romantic, constructionist, postmodern, transformative, and decolonizing conceptions (Roulston, 2010: 51). Neo-positivist interviews are ones in which the interviewer consciously aims at producing valid data and findings through maintaining a neutral stance and asking good questions. Romantic interviews are intimate and aim at obtaining in-depth interpretations and disclosures of the perceptions and lived experiences of the participants. Constructionist interviews are a type of interview in which both the researcher and the researched co-construct the data. Postmodern interviews are interviews that aim at presenting data that reflect the "various non-unitary performances of selves" (Roulston, 2010: 63). Transformative interviews are a type of interview in which the researcher aims to challenge and transform understandings and perceptions of the participants. Finally, decolonizing interviews are ones in which issues of power and oppression are highlighted and brought to the forefront (Roulston, 2010).

Other scholars categorize interviews according to their disciplinary and theoretical perspectives. Three often-discussed disciplinary-based interviews are phenomenological interviews, ethnographic interviews, and feminist interviews (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Roulston & Choi, 2018). Phenomenological interviews are interviews that aim at generating detailed data about phenomena through a focus on the participants' lived experiences and their understanding of their worlds (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 113; Rouslton & Choi, 2018: 235). Ethnographic interviews aim at exploring the cultural worlds of participants through the meanings and connotations they give to them in their own language, over extended periods of time (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 113; Roulston & Choi, 2018: 235). Feminist interviews aim at producing knowledge that starts from women's voices and experiences, with the aim of promoting equality and social

justice for them (Roulston & Choi, 2018: 236–236). Other types of interview include hermeneutic interviews, postmodern interviews, and intra-views (see Roulston & Choi, 2018: 235–236).

Perhaps the most referred-to categorization of interviews, however, is that based the structure and organization of the interview questions. According to this criterion, interviews can be categorized into structured interviews, unstructured interviews, and semi-structured (in-depth) interviews.

Structured interviews are those in which respondents are required to answer a specific set of questions in the same order. The researcher in this type of interviews has total control over the direction of interview process and the issues covered by the interview questions (Brinkmann, 2014; Cook, 2008; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Roulston & Choi, 2018: 233). Unstructured interviews, on the other hand, are "loosely formatted" and "more likely to resemble everyday conversation" (Roulston & Choi, 2018: 233). In this type of interview, the researcher has no pre-determined set of questions and consequently has minimal control over the course of the interview (Bauman et al., 2002; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Roulston & Choi, 2018). Finally, semi-structured or in-depth interviews—which are the type adopted by the thesis—are considered the most widespread form of interview in social sciences (Brinkmann, 2014: 286). This type of interview is one in which a pre-determined list of questions and topics are covered by the respondents in a more flexible fashion and in no specific order. In this type of interview, the researcher has some control over the direction and content, and can probe on certain views and perspectives with the aim of attaining in-depth data in line with the research objectives (Cook, 2008; Gray, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Roulston & Choi, 2018). Compared to structured interviews, semi-structured interviews are argued to better contribute to the "knowledge-producing potentials of dialogues" as they allow both the interviewee and interviewer to become visible and central in the construction of meanings and understandings (Brinkmann, 2014: 286).

Interviews have been subject to a number of criticisms related to the subjectivity in participants' accounts, the reliance of the data on the participants' articulation of experiences within the limited interview timeframe, and the limited ability it offers for interpretation by the researcher (Bauman et al., 2002; Cook, 2008; Roulston & Choi, 2018). However, despite these criticisms, interviews (particularly semi-structured or in-depth interviews) "remain one of the most popular and effective methods of data collection in qualitative research" (Cook, 2008: 423).

In order to mitigate the challenges related to interviews as a qualitative method, the thesis draws on the feminist epistemological foundations and theoretical framework in the employment of interviews in its data collection. According to Roulston (2010) and Roulston and Choi (2018), epistemological and theoretical assumptions adopted by researchers largely determine the way interviews are integrated in a research design and whether they can be used as the primary method for data collection or not (Roulston, 2010: 51; Roulston & Choi, 2018: 244). For feminist studies—or studies stemming from a feminist epistemology, like the one at hand—interviews have always been a valued method (McHugh, 2014: 150).

Using interviewing as a feminist research method allows for highlighting women's different lives and experiences as a source of data and knowledge production, and reflects women's voices, feelings, and perspectives as a starting point for social inquiry (DeVault & Gross, 2012; McHugh, 2014). Moreover, it allows for breaking down hierarchal relations through maintaining an equal relationship between the researcher and the researched in the process of knowledge construction and practising reflexivity throughout the different stages of research. In addition, it brings out women's "subjugated knowledge" (Hesse-Bieber, 2007: 112) and ignored experiences with the aim of achieving social change (DeVault & Gross, 2012; McHugh, 2014).

Thus, drawing on feminist epistemology in analysing the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan, the thesis employs in-depth interviews as a qualitative data collection method with the aim of highlighting Sudanese women's unacknowledged voices and perspectives on their roles in peacebuilding and the impact that religion has—as part of Sudanese culture and political tradition—on their participation. Moreover, it places these views, perspectives and experiences within their specific cultural and historical contexts, acknowledging the various categories of differences in women's lives and experiences, with the aim of constructing knowledge that is relevant to their specific realities and would contribute to enhancing their inclusion and participation.

5.4.2 Focus group discussions

Complementary to in-depth, semi-structured interviews, the thesis adopts focus group discussions as a data collection method to obtain Sudanese women's perspectives and attitudes regarding peacebuilding and the impact of religion on their participation in peace initiatives.

Focus group discussions, which are largely linked to market research, have been increasingly used in recent years in social sciences and applied research (Leavy, 2007a: 167; Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016: 127). As a qualitative data collection method, a focus group is an instrument that aims at gaining a range of insights and perspectives on certain issues resulting from the discussions and interactions among a group of people (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016).

According to McHugh (2014), focus group interviews or discussions can be especially effective in cases where gaining information from participants using interviews can be challenging, or when the aim of the research is to get more in-depth insights and perspectives about certain issues, or give voice to marginalized groups (McHugh, 2014: 152). The ongoing interaction among focus group participants, including sharing similarities and comparing differences in views and perspectives, leads to the co-construction of meaning and knowledge by participants and gives a deeper insight not only into what they think "but also why they think the way they do" (Morgan & Hoffman, 2018: 250). Compared to in-depth individual interviews, focus group discussions contribute to enriching research analysis by providing a variety of different views and perspectives, as well as the extent of their consensus and diversity yielded through moderating of group interactions. However, it does not provide the same level of depth and detail obtained through individual interviews (Morgan & Hoffman, 2018: 251; Brinkmann, 2014: 289).

In addition, the "group effect" that arises from the interactions among focus group participants can have both positive and negative outcomes. According to Leavy (2007a), while group debate and interaction can facilitate discussions and knowledge building around difficult issues, it could intimidate and deter certain participants from voicing their views, particularly in group compositions in which participants can have unequal standpoints (Leavy, 2007a: 177). This challenge requires special attention from the researcher in both the selection of participants and the moderation processes to avoid replicating unequal social relations or dynamics.

However, similar to in-depth interviews, focus groups have been increasingly used as one of the primary data collection methods in feminist researche. Focus groups allow for accessing of the silenced or ignored views, perceptions, and feelings of marginalized groups, including women, regarding their social realities and the meanings they give to their worlds and experiences (Leavy, 2007a: 168). In addition, focus group settings shift power and authority to the participants, allowing participants (women) to share their

experiences and perspective in a safe environment conducive to knowledge building and construction (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2014; McHugh, 2014). Moreover, in line with feminist research objectives, focus group settings can contribute towards creating group dynamics that "mitigate alienation, create solidarity, and enhance community building" (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2014: 321), thus contributing to the feminist research objective of social transformation.

Building on above, the thesis employs the focus group as a complementary data collection method, with the aim of examining ordinary Sudanese women's attitudes and perceptions concerning the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan, and of obtaining rich data about their lived experiences and the impact of religion as a societal and cultural construct on their worlds and realities.

5.4.3 Application of the data collection methods to the study of women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan

Departing from the aforementioned discussion, the researcher employed both in-depth interviews and a focus group discussion conducted during two field visits to Khartoum, Sudan, the first between 14 and 23 December 2019 and the second between 28 February and 6 March 2020, to obtain primary data on women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan.

The in-depth interviews included 42 respondents, representing different local and international governmental and non-governmental organizations and actors working on issues related to women and peacebuilding in Sudan. The respondents were divided into two main groups. The first group comprised 19 international peace and security practitioners in Sudan and was primarily comprised of the main international governmental organizations working in Sudan (United Nations, African Union, UNAMID); representatives of international partners and donor organizations related to issues of peacebuilding in Sudan (the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden, the European Union, and other Western embassies and organizations that wished to remain anonymous); as well as officers from international non-governmental organizations operating in Sudan (Mercy Corps, Cooperation International (COOPI), Muslim Aid).

The second group comprised 23 officials of local governmental and civil society organizations and activists involved with women and peacebuilding issues in Sudan. These included Sudanese women activists and members of peace networks (Sudan's Women, Political and Civil Groups (MANSAM), SuWEP, No to Oppression against Women Initiative, Taskforce for the Engagement of Women in Sudan); members of

local governmental and non-governmental development organizations (the National Unit for Combating Violence against Women and Children, the Sudanese Development Call Organization (NIDAA), the Strategic Initiative for Women in the Horn of Africa (SIHA), *AMNA*, the Sudanese Organization for Peace and Cultural Trends (SOPAT)); academics (Ahfad University for Women, Khartoum University, Al-Daein University); gender advisors to international organizations; as well as politicians and thought leaders (FFC coalition, Umma Party (UP), Sudanese Congress Party, Reform Now Party, Sudanese People Liberation Movement- North (SPLM-N), Aqqar faction).

Interviews conducted with the first group aimed at understanding the peacebuilding context and the different governmental and non-governmental initiatives aiming at achieving peace in Sudan. In addition, they aimed at exploring the understanding of international actors regarding the challenges preventing Sudanese women from fully participating in peacebuilding initiatives, as well as the impact of religion and cultural factors on peacebuilding initiatives in general and the participation of women within these initiatives in particular. Similarly, interviews conducted with the second group aimed at exploring the multiplicity of roles Sudanese women play in peacebuilding in both formal and informal contexts, as well as the impact of religion—as an integral part of Sudanese culture and political tradition—on their role. Moreover, building on the combination of African and Islamic feminisms as the theoretical framework of the thesis, interviews also aimed at exploring Sudanese women's views on the potential for a positive role for religion in consolidating peace and promoting an increased inclusion of women in peacebuilding initiatives.

In addition to the in-depth interviews, a focus group discussion with six ordinary Sudanese women involved in peacebuilding initiatives in local communities in Khartoum was conducted, with the facilitation of one of the local non-governmental organizations working on issues related to women and peacebuilding in Sudan. The focus group discussion included women between the ages of 23 and 27, representing different professional and educational backgrounds, with the aim of obtaining rich data on the lived realities of women in terms of the impact of religion on the level of their participation in peacebuilding and the cultural/societal factors limiting their inclusion. However, given the limitations related to the security challenges in Sudan, as well as difficulties in obtaining travel permits to conflict areas where most

peacebuilding programs are located, the researcher was not able to conduct more than one focus group discussion with ordinary Sudanese women.

Stemming from the feminist epistemological foundations of the research methodology and the Third World feminism theoretical framework, the researcher was keen in her selection and conduction of data collection methods to comply with feminist research objectives. In-depth interviews and the focus group discussion processes maintained an equal relationship between the researcher and the participants, privileging the voices of the researched and their perspectives regarding the role of Sudanese women in peacebuilding and the impact of religion as a cultural and political factor on their participation. The selection of the participants for the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussion ensured a high level of inclusivity, reflecting the diversity in participants' standpoints and various categories of differences including gender, religious orientation, ethnicity, and political affiliation, aiming at providing different perspectives on women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan and enriching the description and analysis of the study. Finally, through highlighting the silenced views and perspectives of Sudanese women on their peacebuilding roles and the impact of religion–whether positive or negative—on their participation and inclusion, the study contributes to bridging the gap in knowledge and research on this particular issue, thus contributing to achieving social change and transformation for Sudanese women.

Given the relative novelty of the topic under investigation, the data collected through the above-mentioned primary sources were reviewed in comparison to the secondary data obtained through extensive desktop research of well-researched books, journal articles, research reports, and a review of the main literature dedicated to the fields of "women and peacebuilding" and "religion and peacebuilding". As such, secondary data were used to confirm and consolidate aspects of primary data related to the roles of women and religion in peacebuilding. On the other hand, the primary data were used in consolidation of the limited literature linking both women and religion to peacebuilding, both in theory and in practice, ultimately contributing to bridging the gap in research between the two fields and analysing the impact of religion as a cultural and societal factor on the participation of women in peacebuilding initiatives.

5.5 SAMPLING

According to Miner et al. (2012), sampling refers to "the selection of people from a population" about which a study or a research is conducted (Miner et al., 2012: 250). As such, sampling includes selecting a representative sample or a subset to participate in the research from "the overall group of individuals the researcher wants to study", or the population (Miner-Rubino & Jayaratne, 2007: 303). This selection procedure, including determining the sampling strategy or technique as well as the sample size and design, is significant in determining the validity of the research and the generalizability of its results to the "population" of the study (Miner et al., 2012: 250; Miner-Rubino & Jayaratne, 2007: 303)

Two basic types of sampling strategies/techniques are commonly identified in methodology literature: probability and nonprobability sampling. According to Miner et al. (2012), both have their advantages and disadvantages and can be prone to "sample bias"; however, the choice of whether to utilize either of them largely depends on the availability of resources to the researcher, the nature of the research, and the level of generalizability and applicability required (Miner et al., 2012: 250, 252).

Probability sampling, also known as random sampling, is a sampling strategy (strategies) in which participants or respondents are randomly identified (Miner et al., 2012: 251; Miner-Rubino & Jayaratne, 2007: 303). Because of the randomness in sample selection, probability sampling has the advantage of generating findings that can be generalized to the research population from which the sample was drawn, thus increasing its credibility and applicability (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 96; Miner-Rubino & Jayaratne, 2007: 304).

Nonprobability sampling, on the other hand, includes techniques in which the selection of respondents is non-random, or rather, purposeful. In this type of sampling, the researcher selects research participants based on their ability to provide important information or perspectives on the issue under investigation (Gray, 2014; Hesse-Biber, 2007; Miner-Rubino & Jayaratne, 2007). Purposeful sampling, which is the most commonly used form of non-probabilistic sampling in qualitative research, is "based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 96). Despite lacking probability sampling's advantage of the high level of generalizability of its findings, nonprobability or purposeful sampling is

"relatively inexpensive and can usually generate a large sample more quickly than probability sampling strategies" (Miner et al., 2012: 250–251).

A number of scholars have differentiated between different types of purposeful sampling, the most common of which are convenience sampling and snowball sampling (Hesse-Biber, 2007; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Miner et al., 2012; Miner-Rubino & Jayaratne, 2007). Convenience sampling is a sampling technique in which the selection is primarily based on the availability of time and resources, as well as the easy accessibility of respondents or research sites. Although this type of sampling can provide insights on the selected sample, researchers relying on this basis of selection alone find it difficult to generalize their results beyond the characteristics of their particular sample, ultimately leading to the generation of poor or less credible findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 98; Miner et al., 2012: 25; Miner-Rubino & Jayaratne, 2007: 304). Snowball, or chain or network sampling, on the other hand, involves recruiting key research participants based on the specific criteria the researcher has created for his/her research sample, who then refer the researcher to other participants that fit the same criteria (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 97–98; (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016: 107). Though perhaps the most commonly used form of purposeful sampling, it has been criticized for instances of creating "systematic sources of sampling error" in cases where participants invite others, "who share similar characteristics in addition to the characteristic of interest" to join the sample (Miner et al., 2012: 251).

Another form of non-probabilistic sampling used by qualitative researchers is commonly referred to as theoretical sampling (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016). Theoretical sampling is an ongoing sample selection process that is largely guided by the emerging data and "the potential of each case to aid the researcher in developing theoretical insights into the area of social life being studied" (Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016: 106–107). In this type of sampling technique, the researcher recruits an initial sample of respondents based on a specific set of criteria and is guided by the data generated from this initial sample in his/her selection of other respondents until a broad range of theory-generating perspectives has been reached (Merriam & Tisdell: 98–99; Taylor, Bogdan, & DeVault, 2016: 106–107).

Building on the above, with the aim of studying the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan, the thesis has adopted a combination of snowball and theoretical nonprobability sampling techniques in its selection of the in-depth interviews and focus group participants. The selection

of respondents for the initial set of in-depth interviews, conducted during the first field visit to Sudan between 14 and 23 December 2019, was primarily based on the criteria the researcher has specified for her research sample as well as the referrals and recommendations she received from key informants/respondents to other organizations and individuals. However, the second set of in-depth interviews and the focus group discussion, conducted during the second field visit to Sudan between 28 February and 6 March 2020, were largely guided in the selection of their respondents by the data collected during the first field visit, prompting a more purposeful theoretical selection of respondents who are most relevant to the research questions and objectives.

Drawing from a *sample population* of local and international organizations and actors working on issues related to women and peacebuilding in Sudan, the research *sample size* included a total of 48 respondents divided among three main groups. Selection of respondents was primarily based on the criterion of their theoretical or practical involvement in the areas of women and peacebuilding in Sudan, and their ability to provide relevant insights and perspectives to the issue under investigation. Moreover, the selection process satisfied criteria of diversity and inclusivity within the composition of the different groups, with the aim of mitigating sampling errors that could be connected to the snowball technique of sample selection, and of enriching data and reflecting difference in views, experiences and perspectives regarding the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan.

In light of the above considerations, three main groups of respondents were recruited:

- The first group (19 respondents) was composed of respondents from international governmental organizations, including officers from UN agencies working on issues related to women and peacebuilding, gender and security advisors from the AU, and gender and human rights officers in UNAMID. It also included respondents from embassies and development agencies representing the main international actors and donor organizations working on women and peacebuilding issues in Sudan. In addition, international non-governmental organizations working on peacebuilding in conflict affected areas and local communities were also represented, including one international Muslim faith-based organization.
- The second group (23 respondents) included representatives from the main local women initiatives and peace networks, in addition to a number of governmental and non-governmental

organizations working on the protection and developmental aspects of women and peacebuilding in Sudan. Moreover, academics and representatives of a number of women and peace research centres, as well as activists and politicians representing the main political parties and armed groups participating in the peace process, were also interviewed.

- The third group of respondents, the focus group, was composed of six Muslim Sudanese women from the same age group of 23 to 27, representing different professional and educational backgrounds, sharing the commonality of participating as volunteers or recipients of peacebuilding programmes in their local communities.

5.6 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis, as defined by Flick (2014), is "the classification and interpretation of linguistic (or visual) material to make statements about implicit and explicit dimensions and structures of meaning-making in the material and what is represented in it" (Flick, 2014: 5). It is a meaning-making process in which the researcher "makes sense out of the data" through "consolidating, reducing, and interpreting what people have said and what the researcher has seen and read" with the aim of "answering the research question(s)" (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 203). Data analysis is a highly "intuitive and inductive" process with the aim of providing deeper interpretation and understanding of the phenomenon(a) under investigation (Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2016: 160; Saldaña, 2011). It is an ongoing process that occurs simultaneously with the collection of the data, both inside and outside the field, in which researchers are constantly attempting to interpret and make sense of their findings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 196–197; Taylor, Bogdan & DeVault, 2016: 160).

Similar to the variety of forms, styles and methodologies associated with qualitative research, there are also a variety of methods for qualitative data analysis. As such, qualitative research "has no standardized methods of data analysis" (Saldaña, 2011: 93). However, most qualitative data analysis methods share the commonality of being generally "inductive" and involving a degree of data coding and categorization (Flick, 2018a: 126; Gray, 2014: 602; Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014: 24; Merriam & Tisdell, 2016: 216). Consequently, the selection of data analysis methods primarily depends on the theoretical and conceptual framework and the research design adopted for the study (Roulston & Choi, 2018: 241; Saldaña, 2011: 89).

With regard to the study at hand, primary and secondary data obtained through the aforementioned qualitative data collection resources were analysed using a combination of content analysis and thematic analysis methods, with the aim of getting a deeper understanding of the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan.

5.6.1 Content analysis

Content analysis is considered one of the most common approaches/methods for analysing and interpreting qualitative data (Gray, 2014: 607; Schreier, 2014). It is a method used for the "systematic examination of texts and visuals (e.g., newspapers, magazines, speech transcripts), media (e.g., films, television episodes, Internet sites), and/or material culture (e.g., artifacts, commercial products) to analyze their prominent manifest and latent meanings" (Saldaña, 2011: 10). It is a way of reducing and interpreting qualitative data by categorizing them into similar units, concepts, or themes, with the aim of linking or finding associations between research variables (Gray, 2014: 607; Julien, 2008: 121).

Four main features characterize qualitative content analysis: it is typically inductive, it reduces data, it is systematic, and it is flexible (Julien, 2008: 122; Schreier, 2014: 170). Content analysis is generally inductive, involving a close reading or examination of data with the aim of providing a deep understanding and interpretation while taking the context of data into consideration (Julien, 2008: 122; Schreier, 2014: 174). It helps in reducing the amount of data through focusing specifically on aspects related to the research question(s) (Schreier, 2014: 170). It is highly systematic in its examination of the collected data in relevance to the research question(s) and objectives, as well as in its sequence of steps and its coding and categorization of data with the aim of finding patterns of relationships between categories or themes (Julien, 2008: 122; Schreier, 2014: 170). Finally, it is a very flexible method that could be applied to a wide range of data, and irrespective any particular theoretical or conceptual frameworks (Julien, 2008: 122; Schreier, 2014: 171).

Content analysis includes the clustering of data into codes that translate into themes. This is done through classifying different parts of the data materials into different categories of a "coding frame" built around concepts and elements that describe and interpret the data (Julien, 2008: 121; Schreier, 2014: 170). Those themes or categories of could be determined deductively from the theoretical or conceptual framework of the research prior to the analysis process, or inductively from the data itself (Gray, 2014: 608; Julien,

2008: 121; Morgan & Hoffman, 2018: 259). The identification of codes and categories within the material is followed by the process of data reduction through finding patterns and relationships between the different themes, providing a detailed description or a deeper understanding for the phenomenon under investigation (Gray, 2014: 608).

Schreier (2014) distinguishes between content analysis and inductive coding as a method of data analysis. According to him, although content analysis is easily confused with inductive coding, it is much more systematic and restrictive in its process. It follows a predefined series of steps, which includes "making use of a coding frame, generating category definitions, segmenting the material into coding units, and distinguishing between a pilot phase and a main phase of analysis" in which the coding frame is evaluated in terms of "its reliability and validity" (Schreier, 2014: 173–174).

5.6.2 Thematic analysis

Similar to content analysis, thematic analysis is "a data reduction and analysis strategy by which qualitative data are segmented, categorized, summarized, and reconstructed in a way that captures the important concepts within the data set" (Ayres, 2008: 868). It is a method for identifying and analysing "themes" or "patterns" which reflect important aspects in the data in relevance to the research question(s), and often include "an internal connected structure: a relationship between two concepts or actions, a proposition or belief, a narrative or argument, or other more complex sets of relations" (Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014: 26–27). It is also a descriptive strategy in which the relationships between the identified themes or patterns are described within the context of the overarching framework that unites them (Ayres, 2008: 868).

Unlike the many steps of content analysis, the thematic data analysis method primarily involves thematic coding and thematic analysis. Thematic coding is a data reduction technique that includes the segmentation and categorization of data into either pre-determined theoretical-inspired or data-driven categories or themes for analysis (Ayres, 2008: 868; Gray, 2014: 609; Morgan & Hoffman, 2018: 260). During this process, data are separated from their original contexts and regrouped or re-contextualized into themes or categories (Ayres, 2008: 868). In the thematic analysis process, on the other hand, themes are examined in relevance to each other, as well as to the research question(s) and the data material as a whole, thus re-integrating data into the context from which it was derived or "coded" (Ayres, 2008: 868; Maxwell & Chmiel, 2014: 27). Unlike content analysis, in which coded data are analysed independent of

the "account from which it was drawn", thematic analysis re-contextualizes coded data "retaining their connection to their sources", potentially leading to the production of case-based generalizations of qualitative research (Ayres, 2008: 868).

5.6.3 Application to the study of women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan / relevance to the study

Building on the aforementioned, both primary and secondary data obtained through in-depth interviews, focus group discussion, and extensive desktop research and review of the main literature on the fields of "women and peacebuilding" and "religious peacebuilding" were subject to a data analysis process that combined both content analysis and thematic analysis methods in its examination and investigation.

Both methods were used to closely inspect data derived from both primary and secondary sources, categorize them into codes congruent with the adopted conceptual framework, and ultimately classify them into themes that were derived from both the review of literature and the theoretical framework of the study. Relationships between the main themes were then identified and described, with the aim of exploring the relationships between the three main variables of the study (women, religion, and peacebuilding) and contributing to bridging the gap in literature between "women and peacebuilding" and "religion and peacebuilding". Through analysis, the emerging relationships between the identified themes were contextualized further through the adopted case study approach, which describes phenomena within their specific settings and highlights the relevance of context to the process of knowledge construction. Furthermore, and in line with the feminist epistemological foundations of the research methodology, the analysis process sought to provide a deeper understanding of the relationships between the main research themes or variables, through highlighting the voices and experiences of women and their perspectives regarding their roles in peacebuilding and the impact of religion on their participation and inclusion.

5.7 ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS AND LIMITATIONS

Drawing from the feminist epistemological influence of the research, the researcher has practised a high degree of reflexivity all throughout the research process and was aware of her standpoint and positionality and its impact on the different aspects of the study. In this regard, the researcher maintains that her background as a woman of African Muslim descent, who has previously lived and worked in Sudan, has

presented both an asset and an ethical limitation in the conducting of the research, which the researcher attempted to reduce and use to the study's best advantage.

To mitigate the potential challenge associated with the researcher's background, prior to conducting the field research, the researcher built a level of trust and confidence with relevant civil society organizations, whose inputs were vital to conducting the research and in providing access to other respondents. Moreover, the researcher used key informants to introduce her to local civil society organizations and actors, who were otherwise difficult to access, which helped in building trust and rapport during the interviews and focus group discussion and facilitated the smooth conducting of both processes. The researcher also drew on her previous connections made while working in Sudan to gain access to international organizations and development agencies operating in the country, who helped provide a more holistic perspective on the issues under investigation.

The researcher was keen in her designing of the interviews and focus group discussion to maintain an equal relationship between herself and the respondents, eliminating any hierarchal or power relations in the process. Interview and focus group discussion questions were semi-structured, which allowed a level of flexibility in the administering of both processes and helped the respondents express their detailed views and perspectives on the issues under study. The objectives of the research, as well as the rights of respondents to anonymity and withdrawal from the research were fully explained, and informed consent forms were obtained prior to the administering of both the in-depth interviews and the focus group discussion. Moreover, the interviews with local respondents were conducted in their native Arabic language, which facilitated the conducting of interviews and the focus group discussion without the need for a translator, and helped the respondents freely explain their thoughts and feelings regarding the subjects at hand.

Throughout the conduct of the field research, the researcher maintained an awareness of her position as both an insider and an outsider. With regard to Sudanese respondents, being an insider sharing the same gender, religion, language and similar cultural and societal background added to the understanding between the researcher and the respondents and helped in probing on issues of culture and religion without any sensitivities related to cultural differences. On the other hand, being an outsider helped build a level of trust between the researcher and the respondents and reduced fears of potential biases in

analyses or conclusions. With regard to international respondents, sharing the same professional background and drawing from previous work networks helped build a high level of understanding of the nature of work of these international organizations in Sudan, which facilitated discussions during the interviews and helped respondents probe their experiences and perspectives without fear of misinterpretation.

The researcher was also aware of her positionality in her presentation and analysis of findings. The researcher's background and previous experience and understanding of the Sudanese context has helped in contextualizing data obtained from primary and secondary sources and in analysing the relationship between the identified themes with a deeper understanding of the cultural and societal context, and the impact of religion in this regard. However, the unique understanding and interpretation of religion in Sudan and the difference of its impact on women's lives and participation has limited the influence of prior assumptions on the discussion and analysis of findings. The researcher also attempted to mitigate these potential biases through the selection of her data collection and analysis methods, which highlight the voices and perspectives of the respondents and analyse them in a systematic manner with the aim of ensuring validity and reliability in relevance to the research questions and objectives.

With regard to the limitations of the research, the researcher has encountered a number of difficulties and limitations in conducting field research in Sudan. The beginning of the research (December 2018) coincided with nation-wide demonstrations and protests against the previous Islamist regime, which resulted in a regime change and the appointment of a transitional government in August 2019. This has significantly delayed the conducting of the field research because of the difficulty in obtaining the required letters of approval from various local and international organizations to administer the interviews and focus group discussion. In addition, the difficulty in obtaining travel permits to conflict areas in Sudan (Darfur-Blue Nile-South Kordofan) and the high risk associated with conducting fieldwork in these areas, given the political and security situations at the time, has limited the scope of fieldwork to the capital, Khartoum. Moreover, with the Sudanese peace talks held in Juba, South Sudan, the researcher had difficulty in accessing the main negotiators to get their perspectives on the issues under research.

 However, the researcher attempted to mediate these challenges of security and inclusivity through a number of techniques. In addition to the University of Pretoria's research ethics instruments, such as the

informed consent, the researcher obtained research approval from the University of Khartoum, which generally facilitated the conducting of interviews and the focus group discussion with the different respondents and eliminated any security risks associated with these processes for both the researcher and the respondents. In her selection of the research sample, the researcher aimed at obtaining the views and perspectives of respondents from conflict areas (Darfur, Two Areas), as well as organizations operating in their communities. Finally, the researcher divided her fieldwork among two field visits, which allowed her to analyse initial findings and focus her second set of in-depth interviews on organizations and individuals who would provide rich analyses to the research.

5.8 CONCLUSION

Departing from the above discussion, the thesis, drawing on the Third World feminist theoretical framework of the study and the feminist epistemological foundations of its methodology, was able to align both theoretical and empirical aspects in its study of the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan. The selection of the different elements of the research methodology was done with the clear intention of achieving the objectives of feminist research, while linking the field research to the gap in literature and scholarship on the intersection between the fields of "women and peacebuilding" and "religion and peacebuilding".

The thesis uses the case study of Sudan, which presents a unique context that combines both African and Muslim attributes in its identity, to reflect on the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Africa. Furthermore, it employs qualitative data collection and analysis methods congruent with its feminist epistemological foundation to reflect the voices and agency of Sudanese women within their particular contexts and describe their perspectives regarding their roles in peacebuilding and the impact of religion on the level of their participation and inclusion.

CHAPTER 6: PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

6.1 INTRODUCTION

As discussed in the previous chapter, the thesis, founded on a feminist epistemological approach, adopted a research design that combines both qualitative and case study approaches to study the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan. In the same vein, the thesis adopted in-depth interviews and focus group discussions as its data collection methods with the aim of reflecting the experiences and voices of women with regard to their roles in peacebuilding and the impact of religion on their participation and inclusion. Furthermore, the thesis combined both content and thematic analysis methods in its discussion of findings with the aim of exploring the intersection between the fields of "women and peacebuilding" and "religion and peacebuilding" and contributing towards bridging the gap in literature on the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding.

Building on the above, this chapter presents the main findings that came out from the field research and discusses them using the aforementioned data analysis methods in line with the conceptual and theoretical frameworks of the thesis, as well its research questions and objectives.

6.2 OVERVIEW OF FINDINGS

As previously mentioned, a total of 48 respondents were interviewed using in-depth, semi-structured interviews (42 respondents) and a focus group discussion (six respondents), during two field visits to Khartoum, Sudan, conducted between 14 and 23 December 2019 and between 28 February and 6 March 2020, to obtain primary data on women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan. The respondents comprised three main groups: the first group (19 respondents) was composed of representatives of international governmental and non-governmental organizations working on issues related to women and peacebuilding in Sudan. The second group (23 respondents) was composed of Sudanese women activists and members of governmental and civil society organizations (women networks, academia, political parties, armed groups, NGOs) involved in women and peacebuilding issues. The third group as made up of six ordinary Sudanese women involved in peacebuilding initiatives in their local communities in Khartoum.

Selection of respondents was primarily based on the criteria of their theoretical or practical involvement in the areas of women and peacebuilding in Sudan and their ability to provide relevant insights and perspectives on the issue under investigation, while taking into account elements of diversity and inclusivity within the composition of the different groups. This allowed the study to reflect differences in views, experiences and perspectives regarding the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan, and obtain rich data on the lived realities of women in terms of the impact of religion on the level of their participation in peacebuilding and the cultural/societal factors limiting their full inclusion.

Interview and focus group discussion questions were tailored to the specificities of the three groups in line with the main research themes and questions. Questions aimed at understanding the peacebuilding context in Sudan and the various roles Sudanese women play in peace processes—which are not adequately reflected in literature on women and peacebuilding in Africa—as well as the challenges militating against their full participation and inclusion. In addition, they aimed at exploring the relationship between religion and peacebuilding in Sudan and identifying whether religion—either on the institutional level or as an integral part of Sudanese culture and identity—plays a direct role in peacebuilding initiatives. Moreover, the questions aimed at analysing the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan, through understanding the actual impact of religion on the level of Sudanese women's participation in peacebuilding processes, and the potential it could have regarding enhancing their participation and inclusion.

The interviews were designed in a semi structured manner, in which the main themes or questions of the thesis were covered, including the roles of women in peacebuilding, the role of religion in peacebuilding, and the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding. Probing questions were used in many cases to direct respondents back to the main themes or provide more explanation on previous questions. The researcher maintained an equal relationship with respondents, with little control exercised on her part in terms of the order and structure of interview questions. The allowed for providing detailed descriptions of the respondents' perspectives and experiences in line with research objectives. Data from in-depth interviews and the focus group discussion were stored using audio-recordings and written notes and were transcribed and translated at a later stage in preparation for their analysis and presentation.

Building on the aforementioned, the findings of the study can be divided into three main themes or categories: women and peacebuilding, religion and peacebuilding, and women, religion, and peacebuilding.

6.2.1 Women and peacebuilding

With regard to the relationship between women and peacebuilding in Sudan, findings from the in-depth interviews and focus group discussion reflected a number of perspectives in relation to the roles Sudanese women play in the context of peacebuilding in Sudan, as well as the challenges hindering their full inclusion. Regarding the roles of Sudanese women in peacebuilding, the collected data from in-depth interviews and the focus group discussion reflected the following findings:

- Respondents agreed on the importance of including women in the different phases of peacebuilding processes for ensuring their success and sustainability on the longer term.

- Almost all respondents highlighted the exclusion and marginalization of Sudanese women from formal peacebuilding mechanisms and their minimal impact on negotiation processes.

- All respondents agreed that Sudanese women play a variety of roles in different aspects contributing to peacebuilding in Sudan. However, their contribution to peacebuilding is largely confined to informal activities that are neither reflected in more representation in formal peacebuilding mechanisms, nor on the level of the women and peacebuilding scholarship.

- Respondents highlighted the impact of conflict on Sudanese women, both in terms of their victimhood and subjugation to different forms of direct and structural violence, as well as in terms of their changed gender roles and increased social responsibilities resulting from the conflict.

- Findings concerning the informal roles played by Sudanese women in peacebuilding referred to women's roles in civil society organizations, mass action and activism, peace networks and advocacy, as well as their roles in mediation and reconciliation and maintaining the societal fabric at the communal and grassroots levels.

- Findings also referred to the roles of Sudanese women in political institutions and decision-making structures as one of the important roles in peacebuilding.

- A few respondents referred to the roles of women in instigating conflict, whether as *Hakamat,* who used to sing combatants into conflict, or as members of armed rebel groups.

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With regard to challenges militating against the full participation and inclusion of Sudanese women in peacebuilding processes, findings reflected the following:

- Respondents highlighted the role of cultural and societal factors in determining specific gender roles in Sudanese society as one of the primary challenges that limit women's inclusion and participation in peacebuilding initiatives.

- Related to that is the patriarchal mentality and ideology at all levels of society, including political institutions and decision-making bodies, in which women are largely excluded and marginalized.

- Religion, according to a large number of respondents, was also referred to as a constraining factor. However, respondents differentiated in this regard between religion as a value system and its specific employment and integration into the legal framework (Shari'a laws) by the previous Islamist regime as a source of limitation to women's participation.

- Respondents also referred to the division and polarization of the women's movement in Sudan as an inherent source for the movement's weakness and the non-inclusion of women in peacebuilding initiatives.

- Respondents also highlighted the role of structural and institutional challenges—represented in the Shari'a-based legal framework and the weak representation of women in decision-making structures and political institutions—in militating against women's participation and full inclusion in public life in general and peacebuilding processes in particular.

- A small number of respondents referred to the negative role of the international community and international donors in exacerbating divisions within the women movement and limiting the effectiveness of women's participation in peacebuilding initiatives

- Other respondents also highlighted challenges related to the prevalent narrow conception of peacebuilding and peace negotiations, and their focus on security and power-sharing arrangements, leading to the lack of acknowledgment of the various contributions of women to peacebuilding and their exclusion from formal peacebuilding structures.

- Moreover, respondents highlighted the lack of education, capacities, and economic empowerment, as well as the reluctance of women to attain leadership roles as among the challenges militating against women's full participation and inclusion in peacebuilding initiatives in Sudan.

6.2.2 Religion and peacebuilding

With regard to the relationship between religion and peacebuilding, answers of the respondents tackled the significant role of religion in Sudan, the role of religion in peacebuilding in Sudan, and the relevance of religious peacebuilding and the incorporation of religion in the peacebuilding context of Sudan as follows:

- Respondents stressed the significant role religion plays in Sudan, both as an identity-marker of Sudanese culture and politics, and as an influential factor in the trajectory of conflict and peace throughout Sudanese history. They highlighted, in this regard, the ongoing debate over the role of religion in the future of the Sudanese political system following the ousting of the Islamist regime.

- The majority of respondents stated that the role of religion in peacebuilding is debatable in Sudan, particularly with the politicization of religion during the Islamist regime and its role in the Sudanese civil wars.

- On the other hand, respondents contended that while local Islamic faith-based organizations were largely politicized during the Islamist regime and had no visible role in peacebuilding, local and international Christian institutions and religious actors played a more prominent role in this regard.

- A number of respondents also referred to Islamic international faith-based organizations operating in Sudan; however, their roles have been mainly focused on humanitarian assistance, with no direct role in the mediation or negotiation processes.

- With regard to the relevance of religious or faith-based peacebuilding in the context of Sudan, participants generally agreed on the potential positive role religion can play to promote peace and co-existence in Sudan. However, the approach and relevance of using religious values to promote peacebuilding was quite a contested matter.

- Respondents from international organizations signalled that they do not generally incorporate religious discourse or partner with local faith-based organizations in their peacebuilding programmes, given the secular nature of their member states and the high level of politicization of religious organizations during the previous regime.

- Local respondents, on the other hand, were quite divided over the issues. While a number of respondents saw relevance in employing religious values and actors in consolidating peace and peacebuilding activities, others felt that the issue of peacebuilding in general and women and peacebuilding in particular needs to be addressed from a purely secular international human rights approach.

- However, respondents, both local and international, agreed that the use of religious discourse is vital with regard to particular components of peacebuilding like protection, GBV and protection of women and girls from harmful practices. Moreover, respondents referred to the importance of targeting religious leaders in peacebuilding programmes—which play a significant role in native administration and other community leadership structures—to ensure the success and sustainability of these programmes, especially in conflict-affected areas.

6.2.3 Women, religion, and peacebuilding

Findings related to the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan addressed the impact of religion on the participation of women in peacebuilding initiatives; the role(s) of women religious actors—or women inspired by their faith—in peacebuilding; and the potential role of religion in enhancing and motivating women's participation in peacebuilding, as follows:

- The majority of respondents highlighted that the incorporation of religion into the legal framework by the Islamist regime during its 30-year rule had a negative impact on the inclusion of women and their participation in public life in general and in peacebuilding initiatives in particular.
- Others referred to the complex relationship between religion and culture with regard to gender roles and expectations. According to this view, the interaction between religion—or a restrictive interpretation of religion— and cultural traditions led to the confinement of Sudanese women to certain gender roles, largely excluding them from peacebuilding processes. In this context, a number of respondents highlighted the varying impact of religion on Sudanese women in different contexts, according to the existing cultural norms as well as the socio-economic status of women within these contexts.
- A third group of respondents felt that religion acted as a motivator for their participation and inclusion in peacebuilding processes, despite the existing cultural and structural barriers.
- Regarding the role of women religious actors—or women inspired by their faith—in peacebuilding, respondents highlighted the contributions of women in religious seminaries or circles; women in Islamic/Islamist movements and political parties; as well as women in civil society organizations to peacebuilding in Sudan. Others referred to the role of women's groups affiliated to the Islamist regime in instigating conflict and carrying out the agenda of the ruling party.

- The potential for using religion as a tool to enhance women's participation in peacebuilding has proven to be a debatable issue among respondents.

- A number of participants agreed that religion could play a significant role in changing the discourse regarding women's participation and representation in a country like Sudan, where religion is an integral part of the culture and identity.

- Others believed that, given the high politicization of religion and women's issues during the previous regime, employing a religious discourse to advance women's rights could be controversial.

- A number of respondents indicated that progressive religious interpretations with regard to women's participation have precedents in Sudan but have not been connected to the Islamic feminist movement at the theoretical level.

- Only one civil society organization working on issues of women and peacebuilding was found to be openly incorporating Islamic feminism in its discourse and programming, as the most appropriate adopted tool for increasing women's participation in public life in general and peacebuilding initiatives in particular in a predominantly Muslim country like Sudan.

6.3 PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS: THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN, RELIGION, AND PEACEBUILDING IN SUDAN

Building on the overview of the findings, the collected data were analysed using a combination of content analysis and thematic analysis methods. The combination of both methods allowed for the in-depth examination of the collected data through a process of systematic coding and categorization, followed by classifying of the coded data into thematic areas in line with the main research questions and objectives, as well as the thematic categorization conducted in the conceptual review and theoretical framework chapters. Moreover, the content and thematic analysis of the data allowed for the creation of patterns and relationships between the main research themes, thus providing rich descriptions of the relationship between "women and peacebuilding" and "religion and peacebuilding" in Sudan, as well as contributing to the gap in literature on the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding.

The findings can be divided into three broad themes, under which a number of key sub-themes will be identified and discussed. These are women and peacebuilding in Sudan, religion and peacebuilding in Sudan, and women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan.

6.3.1 Women and peacebuilding in Sudan

Congruent with the themes emerging from the review of literature on women and peacebuilding, findings from the field research relating to women and peacebuilding in Sudan can be classified into three main sub-themes: the impact of conflict on women in Sudan; the ambivalent roles of Sudanese women in conflict and peace; and the challenges facing their full inclusion in peacebuilding initiatives.

6.3.1.1 The impact of conflict on women in Sudan

A number of respondents have highlighted different forms of victimization of women as a result of prolonged conflict and political instability in Sudan. Respondents contended that women represent the group most vulnerable to conflict in Sudan. They highlighted the different forms of direct and structural violence Sudanese women are subject to, both inside and outside contexts of conflict.

In this context, a number of respondents referred to the different forms of gender-based violence women in Sudan—particularly in conflict areas and Darfur—are subject to as a method or a tactic of war. Others noted the different forms of physical suffering, displacement, and poverty women in IDP camps suffer from. Others highlighted "the changing gender roles and norms in communities affected by war, and the increased social and economic responsibilities and burdens on women due to conflict" (interview with Sara Nakdallah, Umma Party, 2 March 2020). Moreover, respondents highlighted the deteriorating impact conflict has on the infrastructure of the society, which leads to "widespread of illiteracy, negligence or marginalization in the health sector, maternal mortality rates, infancy mortality rates, and others" (interview with Moez Abdel-Wahab ElSheikh, Political Activist, 15 December 2019). Respondents also argued that Sudanese women have suffered from other forms of violence and discrimination outside contexts of conflict. In addition to being subject to different forms of structural violence in the form of marginalization and discrimination in the different aspects of public life, respondents reported that women were the "target of arrests and detention, different forms of torture, and other forms of assault and violence in the December 2018 protests" (Focus Group Discussion, 1 March 2020).

On the other hand, respondents stressed that despite their victimhood, Sudanese women have shown agency and resilience, and it is rather their victimhood and the disproportionate impact of conflict and violence on women that strengthens their relationship with peace and necessitates their involvement in all levels of peacebuilding. Within this understanding, the importance of Sudanese women's participation

and inclusion in peacebuilding initiatives also stems from their disproportionate victimization and the impact conflict has on their lives and roles in the society. Despite common portrayals of women as mere victims of conflict, women's victimization in this context is understood as a strong motivation for peace and justification of the importance of their involvement in all levels of peacebuilding initiatives. According to one of the respondents, "Sudanese women seek peace in a more adamant manner because they are more impacted by war and conflict" (interview with Zainab ElSawi, United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Gender Advisor / SuWEP, 3 March 2020).

Findings on the impact of conflict on Sudanese women coincide with reports on the impact of the different conflicts in Sudan on the status of women. A number of UN reports have indicated that, in addition to facing significant levels of instability, insecurity, rule of law challenges, poverty and underdevelopment, women in conflict areas in Sudan have been disproportionately affected by conflict through being subjected to displacement, disempowerment, marginalization, and exposed to different forms of gender-based violence and human rights violations (OHCHR, 2016; 2018; UN Women Sudan Country Office, 2016). Reports have specifically highlighted the pervasiveness of gender-specific attacks and sexual assaults, as a common inter-tribal conflict tactic, in IDP and refugee camps (IPTI, September 2018; OHCHR, 2018). They have also pointed to the deterioration of the overall level of development in conflict- affected areas and its significant impacts on traditional gender roles, health conditions, as well as education levels among women and children (ElSawi, 2011; OHCHR, 2016; 2018). In addition, reports have highlighted the vulnerability of Sudanese women to violence outside the contexts of conflict. Security forces have been reported to use different forms of violence and abuse to silence women and curtail their freedom of movement (OHCHR, 2018; UN Women Sudan Country Office, 2016). Moreover, during the 2018 protests, Sudanese security forces were reported to have utilized excessive force—including the use of sexual violence—to disperse protestors (UNSC, 9 October 2019: 12; UNSC, 3 June 2020: 18).

These reported findings on the impact of conflict on Sudanese women are also in line with the review of existing literature on women and peacebuilding and the adopted theoretical framework. The impact of conflict and violence on Sudanese women can be analysed within the analytical framework proposed by Lisa Schirch (2012) for studying the different types of violence against women, which categorizes the types of violence women are subject to into non-war violence, war violence, and post-war violence (Schirch,

2012: 54). This framework helps clarify the different forms of violence Sudanese women are subject to, both inside and outside contexts of conflict, which severely hamper their ability to fully participate in peacebuilding initiatives and processes. Moreover, it could also be analysed within the framework of Third World feminism's conception of the victimization of women, which highlights the important role of context in analysing the impact of violence and conflict on women and rejects the victim identity associated with women in the Global South (Anderlini, 2007; Cheldelin, 2011; Confortini, 2010; Mohanty, 1991b). In addition, it takes into account the different forms of violence and discrimination these women are subject to, including contemporary forms of structural imperialism, thus enriching the analysis of the multiple formal and informal roles Sudanese women play, beyond their victimhood, to consolidate peace and stability in their communities and the factors hampering their full inclusion.

6.3.1.2 The ambivalent roles of women in conflict and peace in Sudan

In addition to being victims of different forms of conflict and non-conflict-related violence and atrocities, women have been key players in both conflict and peace in Sudan. They have contributed to instigating and prolonging the conflict, as well as catalysing the reconciliation and peacemaking process through their various roles within their direct local communities and within Sudanese society at large. However, despite regional and international efforts, coupled with Sudanese women's organizations working at increasing women's participation in peacebuilding, women's key roles in peace and conflict in Sudan remain confined to the informal level. This, according to respondents, has included their roles as combatants and instigators of conflict; their roles in lobbying and mass action; their roles at the communal and grassroots levels; their roles in civil society organizations, and their roles in peace networking and advocacy.

6.3.1.2.1 Combatants and instigators of conflict

A number of respondents have shed light on the roles of women in different conflicts in Sudan. In this light, respondents referred to the roles women have played as combatants in armed groups in the Sudan People's Liberation Army and the Sudan People's Liberation Army–North (SPLA-N), as well as in providing support to the warring parties. Respondents have highlighted the roles of *Hakamat*[29] in Darfur in instigating conflict and encouraging combatants to fight and commit crimes.

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[29] Hakamat are women who compose and sing songs that emphasize and transmit the tribe's value system. They have a significant impact on their communities, and have traditionally been known to sing men into battle.

This is supported by historical accounts and reports on the roles Sudanese women played in the Sudanese civil war, as well as the conflict in Darfur. According to these accounts, women from both the North and the South actively participated in the civil war as combatants in the Popular Defence Forces (PDF) and the Sudan People's Liberation Army, as well as in the mobilization and recruitment process and promoting the culture of war on both sides (Adam, 2016; Ahmed, 2014; ElSawi, 2011; Itto, 2006). In the Darfur conflict, a number of reports associate the *Hakamat* with the inter-ethnic conflict and violence in the region. These women were accused of instigating conflict, participating in the looting of villages, as well as encouraging the Arab militias (known as Janjaweed) to sexually assault women and commit other forms of gender-based violence (Adam, 2016: 159–160; Amnesty International, 2004: 24).

Respondents, however, pointed to the roles of these women in peace as well. In an interview with a member of the SPLM-N, she noted the high level of representation of women among the armed group membership as well as their participation in the peace negotiations in Juba. According to her:

> The Sudanese Revolutionary Forces (SRF) [30]has a women unit, and it has a department for peace issues, as well as a department for IDPs and refugees. Moreover, the women of SRF are represented in the MANSAM coalition, and the objective of all these women groups and coalition is the achievement of peace (interview with Bothayna Deenar, SPLM-N (Aqar), 6 March 2020).

Another respondent pointed to the role of *Hakamat* in promoting peace:

> In Darfur, women peacebuilders have worked with *Hakama*t who historically used to instigate and promote for conflict, they have targeted them so they play a role in peacebuilding in their communities. Currently, *Hakamat* promote peace through advocacy or through their songs. Which is a neglected dimension in peacebuilding; using arts to promote peacebuilding, because it is a huge part of the conflict as well (interview with Anonymous 4, *AMNA*, 23 December 2019).

This multiplicity of roles of Sudanese women, and their direct involvement in conflict as well as in peace, is congruent with Third world feminists' analyses regarding the roles of women in peacebuilding and their refutation of Western feminist reductionist views of women as mere victims of conflict, as well as

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[30] A coalition of the major armed groups in Sudan.

essentialist views that equate women with pacifism and peacefulness. It also highlights the important role of context in examining the various roles of women in peacebuilding, thus reflecting the variety of roles Sudanese women can play, both in peace and in conflict, relevant to the specific context of Sudan, as well as the changing nature of their roles across the different geographical and historical contexts.

6.3.1.2.2 Lobbying and mass action

The roles of Sudanese women in the December 2018 mass protests, which led to the ousting of the Islamist regime in April 2019, were repeatedly highlighted by different respondents. Respondents argued that Sudanese women's participation in the protests and sit-ins has been overwhelming given the different forms of violence they were subject to from the security forces.

According to many, Sudanese women have been a driving factor of the revolution. However, this was not reflected in the aftermath of the ouster of the Islamist regime. Women were largely excluded from the negotiations that ensued between the Transitional Military Council (TMC) and the Forces of Freedom and Change, as well as the peace negotiations that commenced right afterwards, in September 2019. According to one respondent, "A distinction needs to be made: women were the face of the revolution, but when it came to negotiations few women were represented. And when it came to appointments very few women were appointed" (interview with Massimo Diana, United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 4 March 2020).

The participation of Sudanese women in mass protests is not a new phenomenon. The Sudanese women's movement has historical precedents of participation in the different protests and revolutions that have marked Sudan's political history and has played an instrumental role in the fight for independence and for attaining political and economic rights for Sudanese women under different regimes (Ahmed, 2014; Habbani, 2017; Osman, 2014). However, a number of respondents highlighted that this overwhelming participation was due to "the disproportional levels of oppression and marginalization women suffered from as a result of the ongoing conflict, as well as the ruling theocratic political regime" (interview with Moez Abdel-Wahab ElSheikh, Political Activist, 15 December 2019).

Others highlighted the positive impact of women's participation in mass protests on the status of women in Sudan and their inclusion in public life. For one respondent, "the revolution constituted a new era for women, coz it broke patriarchal barriers with more women and girls participating in the revolution. For

these girls, there is somehow no return" (interview with Christina Eikeland, Norwegian Embassy, 19 December 2019). Moreover, with regard to the impact of their participation on women's participation and inclusion in peacebuilding overall, a number of participants highlighted the fact that despite their absence from negotiations, women's demands were highlighted in the transitional constitutional document, including the implementation of UNSC Resolution 1325 and the 40% quota for women's participation in the Transitional Legislative Council. Women were also appointed in the Sovereign Council, Cabinet, and local governorates, and are expected to be present in a number of other transitional structures that are under constitution. According to an international officer, "Women were very active during the revolution and were one of its driving forces. And now there are higher number of women ministers and government officials, and this is a direct contributing factor" (interview with Guilia, International Organization, 1 March 2020).

6.3.1.2.3 Communal and grassroots levels mobilization

The majority of the respondents highlighted the roles and contributions of women in supporting and consolidating peace at the communal and grassroots levels. Women at the grassroots level play various roles in peacebuilding and reconciliation. According to respondents, women at this level play a significant role in "maintaining the social and societal fabric in their communities during times of conflict" (interview with Sulaima Ishaq, National Unit for Combating Violence against Women and Children, 18 December 2019). They play an important role at the level of their households and direct communities with the increased social and economic responsibilities they hold during times of conflict and in conflict-affected contexts. They contribute, through their roles as mothers and wives, to reconciliation and ending conflicts by convincing their family members to refrain from engaging in conflict, as well as mediating in many instances across enemy and tribal lines. An example on these roles is "the mediation roles played by women in South Kordofan to return to their families, who have been divided among the government-controlled areas and armed groups-controlled areas" (interview with Huda Shafiq, MANSAM/Women Task Force, 17 December 2020).

Women also play a role in their local conflict resolution and reconciliation processes, and as part of the native administrative structures in these communities. However, these roles are not reflected in mainstream research and scholarship on women and peacebuilding. In IDP camps, women were reported

to play roles in "monitoring; providing early warning signals for conflict and potential intelligence information; reporting actual incidents on rape and gender-based violence; as well as organizing women movements" (interview with Anonymous 8, UN, 4 March 2020).

Respondents from different local and international organizations also highlighted the roles women play in conflict-affected areas in a more institutionalized manner. Women in these areas have been targeted by peacebuilding programmes with the aim of increasing women's participation and inclusion in peacebuilding mechanisms, including community-based organizations, local peace commissions, local reconciliation committees, and other mechanisms at the communal level. In addition to this, women have also played a role as part of local NGOs and civil society organizations working to promote peace in conflict-affected areas. According to the Women's Protection Adviser in the Human Rights Section of UNAMID, "In Darfur, UNAMID continues its efforts of ensuring that women's participation and voices are heard in mechanisms such are inter-communal conflict resolution committees, peaceful co-existence and crop protection committees" (interview with Jane Some, UNAMID, 2 March 2020).

Speaking about women's participation in local peacebuilding initiatives, a programme leader in a Sudanese NGO explained,

> Community-based committees are trained on peacebuilding regardless on the nature of project. It is a persistent component in all our projects. These committees are constituted on a 50% basis between men and women, and the selection among religious leaders, community leaders, and everyone who has influence in the community (interview with Sanaa Mohamed, NIDAA, 15 December 2019).

Another respondent, speaking about the role of women in peace commissions established by the UNDP Darfur Community Peace and Stability Fund (DCPSF), contended that "The communities used to have issues and conflict over water resources, and women always participated in mediating these conflicts. Within the peace commissions, the sub-committees for water included women members because it is connected to their livelihoods" (interview with Safia Mohamed, Darfur Community Peace and Stability Fund, UNDP, 5 March 2020).

The traditional roles played by women in conflict mediation and reconciliation at the local level are not reflected in mainstream literature pertaining to women and peacebuilding in Africa. Nonetheless, these roles highlight the Third World feminist conception of women's roles in peacebuilding and the specificities of their cultural and historical contexts, as well as the African feminist perceptions regarding the roles of women in pre-colonial Africa and the impact of colonialism on existing gender relations and dynamics (Isike & Uzodike, 2011). Regarding the specific case of Sudan, women's traditional roles have been largely impacted by the British colonialist rule as well as the politicization of religion in Sudan. Both factors have significantly influenced gender dynamics in these areas and confined Sudanese women's roles to the private realm, largely excluding them from both traditional and formal peace processes (Ahmed, 2014; Badri, 2005; Hale, 1992; 2001b).

6.3.1.2.4 Civil society organizations activism

Respondents also highlighted the many roles women in civil society organizations play in issues related to women and peacebuilding in Sudan. "On the CSOs level, there was a persistent role and activism for women with regard to issues of peace and peacebuilding. Beginning with 1990s, women in CSOs (academia, NGOs, etc.) worked on programmes of peace culture and education" (interview with Dr Samia Nihar, Women, Gender and Development Unit, University of Khartoum, 22 December 2019).

According to respondents, women in civil society organizations work in different areas contributing to consolidating peace in Sudan, including combating violence against women (VAW) and gender-based violence, and providing training and capacity-building in areas related to peacebuilding, including issues of transitional justice and sensitization to UNSC RES1325. They play a role in providing "psychological support and rehabilitation services to victims of conflict and violence" (interview with Sulaima Ishaq, National Unit for Combating Violence against Women and Children, 18 December 2019), and they adopt different developmental approaches to peace that "focus on issues of women political and economic empowerment, health and reproductive rights as well as issues related to law reforms and human rights" (interview with Tahani Abass, No to Oppression against Women Initiative, 17 December 2019).

Women in civil society organizations also play a role in the consultations processes that accompany peace negotiations. According to a member of MANSAM[31] women's coalition:

> There is also a primary role of the consultations. Because the space of women and their activism within civil society organizations is much bigger than their space on the level of leadership in political parties and armed groups and the like. They are able to communicate with people on a broader level, they engage in service provision to IDPs and it is an entry point to peacebuilding. They also play a role in spreading a culture of peace (interview with Huda Shafiq, MANSAM/Women Task Force, 17 December 2019).

Another aspect of the role of women in civil society organizations in relation to the field of women and peacebuilding was also addressed. Respondents from the focus group discussions highlighted the space women civil society organizations provide for them to volunteer and participate in issues related to peacebuilding, as well as help instil and spread the culture of peace in their direct communities. In the words of one participant:

> I participate in peacebuilding through instilling the culture of peace in my family: the importance of peace and the negative impact of conflict. We work on our capacities and try to participate through different potential mechanisms, including volunteering with civil society organizations, until I feel I can contribute on a bigger level (Layla Musa, Focus Group Discussion, 1 March 2020).

Historically, Sudanese women have played very important roles in civil society organizations, including non-governmental organizations and academia. Their increasing roles in CSOs coincided with the exclusion of a large number of women activists from public and civil positions with the advent of the Islamist regime and the increased international attention and presence in Sudan, in the post-CPA period, in what has been described as the "NGO-ization" of the women's movement in Sudan (Ahmed, 2014: 14). Since then, Sudanese women have built on the opportunities, technical capacities, and funds provided by the international community and donors to create a space for them in civil society organizations and build

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[31] The Sudan's Women, Political and Civil Groups (MANSAM) is a coordination body created in June 2018 comprised of women from eight political groupings, 37 civil society organizations, as well as independent women, which has branches both inside and outside Sudan. It is considered the largest coalition of women addressing issues of democracy, gender justice, and peace in Sudan during the current phase (MANSAM, December 2018).

thematic coalitions and alliances over issues integral to women's rights and their participation in peacebuilding (Osman, 2014; Tønnessen, 2014a).

The contributions of Sudanese women to peacebuilding through their roles in civil society organizations are in line with the adopted relational conception of peacebuilding and conflict transformation, which takes into account many different activities and processes pertaining to inducing long-term societal changes and contributing to a sustainable peace (Isike, 2009; Lederach, 1997). However, this NGO-ization of women's activism in Sudan has largely made the roles of Sudanese women in peacebuilding invisible. The prevalent narrow conception of peace, which is defined from a negative standpoint of absence of violence, and the focus on security and political arrangements in peace processes have made women, though largely present in civil society organizations and other developmental, relational aspects of peacebuilding, invisible in formal peacebuilding structures. Related to this is the role of the international community in exacerbating differences between women's groups in Sudan. Although the phenomenon of NGO-ization of the women's movement has provided more opportunities for Sudanese women, it has been largely focused on women in the centre, which contributed to a widening of the centre–periphery gap in the women's movement and has largely masked other contributions of women at different grassroots and communal levels.

6.3.1.2.5 Peace networks action and peace advocacy

The development of women's activism at the level of non-governmental and civil society organizations, in parallel with increasing awareness regarding issues of peace and conflict, paved the way for the creation of another form of women's peace activism that played an important role in peacebuilding in Sudan, that is peace coalitions and networks (Ahmed, 2014; ElSawi, 2011).

Though mainly focused on advocacy for more participation and inclusion of women in all levels of peacebuilding processes, these networks have worked around different peace processes to ensure women's participation in the negotiations. They also played important roles in facilitating consultations with grassroots communities; participated in track two diplomacy and corridor mediation between warring parties; and lobbied for the inclusion of women's agendas in the final peace agreements. In addition, these networks have played a significant role in lobbying for an increase in women's representation in decision-making structures as one of the major components of peacebuilding, as well as

raising awareness regarding issues related to peace and conflict in Sudan (Ahmed, 2014; Bigio, April 2018; ElSawi, 2011; ICG, 28 June 2006; IDSR, March 2007).

Respondents have highlighted the role of a number of networks during the different Sudanese conflicts. These include Sudanese Women's Empowerment for Peace and Development (SuWEP), the Gender Expert Support Team, the Sudan Taskforce on the Engagement of Women (or the Women's Taskforce), and MANSAM. Other examples include Women for Peace and Security in Darfur and the 1325 group (interviews with Bothayna Deenar, SPLM-N (Aqar), 6 March 2020; Huda Shafiq, MANSAM/Women Taskforce, 17 December 2019; Dr Maha AlZain, MANSAM, 22 December 2019; Safia Mohamed, DCPSF, 5 March 2020; Dr Samia Nihar, University of Khartoum, 22 December 2019; Zainab ElSawi, SuWEP, 3 March 2020).

Speaking about the experience of SuWEP, established in 1997 during the Second Sudanese Civil War, in bringing together women from both the North and the South, Zainab ElSawi, the former coordinator of the network, recalled:

> Women from both the North and the South sought peace with all the available resources and mechanisms at that time. They played a role through communicating with the main actors in the conflict and voicing the fact that they are fed up with war. On the other hand, they were pushing so much to spread the culture of peace and raise awareness towards the importance of peace in their direct communities in both the North and the South. They played a number of different roles and achieved real breakthroughs in the peace talks and the negotiations, they engaged in advocacy and corridor advocacy and corridor mediation, and presented a common agenda that was really recognized internationally in different fora. The women realized that since we can sit together and reach an agreement so there is a possibility for peace between north and south" (interview with Zainab ElSawi, UNDP Gender Advisor/SuWEP, 3 March 2020).

Similar to SuWEP, other networks like the GEST and the Women's Taskforce were formed around the AU-led Darfur peace process in 2006 and the Roadmap negotiations led by the AUHIP in 2013, respectively. Both groups played a more institutional role in enhancing women's representation in the peace processes, as well as in articulating women's priorities in the outcomes of the peace negotiations and their

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implementation (Bigio, April 2018; ICG, 28 June 2006: 6; Refugees International, August 2006; UN Women, 2012: 10). Moreover, the Women's Taskforce played significant roles as official observers of the Roadmap negotiations, informal mediators between warring parties, as well as in consultations with the local communities (Bigio, April 2018).

Referring to the institutionalization of women's peace advocacy and networking and the role of the international community in supporting a women's peace network, one respondent contended:

> With the support of the international community, women's peace advocacy took a more institutionalized form and became more linked to organizations as well as other permanent structures. This helped in crystalizing ideas and conceptions on peace in a clearer manner and ensured that the addressed issues would have better outreach because it reflected broad joint positions. It also helped the incorporation of peace issues in formal institutions through advocacy (interview with Dr Samia Nihar, Women, Gender and Development Unit, University of Khartoum, 22 December 2019).

Currently, MANSAM is considered the biggest women coalition or network in Sudan since the 2018 revolution. Following the ousting of President Al-Bashir and the launching of the Juba Peace Process between the Government of Sudan and the armed conflict in October 2019, it has actively engaged in lobbying for the appropriate representation of women in the peace process. According to one of the members:

> MANSAM is a pure Sudanese initiative; it represents a diversity of women from different factions. We have four thematic areas: peace, socio-economic, law, and democratic transformation. In the peace committee, we are pushing for women's participation in negotiations, and we prepare women to participate in peace talks with 40% as a minimum of participation (interview with Dr Maha AlZain, SOPAT/MANSAM, 22 December 2019).

Through its "Peace Track", the coalition has organized a number of workshops and events that included different women's groups as well as government officials to raise awareness about the importance of women's participation in the peace process, as well as provide women's groups with training on conflict resolution and mediation (MANSAM). Moreover, it has supported a number of women to participate in technical committees and track-two negotiations and lobbied for the inclusion of a women's agenda during the Juba peace negotiations. According to the head of the Gender Unit of the Sudan Congress Party

and a member of MANSAM, "MANSAM delegation went to juba to present a memo with their vision towards the peace talks. However, it was part of what's called corridor advocacy" (Samia Hamza, SCP Gender Unit, 5 March 2020). In addition to this, MANSAM works in cooperation with other women's organizations in Sudan to enhance women's representation in decision-making bodies and lobbies to enhance the overall status of women in Sudan (MANSAM).

Other groups currently working on peace issues include the 1325 group, formed with the support of the Swedish government in 2004. It works on impacting government policies with regard to women, peace, and security, "including advocating for a national action plan for 1325; providing technical know-how; bridging the views between academia and other forms of CSOs, and government structures" (interview with Dr Munzoul Assal, Centre for Peace Studies, Khartoum University, 12 December 2019).

The discussion of women's ambivalent roles in conflict and peace in Sudan is closely connected to the prevalent conception of peacebuilding and its focus on formal peacebuilding mechanisms and structures. Respondents have acknowledged that the focus on Sudanese women's roles in peacebuilding should not be confined to their participation, or lack thereof, in peace negotiations. Peacebuilding, according to them, is "a multifaceted process in which women should be a part of" (interview with Samia Hamza, Sudanese Congress Party (SCP), 5 March 2020). Within this context, a number of respondents have differentiated between formal and informal roles of Sudanese women in peacebuilding. They drew attention to the fact that women play multiple and varied roles at the informal level—particularly in civil society organizations and at the grassroots level. Their roles and contributions, however, remain largely absent from the limelight in research and media; focus tends to be primarily on women's participation in formal peacebuilding and decision-making structures. As one respondent contended, "the relationship between Sudanese women and issues of peace is deep and old; however, it has not been highlighted. Most people don't know the role women play in peacebuilding" (interview with Zainab ElSawi, UNDP Gender Advisor/SuWEP, 3 March 2020).

Building on the above, adopting a relational conception of peacebuilding which takes into account all processes aiming at conflict transformation at all levels of the peace process allows for the examination of the various contributions Sudanese women make to fostering peace and ending conflict in Sudan (Isike, 2009; Lederach, 1997). Moreover, it allows for the understanding of women's participation in

peacebuilding processes in Sudan from a functionalist and social constructionist perspective, which highlights the different identities and context-specific experiences women bring to peacebuilding processes and the impact of their participation on their sustainability (Adjei, 2019; Anderlini, 2007; Olsson & Gizelis, 2015; Schnabel & Tablyshalieva, 2012a; UNSC, 2010).

6.3.1.3 Challenges hindering Sudanese women's full inclusion in formal peacebuilding processes

The challenges militating against Sudanese women's full inclusion and participation in peacebuilding processes—particularly formal or official peacebuilding mechanisms—have also been discussed. Respondents generally agreed that despite the various roles Sudanese women play in peacebuilding, their contributions have not been translated into more representation and inclusion in peace negotiations and other formal peacebuilding processes. According to a UN officer, the monumental role women played in the December 2018 mass protests "hasn't necessarily translated into women roles—neither in the mediation for the formation of the transitional authorities nor in the current peace talks. We see them on the sidelines rather significantly from all of those different aspects" (interview with Anonymous 2, UN, 19 December 2019).

Respondents noted that Sudanese women have been largely excluded from the different Sudanese peace processes[32]. According to a number of respondents, women's absence from the official delegations, particularly the political delegations, have impacted the outcome of these processes with regard to women's agendas. Comparing the outcomes of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement with those of the Darfur Peace Process, one respondent has noted:

> If you look at the CPA, it was not gender sensitive. They only added phrases for women to please the international community; however, there was no intention for real women participation. So, the CPA came totally gender blind. With the Darfur conflict, the UNIFEM exerted effort to bring women to participate in the peace talks. As a result, the Doha declaration was quite gender-sensitive compared to the CPA and there were different interventions from different partners, and in this case, the Sudanese women participated

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[32] Comprehensive Peace Agreement; Darfur Peace Agreement; Doha Document for Peace in Darfur; Roadmap peace negotiations; and, more recently, the Juba Peace Process.

effectively (interview with Safia Mohamed, Darfur Community Peace and Stability Fund, UNDP, 5 March 2020).

These findings are in line with the limited available literature on Sudanese women's participation in peace negotiations, which reflect the poor representation of women in the different peace negotiations conducted in Sudan and the varying success of women's networks in including women's issues on their agendas (Ahmed, 2014; ElSawi, 2011; ICG, 28 June 2006; IPTI, September 2018; Itto, 2006; Tønnessen, 2014b).

Moreover, respondents highlighted the absence of women from the Juba peace negotiations, which took place between the Government of Sudan and armed groups following the ousting of the Islamist regime in 2019. They noted that while women were present in track-two negotiations on the sidelines of the negotiations, a smaller number of women were present in the official delegations. A respondent representing the peace component of the coalition of MANSAM contended:

> The official delegations do not include women. However, women participate in corridor advocacy on the side-lines of the peace process. In partnership with UN Women, we sent a number of delegations of women to exert pressure and advocate for their views and their concerns, and we pushed for the increase of women representation in formal delegations as experts. One of the positive outcomes was the participation of five women as experts in the different themes of the negotiations, which was a breakthrough (interview with Huda Shafiq, MANSAM/Women Task Force, 17 December 2019).

Another respondent confirmed this weakness of women's representation in official peace negotiations. She contended:

> Until now we haven't been able to build on peace advocacy or be included in the peace negotiations. We have pushed women to participate among the FFC[33] components; however, the participation in the committees is so limited and the structure of participation itself is not clear to us. Women are participating through the technical support committees and in track two, but not in the official delegation (interview with Dr Maha AlZain, SOPAT/MANSAM, 22 December 2019).

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[33] Forces of Freedom and Change

The issue of the substantive representation of women and the impact of their participation in peace process on the overall women agenda was also addressed. Respondents argued that it is not the "mere representation" of women at the peace table that is needed, but their actual representation that allows the tackling of peace processes from a more comprehensive level, as well as ensuring their success and sustainability. According to one respondent:

> I think the lack of women in the actual formal peace process is one of the biggest threats to
> the success of these processes. For the women, peace is not only lack of conflict but living
> a life with choice and living a life with dignity, and that's not what is included in the process.
> And if you don't get that, then it wouldn't be considered peace for most of the population
> of Sudan (interview with Anonymous 5, Western Embassy, 23 December 2019).

In addition, respondents contended that the participation of women in peacebuilding processes broadens the peace agenda and "puts emphasis on issues of youth, development, health care, education, access to land, rehabilitation and other issues that are usually neglected" (interview with Anonymous 8, UN, 4 March 2020). They stressed that women's involvement is vital for the success of peace agreements and the sustainability of peace in communities. According to one respondent, "We think peace is more sustainable if women are involved, it's not a gift to women, it's necessary for peace to hold, and the agreements to be more solid and also reflecting of the needs and wants and demands of the whole population" (interview with Christina Eikeland, Norwegian Embassy, 19 December 2019).

In light of the above, respondents covered a wide range of challenges pertaining to women's inclusion in peacebuilding initiatives. Challenges highlighted by respondents included patriarchy and cultural barriers; polarization of the Sudanese women's movement; structural and institutional barriers; the negative role of the international community and the narrow conception of peace; and the lack of individual capacities for participation in peacebuilding.

6.3.1.3.1 Patriarchy and cultural barriers

The majority of respondents argued that the dominant patriarchal culture in Sudan plays a critical role in curtailing women's roles and freedom of movement, largely confining them to certain gender roles outside the public realm. According to one respondent:

Despite being competent, women still face difficulties in being fully incorporated into the peacebuilding society. Some of these reasons owe to their cultural norms in which men still consider women as house makers only and not equipped enough to face the challenges of the outside world (interview with Frederique Wesselingh, Embassy of Netherlands, 2 March 2020).

The issue of patriarchal culture as a barrier to Sudanese women's inclusion in peacebuilding is largely connected to the impact of patriarchal religious interpretations on gender roles and dynamics within the society, as well as the dominance of a patriarchal mentality within political institutions. With regard to religious patriarchy, respondents have argued that the restrictive/patriarchal religious interpretations that have been adopted and incorporated in the Sudanese political system and legal framework by the Islamist regime during its 30-year rule, have been deeply embedded in the Sudanese culture, and consequently have impacted the discussion pertaining to gender roles and expectations. Others have argued that the impact of religion has been variant depending on the different contexts, and that in some instances the prevalent traditions and norms were in fact more restrictive than religion with regard to gender roles. In the words of one of the respondents:

This patriarchal culture differs from one community to another, and with it, the limitations on women's roles. Customs and traditions play a dominant role in the society, and it even impacts religion in many aspects, as well as the interpretation of religion itself (Ikhlas Ahmed, Focus Group Discussion, 1 March 2020).

This debate is in line with the social constructionist conception of religion and the Islamic feminists' discussion of the concept of religious acculturation adopted by the thesis. According to this understanding, both religion and culture are largely intertwined and mutually influence one another; while religion is a constitutive element in the Sudanese culture and an integral component of Sudanese identity, the prevalent norms and traditions—as well as political practice—have significantly impacted the interpretation and implementation of religion within the society (Gerami, 1996; Saadallah, 2004). This interaction between religion and culture has resulted in gender roles and expectations that are specific to the Sudanese context differ in their impact from one region to another.

Regarding the dominance of patriarchal mentality in political institutions, respondents argued that it impacts the selection and appointment of women in different decision-making and political structures. These institutions are argued to be largely male-dominated, with little room for women's participation, especially in leadership roles. This patriarchal mentality has also affected the work environment within these institutions, which largely limits women's participation and involvement. Moreover, the prevalence of corruption and non-female-friendly structural and institutional barriers within political institutions has led women to refrain from participating in these structures for fear of cultural stigmatization, preferring civil society organizations instead. As one respondent has explained:

> With the corruption of the political environment and the lack of best practices in governance and political participation, women refrain from participating in the public domain. Political parties and institutions have their problems and have been highly corrupted during the previous regime. Thus, when these parties participate in peace talks, women refrain from being part of these institutions because they fear the stigma and tarnishing their reputation, because, in many instances, these peace negotiations include deals that could tarnish women's reputation and credibility. Thus, the corruption of the political environment makes women refraining from participating (interview with Zeinab Abbas, Gender Expert, 3 March 2020).

Respondents also highlighted the role of tribal affiliations in impacting women's roles in public life in general and peacebuilding in particular. Regardless of the degree of religious dominance in certain areas, issues of tribal roles, guardianship and respect for elderly persons often impact the space allowed for women to participate and voice their demands. "For example, if you are a woman present in a meeting with elderly men, you should not speak first" (interview with Zeinab Abbas, Gender Expert, 3 March 2020).

Related to these cultural barriers are the societal and cultural practices that negatively impact women's empowerment and agency, like early or child marriage, FGM, and privileging boys over girls in education, consequently limiting women's full inclusion and participation in public life in general and peacebuilding in particular. According to one respondent, these practices "are done in educated families out of fear, sometimes, of social and cultural stigma, and to ensure that women are confined to their domestic roles" (Mihrab Jumaa, Focus Group Discussion, 1 March 2020).

Another aspect of the impact of cultural barriers that was highlighted by respondents is the challenge they pose, in many instances, to peacebuilding programmes targeting women in conflict- affected areas. According to the Projects Manager of one of the International NGOs operating in Sudan:

> In the last two years, we have been supporting communities in Kassala in the East of Sudan. In these areas, male officers are not allowed to perform outreach activities with female citizens. Even when you conduct interviews and focus group discussions, you need to be careful on what you ask because they might be offended. So, the cultural barriers do exist (interview with Birhanu Yimam, COOPI, 23 December 2019).

This discussion of cultural barriers gains relevance within the adopted theoretical framework, which combines both African and Islamic feminisms in its analysis and examination of the roles of Sudanese women in peacebuilding processes. The framework highlights the specificity of the context of the Sudanese cultural and political tradition, in which religion plays a significant role. It analyses the role of religion vis-à-vis the Sudanese culture in impacting women's participation and inclusion in peace processes. Moreover, it allows for the examination of other factors, including tribal affiliations, traditional practices, and patriarchal mentality and their impact on the gender roles and expectations within the specific context of Sudan.

6.3.1.3.2 Polarization of the Sudanese women's movement

Another challenge that was widely highlighted by respondents is the division and polarization of the Sudanese women's movement. Stemming from the very diverse nature of Sudanese society, the women's movement in Sudan is quite diversified along religious, ethnic, class, generational and political lines. This diversity has enriched the movement throughout its development and brought a wide range of issues and demands to its agenda; however, it has also been an inherent source of weakness which led to its inability to surpass differences for the common good of Sudanese women (Badri, 2005; Hale, 2001b). These divisions, according to one respondent, go beyond the previous and current political regime and "negatively impact the women agenda on peace and security issues" (interview with Dr Samia Nihar, Women, Gender and Development Unit, University of Khartoum, 22 December 2019).

Among the various categories of difference in the Sudanese women's movement, the respondents highlighted the centre-periphery gap and the generational gap. The women's movement in Sudan has

always been criticized for its elitism and the domination of women of the centre—particularly Khartoum—on the leadership of the movement, with little if any representation of women from the peripheries and conflict-affected areas. Women in these areas claim that the women's movement does not reflect their needs and demands and that the women speaking on their behalf have not been subject to the same experiences.

Speaking of the elitism and centralization of the women's movement, an African Union advisor contended:

> This separation in the women's movement is dangerous. There is this phenomenon in Sudan of the "NGOization of the women's movement", and it is a real danger. It becomes like a club or a profession. The women's movement should come from the grassroots women, not from the elites. Even with this revolution, the momentum was from women who were not part of these NGOs. Grassroots women, however, get intimidated, although they are the majority of women (interview with Anonymous 1, AU, 17 December 2019)

Another respondent addressed the impact of this polarization on the participation and representation of women in peace processes,

> The women's movement is concentrated in Khartoum. However, the women who have the most interest in peace and conflict in Sudan are the women who are in the IDP and refugee camps and conflict-affected areas in general. This creates a separation between women in civil society organizations and the reality in the conflict areas. It also puts a challenge on representation, because women of the centre cannot be fully representative of women in peripheries and conflict affected areas. And these women are not really represented in the peace negotiations (interview with Tahani Abass, No to Oppression Against Women Initiative, 17 December 2019).

In addition, the women's movement has also been weakened by a huge generational gap in which the voices and agency of young generations of women have been largely ignored. This has led to the division of these groups and the increased feeling that the women's movement is not representative of Sudanese women. As a respondent from a youth organization explained:

> The element of youth adds an additional layer of difficulty to our work in peacebuilding, not only on the grassroots level or with the communities, but also on the level of the women's

movement in general. In many instances, our presence and participation is only allowed to satisfy conditions of "youth representation" in meetings and events without really taking our ideas or priorities or concerns into consideration, our initiatives would be completely disregarded (interview with Anonymous 4, *AMNA*, 23 December 2019).

This challenge of polarization and division of the women's movement has been criticized by a number of respondents. According to them, women's differences—like men's—are a normal phenomenon. However, attempts at unifying women under one body or umbrella weaken the women's movement and consequently impact women's participation and inclusion. These arguments stem from Third World feminist and standpoint feminist theories, which criticize mainstream Western feminism's conception of women as a homogeneous entity while highlighting the important role of context in understanding the intersection of the various categories of difference in women's standpoints and identities (Mohanty, 1991a; Narain, 2004; Waylen, 2005).

However, both groups of respondents agree that regardless of these differences, women's groups should agree on a broad common agenda or demands for Sudanese women. Respondents agreed that the lack of coordination and solidarity among women's groups have "negatively affected their participation and inclusion in peace processes, and had an impact on the sustainability and continuity of their peacebuilding efforts" (interview with Dr Maha AlZain, SOPAT/MANSAM, 22 December 2019).

Another level of polarization and division among women's groups that has been highlighted by a number of respondents lies along the religious and ideological lines. Women have been divided according to their religious affiliations into Islamist and secular groupings (Badri, 2005; Tønnessen, 2010). However, with the ouster of the Islamist regime, women's groups affiliated to the ruling party and other Islamist movements have largely disappeared from the public scene. Moreover, they have been "intentionally excluded" by the current groupings of women that formed after the revolution, leading to an additional layer of fragmentation and division within the women's movement in Sudan, as well as excluding their voices and concerns from peace processes (interview with Anonymous 5, Western Embassy, 23 December 2019).

6.3.1.3.3 Structural and institutional barriers

Structural and institutional barriers militating against women's participation and full inclusion in public life in general and peacebuilding processes in particular were also discussed. Respondents highlighted the Sudanese legal and constitutional frameworks, the absence of Sudanese women from political institutions and decision-making structures, as well as the delay in establishing the transitional bodies as stipulated in the constitutional document, among the challenges facing women in this regard.

6.3.1.3.3.1 Shari'a-based legal framework

With regard to the legal framework, respondents have highlighted the role of Shari'a laws, adopted and instilled by the previous Islamist regime, in curtailing women's freedom of movement and restricting their participation in public life in general. Laws such as the Muslim Family Law, the Public Order Law, and others were used to target women and limit their agency and freedoms, giving men dominance and authority over them. According to one international officer working in Sudan, "The legal framework in Sudan is harmful. Women do not have the tools to be empowered because the legal framework is very restrictive. There are talks about trying to change the Shari'a-inspired laws, but not much has been done so far; it's a work in progress" (interview with Guilia, International Organization, 1 March 2020)

Despite the gradual consolidation of women's political and civic rights in the different Sudanese constitutions, the Sudanese legal framework has been largely discriminatory against women, constituting a major pillar of the Sudanese women's movement struggle. Throughout the history of Sudan, areas of personal status and civil rights (private rights) have been regulated by Islamic laws or laws derived from Shari'a (Tønnessen & Roald, 2007; Tønnessen, 2010). Several articles within the Muslim Family Law (1991), the Criminal Law (1991) and the Public Order Act (1996), codified during the reign of the Islamists, discriminate against women and girls when it comes to social and civil rights[34]. While the Public Order Act was repealed in November 2019, other discriminatory laws against women—notably the Muslim Family Law—have not been amended. And even though these laws are not directly related to women's political rights or their participation in the public sphere, they give men (or male guardians) power and authority

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[34] The Muslim Family Law, for example, defines "puberty" as the appropriate age of marriage and states that a woman needs a guardian to validate her marriage. Moreover, it gives men the right to forbid their wives to work outside the home. The Criminal Law, on the other hand, stipulates that "whoever commits an indecent act or an act that breaches public morality or wears clothes that are indecent or would breach public morality which causes annoyance to public feelings is liable to forty lashes or fine or both punishments" (Tonnessen & Kjostvedt, 2010)

over women and have been used by the state to restrict their freedom of movement and limit their participation and inclusion.

In addition to this, laws and legislation regulating the work of civil society organizations placed numerous restrictions on women's activism, as well as the issues that women were allowed to address in their programming (like issues of GBV, FGM, etc.). In the words of one of the respondents:

> During the old regime, we suffered from a lot of restrictions, not only in our participation and our work as civil society, but we also had a lot of restrictions in tackling gender issues. Simply advocating for gender would be a problem and would cause security issues. On the other hand, there are many laws that restrict our freedom of movement and participation in everyday life. However, after the revolution and civilian rule, there are a lot of issues and topics that civil society organizations can tackle without being worried about the state and security apparatus, especially sexual and reproductive health and rights, which was previously forbidden (interview with Anonymous 3, *AMNA*, 19 December 2019).

Closely related to the challenges imposed by the Shari'a-related legal framework is the adoption of regional and international instruments related to women, including the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Discrimination against Women (CEDAW) and the Maputo Protocol on Women's Rights. Although previously attributed to its contradiction with Shari'a during the Islamist regime, the controversy over the ratification of CEDAW and Maputo protocol still holds relevance after the ouster of the regime and its succession by a transitional civilian rule. "The Islamist movements are resisting CEDAW. CEDAW has been singled out by Islamists, which creates caution by women organizations with regard to advocacy for its ratification and implementation" (interview with Anonymous 8, UN, 4 March 2020). Moreover, the transitional government has been reluctant to ratify these measures before the appointment of the legislative council in fear of a backlash that might ensue due to claims that they are against Islam and contradictory to the Shari'a-inspired legal framework.

Currently, the Constitutional Document of the Transitional Period, signed after the Sudanese revolution in August 2019, includes many progressive articles and provisions pertaining to women's rights. It establishes a quota of 40% for the participation of women in the Legislative Council and stipulates the establishment of a Women and Gender Equality Commission. In addition, it singles out a whole section on women's rights

and consolidates the principle of positive discrimination in achieving gender justice and equality, as well as stipulating the application of UNSC Resolution 1325[35] and relevant AU resolutions regarding the participation of women at all levels in the peace process (Sudan's Constitutional Charter, 2019). However, respondents have highlighted a delay in the formation of these structures—including the Legislative Council and the Women and Gender Equality Commission—largely hindering the legal framework reform process, on one hand, and limiting Sudanese women's inclusion and participation in peacebuilding mechanisms on the other.

6.3.1.3.3.2 Absence of women from political and decision-making structures

Related to the above discussion is the absence or marginalization of Sudanese women from political and decision-making institutions and structures.Respondents have pointed to the close link between women's participation and representation in political and security institutions and the level of their participation in peace negotiations. They argued that their weak representation in these structures contributes to their exclusion from the "peace processes that are primarily focused on security, wealth, and power-sharing arrangements" (interview with Huda Shafiq, MANSAM/Women Task Force, 17 December 2019).

With regard to women's political participation and representation in Sudan, most respondents argued that while women—affiliated to the ruling National Congress Party (NCP) and other Islamist groups—were represented in the government and national assembly of the Islamist regime, this was largely argued to represent a form of a "token representation". According to them, women's representation in the Islamist regime was used to primarily serve the ruling party's agenda, while having no positive impact with regard to the advancement of the women agenda or the enhancement of women's representation in peace negotiations. Alternatively, while the ousting of the Islamist regime has brought about a number of positive developments with regard to women's representation in the constitutional document and various public appointments[36], respondents have noted that it still has not translated to greater representation of

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[35] Despite efforts on part of the international community and local women's organizations, Sudan only recently adopted a National Action Plan for the Implementation of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on women peace and security (NAP 1325)—on 10 June 2020 (UNICEF Sudan, June 2020; UN Women Sudan Country Office, 2016).

[36] Including the appointment of women in the Sovereign Council, the Cabinet, and local governments, as well as stipulating a 40% quota for women representation in the transitional legislative assembly.

women in the peace process—an issue that women's groups have been actively working on. According to one respondent:

> There is an increasing awareness and recognition of the importance of women inclusion, even though it might take time. There is a recognition and awareness that our society will not develop without a bigger role for women in peacebuilding and in negotiations involving all levels of the government (Moez Abdel-Wahab ElSheikh, Political Activist, 15 December 2019).

Moreover, related to the issue of representation of women in decision-making structures, respondents highlighted the lack of representation of women in political parties' leadership. According to them, Sudanese women's absence from the membership and the leadership of political parties excludes them from representation in decision-making bodies, which consequently makes them invisible in peace negotiations and other formal peacebuilding mechanisms. Speaking about the exclusion of women from political parties' membership and its impact on their representation in peace processes, a leader from the Forces of Freedom and Change—the political alliance forming the civilian component of the Sudanese Transitional government—explained:

> The problem is the lack of political representation. This has its roots in the lack of women representation in political parties. The existing system and structures within political parties make it difficult for women to reach leadership positions and thus, this is reflected in the various political appointments and participation in peace negotiations and similar processes (interview with Khalid Yusif, SCP/FFC, 5 March 2020).

The Issue of women's absence from security apparatuses and their marginalization from the leadership of armed movements was also discussed. Respondents highlighted that this challenge also contributes to the exclusion and invisibility of women from formal peace negotiations and their marginalization in other security-related peacebuilding mechanisms like the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration (DDR) programmes. Their exclusion from these processes "largely hampers a huge component of peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction processes and limits their outcomes" (interview with Anonymous 1, AU, 17 December 2019).

In addition, the impact of the lack of women's representation in decision-making structures on the levels of women's participation on the local and communal levels was also noted. A number of respondents

highlighted the weak representation of women in native administrative bodies at the communal level, as well as the community resistance committees that were formed during the revolution, despite their large presence in protests and activism. As one respondent stated, "Most of these communal and societal mechanisms are not just to women or youth, they are mostly dominated by the elderly and by men" (interview with Huda Shafiq, MANSAM/Women's Taskforce, 17 December 2019). In addition, respondents from organizations working in conflict-affected areas highlighted the difficulty they face "in recruiting women in decision-making committees related to their projects or programming despite the significant role they play on the ground" (interviews with Birhamu Yimam, COOPI, 23 December 2019; Christina Eikeland, Norwegian Embassy, 19 December 2019).

The challenge of lack of women's representation in decision-making institutions is closely related to the debate concerning descriptive versus substantive representation of women (Childs & Krook, 2005). A number of respondents indicated that the absence of women from these institutions represents a dual challenge. On the one hand, it leads to the stark absence of women from formal peacebuilding processes, thus threatening its successes and sustainability. On the other hand, it limits the effectiveness of the participation of women in peacebuilding processes, with the numbers of women represented becoming the focus of women's inclusion rather than the impact of their participation. According to one respondent, "Women movements don't want mere representation on the negotiation tables. Women groups have different agendas and priorities, and that is why all these groups need to be there to voice their concerns and priorities. We need real participation not just representation" (interview with Tahani Abass, No to Oppression against Women Initiative, 17 December 2019).

6.3.1.3.4 The role of the international community and the narrow conception of peace

The role of the international community and international donors as a challenge to women's full participation and inclusion in peacebuilding initiatives was also addressed. International organizations and donors have been criticized for exacerbating divisions among women's groups by focusing their support on specific groups from the centre, without taking into account other groups and organizations representing different areas or perspectives on peacebuilding. This has created a gap in representation in peacebuilding processes. "Issues related to women's participation in peacebuilding are always approached from a top-bottom manner, and are dominated by women from the urban sector (centre), from the civil

society organizations and civil communities in the cities. The women on the community level are not involved" (interview with Zeinab Abbas, Gender Expert, 3 March 2020).

Related to this are the preconditions the international community enforces regarding women's representation in the different levels of peacebuilding, and the top–bottom approach implemented in selecting women for peace negotiations and other processes, which ultimately led to token representation of women in these processes, without taking into consideration the value added or the impact of their participation. As a representative from an international donor organization has described it, "the debate gets a little bit centred around women's representation without really thinking more holistically about making sure we are really thinking about the gender dynamics or the gender norms which perpetuates and continue with these negative stereotypes enforced" (interview with Anonymous 9, International Organization, 5 March 2020).

International organizations have also been criticized for not building on existing structures and mechanisms, while trying to impose "peacebuilding programmes that in many instances don't take the cultural and historical specificities of the Sudanese context into account, leading to the un-sustainability of these endeavours, and their non-reflectiveness of the communities' needs" (interview with Khalid Yusif, SCP/FFC, 5 March 2020).

Other respondents referred to the lack of coordination between international organizations; the division between peacebuilding programming at the grassroots level and the national level; as well as the ad-hoc nature of peacebuilding programming, as factors representing a challenge to the sustainability of peacebuilding initiatives in general and to women's inclusion in peace initiatives in particular. The aforementioned challenges hamper the sustainability of peacebuilding processes and limit their contribution to creating institutional and behavioural changes in the targeted communities as a prerequisite to peacebuilding and conflict transformation.

In addition, a number of respondents also highlighted the existing negotiations modules and approaches adopted by regional and international organizations and mediators, as a key challenge to women's full inclusion in peace processes. According to them, these modules largely stem from a security-based approach to peacebuilding that does not consider other developmental and relational aspects, and consequently confines the participation in peace processes to representatives of male-dominated political

and security institutions. This in turn influences the negotiations agenda and excludes issues like education, healthcare, rehabilitation, etc. from the negotiations table. Moreover, it makes the inclusion of women in the peace negotiations an "unwelcomed addition that highly complicates the whole process by adding new players to it" (interview with Anonymous 5, Western Embassy, 23 December 2019).

Related to the above is the narrow or limited conception of peacebuilding and its impact on the acknowledgment and recognition of women's contributions to peacebuilding in Sudan. Respondents have indicated that a conception of peace that primarily focuses on security aspects does not take the informal processes that contribute to conflict resolution and transformation into consideration or reflect them in formal peacebuilding processes.

Speaking about the prevalent narrow conception of peacebuilding in Sudan and its impact on women's participation and inclusion in peacebuilding processes, a Sudanese female peacebuilder has contended:

> The conceptualization of peace and peacebuilding in Sudan is one of the challenges; the focus is only on programmes that directly mention peace, or official peacebuilding structures, which are blind to the different approaches and initiatives undertaken by civil society organizations in Sudan. Unfortunately, women peacebuilders are not recognized in the formal peacebuilding structures. All these approaches need to be acknowledged as part of peacebuilding initiatives, and thus, can contribute to increasing women's participation in peace negotiations (interview with Adla, SIHA, 22 December 2019).

This narrow conception of peace and peacebuilding has also led to the lack of recognition of the informal roles played by Sudanese women on the levels of media and research. With the attention primarily directed to peace processes, the various contributions of Sudanese women to peace have been largely ignored in research and literature pertaining to women and peacebuilding in Africa, deeming Sudanese women as "inactive agents" in these processes. "Women are generally out of the limelight. Media focuses on men political and their participation in public life more than women, and this makes their roles more invisible in many instances" (interview with Dr Samia Al-Habbani, Reform Now, 17 December 2019).

6.3.1.3.5 Lack of capacities as a hindrance to participation in peacebuilding

Other challenges pertaining to the capacities of Sudanese women and their impact on the level of their participation in peacebuilding processes were also addressed. Respondents indicated that the high levels

of illiteracy and lack of education and awareness among women and girls with issues related to women's rights and peace play a significant role in hindering Sudanese women's full inclusion in peacebuilding initiatives. Others have addressed the issue of lack of economic empowerment among women, particularly issues related to land ownership and microfinance, and lack of access to healthcare services, as well as the impact these have on women's overall participation and involvement in public life. This is also reflected in the lack of resources for women groups, ultimately translating into their inability to fully participate in peacebuilding initiatives.

A number of respondents also referred to the reluctance of women to participate or assume leadership roles related to peacebuilding. While this challenge could be explained in terms of the prevalent socially and culturally accepted gender roles and expectations, and the institutional and structural challenges related to the work environments in decision-making institutions, it could also be attributed to the lack of capacity and experience on part of these women and the lack of support afforded to them in assuming such roles.

These challenges are generally related to the overall socio-economic situation in Sudan and the prevalence of certain norms and traditions that privilege men over women in areas of education, economic empowerment, and political participation. They are also related to the non-supportive legal framework which has largely restricted women's movement, instilled men's leverage and guardianship over women, and confined women's roles to the private sphere over the years (interviews with Dr Maha AlZain, SOPAT/MANSAM, 22 December 2019; Zainab ElSawi, Gender Advisor, UNDP/SuWEP, 3 March 2020).

The discussion of the roles of Sudanese women in peacebuilding processes and the challenges militating against their full participation and inclusion is largely embedded in a Third World feminist framework, which highlights the critical role of context in examining women's roles and agency, as well as the various forms of oppression and marginalization to which they are subjected. It is also largely embedded in a relational conception of peacebuilding, which takes into account the formal and informal processes and mechanisms leading to the sustainability of peace and conflict transformation. Such a theoretical and conceptual framework allows the reflection of Sudanese women's various roles in peacebuilding, which, though not adequately reflected in formal peacebuilding structures, are massive in terms of the sustainment of peace in Sudan. It also allows for studying the actual impact of women's inclusion and participation in

peacebuilding on the final outcomes of peace processes, beyond the quantitative standpoints that focus on direct representation at the negotiations table (Bjarnegård & Melander, 2015; Ellerby, 2015; Paffenholz et al., 2016).

Thus, examining the roles of Sudanese women from a Third World feminist perspective, which combines both African and Islamic feminism, in studying the roles of women and the impact of cultural factors—including religion—on these roles, acknowledges the various roles Sudanese women play in peacebuilding initiatives that are not reflected at the formal level. Moreover, it highlights the role of context and its impact on these roles, thus allowing for an understanding of the factors militating against women's full participation and inclusion in peace processes as well as their potential role in its enhancement.

6.3.2 Religion and peacebuilding in Sudan

The relationship between religion and peacebuilding in Sudan was also examined. Questions regarding the relationship between religion and peacebuilding in Sudan primarily aimed at identifying the role religion—both as a set of values and in its institutional form—plays with regard to current peacebuilding initiatives in Sudan, and the potential for its incorporation as tool for peacebuilding. In this regard, findings from the interviews and focus group discussion could be classified into three main sub-themes: the role of religion in Sudan; the role of religion with regard to peace and conflict in Sudan; and the incorporation of religion as a tool in peacebuilding initiatives in Sudan.

6.3.2.1 Religion, society and the state in Sudan

Respondents stressed the significant role religion plays in Sudan, both as an identity-marker of Sudanese culture and politics and an influential factor in the trajectory of conflict and peace throughout its history. While Sudanese society is multi-ethnic and religiously pluralistic, Islam is the religion of the majority of the population and is deeply embedded in Sudanese culture. According to the latest estimates of the religious composition of the Sudanese society prior to the secession of the south, Muslims in Sudan constitute 97% of the population, while Christians and animists comprise 3% (Berkley Center for Religion, Peace and World Affairs, August 2013: 7; UNDP, 2019; United States Commission on International Religious Freedoms (USCIRF), 2019: 2). Other reports state that the percentage of Muslims in today Sudan constitutes approximately 90.7% of the population, while Christians constitute 5.4 % and the rest is divided among

Buddhists, Hindus, Baha'is, followers of indigenous religions, and others (United States Department of State, 2019: 2–3; USCIRF, 2020: 81).

A number of respondents highlighted the role religion plays as a constitutive component of Sudanese culture and national identity. They referred to the impact of the spread of Sufism[37] on Islam in Sudan and its peaceful, tolerant approach to religion. In the words of one of the respondents:

> As an integral part of Sudanese culture, religion is a positive cultural component. Religion in Sudan is moderate, influenced by Sufism, and is reflective of how peaceful Islam was spread in Sudan. The development of religion in Sudan was influenced by the features of the Sudanese society and its diversity (interview with Moez Abdel-Wahab ElSheikh, Political Activist, 15 December 2019).

Within this context, respondents differentiated between Islam as embedded in the Sudanese culture and Islam as part of the political and legal tradition in Sudan. According to them, the manner in which religion was employed in Sudan—particularly during the 30-year rule of the former Islamist regime—was highly politicized. Islamist movements have utilized religion in their political struggle and have incorporated their restrictive interpretations of religion and of Shari'a in the legal framework in a way that has maintained certain power dynamics in which other groups—secular political parties, women, religious minorities—were subordinated and largely discriminated against.

Respondents also highlighted the ongoing debate over the role of religion in Sudan following the ousting of the Al-Bashir regime and the calls for secularization and separation of religion from the state. While some of them stressed that secularization is the way forward, others confirmed that religion cannot be separated from Sudanese society and that it is quite embedded in its culture and identity. According to them, religion needs to be positively incorporated rather than discarded. Speaking of this dilemma, one respondent contended:

> There is a whole debate over the role of religion in the state. For me, I feel like during the last 30 years, the card used by the previous regime was religion; the former regime justified

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[37] Mystical Islamic belief and practice in which Muslims seek to find the truth of divine love and knowledge through direct personal experience of God. It consists of a variety of mystical paths that are designed to ascertain the nature of humanity and of God and to facilitate the experience of the presence of divine love and wisdom in the world (Spaulding, NA).

a lot of their practices on religious bases. Unfortunately, the things that were instilled in the community were these negative restrictive or fundamentalist forms of religion. So, I feel that, currently, there is a rejection for any role for religion in the public domain. I feel that people are trying to advocate for secularism. However, whether we like it or not, the majority of the community is religious and they will not be accepting a secular state. There will be a lot of consequences for this backlash. I do not know how the new government will play out the role of religion" (interview with Anonymous 3, *AMNA*, 19 December 2019).

Another respondent, confirming the difficulty in separating religion from the state in Sudan, stressed:

In Sudan, religion cannot be separated from the society. It has to be gradual. You have to use the language understood by Sudanese people. If the religious narrative is gradually changed in a progressive manner, it could contribute to separating religion from politics. The political Islam experience was difficult; however, separating religion from the state is unfathomable (interview with Bothayna Deenar, SPLM-N (Aqar), 6 March 2020).

These findings are in line with the researched literature on the role of religion in politics and the constitutional/legal system in Sudan. According to a number of studies, the relationship between religion and the state has been deeply rooted in Sudan's socio-political heritage. The bases of political commitment in Sudan have always been largely interwoven with the traditional nature of Sudanese society and the dominant role religion plays in it. Historically, political affiliation in Sudan has been greatly intersected with familial, tribal, ethnic, regional as well as religious associations (Bob, 1990: 217; Hussein, 2013: 343). And while religion has been a defining feature of Sudanese politics throughout history, some scholars have claimed that religion in Sudan has been transformed by ruling elites into a "mere ethnic discourse", and that it in fact plays a complementary role to tribalism and ethnicity in its connection to politics (El Zain, 1996: 528–529; United States Institute of Peace (USIP), 3 February 2006). Nevertheless, religion has been and still is an integral part of Sudanese political and legal/constitutional history; the relationship between religious identity and political identity in Sudan has always been a complex matter (Tønnessen & Roald, 2007: 3).

6.3.2.2 The role of religion in conflict and peace in Sudan

Respondents addressed the ambivalent role of religion in the course of conflict and peace in Sudan. They highlighted the role religion has played as an identity marker in the Sudanese civil war, and its manipulation by the warring parties, particularly the Islamist regime in the north, which "transformed the civil war into a holy war and used Islam in its propaganda" to rally people around the conflict (interview with Anonymous 4, *AMNA*, 23 December 2019).

Respondents also acknowledged the significance of religion to peace in Sudan. They adressed the role of religion in peacebuilding in Sudan according to two main sub-themes: the role of faith-based organizations with regard to peace and peacebuilding processes; and the relevance of religious peacebuilding in the context of Sudan.

6.3.2.2.1 Role(s) of faith-based organizations in peacebuilding in Sudan

With regard to the role of faith-based organizations in peacebuilding in Sudan, or the institutional role of religion in consolidating peace, the majority of the respondents confirmed that faith-based peacebuilding was historically present in Sudan, primarily among church-based organizations or Christian faith-based organizations that operated in Sudan during the civil war. According to these findings, organizations like the World Council of Churches and the Sudanese Council of Churches played an important role in providing relief aid and humanitarian assistance during the conflict and developed their programmes and initiatives to contribute to the consolidation of peace at a later stage.

On the other hand, the majority of the respondents contended that they are not aware of any form of Islamic faith-based peacebuilding in Sudan. A number of respondents referred to local faith-based organizations—like Islamic Call (Da'wa)—which were affiliated with the Islamist regime and were primarily used to promote Islamic teachings in the areas in which they operated. Other respondents referred to the role of Sufi orders and Islamic opposition parties—like the Umma Party and the Republican Brothers—in their contribution to fostering peace on the level of their communities. However, respondents argued that, despite ad-hoc instances of positive roles played by religious groups and leaders in local reconciliation and mediation in tribal and local conflicts as part of the local community leadership and native administrative structures, local Islamic faith-based organizations, in the institutional sense, were highly politicized. Most local Islamic faith-based organizations and movements were affiliated with the Islamist regime and were

used to support its agenda. Unlike their Christian counterparts, Islamic faith-based organizations are argued to have no role in peacebuilding. According to one of the leaders of the Umma Party:

> We have many examples of religious leaders and actors who played a role in peace through their moderate interpretations and thinking. However, on an institutional level, there has not been serious attempts for faith-based peacebuilding through religious institutions. Only on the level of religious teachings and discourse (interview with Sara Nakdallah, Umma Party, 2 March 2020).

With regard to international Muslim faith-based organizations operating in Sudan, a number of respondents referred to Muslim Aid and Islamic Relief—organizations based in Khartoum. According to them, programmes of these organizations are primarily confined to the delivery of humanitarian assistance and relief aid, with few recent developmental peacebuilding initiatives. However, they do not have a direct role in mediation or negotiation processes.

Only one respondent referred to the Sudanese Inter-religious Council (SIRC), which was established in parallel with the North-South peace negotiations process to promote inter-religious dialogue and religious co-existence in Sudan. However, no evidence regarding its direct role in peacebuilding or the effectiveness of its activities was addressed.

The above findings consolidate the review of the limited available literature on the role of religious or faith-based peacebuilding in Sudan conducted prior to the field research. Studies examining the role of faith-based organizations in consolidating peace in Sudan reflect a focus in research and documentation on the role of Christian organizations in peace processes in southern Sudan, with no equal reference to the role of their Islamic counterparts. Studies in this regard have highlighted roles played by Christian organizations[38] in providing humanitarian assistance, mediating between conflicting parties, participating in peace processes, and engaging in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction initiatives during the two Sudanese civil wars (Assefa, 1990; Agensky, 2019; Ronen, 2005). On the other hand, desktop research concerning the roles of Islamic faith-based organizations in Sudan has revealed that most of the existing organizations were politically affiliated to the various Islamic political parties/movements in Sudan, and

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[38] The World Council of Churches, the All Africa Conference of Churches, and the Sudan Council of Churches.

thus their role in peace and peacebuilding was regarded as largely biased as well as highly politicized (Mans & Ali, October 2006). Moreover, accounts of other organizations like the Sudanese Inter-Religious Council[39] reflected a high level of scepticism over its role in peacebuilding. According to these studies, criticisms related to the over-involvement of the ruling party (NCP) in the council's work, as well as the lack of appropriate representation of the different religious communities in its membership rendered the SIRC's involvement in the peace process largely ineffective/un-impactful (Badri, 2004; Mans & Ali, October 2006: 38–39).

Findings regarding the role of international Islamic faith-based organizations in peacebuilding in Sudan were also consolidated with data collected from the in-depth interview conducted with a representative of Muslim Aid, one of the two main international Islamic faith-based organizations operating in Sudan. The interview data revealed that programmes conducted by Muslim Aid are largely related to the humanitarian and developmental aspects of peacebuilding. Programmes are primarily directed at providing humanitarian assistance and development aid in conflict affected areas and other local communities in the areas of nutrition and food security, healthcare, livelihood, etc. The respondent indicated that the organization has no previous experience of partnering with local faith-based organizations in the field of peacebuilding. In addition, he stated that the organization follows a humanitarian approach in its programmes and that the religious discourse is directly employed in specific projects. However, the respondent confirmed that operating from an Islamic basis "creates a sense of trust and credibility on [the] part of the communities and facilitates our work on certain sensitive issues" (interview with Anonymous 10, Muslim Aid, 5 March 2020).

Building on the foregoing discussion, the actual roles and contributions of faith-based organizations in peacebuilding in Sudan can be analysed based on the typology[40] adopted by Bouta et al. (2005) and Mans and Ali (2006) in studying the multiple roles played by faith-based organizations in consolidating peace.

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[39] Established in 2000 by the Sudan Council of Churches and the International People's Friendship; an organization founded and run by the Sudanese authorities during the previous political regime with the aim of establishing and maintaining cultural ties with "friendly" countries, particularly the Islamic world (Mans & Ali, October 2006: 38). The council was established as an independent NGO equally divided in its membership between Muslims and Christians, with an overarching objective to promote religious co-existence and tolerance, as well as to consolidate peace and national unity in Sudan (Badri, 2004: 4; Mans & Ali, October 2006: 38; USIP, February 2006).

[40] Which includes faith-based organizations' roles in advocacy, mediation, education, transitional justice, intra-faith and inter-faith dialogue, proselytizing, preaching, and relief services (Bouta et al., 2005: 7–8; Mans & Ali, 2006: 11–12).

According to that typology, it can be argued that while the religious peacebuilding roles carried out by Christian organizations during the two Sudanese civil wars included engagement in advocacy, observation, mediation, intra- and inter-faith dialogues, proselytizing, preaching and providing relief services, Islamic faith-based organizations' roles were more confined to education, proselytizing, preaching, and relief. A limited number of Muslim organizations or groups were involved in advocacy, mediation and observation roles. The lack of information on the peacebuilding of Islamic faith-based organizations in Sudan is also in line with Bouta et al.'s observation regarding the difficulty in making a proper distinction between faith-based and secular peacebuilding actors in Muslim contexts. According to them, the similarity in the processes and activities entailed in both religious and secular peacebuilding, and the inseparability of Islam from other aspects of life in Muslim communities, makes most Muslim actors not see a necessity for emphasizing the role of religion in their work (Bouta et al., 2005: 6).

In addition, the lack of visibility of these roles or actors could also be related to the narrow conception of peacebuilding, which only focuses on formal peacebuilding processes and structures and thus disregards other aspects of peacebuilding, which include other players like women and religious actors and institutions.

6.3.2.2.2 Contestation on the relevance of religious peacebuilding in the context of Sudan

With regard to the relevance of religious or faith-based peacebuilding in the context of Sudan, participants generally agreed on the potential positive role religion can play in promoting peace and co-existence in Sudan. However, the approach and relevance of using religious values to promote peacebuilding were contested.

The majority of international respondents highlighted the ambivalent role of religion in peace and conflict. They differentiated in this regard between "the restrictive interpretations employed by the previous regime, and the general practice of religion in Sudan that is largely influenced by the peaceful Sufi culture" (interview with Anonymous 5, Western Embassy, 23 December 2019). Most of them stated that religion does have a potential positive role to play with regard to enriching the peacebuilding discourse in Sudan; however, it would require reforming the prevalent religious narrative as a pre-requisite to any potential positive role. According to a respondent from the EU delegation, the positive role of religion in

peacebuilding "depends on whether Sudanese people accept such progressive voices of Islam and incorporate it in their politics" (interview with Anonymous 6, EU Delegation, 3 March 2020).

Sudanese respondents, on the other hand, were more divided on the matter: a reflection of the overall ongoing debate regarding the role of religion in the future of Sudan. The majority of Sudanese respondents reiterated the negative role religion has played in instigating conflict during the Sudanese civil wars as well as the role of Shari'a laws in exacerbating the conflict. A number of respondents also highlighted the role religion has played in the conflict between the government and the Sudan People's Liberation Movement– North after the secession of South Sudan, and how it has constituted a stumbling block in the negotiations with the SPLM-N (Hilu), while a third group stated that religious actors should not be involved in peace negotiations and that it should be a purely political and secular process. In the words of one of the respondents:

> Religion weakens peace. Sudan is very diverse, and you cannot employ one particular religion in peacebuilding. I believe in the separation between religion and the state. If the transitional government is keen on achieving peace, they should work on secularity of the state and separate religion from politics. If we do not free the legal framework from religious connotations and references, religion will constitute a huge barrier against achieving peace in Sudan, because the groups negotiating with the government belong to different backgrounds and religious affiliations (interview with Tahani Abass, No to Oppression against Women Initiative, 17 December 2020).

Regarding the potential role of religion in peacebuilding, respondents believed that Islam, like any other religion, could play a positive role in enhancing peace and peaceful co-existence among people, and religious leaders could play a positive role in this regard. However, while the majority of the respondents stated that changing the prevalent discourse is required for this to happen, others were quite sceptical about how religion could be positively employed, given "the high level of politicization of religion in previous regimes" (interview with Zeinab Abbas, Gender Expert, 3 March 2020). This scepticism is best described by the Head of the Centre for Peace Studies at the University of Khartoum. According to him:

> Whatever programmes are there to be implemented, they have to be tailored to the local realities. If religion is relevant in these realities, why not? We could employ the positive

aspects in religion, including customs and traditions to promote peacebuilding. If it serves

this purpose, then why not? However, with the previous regime's negative employment of

religion, people are more sceptical (interview with Dr Munzoul Assal, Centre for Peace

Studies, Khartoum University, 12 December 2019).

The discussion regarding the role of religion in conflict and peace in Sudan can be analysed in light of Scott

Appleby's (2000) conception of "the ambivalence of sacred". This conception, which departs from a

balanced outlook on the role of religion in international politics and its ability to generate different

"ambivalent" phenomena, ranging from non-violent to violent militancy, highlights the instrumental role

religion can play in peace by complementing existing peacebuilding efforts and in terms of religious

peacebuilding (Hertog, 2010; Omer, 2012; 2015a). It is also in line with Abu-Nimer's (2013) and Omer's

(2012) analyses of the complex relationship of religion and identity in its relationship to peace and conflict.

According to both of them, understanding the role of religion in the formation of national identity, allows

for the analysis of the different roles religion can play in the context of conflict, without reducing its role

to a mere cause of the conflict or out-ruling its role in peace and peacebuilding. While the majority of

respondents have highlighted the negative role religion has played as an identity marker in the context of

conflict in Sudan, they have all agreed on the relevance and potential of its incorporation in peacebuilding.

Hence, the differentiation between the role of religion as a content of the North-South conflict, and its

utilization by the conflicting parties in its relation to national identity, allows for an understanding of the

different roles religion can play in the context of conflict in Sudan and examining of the different ways in

which it also contributed to achieving peace.

Moreover, the discussions regarding the role of religion in the context of peacebuilding in Sudan reflect a

high level of scepticism among organizations and actors involved in peacebuilding in Sudan —particularly

local ones—with regard to incorporating religious leaders and faith-based organizations in peacebuilding

in a more systemized manner. This scepticism, while it can be explained in terms of the politicization of

religion by the previous Islamist regime and the negative impact it had on the peacebuilding environment

in Sudan, is also largely embedded in a narrow definition of peacebuilding which confines the role of

religion to the context of formal peacebuilding structures (Isike, 2009; Lederach, 1995; 1997). In this

regard, respondents focused in their answers on the contentious role religion plays in peace negotiations

and the absence of religious leaders from peace talks, while not taking into account the various roles religious organizations can play in supporting and consolidating peacebuilding processes at both the national and the communal levels.

However, there is still a recognition that the nature of Sudanese society and the way religion is intertwined with its culture and political tradition is something that has to be taken into account, and embraced, rather than completely shunned or discarded.

6.3.2.3 The incorporation of religion as a tool in peacebuilding programmes in Sudan

Building on the aforementioned discussion, respondents differentiated between three levels at which religion can be utilized or incorporated as part of peacebuilding programmes and initiatives in Sudan: incorporating religious discourse in peacebuilding programmes, partnering with faith-based organizations, and targeting religious leaders as part of peacebuilding endeavours.

With regard to utilizing a religious discourse, the majority of respondents from international organizations indicated that incorporating religion as a discourse hasn't been a direct approach in their peacebuilding programmes in Sudan. A number of them highlighted the secular backgrounds of their member states and donor countries that do not allow them to incorporate direct religious discourse or approach in their programming or even consider its relevance vis-à-vis "the rights-based approach" (interview with Anna Selim, Swedish Embassy, 3 March 2020). However, international respondents indicated that they give significant consideration to societal and cultural aspects within their programmes and initiatives in the context of Sudan. Given the religious context of Sudan, respondents indicated that they largely rely on the local civil society organizations and actors they partner with in the implementation of their peacebuilding initiatives to employ the most appropriate approaches in relation to the nature of the programme at hand. In the words of the Deputy Head of the EU delegation in Sudan:

> We have a secular approach. We have certain targets that are development-oriented, so we will not think in religious terms. Maybe we should do more to achieve our goals but there would be nobody actually in the delegation who would be able [to] have that deep understanding of religion. We just trust our partner local organizations, and how they handle these cultural and religious aspects. In the end, they are Sudanese and they want to

achieve [a] better future for Sudan (interview with Nadia Lichtenberger, EU delegation, 15 December 2019).

On the other hand, international organizations and donors working on issues related to protection against gender-based violence and harmful practices like female genital mutilation indicated that they openly utilize the religious discourse in their approach. According to them, the religious approach is considered the most relevant to these types of issues given the religious backgrounds of such issues, the restrictive male-dominated religious interpretations they have been associated with, and the fact that they are deeply embedded in the Sudanese culture. According to the UNFPA Sudan country director:

> In any country where religion plays an important role, you need to work with people who speak religion, because there is far greater change if the *mufti*, the preacher, the *imam* on the Friday sermon says something. That person, that one sermon, will influence change much more and in a much more sustainable way than an awareness campaign of banners and radios, and flyers or anything (interview with Massimo Diana, UNFPA, 4 March 2020).

Another international officer described how the religious discourse is incorporated in their FGM programmes:

> On the FGM programme, for example, a study is being done on what does the Quran and other religious texts say about these sorts of practices, and a lot of work is done with religious leaders to go through what the sacred texts are saying about these practices and why they are interpreted in a certain way. Then we work through these community leaders to inform the community and convince people to abandon these practices. And in fact, religious arguments are some of the main arguments that we resort to when we do the work on FGM, for example. Because people are convinced that it is against the religion to not carry on with these practices, it has a massive impact on this practice (interview with Guilia, International Organization, 1 March 2020).

On the level of partnering with faith-based organizations, the majority of international respondents indicated that, given their secular backgrounds and the high level of politicization of faith-based organizations during the previous Islamist regime, they have never considered collaborating with local faith-based organizations in their peacebuilding programming. However, a number of respondents

indicated that they already work with international faith-based organizations in humanitarian assistance delivery; others have expressed their willingness to do so, depending on the nature of the programme.

With regard to targeting or incorporating religious leaders in their programmes, most international respondents argued that religious leaders are an integral part of any community approach they undertake in local communities, due to the significant roles they play as part of community leadership and native administrative committees. In this regard, respondents indicated and highlighted the significant roles these leaders play in local reconciliation and mediation processes, as well in facilitating access to local communities in implementing peacebuilding programmes in conflict-affected areas.

Speaking about the importance of targeting religious leaders in peacebuilding programs, a representative of an International NGO contended,

> Our success has mainly been because we involve these institutions—the *Imams* and religious leaders. They are part of the society; if you ignore them, then you have no success. You have to include them because they are the key; they participate in everything. They have a stick in what we do. The only thing for sure [is] that it is a process; we engage them very early and we sensitize them on the objectives of the projects and their own contributions. So, we utilize this tool, but we only use them basically for peacebuilding (interview with Oren Jusu, Mercy Corps, 22 December 2020).

Another respondent explained the relevance of religious leaders for facilitating access and mobilization to local communities:

> For us, in principle, we have to identify the key community leaders in the society who have the respect and moral authority. In Sudan, the village administrators are the *sheikhs* [religious leaders], so it is both. When we compose committees to mobilize the whole community, we identify them, then we start our whole discussions and consultations with them. It is through them that we pass our message for mobilization; so, it is key (interview with Birhanu Yimam, COOPI, 23 December 2019).

Local respondents, on the other hand, were more conflicted on the issue. A group of respondents expressed their rejection of utilizing a religious discourse in their programmes, in relation to the high politicization of religion by the previous regime and the negative impact it had on civil society organizations

and peacebuilding in general. According to this view, "if organizations started employing religion in their discourse, this could instil the perception that religion is the basis for peace, and consequently hamper efforts at creating a Sudanese state based on citizenry/citizenship rather than religious affiliation" (interview with Samia Hamza, SCP Gender Unit, 5 March 2020). In this context, respondents stressed that issues related to women and peacebuilding should be approached strictly from a secular international human rights framework, "to avoid any controversy" (interview with Dr Maha AlZain, SOPAT/MANSAM, 22 December 2020).

Others acknowledged the importance of incorporating religious discourse and religious institutions/actors in specific programmes related to women and peacebuilding—particularly concerning issues of protection. Addressing the debate between civil society organizations regarding the use of religion and the relevance of the religious discourse to their work, one respondent stated:

> The Sudanese society needs to be addressed through the language of religion and virtue. Some civil society organizations and groups believe that using religion as a tool will hinder their work because it will engage them into endless discussions over ideological discourses. However, you have to use the community's language. And sometimes I employ religion in a way to help my cause, and religious actors can play an important role in issues related to FGM and early marriages, and reconciliation as well. However, other organizations consider it a waste of time (interview with Tahani Abasss, No to Oppression against Women Initiative, 17 December 2019).

Another respondent, highlighting the role of religious discourse with regard to issues of protection, contended:

> With regard to the issues of FGM and the programmes countering these practices and increasing the protection of women, we have to employ the religious discourse and religious actors in our tactics to introduce real societal change. Religious actors have a huge role with regard to protection as part of social and societal change. They are an impact tool. If their mindset changed, they would contribute to changing the society (interview with Sulaima Ishaq, National Unit for Combating Violence against women and children, 18 December 2019).

A third group of respondents, while acknowledging the relevance of the religious tool or approach in facilitating access to certain communities or in the context of certain programmes, argued that it should not be used as the sole approach to peacebuilding, but rather a preliminary to a more secular human rights-based approach utilized as a later stage. According to a member of MANSAM:

> I believe that the ultimate goal is that we would be able to reach a level in which we can work using secular-based interventions. However, when I worked with many different communities, I found that a lot of arguments, responses, and justifications people use are religious based. Therefore, if I really want to make a dialogue with these people, I need to have tools to speak with them in their same language and conception. So, to some extent, we need to at least have the narrative, the progressive interpretation of Quran and Hadith that would enable us to engage in conversations and dialogue with communities that are largely religious. However, it could be very risky if it is used as a one and only tool (interview with Huda Shafiq, MANSAM/Women Taskforce, 17 December 2019).

All local respondents, however, agreed on the important roles of religious leaders in conflict affected areas and local communities, and "the importance of targeting them—among the targeted community leaders— and incorporating them in their programmes to ensure their sustainability" (interview with Zainab ElSawi, Gender Advisor UNDP/SuWEP, 3 March 2020).

This previous discussion reflects that, despite a reluctance of women and peacebuilding practitioners in Sudan to openly utilize religious peacebuilding as an approach to conflict transformation, religion is incorporated as part of the cultural and community tools used within programmes targeting local communities, both at the grassroots and the national levels. While it has been incorporated on a much larger scale at the local level, through the targeting of religious leaders in relation to their roles as community leaders and their membership in the native administrative structures, it has been gradually incorporated at the national level with programmes that are primarily related to protection of women and education. This could be attributed to the prevalent political environment during the previous Islamist regime, in which the discourse around religion was highly politicized, as well as the nature of the peacebuilding context in Sudan and the role international donors play in directing the nature and scope of peacebuilding initiatives.

It could also be attributed to the novelty of religious peacebuilding as a field, which has not witnessed a development on the level of implementation and incorporation into peacebuilding processes parallel to its increasing development on the level of peacebuilding scholarship. Closely related to this is the discussion regarding the weaknesses and limitations of religious peacebuilding itself and its implementation. Drawing on studies analysing the limitations of religious peacebuilding, issues of a lack of capacity and professionalism of religious actors, their perceived image as engaging in proselytizing activities, and their incoherent views and perceptions regarding women's rights hold a high degree of relevance in the context of Sudan (Bouta et al., 2005: 40–41; Dubois, 2008). In addition to this, challenges related to Western cultural assumptions regarding the necessity of excluding religion from the public sphere, the lack of mechanisms to measure the impact of religious peacebuilding initiatives, the absence of women, and the lack of media exposure greatly limitat the scope and impact of religious peacebuilding in Sudan (Abu-Nimer, 2013: 72–80).

6.3.3 Women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan

In an attempt to contribute to bridging the gap in literature on the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding, as well as analysing the impact of religion on Sudanese women's participation and inclusion in peacebuilding initiatives, the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan was examined. Findings related to this theme can be classified into: the impact of religion as a cultural and societal construct on the participation and inclusion of women in peacebuilding initiatives; the role(s) of women religious actors—or women inspired by their faith—in peacebuilding; and the potential role religion can play in enhancing and motivating women's participation in peacebuilding.

6.3.3.1 The impact of religion on women's participation and inclusion in peacebuilding in Sudan

Respondents highlighted the "ambivalent" ways in which religion affects women's participation and inclusion in peacebuilding processes in Sudan. They differentiated between religion as a set of values, and its politicization and incorporation in the political and legal systems in Sudan by the previous Islamist regime. Findings in this regard can be classified into two sub-themes: the role of religious patriarchy as inhibiting to women's roles and participation in peacebuilding; and the role of religion as a motivator for participation in peacebuilding. In this context, the views and perspectives of respondents regarding the

impact of religion on the overall context of women and peacebuilding in Sudan, as well as its impact on the respondents on a personal/individual level, are discussed.

6.3.3.1.1 The role of religious patriarchy in hindering Sudanese women's participation in peacebuilding

As discussed in the challenges section, respondents have argued that the patriarchal interpretations of religion that were incorporated in the Sudanese political and legal systems during the former Islamist regime had a direct impact on the culturally accepted gender roles and dynamics in Sudan. Within this context, women's public space and their ability to participate and be included in peacebuilding initiatives have been largely curtailed. In the words of one respondent:

> Religious interpretation is a challenge; there is still this attitude that a women is *'awrah* (intimate and needs to be covered), and that she carries a stigma and should not appear in public space. And if a man tells her to shut up, she needs to shut up, and that's a problem. However, there are other interpretations; it is a matter of which is the dominant one, and that is the religious impediment for women's activism in Sudan. It is this perception that women's voices and opinions wouldn't count (interview with Nadia Lichtenberger, EU delegation, 15 December 2019).

Respondents agreed that the politicization of religion by the previous Islamist regime and the imposition of Shari'a-based laws have severely affected the participation of women and their inclusion in peacebuilding processes. According to this view, the incorporation of religion in the Sudanese legal framework and the imposition of Islamic laws "have largely restricted Sudanese women's freedom of movement and have played a challenging role as a barrier to women's participation and involvement in public life in general and peacebuilding in particular" (interview with Zainab ElSawi, SuWEP, 3 March 2020).

Respondents also highlighted the restrictions imposed by the Islamist regime on women's civil society organizations, limiting their access to specific areas of peacebuilding, particularly areas related to protection against GBV and FGM in Sudan, as well their scope of advocacy with regard to the adoption of regional and international instruments like the CEDAW and the Maputo Protocol. Religion, in this context, "has also been used as a barrier against ratifying these instruments" (interview with Adla, SIHA, 22 December 2019).

Moreover, respondents referred to the complex relationship between religion and culture in Sudan. One respondent commented, "I can't decide where religion stops and culture takes over in Sudan. It is a very complex relationship between religion and culture, and it is difficult to differentiate" (interview with Anonymous 1, 17 December 2019). Within this context, a number of respondents highlighted the impact of restrictive religious interpretations on cultural norms and traditions pertaining to gender roles and relations. By the same token, others highlighted the impact of diverse customs and traditions on the interpretation and practice of religion in the different Sudanese contexts.

Building on the aforementioned, a number of respondents contended that the interaction between religion and culture within the diverse contexts in Sudan has produced variant gender dynamics across the different regions in Sudan. According to this view, the impact of religion on gender roles and relations has been largely variant according to the existing cultural norms, which differ across regions and ethnicities in Sudan from extremely conservative (Eastern Sudan) to less conservative (Nuba Mountains). Others also highlighted the variance in the impact of religion on gender roles according to the prevalent socio-economic and education levels of women in the different regions.

The head of the Women, Gender and Development Unit at the University of Khartoum described this complex relationship between religion and culture, and the varying impact of religion on gender roles and expectations, as follows:

> Religion in Sudan has mixed and interconnected with traditions and customs and created a formula that was not in women's favour. The prevalent interpretations of religion were strongly patriarchal, and were interwoven with customs and traditions that are mostly negative, in societies that are influenced by a high level of illiteracy and ignorance. However, customs and traditions in Sudan vary in their impact according to the different communities and regions. You can find, in some communities, the impact of some cultures and traditions is much worse than religion. In the region of North Sudan, which is the area where Islam entered Sudan, religion limits women's participation and puts them in a form of social confinement out of over-protective interpretations of religion that promote the protection of women and their seclusion. In other southern regions, women are subject to harsh practices and different forms of violence; however, religion does not necessarily play

a role in these regions (interview with Dr Samia Nihar, Women, Gender and Development Unit, University of Khartoum, 22 December 2019).

The discussion of the role of religion in hindering women's participation in peacebuilding is in line with Islamic feminism's conception of religious acculturation and the importance of taking the historical and cultural contexts in which religious texts have been interpreted and applied into consideration (Gerami, 1996; Saadallah, 2004). It is also in line with the existing literature on women, religion, and peacebuilding with regard to the role of religion in shaping gender roles and its contribution to the reinforcement of discriminatory traditions that could marginalize women and severely limit their roles, particularly in post-conflict contexts (Hayward, 2015; Le Roux & Palm, 2018). The discussion of the impact of restrictive interpretations of religion adopted by the Islamist regime on Sudanese women's inclusion in peacebuilding is also consolidated with Kadayifci-Orellana's (2015a) analysis of the utilization of patriarchal readings of religious texts in Muslim countries to legitimize certain power dynamics in which women are excluded from public structures and confined to more informal levels.

Moreover, given the political history of Sudan, one can draw on both African and Islamic feminist discourses in understanding the impact of colonialism and political Islam on the level of women's participation and inclusion in Sudan (Isike & Uzodike, 2011). British colonial rule has also contributed in large measure to disrupting existing gender roles through largely confining education and employment to men as well as applying separatist policies that concentrated development into the centre. In addition, the advent of political Islam in Sudan and the incorporation of patriarchal interpretations of Shari'a into the legal framework have further curtailed Sudanese women's freedom of movement and their ability to fully participate in public life and peacebuilding endeavours (Hale, 2001b). Thus, the interaction of both forms of oppression, in relation to the specific context of Sudan, has resulted in variant levels of impact of religious and cultural factors on Sudanese women, dependent on the regional, ethnic, and ideological context. Nevertheless, it has generally led to their marginalization and exclusion from formal decision-making and peacebuilding structures.

6.3.3.1.2 Religion as a motivation for women's participation in peacebuilding

Respondents also highlighted the role religion can play as a motivating factor for women's participation and inclusion in peacebuilding. In this regard, a number of respondents highlighted the role of religion

(Islam), as a faith and a set of values, in "motivating women's activism and inspiring their participation in peace processes to achieve change" (interview with Anonymous 7, Western Embassy, 4 March 2020). Others referred to the motivating role religion can play through providing Muslim women with multiple examples of women's roles and leadership in Islamic history, upon which they can draw in their participation and inclusion.

Respondents also referred to the participation of women affiliated to the Sudanese Islamist movement in decision-making structures during the previous regime. According to this view, despite the restrictive religious interpretations adopted by the Islamist regime and their impact on the overall gender roles in Sudan, women in Islamist/Islamic movements were motivated by their religious faith in participating in the public sphere. According to a member of the Islamist Reform Now movement:

> I was a member of the Islamist movement since 1977. The Islamist movement taught us to participate and to play a role, but of course, with certain regulations that preserve religion and religious values. However, there were no limitations whatsoever to our public participation (interview with Dr Samia Al-Habbani, Reform Now, 17 December 2019).

Departing from the above, a number of respondents referred to claims regarding the manipulation of these women by the Islamist regime to implement its agenda, "putting the effectiveness and impact of their representation, with regard to the advancement of the Sudanese women agenda, into question" (interview with Dr Munzoul Assal, Centre for Peace Studies, Khartoum University, 12 December 2019). However, according to them, "religion has allowed them to speak out" and negotiate the parameters of their roles within the Islamist regime, "even if it is minimum compared to how it has hindered their progress" (interview with Massimo Diana, UNFPA, 4 March 2020).

The role of religion in motivating women's participation in peacebuilding has also been addressed in a number of studies on the relationship between religion and women's roles in peacebuilding. According to these studies, for many women, religion plays a significant role in inspiring women to be involved in peacebuilding processes in their communities, both in secular and religious contexts (Kwamboka, 2014; Hayward & Marshall, 2015; Marshall et al., 2011; Ogega, 2014). In the same vein, Kadayifci-Orellana (2015a) argues that many Muslim women draw upon Islamic teachings and values of peace as a motivation for their peacebuilding work, despite the cultural and structural challenges they might face in their

communities. However, the level of motivation or inspiration religion presents in the work of Sudanese Muslim women peacebuilders would be very difficult to estimate, given that religion is largely embedded in all aspects of life in Sudan and the challenge in differentiating between what is Islam-inspired and what is not (Bouta et al., 2005).

On the individual level, Sudanese women respondents were asked about the personal impact of religion on their participation and involvement in peacebuilding. Out of 19 interviewed Sudanese female respondents, six indicated that religion has negatively affected their work and involvement in peacebuilding. According to this group, religion, as employed by the previous Islamist regime and incorporated in the legal framework, has imposed many restrictions on their freedom of movement, which largely curtailed the level of their participation in peacebuilding initiatives. A number of participants also highlighted the issue of "male guardianship" endorsed in the Shari'a-inspired legal framework, which largely impacts their work and involvement. Others highlighted the impact of restrictive religious interpretations on societal norms and traditions with regard to socially and culturally accepted gender roles, and the cultural stigma associated with their public work, which, according to one respondent, makes women "feel very crippled" (interview with Anonymous 4, *AMNA*, 23 December 2019). On the other hand, six respondents indicated that religion has a direct positive role on their work and has been a source of inspiration for their peacebuilding work. According to this group, religious values of peace and tolerance have been a direct motivator for their involvement and have encouraged them to engage in peacebuilding initiatives, despite any restrictions. In addition, seven respondents indicated that religion did not have a direct positive or negative impact on their peacebuilding work. They attributed this to the variance in the impact of religion—as part of the cultural barriers or the legal framework—according to the different socio-economic and educational levels associated with different contexts in Sudan and the interaction between religion and cultural norms and traditions within these contexts.

While this variance in views could be explained according to the difference in socio-economic, educational levels as well as religious and political affiliations of the participants, it also confirms that religion's most negative impact on women's involvement in peacebuilding has been through its politicization by the previous regime and the incorporation of its restrictive interpretations in the Sudanese legal framework. Although the impact of religion on women's inclusion in peacebuilding has varied according to the

different contexts and the different ways in which women could negotiate their roles and agency, the legal framework has represented a unifying factor of marginalization and discrimination against women's aspired roles in this regard.

6.3.3.2 The role(s) of women religious actors—or women inspired by their faith—in peacebuilding

Departing from the foregoing discussion, findings on the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan have also reflected a number of examples for roles played by women religious actors, or women inspired by their religious backgrounds in peacebuilding processes.

In this context, a number of respondents referred to the role of women in religious circles or seminaries "*Khalwa*"—independent or affiliated to Sufi orders—in spreading Islamic teachings in their direct communities. According to them, the roles of these circles are usually on the communal level and quite invisible from the donor community. However, they play an important role in spreading religious teachings and could be built on to instil peace culture at the local and grassroots levels.

A number of respondents also referred to the role of female preachers or imams in specific programmes directed at countering violent extremism in Sudan, as well encouraging "women roles in instilling peace in their communities" (interview with Frederique Wesselingh, Embassy of Netherlands, 2 March 2020).

Others referred to the roles of the women's groups affiliated to the Islamist movement and other Islamist groupings[41] during the Islamist regime. While these groups primarily played more roles on the level of religious teachings, women among these groups assumed public roles in parliament and a number of ministries during the Islamist regime. A number of respondents, however, referred to the negative roles played by these women in instigating conflict and generally following the agenda of their parties. According to one respondent, "Women groups who were affiliates to Islamic groups have never worked on tribal peace or reconciliations or any issues related to peace. On the contrary, they worked as spoilers and blockers to peace; they sometimes played a role in instigating conflict" (interview with Tahani Abass, No to Oppression against Women Initiative, 17 December 2019).

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[41] These include women of the National Islamic Front or the Muslim Brotherhood movement, women affiliated to the Ansar Al-Sunna Salafist movement, and similar Islamist parties and movements.

Women inspired by their faith also played a role in peacebuilding as part of Islamic opposition political parties and movements, like the Umma Party and the Republic Brotherhood. Women in these parties have played a role on the levels of advocacy and mass action with regard to issues of peace and conflict, as well as with issues related to the overall women's agenda in Sudan. Speaking about the roles of women in the Umma Party in peacebuilding, the former party Secretary-General contended:

> The Umma Party promotes women's empowerment and participation. The Mahdiya background on which the party is based on shapes the understanding of the party with regard to women's participation. And there are a lot of examples of women who played many roles in the Mahdiya movement in information gathering and sharing, as well as combatants. Therefore, our understanding of women's role and participation and public life is integral, especially with regard to peace and peacebuilding (interview with Sara Nakdallah, Umma Party, 2 March 2020).

With regard to women in civil society organizations and non-governmental women's organizations, as discussed in the previous section on religion and peacebuilding in Sudan, findings have suggested a conflicting position among women in civil society organizations on incorporating religious discourse as a part of their approach. However, one prominent example can be highlighted in this regard. According to the findings, many respondents have highlighted the role of the SIHA network in peacebuilding. Interviews with representatives of the network revealed that the organization openly used a religious discourse in its approach to increasing women's participation in peacebuilding. According to the organization, "Islamic feminism is very important tool, and it plays a very important role in peacebuilding" (interview with Adla, SIHA, 22 December 2019).

Finally, women inspired by their faith have participated in peacebuilding as part of international faith-based organizations like Muslim Aid, operating in Sudan. According to the representative of the organization, "there is a high level of women participation on all levels of the organization, as well as in different community offices" (interview with Anonymous 10, Muslim Aid, 5 March 2020).

Departing from the aforementioned, the difficulty in identifying roles of religious women actors—or women inspired by their faith—in peacebuilding in Sudan is congruent with analyses regarding the invisibility of the roles played by these women in peacebuilding (Hayward & Marshall, 2015; Marshall et

al., 2011). This invisibility is largely attributed to the patriarchal nature of religious institutions, as well as the lack of documentation of the work of women religious actors or women inspired by their faith in peacebuilding processes. Moreover, as with the case of Sudan, the complex relationship between religion and different aspects of life makes it quite challenging to trace religiously or non-religiously inspired roles and contributions (Bouta et al., 2005; Hayward, 2015; Hayward & Marshall, 2015).

In addition, while a number of studies have highlighted roles played by Sudanese religious actors, or Sudanese women affiliated to Islamist groups in the fields of religious teachings and education (Ahmed, 2014; Badri, 2005; Hale, 1992; 2011; Tønnessen, 2010; Tønnesen & al-Nagar, 2013), only very limited studies have linked these contributions directly to peacebuilding (Ali, 2015). This could be attributed to the previously discussed narrow conception of peacebuilding, which ignores the many informal contributions of women and religious actors to peacebuilding. However, findings from the field research reflect that, apart from a very few examples of organizations which openly incorporate the religious discourse in their peacebuilding work—like SIHA and the National Unit for Combating Violence against Women and Children—roles of women religious actors or women inspired by their faith in Sudan are largely confined to preaching, education, and political participation. No direct roles in mediation or peace negotiations can be identified.

6.3.3.3 The role of religion in promoting women's participation in peacebuilding / Islamic feminism and peacebuilding

Stemming from the above, respondents were asked about their perspectives regarding the potential role of religion, and progressive religious interpretation that seeks gender justice and equality (Islamic feminism as an example), in enhancing Sudanese women's participation in peacebuilding. Similar to findings regarding the relevance of incorporating religion in peacebuilding processes in Sudan, the views of the respondents regarding employing a religious discourse to enhance women's participation and inclusion were somewhat conflicted.

The majority of international respondents agreed that religion could play a significant role in changing the discourse regarding women's participation and representation in a country like Sudan, where religion is an integral part of the culture and identity. They stressed the importance of changing the prevalent religious discourse with regard to women and eliminating existing cultural stereotypes regarding women's

roles and participation, a change that, according to them, has to happen from within. In this regard, a number of respondents highlighted precedents with regard to women's participation and representation that could be found in the writings of Islamic thinkers like Hassan Al-Turabi, the leader of the Sudanese Muslim Brotherhood movement, and Mahmoud Mohamad Taha, leader of the Republican Brotherhood Party. Others highlighted the role of the SIHA network and the roles that women preachers and imams play in the field of peacebuilding, which could be built on to increase women's participation and inclusion from a religious perspective.

The Sudanese respondents, on the other hand, were more divided on the matter. While a number of respondents asserted that progressive religious interpretations with regard to women's participation can have a significant impact on women's inclusion in peacebuilding processes, others believed that this is highly dependent on the existing legal framework and the ideology of the political regime, and that a secular rights-based approach would be less controversial in this regard.

Speaking about the importance of incorporating religion in the field of women in peacebuilding, the head of the Women, Gender, and Development Unit at the University of Khartoum contended:

> Religion is a very important tool in our communities. It is the language people understand. I believe that this trend is something women civil society organizations in Sudan have to adopt. They have to be convinced somehow, which is not the case. There is currently a form of animosity of women organizations towards religion because of the previous regime, even though they are all Muslims. They believe that the religious framework is unjust to women because it has instilled certain gender and power dynamics that are more favourable to men (interview with Dr Samia Nihar, Women, Gender and Development Unit, University of Khartoum, 22 December 2019).

In this context, a number of respondents contended that Sudanese women have not been part of the Islamic feminist movement. Despite precedents of progressive interpretations in the works of Republicans, for example, it has been more sporadic and did not fully interact with the movement, either at the local or international levels. According to this view, the Sudanese women's movement "could not agree on a theoretical framework or a conception of our position regarding religion in Sudan", making "the idea of

Islamic feminism or using religion to promote women participation largely non-existent" (interview with Dr Maha AlZain, SOPAT/MANSAM, 22 December 2020).

However, a number of respondents also referred to the positive developments in Sudan following the revolution and the scepticism surrounding the traditional religious discourse following the ousting of the Islamist regime, particularly with regard to women, which could open the door for more theoretical debates contributing to more participation and inclusion of women in the coming period. Others still acknowledged the importance of addressing religion as a cultural barrier with regard to women's participation and inclusion, given the largely religious nature of Sudanese society and the important role of religion in its culture and identity.

Findings on the role of religion in promoting women's participation in peacebuilding reflect the complex relationship between religion and the women's movement in Sudan. In addition to its role in curtailing women's freedom of movement and participation in public life in general, and peacebuilding in particular, religion had a significant role in the development and composition of the Sudanese women's movement. As previously mentioned, studies on the women's movement in Sudan classify Sudanese women's groups along religious/secular lines into the Islamic/Islamist women's groups (that define women's rights and freedoms within the Islamic paradigm) and secular women's groups (that place the feminism struggle in a rights-based paradigm) (Ahmed, 2014; Badri, 2005; Hale, 2001b; Tønnessen, 2010; Tønnessen & Roald, 2007). However, despite this distinction, the relationship between religion and women's activism in Sudan is largely intertwined. Studies have revealed that most Sudanese women activists, regardless of their religious affiliation, place their activism and struggle within the cultural and historical context of Sudan and demand change from within (Tønnessen & Roald, 2007: VII).

Findings also reflect that while Islamic feminism—or achieving gender justice and equality through the re-reading of Islamic texts—has precedents in Sudan, it has not been integrated in the mainstream religious narrative, which was largely monopolized by the Islamist movements. According to Badri (2005), while a number of Sudanese women activists can be categorized under "Islamic feminism", they do not represent a coherent visible group in Sudan, and they do not agree on means of bringing about social change. This group, according to her, involves a wide array of anti-government women activists in political parties and civil society organizations, who build their activism on principles of gender justice and gender equality in

the Islamic paradigm. However, unlike Islamic feminists in other parts of the world, Sudanese women who fall under this categorization have not contributed to theology debates or engaged in the re-interpretation of Islamic texts, except for a few who refer to male Muslim scholars and their theological standpoints, and in a few cases even refer to re-interpretations of the Qur'an. Consequently, their visible presence and impact on Sudanese society has been limited compared to the public presence of Islamist women during the previous regime, or women of the secular group (Ahmed, 2014: 61; Badri, 2005: 15).

Despite the above, respondents' views and perspectives regarding the role of religion in peacebuilding in Sudan, as well as its potential role in enhancing women's participation and inclusion, reflect a clear distinction between religion and its politicization at the hands of the previous regime. Moreover, there is a recognition among the majority of respondents of the important role religion plays in Sudan and the inevitability of its incorporation—whether at the discourse or the institutional level—in peacebuilding processes, albeit to varying degrees.

Within this context, and given the constitutive role that Islam plays in the culture and identity of Sudanese society and its implications with regard to gender roles and relations, religion should be an integral part of any discussion regarding women and peacebuilding in Sudan. Building on aforementioned and drawing on the adopted theoretical framework, the re-interpretation and appropriation of religious texts to assert the important role of women in different political and peace processes can play a critical role in efforts aimed at enhancing the participation of women in peacebuilding in Sudan.

6.4 Conclusion

Departing from the foregoing, the presentation and analysis of the main findings that emerged from the field research in Sudan reflect a number of important insights with regard to the themes of women and peacebuilding, religion and peacebuilding, and the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan.

The findings were reviewed vis-à-vis the previously obtained secondary data and were presented and discussed in consolidation of literature on the roles of women and religion in peacebuilding, as well as the limited literature linking both women and religion to peacebuilding, both in theory and in practice. They contribute to bridging the gap in literature between the fields of "women and peacebuilding" and

"religious peacebuilding" through analysis of the different roles of women religious actors—or women inspired by their faith—in peacebuilding, as well as the impact of religion—both as a hindering and as a motivating factor—on women's peacebuilding roles. Moreover, they enrich the ongoing theoretical debate on the potential role of religion as a tool in enhancing women's participation and inclusion in peacebuilding, through providing primary evidence on the roles of Sudanese Muslim women religious actors and Sudanese Muslim women inspired by their faith in peacebuilding and conflict transformation in their communities.

CHAPTER 7: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

7.1 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

In studying the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding through the case study of Sudan, the thesis—stemming from a Third World feminist framework—has primarily sought to analyse the social and cultural dynamics which influence women's participation in peacebuilding, and to explore the ways in which these dynamics could be employed to increase their participation and inclusion.

In this regard, the thesis aimed to analyse the relationship between religion and the role(s) of women in peacebuilding, a relationship that has not received much scholarly attention, either at the level of the role(s) of women in the context of religious or faith-based peacebuilding, or at the level of the impact of religion itself on such roles. In addition, the thesis aimed to move beyond the traditional study of the role of religion in both conflict and peace, to examine the multiple ways in which it can impact peacebuilding efforts as well as the roles of women within peacebuilding processes.

In doing so, the thesis aimed to contribute to bridging the literature gap between the two academic fields of "women and peacebuilding" and "religion and peacebuilding". It aimed at examining the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding by highlighting the significant impact of religion on women's participation in peacebuilding, and the means through which it could be potentially utilized to consolidate peacebuilding initiatives by increasing women's participation and inclusion.

Founded upon a feminist epistemological approach that has guided its research methodology and adopted theoretical framework, the thesis aimed to reflect the voices of Sudanese women and their perspectives regarding their roles in peacebuilding and the impact of religion as a constitutive element of Sudanese culture and identity on such roles. In doing so, it sought to highlight the specific context of Sudan and its impact on women's roles and experiences, thus enriching the discussion regarding the roles of women in Africa and the Global South in peacebuilding beyond their falsely attributed victimhood and analysing the various categories of marginalization and oppression that affect their experiences. Moreover, it broadens the scope of discussion regarding the role of religion in peacebuilding by examining the roles and contributions of women religious actors—or women inspired by their faith—in peacebuilding and

analysing the ambivalent roles of religion, both as a barrier and a source of motivation for women's inclusion in peace processes.

Departing from the foregoing, the thesis discusses the different gaps in literature, both in and between the fields of "women and peacebuilding" and "religion and peacebuilding" with regard to roles of women in peacebuilding and the factors influencing their full participation and inclusion. In light of its findings, it concludes that in societies such as Sudan where religion plays a dominant constitutive role in social existence, its impact on women's participation and representation in formal peacebuilding processes is profound and needs to be better understood theoretically given the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding. The thesis therefore makes the case for a Global South feminist theoretical perspective that takes into account the multiplicity of actors and processes involved in peacebuilding and conflict transformation, and highlights the role of historical and cultural contexts in influencing women's roles in this regard. The main findings of the study are presented under the following themes from 7.1.1 to 7.1.3.

7.1.1 Women and peacebuilding in Sudan

The thesis reflected a gap in both literature and practice between women's formal and informal roles in peacebuilding. Despite the multiplicity and variety of contributions women make to conflict resolution and peacebuilding on the informal level—whether stemming from a rights-based secular approach or inspired by their faith—there is a persistent lack of acknowledgment of women's contributions to peacebuilding on the level of formal peacebuilding processes and in literature pertaining to women and peacebuilding in Africa.

In this regard, the thesis reflected the roles and agency of Sudanese women that are not acknowledged in mainstream literature on women and peacebuilding, contributing to Third World feminist perspectives regarding the richness and diversity of the peacebuilding experiences of the women in Africa and the Global South that go beyond their victimhood, and beyond their exclusion from peace negotiations and other formal peacebuilding structures. In the same vein, the thesis built on a relational conception of peacebuilding and conflict transformation which incorporates a variety of mechanisms and processes—both formal and informal—which contribute to consolidating peace. This approach has allowed the study to examine different types of peacebuilding processes in which women can be involved, as well as various

types of actors whose participation remains quite invisible in the field of women and peacebuilding—particularly women religious actors or women inspired by their faith.

Stemming from the Third World feminist theoretical framework, the thesis also discussed the challenges pertaining to Sudanese women's inclusion in peacebuilding from their own perspectives. It reflected the various cultural, structural, and personal barriers that inhibit women's full representation and inclusion in peacebuilding initiatives, in relevance to the specific context in which these processes are implemented. Moreover, it consolidated Third World feminists' perceptions of the various categories of difference in women's experiences and the multiple forms of oppression women in Africa and the Global South are subject to, defying the monolithic conception of "women" in mainstream Western feminism and the treatment of women belonging to those regions as a homogeneous "other" facing the same challenges and forms of marginalization and oppression. It also reflected women's awareness of such barriers and their agency in negotiating their roles despite their presence, a reality that stands in stark opposition to the prevalent image of women in Africa and the Global South in general, and Muslim women in particular, as subjects of oppression and marginalization.

Against this backdrop, Sudanese women present a pilot example of the intersection of African and Islamic feminist perspectives regarding the impact of historical and cultural contexts on the conception of gender as well as women's roles and participation in peacebuilding. Examining Sudanese women's roles in peacebuilding through the lens of Third World feminism—which incorporates both African and Islamic feminisms—has helped highlight the traditional roles of Sudanese women, both in conflict and in peace, that are not recognized by mainstream Western literature on women and peacebuilding. It has also reflected the status of Sudanese women as agents of change and of peace, rather than as mere victims of conflict or recipients of peacebuilding programmes and projects by international and regional organizations operating in Sudan. As a result, it shifted the focus of the study from the researcher to the researched, to reflect African-Muslim women's contributions to peacebuilding, as well as their perspectives regarding the challenges that hinder them from fully participating and being included in these processes.

7.1.2 Religion and peacebuilding in Sudan

The thesis consolidated the growing literature on religion and peacebuilding by discussing the ambivalent roles of religion in relation to conflict and peace in Sudan. It reflected how religion—in its complex relationship with culture and national identity—has been utilized to instigate conflict, as well as to consolidate peace and peacebuilding efforts. However, the study expanded on this understanding of religion beyond this negative—positive dichotomy with regard to its roles in conflict and peace, and examined its impact as a constitutive element of Sudanese culture and national identity on the participation of both women and religious actors in peacebuilding processes.

Within this framework, the thesis examined the politicization of religion in Sudan and its impact on the overall peacebuilding context. It highlighted the significance of religion as both an integral part of the culture and national identity of Sudan, as well as an inherent component of its political and legal tradition, throughout its history and in the current transitional context. It also presented the different ways in which religion and religious actors can contribute to peace, both in the context of religious peacebuilding and through its incorporation as a tool in existing secular peacebuilding initiatives.

In this regard, the thesis pointed to the various ways in which religion is currently being utilized as a tool in peacebuilding. **Despite being largely unacknowledged as such, the study has shown that religious peacebuilding is actually incorporated as part of secular peacebuilding initiatives in Sudan, to varying levels and degrees.** Both local and international actors are employing religion to differing degrees in peacebuilding. Whether on the level of religious discourse, of partnering with international faith-based organizations, or of targeting and religious actors and leaders, religion has been utilized as a tool in secular peacebuilding initiatives to ensure more impact and sustainability for these endeavours.

However, the thesis reflected a persistent gap between the employment of religion in peacebuilding initiatives at the community and grassroots levels and the overall national peacebuilding context in Sudan. While religious peacebuilding has been incorporated as a tool of peacebuilding at the local level, its role at the national level remains largely unacknowledged and somewhat debatable. While this could be attributed to the contentious role religion played during Islamist rule, the awareness of its significance within the context of Sudan makes any discussion of peace without a role for religion almost unfathomable.

Departing from the aforementioned, the thesis contended that the incorporation of religion in peacebuilding initiatives in Sudan—a context in which religion plays a significant role—could be built on and institutionalized in a more systematic manner. With the current ongoing debate on the role of religion in post-Bashir Sudan, the institutionalization of religion as a tool in peacebuilding, particularly at the national level, could prove of paramount significance to attempts at changing prevalent religious discourses on peace and conflict. Moreover, the conscious incorporation of religious institutions, including formal religious institutions, in peacebuilding would be vital to consolidating the peace discourse in Sudan, as well as opening up spaces for representation and participation of women within these institutions.

7.1.3 Women, religion, and peacebuilding in Sudan

In addition to the ambivalent roles of religion with regard to conflict and peace in Sudan, the thesis has also reflected the ambivalent ways in which religion has influenced Sudanese women's participation and inclusion in peacebuilding, beyond prevalent perceptions of the negative role of religion with regard to Muslim women's rights and participation in the public space.

The adopted theoretical framework has allowed the thesis to study the impact of religion on women's peacebuilding roles by highlighting the role of the cultural context in examining women's various roles, as well as the challenges inhibiting their full participation and inclusion. Moreover, Islamic feminist perspectives regarding the positive role of religion in achieving gender justice and equality has allowed the thesis to look beyond the negative impact of religion as a cultural barrier to women's full participation in peacebuilding and examine the instances in which religion played a role as a motivating factor for women's inclusion in peace processes.

This study of religion as part of the cultural context has been largely invisible in mainstream literature on women and peacebuilding in Africa. Literature on women and peacebuilding has addressed the role of religion as a cultural challenge pertaining to women's full participation in peacebuilding processes, without analysing the ambivalent roles of religion and the potential it offers for more participation and inclusion of women, despite existing cultural and structural barriers.

Given the novelty of this field of women, religion, and peacebuilding, and the huge literature gap between the fields of "women and peacebuilding" and "religion and peacebuilding", the study of the intersection of the two fields, in the case of Sudan, provided us with very important insights. In this regard, the thesis

reflected that religion does have an impact on women's participation in peacebuilding, which could vary, as was demonstrated, according to the dominant cultural norms in given contexts, as well as the interaction between religion and culture in different contexts and across different historical periods.

However, the thesis contended that a differentiation between religion, on one hand, and the politicization of religion and its incorporation into political and legal systems, on the other, is significant to studying the impact of religion on women's participation in peacebuilding processes. This differentiation allows us to analyse the role of religion as a political tool in curtailing women's freedom of movement and participation in public space, apart from religious texts and teachings whose interpretations are sensitive to cultural and historical contexts. It also allows us to understand the complex, interwoven relationship between religion and culture and the impact of their interaction on gender roles and dynamics—particularly in relation to peacebuilding—in different contexts.

On the other hand, the study of the intersection of women, religion, and peacebuilding also revealed the positive impact of religion on women's participation in peacebuilding. It highlighted the role of religion as a source of motivation and inspiration for women's involvement in peacebuilding initiatives, whether at formal or informal levels. Examples provided by the thesis in this regard, of women religious actors or women inspired by their faith, reflect the positive impact of religion on women's peacebuilding roles that has been unacknowledged in the fields of "women and peacebuilding" and "religion and peacebuilding". It also reflects that despite difficulty in tracing the level of religious motivation in women's peacebuilding work, given the complex relationship between Islam and all aspects of life in Muslim countries, a large number of Muslim women are motivated—or at least unhindered—in their peacebuilding work by their religion and their religious upbringing, despite existing structural and cultural barriers.

Building on the foregoing, the thesis also examined the potential positive role of religion as a tool to enhance women's participation in peacebuilding not only in Sudan but elsewhere in Africa and the Global South where religion plays a dominant constitutive role in social existence. Stemming from an Islamic feminist framework, the thesis contended that the incorporation of feminist progressive re-interpretations of religious texts that seek to achieve gender justice and equality within an Islamic paradigm could prove to be a significant tool for increasing women's participation and inclusion in peacebuilding in religious contexts like that of Sudan.

Moreover, the thesis also reflected that, even though religion is regarded with a high degree of scepticism among the majority of women's groups in Sudan, the Sudanese women's organizations place their activism and participation in the specific context of Sudan, in which religion plays a major role. Moreover, it showed that the absence of the Sudanese women's movement from the Islamic feminist debate, and its focus on political and economic rights throughout its development, have opened the space for Islamist movements to monopolize the discourse on women's rights and participation and politicize issues related to women's civil and private rights in the Sudanese legal framework. Within this context, the thesis contended that rather than shunning it or becoming victims to its politicization, women's groups and women's organizations in Sudan need to incorporate religion in a more conscious, systematic manner and build upon Islamic feminist readings and progressive interpretations of religious texts to legitimize their participation and inclusion in peacebuilding in Sudan.

7.2 CONCLUSION

The gap in literature and practice in the fields of women and peacebuilding and religion and peacebuilding in Africa and the Global South necessitates a re-examination of the roles of women in peacebuilding in this region from a different perspective. It reflects a need for a Global South feminist theory of peacebuilding that goes beyond Third World feminist criticisms of mainstream Western feminist perspectives on peacebuilding to explain Global South experiences and accounts of peacebuilding.

Developing a new theoretical framework that incorporates elements from both African and Islamic feminisms would capitalize on the peacebuilding roles women played prior to the disruption of gender roles and dynamics as a result of colonialism, and takes into account the ambivalent roles culture and religion can play in hindering and motivating the inclusion of women in peacebuilding. It would help examine the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding in specific cases or contexts like Sudan, where religion plays a constitutive role in the culture, national identity, and political tradition. It would also allow us to build on the ambivalent roles of religion in conflict and peace to gain a better understanding of the root causes of conflicts in countries of the Global South, as well as examine the various peacebuilding roles of women—whether motivated by religion, or even hindered by it—that are not are not included in mainstream Western literature.

Studying women and peacebuilding—whether they are secularly or religiously inspired—through Western feminist frameworks, largely limits our understanding of the multiple roles women in Africa and the Global South—or in a country like Sudan where African and Islamic identities intersect—can play in peacebuilding. Moreover, it limits our understanding of the nature of conflicts within these societies, as well as the elements upon which we can build to consolidate peace and enhance women's participation and contribution to peacebuilding initiatives. Thus, a Global South feminist theory of peacebuilding, based on the intersection of African and Islamic feminism, is required to expand our understanding of the complex relationship between context and the roles women can play with regard to conflict and peace, and highlight the specificities of the contexts in which these processes are occurring, including history, culture and religion.

It also helps in looking beyond the roles of women in peacebuilding that have been identified in mainstream literature on women and peacebuilding and highlights less-acknowledged traditional roles upon which peacebuilding initiatives could be built and expanded to include more actors—including women and religious actors. Moreover, it highlights the importance of cultural and historical contexts in peacebuilding and helps understand the specificities of these contexts in which cultural factors and other identity markers—such as religion—intersect and vary in their impact on women's roles and contributions to peace, and consequently on the sustainability and success of peacebuilding endeavours.

Applying the above to the case study of Sudan, the thesis contends that the sustainability of peacebuilding in Sudan requires a thorough understanding of the context in which local and international peacebuilding programmes and initiatives are implemented. It requires highlighting the specific components of this context and understanding the varying degrees to which religion, culture, and politics have affected the participation of different actors—particularly women and religious actors—in peacebuilding. Drawing on the intersection of African and Islamic feminisms, a Global South feminist theory of peacebuilding highlights the impact of colonialism and the politicization of religion in Sudan on gender roles and social relations, thus deepening our understanding of the dynamics influencing Sudanese women's participation and inclusion in peacebuilding in the context of this study. As previously mentioned, the British separatist policies have consciously contributed to creating a developmental gap between the North and South, increasing divisions between the two regions in Sudan. Moreover, it created a gap in

educational and vocational capacities between men and women, through confining education and employment to men and largely disrupting existing gender roles and relations. The advent of political Islam contributed to increasing these gaps through the politicization of religion and its incorporation in the Sudanese constitutional and legal systems, largely curtailing women's rights and freedoms, as well as increasing the social and ideological rift between the North and the South (Ahmed, 2014; Hale, 2001b). However, with the huge diversity of the Sudanese society characterized by the myriad ethnicities, religions, tribes, and languages in the country, the impact of religion, in its intersection with the African and Arab cultural norms and traditions in the various regions, has varied widely with regard to its impact on gender roles and expectations in the different Sudanese contexts.

Thus, implementing peacebuilding programmes without taking these specific intrinsic attributes of the Sudanese context into consideration could result in increasing the gap in gender roles and further excluding women from peacebuilding initiatives, rather than increasing their participation and inclusion. Therefore, designing peacebuilding programmes and initiatives that address these cultural and historical elements would offer a much broader perspective on the root causes of conflict and the various contributions different actors can make to peacebuilding, leading to more success and sustainability of both religious and secular peacebuilding efforts. The intersection of African and Islamic feminism in the Global South context helps us address these factors. It helps us reflect the myriad processes and activities in which different actors—whether they be women, religious actors, women religious actors, or women inspired by their faith—are involved. It enriches the discussion on peacebuilding by taking into account new forms of processes that go beyond merely ending conflict and contribute to peacebuilding and conflict transformation. It adopts a relational conception of peacebuilding, which takes into account all these different processes and mechanisms that lead to conflict transformation and sustainable peacebuilding.

Moreover, the theoretical framework—which combines both African and Islamic feminism into its analysis and examination of the relationship between women, religion, and peacebuilding—helps us look beyond the ambivalent roles of religion, whether as hindering or motivating to women's participation in peacebuilding. It allows us to look deeper at the means in which religion can be employed to enhance women's participation and inclusion in peacebuilding in countries like Sudan, where religion is constitutive of its culture and national identity. It does not limit the discussion to whether religion plays a role in conflict

or in peace, or whether it positively or negatively impacts women's roles and participation. It expands on this discussion by examining the potential role of religion as a tool in increasing women's participation and inclusion in peacebuilding. On the other hand, through adding the element of women to religious peacebuilding, it offers us a wide range of possibilities in which religious peacebuilding itself can contribute to consolidating peace in religious communities. It enriches the processes and activities in which religious institutions and actors can be involved by adding actors whose roles have been largely invisible in theory and in practice, and who can significantly contribute to peacebuilding endeavours.

In conclusion, a Global South feminist theory of peacebuilding that incorporates both African and Islamic feminisms in its analysis would provide a more comprehensive view of peace and peacebuilding in Global South contexts. It would reflect the various roles of women in both secular and religious peacebuilding contexts and highlight their contributions, at the local and grassroots levels, as a continuation to the traditional gender roles they occupied prior to the influence of colonialism and other political forces. It would take into consideration all the actors and peacebuilding processes to which the fields of "women and peacebuilding" and "religious peacebuilding" remain largely blind, and build on their existing roles with the aim of consolidating peace in conflict-affected communities. It would highlight the important role of context and the significance of examining religious, cultural and historical factors in studying women's roles in peacebuilding, and analysing the intersection of women, religion and peacebuilding in Africa and the Global South. It would capitalize on the cultural and religious elements in these contexts and allow the employment of religion as a tool to enhance and legitimize women's participation in peacebuilding. It would deepen our understanding of conflicts in Third World countries, as well as the elements and tools which can be built on to consolidate peace and expand women's representation and participation in peacebuilding. Finally, it would contribute to bridging the gap in literature and in practice between the fields of "women and peacebuilding" and "religion and peacebuilding", while reflecting the agency, voices, and experiences of women in Africa and the Global South, highlighting the specificities of their contexts, and making them the starting point of the research, rather than its objects.

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