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Research Article

CHALLENGING THE MARGINALIZATION OF MUSLIM WOMEN IN PEACEBUILDING: AGENCY, CULTURE, AND FEMINIST PERSPECTIVES IN CONFLICT-RESOLUTION

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ABSTRACT

Women are generally portrayed as victims of war and conflicts. However, women are also active, strong, and resourceful agents as family caretakers, advocates of peace, relief workers, mediators, or combatants. The unrecognition of women's various roles undermines their chances of being involved in formal peacebuilding and negotiations that establish post-conflict state-building, thus marginalizing them further from the political decision-making processes that have a direct and indirect impact on their life. Research findings on women's role in peace processes point to several factors that affect their inclusion or exclusion in the process. This paper focuses on Muslim societies where culture and religion tend to be essentialized as the reason for women's oppression, discrimination, and marginalization. It highlights the various roles Muslim women play during conflicts arguing for contextualizing culture within political, economic, and security factors to understand the obstacles they face. The arguments apply feminist theory on gender roles and patriarchy to explain why women are excluded from conflict-resolution processes, and the lens of postcolonial and Third World feminism to understand the perspective of Muslim communities on involving women. Within the framework of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, the paper follows the experiences of women in Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Sudan to argue for utilizing women's agency to ensure peace through local culture and religion, especially in the context of terrorism and extremism.

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1. Introduction:

A major obstacle to women's participation in peace processes is gender roles and stereotypes about their knowledge, skills, and social status to contribute to conflict resolution and post-conflict peacebuilding. In addition, political structures, economic conditions, and social development in the countries affect the status and role women have in society, and therefore their ability to be involved. Gender-based violence during conflicts, cultural pressures, lack of resources, and mobility are other factors. For Muslim societies, there are additional factors that influence the political dynamics and power relations between men and women, such as tribal hierarchy, sectarianism, militancy, insecurity, and foreign intervention.

Therefore, cultural and religious factors should not be considered the main explanation or obstacle for Muslim women's lack of participation in peacemaking. Instead, culture and religion could be a supporting factor for women's inclusion. Muslim women's agency can be utilized to ensure peace through local culture and religion.

For gender mainstreaming to be effective in peacebuilding processes, there must be strong empowerment structures that allow women greater voices in the public sphere, and to allocate resources to human development priorities. Therefore, it is important to understand the factors – political, economic, social, and cultural – that enable or constrain Muslim women from the peacebuilding process in order to address them and facilitate more participation of women. Efforts by international nongovernmental organizations (INGOs), governments, and international organizations need to encourage, assist, and develop the capacity of local Muslim women's activities and facilitate the conditions for their safe, conducive involvement in the peace process based on localized, contextualized approaches.

Postcolonial feminists reject agendas and interventions by international organizations and INGOs that try to advance a Western-centric global agenda at the expense of local women's agency and approach since that invokes notions of imperialism in the guise of international intervention (Pratt, 2013). This could explain the objections and resistance to the changes in gender roles in the post-conflict phase if they were seen as imposed by the West.

Third World feminists, on the other hand, seek to understand the oppression and resistance of Third World women within their specific historical background and location and the intersection of gender, race, class, ethnicity as well as religion (Mohanty, 1991). Hence, the need to acknowledge the historical and political agency of Third World women who are more informed and aware of the details and circumstances affecting their lives (Mohanty, 2003).

2. **Methodology**:

Intersectional Framework:

Through an intersectional framework, the paper analyzes how gender, religion, ethnicity, class and regional politics intersect to affect Muslim women's role in peacebuilding within a patriarchal society that shape power relations between men and women. The qualitative desk study examined texts and documents that show how the multiple identities of women and the political, economic and cultural factors affected women's participation in peace processes in Muslim societies. This provided a more nuanced understanding of the layers of marginalization and empowerment that shape women's participation.

Longitudinal Analysis:

The paper compared women's participation in peacebuilding and negotiations in three different Muslim countries – Afghanistan, Nigeria and Sudan – during the period from 2000 to 2020, to highlight the various constraining and enabling factors that influenced their participation. These three countries were chosen given the women's long history of activism, ongoing internal conflicts, and the role of extremist ideologies and groups in these countries.

The long-term analysis captures how the changing political, security, economic and social environments have affected the women's roles.

3. Background:

Arriving at peace is a process that starts from the pre-conflict or conflict prevention period to the time during the conflict itself and the negotiations for peace and peacebuilding, and then the post-conflict period. In each stage, usually, the same actors or members of society are involved except for a conspicuously absent segment who are most often excluded in the final stage – women.

It is often argued that "*war and peace are gendered activities*" (Manchanda, 2005, p.4737) where the experiences of men and women differ as well as their needs and perspectives, which would require the inclusion of both when it is time to make peace. However, women's experiences tend to be ignored by national and international policymakers. Depicting women as mainly victims of conflict and not as agents of change undermines their role in conflict-resolution and limits their involvement to addressing only their grievances and not their contributions. Such a blindside approach toward women leads to their greater impoverishment, marginalization, and discrimination.

The UN Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1325 on October 31, 2000 (UNSC, 2000), which recognized women's roles as agents of peace and not only as victims of gender-based violence. It set a long-term agenda for the participation of women in conflict-resolution, peacebuilding, peacekeeping, humanitarian response, and post-conflict reconstruction, as well as their protection during conflicts – the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda.

3.1 Blaming religion:

The monolithic view of women and their roles and capacities as well as gender stereotypes and patriarchal structures found across cultures are considered the main barriers to women's inclusion in peace processes. Yet more often, these obstacles are particularly highlighted in Muslim societies while other factors are downplayed. The liberal-rooted approach to peace by international organizations, Western countries, and INGOs that emphasizes and prioritizes a hegemonic formula based on their definition of democracy, secularism, women's rights, and capital markets, portrays Muslim culture and religion as generic, unchanging, resisting modernity and equality, and in need of their intervention and reform to empower women (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2015; Richmond, 2011). Not only are the assumptions biased and unfounded, but the approach taken, and the outcomes could also be disastrous.

In Afghanistan, the United States mobilized support for its invasion of the country in late 2001 under the claim of "liberating" Afghan women from the brutality of Islamist fundamentalism practiced by the Taliban government. "*"Liberating" Afghan women was central to the anti-Taliban discourse that ideologically drove the US-led attack*" (Manchanda, 2005, p.4740) in retaliation to the 9/11 terrorist attacks on the US by the Afghan-based Al-Qaeda terrorist group. President George W. Bush in a speech described the Taliban as "*a regime allied with terrorists and a regime at war with women*," (Bush, 2001). Rallied by the support of liberal feminists to the war on terrorism, "*women became the site for contesting* *ideologies of modernity versus tradition*," (Manchanda, 2005, p.4738). Rather than addressing the root causes of the rise of fundamentalist ideologies, including US support of militarization, the US administration used women's suffering for its political agenda (Samar, 2019). Similarly, in Iraq, Syria, Yemen, Somalia, and Nigeria where there are militias and organized terrorist groups acting in the name of their fundamentalist Islam, the liberal discourse is mostly focused on a biased understanding of the local culture and religion in framing the oppression and marginalization of women in these countries, while ignoring the historical context of colonialism and imperialism as well as corrupt political regimes, socioeconomic underdevelopment and foreign intervention (Abu-Lughod, 2006; Pratt, 2020).

Women in Muslim countries have long been active politically against colonial oppression and occupation and were at the forefront of democratic movements. In recent struggles, women have collaborated and organized for peace "*across cultural and sectarian divides*" (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2016, p.5) such as in Afghanistan and Iraq. In Somalia, they used high-profile visible tactics to pressure conflicting parties and mobilize public opinion (Bigio & Vogelstein, 2016), which contradicts the stereotypical perception of Muslim women as invisible and silent. Women civil society groups in Muslim countries – such as Indonesia, Tunis, Libya, Mali – played an active role at the grassroots and national level in peacebuilding and participating in peace negotiations. Their contributions included raising social issues, political and legal reforms, economic recovery, and transitional justice concerns. While they did face cultural constraints just like in non-Muslim countries, they were able to lobby and mobilize with the support of their local community.

3.2 Gender roles and social structures:

Traditional and stereotypical gender roles in a patriarchal society are emphasized during conflicts where the man is expected to go fight while the woman takes care of the home and children (Smith, 2001), which ignores and constrains women's and men's other roles whether in making a living, active peacebuilding or armed struggle. Nevertheless, during conflicts, the stereotypical gender divisions of labor get mixed where women engage in all types of work including what is considered masculine (El-Bushra, 2007). Furthermore, with the absence of males on the battlefront, killed or wounded, the females take on the role of head of household and breadwinner and other community and public roles, which could become opportunities for women's future political participation (Bouta et al., 2005), but that is not guaranteed. Most often once peace returns and men are back home, the traditional social structures and gender labor divisions return as well, and women are expected to retreat from political and public life (Bouta et al., 2005).

The main challenge women encounter to be included in peace negotiations is in being recognized by the decision-makers, who are mostly men, for their value-added and status. Most often, only conflicting parties, which are dominated by men, are invited to the negotiation table, even though women are also involved in the military struggle and play various support roles (El-Bushra, 2007). In many countries there is the perception that since women do not play a significant role in politics they are not eligible to participate in peace negotiations, and the assumption that the needs of men and women are the same therefore men can speak on their behalf, or worse, that women's issues are irrelevant to peace talks or insignificant to discuss in negotiations (Kidane, 2014).

4. Results and Discussion:

Women's participation in prominent public roles, particularly political, is usually met with resistance in patriarchal societies, which are not limited to the Muslim world. Parties involved in conflicts would resist women's participation in peace processes in different ways "*ranging from questioning their independence and legitimacy… to direct harassment and serious threats*," (Paffenholz et al., 2015, p.18). Support for women's participation in the face of resistance usually comes from external mediation teams and third parties, but it is mainly the women's own experiences and traditional authority in settling disputes that bolster their position (Paffenholz et al., 2015). In addition to patriarchal structures, Muslim societies are often also tribal structures that are hierarchical and based on tribal loyalties and relationships, which tend to hinder women's participation in public roles and decision-making (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2019).

In the case of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the 1999 constitution promotes gender equality, but the reality is different where women generally face discrimination. Nwadinobi (2017) explains that when the country's president set up a committee to review the constitution in 1999, women were completely excluded, but after women expressed their outrage, the committee membership was expanded to include women. Furthermore, in conflict resolution, women's informal roles are recognized and expected, but in peace commissions, committees, and signing of peace pacts, women are excluded. The barriers to women's participation include cultural and traditional practices, attitudes towards women's leadership roles, financial resources, and social structural issues such as being away from home and playing non-stereotypical gender roles. Nevertheless, Nigerian women have been active in various ways including in peaceful protests for peace, in their appointed and elected leadership roles, in the Women, Peace and Security Network that works to raise public awareness and implementation of the National Action Plan (NAP), in their role as combatants against insurgent and extremist groups, and as peacebuilders and activists. However, there is a "*lack of policies that encourage women's participation and the mindset that mediation and negotiation is the exclusive preserve of men*," (Nwadinobi, 2017, p.8).

Sudanese women were largely excluded from the negotiations that forged the 2005 Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), which impacted the inclusion of any gender dimensions, but women took a greater role in implementing post-conflict projects and in transitional institutions through the support of the UN mission and INGOs (ICG, 2006). ElSawi (2011) noted that most of the women who were affected by the conflict were illiterate or had little education, so they remained outside the peace talks, although illiteracy did not prevent men from participating. ElSawi also noted that women played an indirect role through elderly women who were allowed to speak in public, and by influencing their male family members as mothers, wives, and sisters.

On the other hand, Sudan's Darfur Peace Agreement (DPA) 2006, did include "*an impressive amount of gender-sensitive language*," but it was "*superficial*" (ICG, 2006, p.6) as it lacked specific measures and mechanisms for implementation, which meant that the inclusions were mainly due to international pressure. Darfur women were initially excluded from the first rounds of negotiations for the DPA, which were led by the African Union (AU), but in the final round, with the support of the AU and its international partners, they formed a gender expert team to represent them and created a unified platform of their priorities and demands (ICG, 2006).

In the revolution that toppled the regime of President Al-Bashir in 2019, Sudanese women played a very active role and represented around 70% of the protesters, yet women found themselves sidelined from the country's peace process (Lieberman, 2019). During the negotiations between the transitional army and the transitional government, only one woman was allowed to participate. Furthermore, only two women were included in the 11-member sovereign council that led the 39-month-long transition to democracy, and women were completely absent from the signing of the Constitutional Declaration (Solomon, 2019). The women voiced their indignation, and eventually, the new prime minister announced that women would have a bigger role in his cabinet, appointing four women ministers out of 18 (Tonnessen & al-Nagar, 2020).

4.1 Gender quotas:

Ensuring that women are involved in drafting a constitution is important because that is where the ground rules for operating a state in the future are established, therefore the window for including substantive provisions on equality for women in post-conflict and addressing social structures of inequality (Grenfell, 2016). Hence, there is support for gender quotas to ensure women's inclusion in formal political institutions. However, since constitution-making is about power distribution and maintaining privileges, political male elites would make all efforts to control the process (Grenfell, 2016). On the other hand, foreign actors will not necessarily push for women's participation if it is not in their interest.

In Afghanistan, it was international pressure that succeeded in ensuring that women represented 12% of the participants in the emergency meeting of Afghanistan's traditional assembly, the Loya Jirga, in 2002 that followed the US invasion and the collapse of the Taliban regime (Manchanda, 2005), but the warlords and commanders present dominated the talks and the women were barely heard (Grenfell, 2004). Women's representation in the Constitutional Loya Jirga in late 2003 that ratified the country's draft constitution reached 20% of the delegates, but again their participation was limited due to intimidations – a female member who was vocal required special security during and after the meeting (Grenfell, 2004). Throughout the constitution-making process, a women's quota was imposed on the participants. The 2004 constitution guarantees equal rights for men and women under the law, 25% of seats in the Lower House and 17% of appointed seats in the Upper House were allocated for women, and women were represented in various official institutions and leadership positions, but women continued to face violence and hostile attitudes in their daily life and public roles (Saddique, 2004).

However, support for women's inclusion in the 23 rounds of inter-Afghan peace talks from 2005 to 2014 dwindled to only two occasions (Peace Women, 2020) when political and security priorities for the foreign actors changed. Women's representation in negotiations that took place in 2018 and 2020 was minimal and only on the government's team (UNSC, 2021). More crucially, throughout the 2019 US-Taliban talks, women were completely excluded as well as any reference to women's rights (Peace Women, 2020). The final withdrawal of US forces in 2021 and handing over control of the country to the Taliban was a big blow and betrayal to Afghan women.

No doubt, persistent patriarchal attitudes towards women in Muslim communities continue to form a major barrier to women's participation in peace processes, but as demonstrated in the experiences of women in Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Sudan, it needs to be understood within not only a cultural context but also a political context of power relations, structure, and resistance to foreign impositions. Where women succeeded in participating and amending the constitution, it was mainly due to their activism and empowerment within locally supported social structures.

4.2 Enabling and constraining factors:

Women's ability to exercise strong influence during the peace process and constitution-making is affected by several enabling and constraining factors. Among these factors are the selection criteria and procedures such as quotas; the decision-making procedures where it is not about the number of women on the table but what authority they have; coalition-building among the women and with other participants; transfer strategies for conveying inputs to the negotiators; inclusion-friendly mediators; early inclusion in the peace process; support structures such as resource centers; monitoring mechanisms to follow on the implementation; and funding (Paffenholz et al., 2015). These are all crucial mechanisms and elements that affect how and to what extent women can participate in peace processes that have more to do with patriarchy and internal politics than with religion.

Furthermore, there are context factors, including support or resistance from the elite such as political and religious leaders; public buy-in; the influence of regional and international actors; heterogeneity of women's identities such as their ethnicity, religion, clan, age or class; societal and political attitudes and expectations of gender roles; the presence of strong women's groups and regional and international women's networks; and the presence of prior commitments by the state to gender issues and women's inclusion (Paffenholz et al., 2015). This shows the importance of understanding the context, the history, and the social, political, and economic background of women's role and influence in society. As Mikell (2005) argued in the experience of Nigerian women's peace activism, it is important to contextualize the Nigerian conflict, which is caused by ethnic and religious tensions arising from political and economic inequalities, to understand the women's intricate dialogue between cultures and within a culture.

The problem in including women might be in trying to impose a foreign international agenda and process, as postcolonial feminists argue. International actors would be more helpful to local women's agency in their struggle against patriarchy by supporting their work, initiatives, and priorities rather than imposing a one-size-fits-all approach. As demonstrated in Sudan, Afghanistan, Nigeria, many internal factors and external forces affect the level and type of input and role women play during peace processes that are not necessarily cultural or religious.

The reports by the UN itself and academic research have consistently shown the need to include, incorporate and consider local views, social structures, and cultural traditions when introducing and implementing peace processes involving women. This becomes particularly important in conflicts where violence and insecurity are rampant whether by state or non-state actors.

4.3 The security discourse:

Recent reports still show a lack of progress in women's participation in peace processes and the inclusion of gender-related provisions. The UN Secretary-General's 2021 report to the Security Council (UNSC, 2021) indicated that women's representation was only 23% in peace processes led or co-led by the UN in 2020, and none of the ceasefire agreements reached between 2018 and 2020 included gender provisions. The report linked the continued marginalization of women with the rise in political violence targeting women. Since 9/11, which occurred a year after the adoption of 1325, the discourse on WPS has been mostly framed within the security discourse of counterterrorism and counterinsurgency (Pratt, 2013). In the UN Global Study 2015, around 84% of civil society surveyed "*stated that the emerging issues of concern were violent extremism and counterterrorism*," (Coomaraswamy, p.20).

The UN Global Study 2015 also points out that many of the perceived root causes of war have changed, from nationalist or political wars in the post-World War II period to today's identity politics wars that are mostly religious or ethnic in origin, and in their "*most extreme form, are deeply conservative and reactionary toward women and their rights*," (Coomaraswamy, p.21), implicitly referring to Islamist extremist groups. However, according to SESRIC (2019) report, the main drivers and impacts of the conflict in Islamic countries are inequality, human development, political and social exclusion, and weak institutions. Thus, unlike the UN report, the SESRIC report considers the religious and ethnic internal conflicts not as the root cause of war but as a result of underdevelopment, political and social inequality, and weak or corrupt state institutions, which was the situation in Nigeria, Sudan, and Afghanistan. Liberal approaches to peace by the international community have failed to bring peace and stability to conflicts in Muslim communities because they either framed religion as an instigator or ignored religion altogether even to play a positive role (Kadayifci-Orellana, 2015), which distorts the contextual background of the conflict. Thus, international actors that approach the conflict from the beginning in a way that obscures their options, undermine their success in resolving it.

Insecurity is a major concern for women during and post-conflict, and naturally, it impacts their participation in public life. To address the various challenges arising from insecurity including terrorism, there is a need to understand local realities and localize national and international programs.

Although America's attention to Afghanistan after 9/11 was framed in the narrative of liberating women, and Afghan women's conditions post-Taliban did improve, women continued to struggle for their rights and equal opportunities (Samar, 2019). The insurgents deliberately targeted Afghan women who were in positions of power and influence because they saw them as symbols of betrayal to the Taliban's orders (Samar, 2019). A 15-province status report (APPRO, 2017) on Afghanistan, consistently showed that insecurity and violence against women whether domestic, or by the community in the form of harassment, or by the state in the negative attitude of law enforcement and the judiciary, were the main obstacles for women's participation in politics and civil service. The report indicated that the overall deteriorating security impacted women's mobility and access to healthcare, education, work, and justice, which were already lacking. On the other hand, it showed that informal methods of reconciliation by community elders and preventing violence through advocacy and raising awareness by civil society and religious elders, were common and more effective, especially since women often distrusted the police and the formal justice system because they were biased against them and corrupt.

Similarly, in Nigeria, since 2009, women live in fear of being kidnapped by Boko Haram militants or used by insurgents "*as war exploits, sex slaves, and domestic servants*," (Atim, 2017, P.63). Atim points that during armed conflicts women became internally displaced in camps where conditions are miserable and they have to take care of the children, the elderly, the wounded and other displaced in need of help, which limit their economic activity. She criticizes the government for not doing enough or incapable of doing much to rescue and protect women and girls from violence, not making efforts to bring the perpetrators to justice, and excluding women from the negotiation tables.

4.4 Local Muslim women peacebuilding actors:

Since religion plays an important role in the lives of Muslim communities it cannot be dismissed in the efforts to resolve conflicts just because minority extremist groups manipulate it for their own purposes. On the contrary, it should be used against them to counter their false and misleading interpretations. The approach of Muslim women in Nigeria offers a good example, where they played an active role in bridging the Islamic and non-Islamic discourse and raising awareness in the Muslim and Christian community on democratic rights and women's rights to advanced national reconciliation (Mikell, 2005).

Nigeria, a multi-ethnic and multi-religious state, has suffered from religious tensions and extremist groups for decades. Since the 1990s, Muslim and Christian women's groups resisted militancy through education campaigns, general strikes, and criticizing the government in the media because they realized that the core of the conflicts were ethnic mobilizations by the military over control of oil resources, and the government usually responded by violence which created the tensions (Mikell, 2005). The female activists engaged women across the country stressing national identity over religious, ethnic, and class differences; collaborated in fighting for women's rights; and critically looked at laws and worked to change them (Mikell, 2005). In countering the Boko Haram, they play an active role in informal peacebuilding, creating counter-narratives and raising awareness in the community to mobilize and provide assistance against the insurgency (Imam, A. et al., 2020).

Similarly, Fabra-Mata & Jalal (2018) found that in Afghanistan religious leaders are highly trusted more than any other institution and have an important role to play in conflict resolution and peacebuilding. Their research on Afghan female religious actors noted that they have been active in contributing to peacebuilding through education and raising awareness of women's rights, peaceful coexistence, and counter-extremism; mediation in family and community conflict resolutions; and facilitating dialogue between non-state armed groups, communities, and state officials. Yet, Afghanistan's national action plan (NAP) for implementing the WPS agenda does not recognize the role of female religious actors, even though it does mention among its objectives to train women on *Sharia* (Islamic law) and to include women in *Ulama* (religious scholars) Council. In the Afghan context, "*religious literacy can enhance the legitimacy and acceptance of female peacebuilders to operate within and expand the culturally sanctioned spaces that already exist*," (Fabra-Mata & Jalal, 2018, p.79).

In Sudan, the situation was different because it was the government that claimed to be representing and acting in the name of Islamic law. Sudan is a militarized society and has been plagued by war since its independence in 1956 that was mostly caused by inequities and intolerance between the North and South. Sudanese women have long been active politically in movements for independence and women’s rights since the 1950s but were later marginalized from any official roles by the authorities (ElSawi, 2011). Women members of, or associated with, the ruling Islamist party since 1989 spoke within the boundaries of conservative religious texts and laws imposed by the party, which undermined women’s rights and women’s solidarity (ICG, 2006).

Nevertheless, ElSawi (2011) relays how Sudanese women activists and civil society groups were involved during the Islamist rule in raising awareness and educating women at the grassroots community level about their marginalized status and rights in Islam and analyzed laws that discriminated against women. They were also active during the civil war in efforts to reconcile the rebels and the government, and in community mobilization for advancing women’s role in governance and economic empowerment. They succeeded in overcoming cultural, religious, racial, and political differences evident in the establishment of peace centers, increased participation and role of women in negotiations, training of community leaders and youth on peace issues, and the attainment of 25% quota for women in the 2010 elections.

Thus, in looking at the experiences of women in Afghanistan, Nigeria, and Sudan in peacebuilding and conflict-resolution, it is necessary to contextualize the role of culture and religion in shaping and influencing women’s agency in conflict resolution within the historical, political, and social backgrounds of each community affected by war. It is also necessary to look at other factors such as the type of government, economic conditions, and ethnic tensions, but especially foreign intervention, that affected women’s participation within this contextual background.

5. Conclusion:

The tendency by Western actors to frame the complex interaction of internal and external factors affecting women’s political engagement as simply caused by traditional culture and religion, and therefore attempt to reform, alter or dismiss them through imposed ideologies and agendas, is counterproductive. The case studies presented in the paper showed that cultural change has to be organic, local, bottom-up approach. Imposed agendas and ideologies will be resisted, and as soon as international pressure is lifted or weakened, the previously dominant factions and ideologies will reassert their power and influence. That is why education and awareness-raising, especially of authentic religious understanding to counter extremist ideology, are important for women and men. Political will and leadership are essential, in a top-down approach complementing the inclusive, safe community-level empowerment of women and men in peacemaking and peacebuilding. Economic and political stability are key to the success of these efforts, and security – as defined and prioritized by the local community – is a fundamental aspect.

6. Limitations of the study:

There are two major limitations in this study that could be addressed in future research. First, the limited access to data due to language barriers and lack of information and references on the intersectional factors that impacted the participation of Muslim women in peace processes, which in itself is indicative of their marginalization in peacebuilding. Second, time constraints, which affected the number of Muslim countries that were included in the study and in conducting in-depth analysis of the multiple factors that affected women's participation in peace processes.

7. Recommendation for further study:

Increasing the number of Muslim countries in the study would enhance the findings on women's participation in peace processes across diverse Muslim societies and in understanding the impact of intersectional factors on their participation. Furthermore, the intersectional framework could be used to compare women's participation in peace processes across various societies in order to contextualize the findings, which is key to understanding the barriers to women's participation in peacebuilding and therefore in taking appropriate measures to increase their participation and contributions.

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