

GENDER RELATIONS IN THE SUDANESE FAMILY VS. ISLAMIC FOUNDATIONS: A SOCIOLOGICAL ANALYSIS STUDY

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Abstract

This study examines the intersection of Islamic principles and Sudanese cultural practices in shaping gender relations within the family. Using a comparative analytical approach, it explores how key Islamic texts, including the Quran and Hadith, define gender roles and responsibilities, and compares these foundations with the lived realities of Sudanese families. Data was collected through content analysis of Islamic religious texts, social reports, and scholarly literature on gender relations in Sudan and Islam. The research focuses on the contemporary context while tracing historical shifts in Sudanese family dynamics amidst the nation's cultural and social diversity.

Findings reveal that Islam emphasizes equality in rights and responsibilities between men and women, promoting role complementarity within the family. However, gender relations in Sudanese families are shaped by a complex interplay of cultural, social, and economic factors. While Islamic principles align with many Sudanese cultural norms, local traditions often exert a stronger influence, particularly in rural areas where women may experience subordinate roles despite Islamic teachings advocating equality.

This study contributes to a deeper understanding of how religion and culture interact to shape family dynamics, highlighting the nuanced and evolving nature of gender relations in Sudan. The findings underscore the need for a balanced approach that respects cultural diversity while aligning with the egalitarian principles of Islam.

Keywords: Comparison, gender relations, Islam, Sudanese family.

1. Introduction:

Gender, as a social construct, plays a pivotal role in shaping both individual and collective identity. Islamic law addresses gender relations with a balanced approach, emphasizing justice and equality while acknowledging inherent differences and social roles traditionally associated with men and women. Within this framework, the study of "Gender Relations in Islam" provides valuable insights into how Islamic principles define rights, duties, and roles in familial and societal contexts.

In Sudan, the family serves as a central institution for shaping gender relations, where religious principles and local traditions intersect to create distinct patterns of interaction between men and women. The cultural and social diversity characteristic of Sudanese families adds layers of complexity to these dynamics, influencing the distribution of roles, responsibilities, and rights. This unique interplay between religion and culture creates a fertile ground for examining the alignment and divergence between Islamic teachings and Sudanese social practices.

This research seeks to compare Islamic perspectives on gender relations with their practical application in Sudanese families. It investigates the extent to which religious values align with or diverge from social norms and explores how local customs and traditions shape the understanding and implementation of gender roles in everyday life.

Gender relations within Islam have long been a topic of scholarly debate, as Islamic teachings present a comprehensive framework of rights and duties. From its inception, Islamic law delineated gender roles based on principles of justice rather than absolute equality, enabling men and women to fulfill complementary functions within the family and society. Over time, however, the interpretation and application of these concepts have evolved across different temporal and geographical contexts, resulting in diverse practices among Islamic societies (Alwani, 2007).

In Sudan, gender relations are deeply influenced by the interaction between Islamic heritage and prevailing tribal and social customs. Historically, Sudanese women have held significant

roles in family and societal life. However, these roles have shifted considerably in response to political and economic changes, reflecting the dynamic interplay of social, religious, and economic factors (Badri, 1998). This evolution underscores the importance of understanding gender relations as both a product of religious values and a reflection of socio-cultural influences, particularly within the Sudanese context.

2. Problem Statement:

Gender relations within Sudanese families have undergone profound changes, driven by rapid social, cultural, and economic transformations. These shifts have created significant challenges in defining the roles and responsibilities of men and women within the family structure. While Islamic principles offer a balanced framework for gender relations, emphasizing equality in rights and responsibilities to promote familial and societal harmony, there is an evident gap between these ideals and the realities observed in contemporary Sudanese families.

This disparity highlights the need for a comprehensive analysis of gender dynamics in Sudanese families, focusing on the factors contributing to this misalignment. Social and cultural practices, deeply rooted in Sudanese traditions, often interact with or override Islamic principles, shaping gender roles in ways that deviate from the religious framework.

The central issue, therefore, is understanding the extent and nature of this gap between Islamic teachings on gender relations and the lived experiences of Sudanese families. This involves examining the influence of cultural and social practices, as well as identifying challenges and opportunities for fostering a gender balance that aligns with Islamic values. Such an analysis is essential for addressing the evolving dynamics of gender relations in Sudanese society and promoting a more harmonious integration of cultural traditions with religious principles.

3. Research Questions

What principles does Islam outline regarding gender relations within the family?

.How Are Gender Relations Formed in Sudanese Families in Terms of Roles and Responsibilities?

What are the key similarities and differences between gender relations in Sudanese families and the Islamic framework for gender relations?

4- Research Objectives

To identify the Islamic principles that govern gender relations within the family.

To analyze gender relations in Sudanese families, focusing on roles, rights, and responsibilities.

To compare the similarities and differences between gender relations in Sudanese families and the Islamic framework for gender relations.

5. The Significance of The Study

5.1. Theoretical Significance of the Study

Enriching Knowledge in the Field of Gender Relations.

Establishing a Scientific Dialogue on the Intersection of Religion and Society
By emphasizing the role of Islamic values in shaping family gender relations and their influence on societal stability, this study provides a robust theoretical foundation for future research. It promotes scholarly dialogue on the intersection of religion and society, particularly in culturally diverse contexts, enabling a deeper exploration of how religious and societal dynamics integrate to influence gender roles.

5.2 Practical Significance of the Study

The findings of this study may offer practical recommendations for Sudanese families to harmonize local traditions with Islamic principles.

This research provides analytical insights that can inform policymakers in developing strategies to strengthen family relationships.

6. Methodological Procedures of The Study

6.1. Study Methodology

This study adopts an analytical comparative approach, which is well-suited for examining the intersection of theory and practice in gender relations. The methodology involves analyzing key theoretical and religious texts that outline gender relations in Islam and comparing these principles with the social practices observed within Sudanese families. This approach enables a comprehensive understanding of the similarities and differences between Islamic teachings and real-life practices.

6.2. Data Collection Tools

The data collection methods included Islamic texts and writings related to Sudanese families. The studies on Sudanese families referenced in this research are relatively outdated, primarily due to Sudanese researchers being preoccupied with the challenges of wars and their associated impacts. Even the studies that addressed this subject often focused on the effects of wars and strategies for addressing them, which limited the direct and comprehensive exploration of family-related issues

6.3. Type of Study

This research is a theoretical, analytical, and comparative study.

6.4. Study Fields

Thematic Field: The study focuses on analyzing gender relations in Islam and Sudanese families, with an emphasis on roles, responsibilities, and their intersections.

Temporal Field: The research prioritizes the current context of gender relations while incorporating references to historical changes and their impact over time.

7. Study Terms:

Relationship:

Linguistic Definition

The term “relationship” in language refers to the connection or bond that links two or more entities, whether material, emotional, or social. It derives from the root ‘alaqa in Arabic, which signifies attachment or association (Ibn Manzoor, 1988).

Terminological Definition

A relationship is defined as the connection between two or more parties, characterized by mutual influence and interaction, whether in social, economic, or cultural domains. In social contexts, it describes the ties that bind individuals or groups based on defined roles and responsibilities (Abdul Rahman, 2015).

Operational Definition

In this study, “relationship” refers to the mutual connections and interactions between genders (gender relations) within the family. It is defined by roles, rights, and responsibilities and is used to assess how these connections within Sudanese families align with Islamic principles of gender relations, with a focus on the influence of social customs and traditions in shaping these relationships.

The Concept of Gender:

Linguistic Definition

The term “gender” linguistically refers to classification or distinction among objects or beings based on specific characteristics. In Arabic, it derives from the word “نوع,” which denotes a category or group sharing common traits (Ibn Manzoor, 1988). In English, the term “Gender” originates from the Latin root “genus,” which means class or type (Oakley, 2019).

Terminological Definition:

Gender is defined as the roles, behaviors, and characteristics that society assigns to men and women, which vary according to cultural, social, and temporal contexts. The term goes beyond biological differences to focus on social and cultural roles imposed on the sexes (World Health Organization, 2023; Lorber, 2021).

“Gender refers to the roles, behaviors, activities, and attributes that a given society considers appropriate for men and women.” (World Health Organization, 2023).

Operational Definition:

In this study, “gender” refers to the distribution of roles and responsibilities between males and females within Sudanese families. These relationships are shaped by cultural and social traditions and are compared with the Islamic foundations of gender. The study emphasizes analyzing the alignment of these roles with Islamic values and their impact on family stability.

Operational Definition of Gender Relations in This Study

In this study, “gender relations” refers to the roles, responsibilities, and power dynamics between men and women within the Sudanese family, as influenced by both cultural norms and Islamic principles..

Family:

Linguistic Definition

The term “family” refers to a man’s tribe and close relatives who provide him with support, often related to his strength and connections. The family is considered the tribe of the man and his household (Ibn Manzoor, 1993, p. 104).

Technical Definition:

A family unit is composed of a man and a woman connected by a solid marital relationship, along with their children and relatives. Its existence is based on instinctual drives, mutual interests, and shared feelings that align with its members (Tayoub, 2019, p. 8).

Operational Definition:

In this study, the family refers to a structure formed by a legitimate marriage between a man and a woman, including their children and extending to both their ancestors and descendants.

8. Theories of the Study:

8.1. The Islamic Feminist Theory

The hypotheses of the theory are:

Intrinsic Equality Between Genders: Islamic feminism assumes that Islam does not discriminate against women but recognizes their rights and provides them with equality (Mernissi, 1991).

Natural Differences and Complementarity: Islamic feminism views men and women as complementary beings, acknowledging natural differences between them, yet Islam does not allow these differences to result in inequality in rights (Wadud, 1999).

Reinterpreting Religious Texts: Islamic feminism calls for a re-reading and interpretation of religious texts (the Qur’an and Hadith) in a way that elevates women’s status in society (Wadud, 1999).

Since the study involves gender analysis in the context of Sudanese families and gender relations in an Islamic society, Islamic feminism provides a suitable framework to understand how religious values influence gender roles within the family, thereby enhancing the understanding of family attitudes toward women’s status in society. The theory calls for a reinterpretation of women’s status according to Islamic texts, making it useful in analyzing the role of women in Sudanese families in light of religious and gendered concepts

8.2. Structuralist Gender Theory

Hypotheses of the Theory

Gender roles are rooted in social structures: The structuralist gender theory posits that the differences between sexes are the result of social structures that institutionalize gender roles, with social institutions contributing to the reinforcement of these roles across generations (Giddens, 2001).

Structural Gender Theory emphasizes how societal and cultural structures shape gender roles and behaviors [Lorber, 1994, p. 32]. Studies indicate that gender differences are primarily influenced by cultural and social factors, such as societal expectations, education, and media, rather than biological distinctions [Bigler & Liben, 2007, pp. 162-166]. Social power influences gender relations: The theory emphasizes that gender dynamics are not only a product of culture but are also influenced by the distribution of power within society, affecting the relationships between individuals (Bourdieu, 1990).

For instance, Structural Gender Theory suggests:

Gender roles are shaped by societal and cultural structures [West & Zimmerman, 1987, p. 126].

Social expectations and cultural values impact individual behaviors [Hoffman, 2001, p. 45].

Societal structures lead to gender disparities in areas like education, employment and healthcare [Kimmel, 2000, p. 87].

Structuralist Gender Theory offers a suitable framework for understanding how social structures, such as family, religious institutions, and educational systems, shape gender roles within the Sudanese family. Based on this theory, one can analyze how societal and religious values influence individuals' interactions with the roles assigned to them as men and women in Sudanese society.

9. Answers to The Study's Questions

9.1. What principles does Islam outline regarding gender relations within the family?:

The differences in gender roles for men and women are not a modern phenomenon but stem from deeply rooted societal values and traditions that assign specific tasks and responsibilities to each gender.

This perspective on the roles of both men and women is ancient and appears deeply rooted in the social and religious context. This can be evidenced by what historians narrated about Asma bint Yazid Al-Ansariyah. It is reported that she came to the Prophet (P.U.H) while he was among his companions and said:

“May my father and mother be sacrificed for you! I am the delegate of women to you, and I speak on behalf of them. There is no woman in the East or the West who hears of my coming but that she shares the same view as mine. Indeed, the One who sent you with the truth for men and women alike, we believed in you and your God who sent you. But we, as women, are confined to your homes, fulfilling your desires, and bearing your children. Yet, you men have been favored over us with Friday prayers, congregational prayers, visiting the sick, attending funerals, performing Hajj after Hajj, and, above all, striving in the path of Allah. When one of you goes for Hajj, Umrah, or participates in Jihad, we safeguard your wealth, wash your clothes, and raise your children. Shall we not share in this merit, O Messenger of Allah?” (Al-Sayyid, 2007, p. 25).

The sentiment expressed by Asma bint Yazid al-Ansariyah was not born out of a vacuum; rather, it was a natural reaction to the prevailing state of Arab society, characterized by male dominance. Both pre-Islamic and early Islamic Arab societies were predominantly patriarchal. However, it was unrealistic to expect Islam to fulfill all women's aspirations at that stage instantly. The issue was not merely about the revelation of a verse or the narration of a hadith; it was about a complex social reality with entrenched constraints that could not be easily overridden. These constraints set a ceiling on the transformative process that Islam aimed to undertake.

A telling example of the prevailing social mindset is reflected in the reaction of the Prophet's companions to Asma's discourse. They remarked, "We did not think that a woman would be guided to such (an argument)." This indicates that, at that time, Muslims had not yet reached a level where they perceived women as capable of articulate speech and argumentation—qualities perhaps presumed to be exclusive to men.

The examples mentioned illustrate the status of women and the nature of gender relations prevalent before and during the early stages of Islam. Over time, as events unfolded, gradual changes occurred. Women began to participate in various fields, and this involvement positively impacted their status in society and their relationships with its other components. The Qur'an establishes a clear framework for gender relations through several verses, including:

Surah An-Nisa (4:1): "O mankind, fear your Lord, who created you from one soul and created from it its mate and dispersed from both of them many men and women."

Surah An-Nahl (16:97): "Whoever does righteousness, whether male or female, while he is a believer – We will surely cause him to live a good life."

Surah Al-Ahzab (33:35): "Indeed, the Muslim men and Muslim women, the believing men and believing women, the obedient men and obedient women, the truthful men and truthful women, the patient men and patient women, the humble men and humble women, the charitable men and charitable women, the fasting men and fasting women, the men who guard their private parts and the women who do so, and the men who remember Allah often and the women who do so – for them Allah has prepared forgiveness and a great reward."

Surah Al-Hujurat (49:13): "O mankind, indeed We have created you from male and female and made you peoples and tribes that you may know one another. Indeed, the most noble of you in the sight of Allah is the most righteous of you."

These verses emphasize the equality and mutual respect between genders, highlighting that righteousness and piety are the true measures of a person's worth in Islam.

It can be concluded that Islam addressed gender relations in an indirect yet profound manner, establishing principles that emphasize equitable justice between men and women. Islam accorded both genders equal status in the Qur'anic discourse, addressing divine commandments to both men and women without discrimination. Furthermore, it established equality in their shared human responsibility, including adherence to divine law, leadership roles in societal reform, and participation in the development and cultivation of the earth. Both genders were granted equal rights to ownership and the pursuit of knowledge, with the latter being an obligation for both men and women.

There are numerous examples that highlight Islam's emphasis on granting women their rights and ensuring equality with men, in addition to the previously mentioned verses and examples. For instance, the first person to embrace Islam was a woman, Khadijah bint Khuwaylid, who stood by the Prophet (PBUH) during the early days of the Islamic mission as a believer, supporter, and companion (Al-Khalidi, 2009, p. 34). Women also participated in the Pledge of Aqaba, which laid the foundation for the establishment of the Islamic state, emphasizing their role in building the first Islamic society (Al-Rifa'i, 2015, p. 88). Moreover, the Prophet (PBUH) entrusted Lady Aisha and Lady Asma bint Abi Bakr with the details of the most pivotal event in Islamic history, his migration to Medina, demonstrating the immense trust he placed in women during critical moments (Al-Husseini, 2013, p. 129).

Additionally, the Qur'an records the story of the woman who debated with the Prophet (PBUH) regarding her husband, leading to the revelation of specific laws and rulings addressing her situation. This incident underscores Islam's commitment to justice and protecting women's rights (Ali, 2017, p. 45). Furthermore, there is the well-known instance of a woman correcting Umar ibn al-Khattab, the second caliph, during a public discourse,

prompting him to admit, “The woman is right, and Umar is wrong.” This reflects the respect Islam accorded to women’s opinions and their ability to influence decisions at the highest levels of authority (Salem, 2019, p. 76).

Examples of women’s participation in public affairs include the account of Umm ‘Atiyyah Al-Ansariyyah, as recorded in the two Sahihs: “I participated in seven battles with the Messenger of Allah (PBUH).” Likewise, Umm ‘Umara, Nusaybah bint Ka’b Al-Ansariyyah, was among the women who pledged allegiance during the Hijrah, the Pledge of Aqabah, and the Pledge of Ridwan. She was renowned for her exceptional bravery during the Battle of Uhud, where she fought valiantly when the Muslims retreated, shielding the Prophet (PBUH) with her own life. She was struck with a wound to her shoulder by Ibn Qamiah, who had aimed for the Prophet (PBUH). Despite severe bleeding and injuries across her body, she continued to fight to protect him. The Prophet (PBUH) directed those fleeing the battlefield to leave their shields and weapons for her to use. He praised her, saying: “Who can endure what you endure, O Umm ‘Umara? I did not turn right or left during the Battle of Uhud without seeing her fighting to defend me. The station of Nusaybah bint Ka’b during the Battle of Uhud is better than that of so-and-so among men.” (Al-Ghazali, 1999: p. 67). Umm ‘Umara’s dedication to public service earned the admiration and respect of the Prophet (PBUH).

The life of the Prophet (PBUH) tells us that Umm Hani bintt Abi Talib granted sanctuary and protection to a believer from the Banu Hubaireh whose life was at risk. She also stood up to her brother Ali ibn Abi Talib when he pursued the man, she had granted protection. She narrates, as reported in both al-Bukhari and Muslim:

“I went to the Messenger of Allah (PBUH) during the year of the conquest of Mecca and found him bathing, with his daughter Fatimah shielding him. I greeted him, and he asked, ‘Who is this?’ I replied, ‘I am Umm Hani, daughter of Abi Talib.’ He responded, ‘Welcome, Umm Hani.’ After he finished his bath, he got up and prayed eight units of prayer, covering himself with a single garment. When he finished, I said, ‘O Messenger of Allah, my cousin (Ali ibn Abi Talib) claims he killed a man I have given sanctuary to – so-and-so, son of Hubaireh.’ The Messenger of Allah (PBUH) replied, ‘We have granted protection to whoever you have granted protection to, Umm Hani.’”(Ismail,1987)

This noble participation continued after the time of the Prophet (PBUH). For example, Asma’ bint Abi Bakr confronted al-Hajjaj ibn Yusuf after he killed her son, Abdullah ibn al-Zubair. He sent a messenger demanding she come to him, but she refused. He sent a second messenger threatening, “Either you come to me, or I will send someone to drag you by your hair.” She replied, “I swear by Allah, I will not come to you until you send someone to drag me by my hair.” Eventually, al-Hajjaj himself went to her, swaggering, and said, “How do you think I dealt with the enemy of Allah?” She responded, “I saw you ruin his world and ruin your own afterlife. Indeed, the Messenger of Allah (peace be upon him) told us that among the people of Tha’qif were a liar and a butcher. We saw the liar (Al-Mukhtar ibn Abi Ubayd al-Thaqafi), and as for the butcher, I don’t think anyone else but you fits that description.” He turned away and did not respond to her.(ibn Umar,1990).

In the early days of Islam, women actively participated in public affairs and social events. An example of this is the incident where both Ikrimah and Kathir of ‘Azza passed away on the same day. Their funerals were held simultaneously, and women predominantly led the procession. Imam Abu Ja’far Muhammad ibn Ali requested to carry Kathir’s funeral bier, and as men attempted to move the women aside, Imam Muhammad ibn Ali struck them with his sleeve, saying, “Move aside, O companions of Yusuf.” A woman among them responded, “O son of the Messenger of God, you have spoken the truth; we are indeed the companions of Yusuf, and we were better to him than you were.” Later, Imam Muhammad ibn Ali confronted this woman, who was identified as Zaynab bintMu’ayqib, and she eloquently

explained the differences in their treatment of Yusuf, highlighting the compassion and care women offered him compared to the hardships he endured from men. Imam Muhammad ibn Ali acknowledged her wisdom, stating, "May God bless you; no woman will be contradicted except she will prevail"(ibn Umar, 1990: p456). This story underscores the significant role of women in public life and their active participation in social events, reflecting an equitable relationship between men and women.

In the early days of Islam, the Islamic message worked to reform family affairs in general, with a particular focus on improving the status of women in society and their relationship with men. In the pre-Islamic era, women were treated as property, inferior to slaves, and it was permissible to bury daughters alive out of fear of shame. In such circumstances, the Islamic message came to establish that women are human beings equal to men before God, addressed with the same duties, and possessing legal personality that allows them to engage in trade independently, participate in wars, and even issue religious rulings.

During the prophetic era, women played a prominent role in various fields. They participated in political activities such as pledging allegiance, migration, and consultation. They also took part in service activities during military campaigns, such as providing water and tending to the wounded. Additionally, they engaged in manual labor and agriculture, reflecting their active role in society.

Therefore, it is evident that Islam granted women distinctive rights and status, making them active partners in building and developing society.

Here are some examples that confirm women's rights in Islam:

Equality Between Spouses in Rights and Duties

Islam establishes the principle of equality between spouses as the foundation for a relationship based on mutual respect. The Quran mentions that men and women were created from a single soul, indicating equality in humanity and dignity (Quran, Surah An-Nisa: 1). Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) emphasized the woman's right to kind treatment, stating: "The best of you are those who are best to their wives, and I am the best among you to my wives" (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2001).

Affection and Mercy as the Basis of the Marital Relationship

Islam emphasizes affection and mercy as the foundation of the relationship between spouses. Allah says: "And among His signs is that He created for you from yourselves mates that you may find tranquility in them; and He placed between you affection and mercy" (Quran, Surah Ar-Rum: 21). This verse clarifies that the marital relationship transcends the physical aspect to include feelings of love and mercy, ensuring the continuity of a healthy and happy marital life (Al-Tahawi, 1993).

Sharing Responsibilities Within the Family

Islam defines roles based on the complementarity between spouses, not competition. For example, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) highlighted the importance of cooperation in family matters, as he assisted his family with household chores (Sahih al-Bukhari, 2001). This illustrates that the division of responsibilities is not gender-based but rather on cooperation and mutual contribution.

Justice in Treatment Among Family Members

Islam ensures justice among family members, whether between spouses or children. The Prophet (peace be upon him) said: "Fear Allah and be just among your children" (Sahih Muslim, 2002). This justice includes the fair distribution of responsibilities, rights, and duties, ensuring the stability of the family (Al-Sabahi, 1998).

Respect for Human Dignity of Every Individual

Islam promotes the principle of respecting the human dignity of every individual in the family, regardless of their role or gender. Allah says: "And We have certainly honored the

children of Adam” (Quran, Surah Al-Isra: 70). This applies to the relationship between men and women within the family (Al-Tahawi, 1993).

These principles reflect Islam’s commitment to women’s rights and honor, ensuring they have an active and equal role as men in various aspects of family and social life

The above discussion addresses the first research question and thus achieves the study’s objective of identifying the Islamic foundations that regulate gender relations within the family.

These findings align with the principles of Islamic feminist theory, which posits that Islam does not discriminate against women but rather acknowledges their rights and ensures equality within the framework of Islamic laws and regulations

9.2. How Are Gender Relations Formed in Sudanese Families in Terms of Roles and Responsibilities?

Sudanese society is distinguished by its rich cultural diversity, arising from the multitude of tribes and ethnic groups, each contributing unique subcultural norms. This diversity is reflected in the regional variations in gender relations and the roles assigned to men and women within families. For example, in western Sudan, women's roles are notably flexible and expansive. Beyond domestic responsibilities and childcare, women actively participate in agricultural and pastoral work, which are essential to both family and community economies. According to the 1993 population census, economically active women constituted approximately 24.7% of the total population, with significant regional differences: 60% in Kordofan and 75% in Darfur, compared to just 6.1% in the northern region (Badri, 2008).

This expanded role of women in western Sudan positions them as stronger partners in familial relationships compared to women in northern and eastern Sudan, where roles are more traditionally defined. In these regions, cultural heritage often dictates that women primarily manage the home and raise children, while men are responsible for external labor to provide for the family.

Despite regional differences, Sudanese communities share cultural values that reinforce traditional gender role divisions. Across these communities, women’s roles are often perceived as internal (domestic), while men’s roles are considered external (economic providers). This dichotomy creates a framework for gender relations rooted in role differentiation, which often leads to disparities in power dynamics between men and women within families.

Cultural heritage is a central force in shaping these gender relations, interacting with economic and social factors to define roles and responsibilities. In agriculturally and pastorally reliant regions such as western Sudan, women are considered equal contributors in labor and production, which enhances their social influence within families. Conversely, in urban areas or regions with more traditional structures like northern and eastern Sudan, societal norms often position men as the central economic authority, confining women to domestic roles and limiting their independence and influence.

This gender-based role classification also reflects deeper ideological and historical dimensions that have developed over generations. Economic structures and entrenched customs have perpetuated traditional patterns, although these patterns are not static. In some communities experiencing significant economic or social changes, factors like education and migration have contributed to reshaping gender roles within families.

Educational curricula in Sudan further reinforce these traditional gender roles, reflecting broader societal attitudes. For instance, although both genders study similar academic subjects at the secondary school level, there is a distinct differentiation in practical activities. In girls’ schools, subjects such as home economics and sewing are emphasized, whereas boys study fields related to engineering, horticulture, and agriculture. Vocational schools similarly

perpetuate this division: girls are directed toward home management, maternal and child care, and tailoring, while boys receive training in engineering and agricultural disciplines. These curricula entrench societal expectations of gendered roles, influencing the formation of gender relations from a young age (Sudanese Studies Journal, 1991).

This approach reflects how gender roles are modeled within Sudanese families, where behaviors deemed appropriate for each gender are grounded in traditional societal definitions. Education reinforces the notion that women are "naturally" suited for domestic tasks and child-rearing, while men are viewed as more fitting for physical labor and external responsibilities. This division mirrors the traditional family structure, where women are typically responsible for internal duties and caregiving, while men are expected to provide the family's economic resources.

Recently, this educational division has lasting effects on gender relations within the Sudanese family. When generations grow up under such classifications, it becomes common to perceive men's work as "more important" and "heavier," while women's work is often regarded as "simple" and "less valuable." However, the tasks women perform are undeniably essential to the stability of both family and society (Fatinou Bekele, 1988).

Within this framework, the Sudanese family tends to reinforce a hierarchical relationship between genders, where men are granted economic and social power, while women are relegated to subordinate roles. However, these roles are not static. In urban environments and more educated families, there has been a noticeable shift, as increased access to education and employment for women slowly alters these traditional dynamics.

In summary, the gender division embedded in educational systems and labor structures not only reflects societal perceptions but also perpetuates them within Sudanese families. Over time, these perceptions can either reinforce traditional roles or foster more equitable gender relations.

In recent years, the dynamics of gender relations within Sudanese families and society have undergone notable changes, especially in education. Curricula have gradually begun to emphasize the contributions of Sudanese women, such as Queen Al-Dar, signaling a shift toward greater recognition of women's roles in society and a gradual decline of historically unequal gender relations.

Additionally, studies have highlighted that, despite the restrictions historically placed on Sudanese women, they have always held influential roles. Many women have been warriors, leaders of tribes, and achievers in education (Badri, 1984). This reveals that gender relations are not fixed but are instead dynamic and subject to change. While men often hold superior positions in Sudanese society, there are instances where women assume higher statuses based on their contributions.

External factors, such as constitutional reforms, international treaties, women's education, and changing political and economic conditions, play a crucial role in the evolving nature of gender relations. These factors, along with the dimensions of time and place, help reshape cultural hierarchies and power dynamics between men and women within Sudanese families and society.

One of the key contributors to the restructuring of gender relations has been the growing participation of women in urban employment, characterized by regular working hours and fixed salaries. This shift has profoundly impacted both male and female roles, leading to significant changes in gender dynamics.

The entry of Sudanese women into the urban workforce, however, occurred later than expected. This shift was closely linked to the development of education, which only began to take root in Sudan in the early 20th century. Education enabled women to move beyond traditional labor roles and embrace jobs that required specialized skills. In contrast, rural

women's participation in the labor force was more of an economic necessity, driven by the demands of their environment (Badri, 1998).

The economic challenges of urban life, coupled with the rising demands of a more luxurious lifestyle, have led women to assume responsibilities traditionally associated with men, such as shopping and paying household bills at offices and companies. Simultaneously, men have taken on tasks traditionally considered women's work, including washing dishes, cleaning the house, and feeding children. These shifts signify a qualitative change in the division of labor within families due to economic transformations and urbanization. The roles of husbands and wives are no longer fixed as they once were but are instead characterized by shared cooperation, with the exception of biological functions exclusive to women, such as pregnancy and childbirth (Omar, 1994, p. 17).

Studies show that most husbands in urban families affirm that their wives share in family leadership. This can be attributed to a higher cultural awareness within this demographic and their evolving perspectives on life. Moreover, a significant proportion of women in these families actively contribute to household expenses and share family responsibilities with their husbands. (Al-Khouli, 2015, p. 93). This shift highlights a transformation in gender relations, particularly evident in Sudanese families, where there has been a notable increase in the number of women entering the labor market in urban areas. According to labor market surveys, the rate of women's workforce participation in the 1990s grew at twice the rate of men's (7% compared to 3.5%), contributing to a rise in women's participation from approximately 18% to 28%. Though labor market surveys have been discontinued, observational evidence suggests that women's participation has now exceeded 35% (Ministry of Social Welfare, Women's and Children's Affairs, 2006, p. 7).

Women's entry into public employment has granted them economic power and decision-making experience, enhancing their status in the social hierarchy and reshaping gender relations. Decision-making is a critical process in both social and economic life, as it influences the dynamics of relationships and role interactions between men and women. Given that women are integral members of the family, their involvement in decision-making is paramount (Abu Talhounh, 2000, p. 347).

Consultation now forms the foundation of family decision-making, with women, through their education, work experience, and public life involvement, occupying a pivotal role in these consultative processes. This development serves as a positive indicator of evolving gender relations, as women increasingly play an influential role in shaping decisions within both the family and society.

It is evident that a relative shift has occurred in the nature of gender relations within Sudanese families and society. Recent years have seen significant transformations that strengthen women's roles and status. One notable aspect is the increase in the migration of women, often supported and encouraged by their families and communities. Married women with children often see their husbands accompany them to host countries, and in some cases, husbands take on childcare responsibilities while their wives work. Additionally, some women bring their children along when their husbands cannot travel, reflecting growing acceptance of these arrangements due to economic, cultural, and social shifts.

Furthermore, an increasing number of young men now prefer to marry working women, recognizing the economic and social advantages such unions bring. This shift has positioned women in a stronger role within gender relations, enabling them to significantly enhance the family's socioeconomic status.

Although the Sudanese family is experiencing notable changes in gender role distribution, with women taking on responsibilities beyond traditional roles—such as contributing to the

workforce and participating in family decision-making—the conventional division of labor remains pervasive.

This relative change in gender relations reflects a state of flux, influenced by social, economic, and political conditions. Despite advancements in securing constitutional and legal rights for Sudanese women, gender relations within the family remain unequal. Men still hold authority derived from prevailing cultural norms, which perpetuate discrimination against women.

However, the recent gains achieved by Sudanese women in constitutional and legal realms, previously unattainable, result from comprehensive changes across various sectors. Therefore, gender relations within the Sudanese family are not static but continuously evolving in response to external circumstances, with some aspects of inequality and discrimination still lingering.

In conclusion, gender relations within Sudanese families are a complex product of the interaction between cultural, economic, and social factors. The roles and responsibilities within the family structure remain central in determining power dynamics between men and women. The study's objective of analyzing gender relations in Sudanese families regarding roles and responsibilities has been achieved, addressing the second research question.

This perspective resonates with the hypothesis of structural gender theory, which asserts that gender differences are not biologically determined but are rather cultural and social constructs. The theory rejects biological explanations of gender roles and contends that gender expectations are socially constructed and enforced through various means, such as education and media.

9.3. What are the key similarities and differences between gender relations in Sudanese families and the Islamic framework for gender relations?

The study of gender relations within Sudanese families, particularly in comparison with Islamic foundations, reveals a complex interaction between local cultural heritage and religious principles. This interplay shapes the roles and relationships between men and women within families, influenced by historical, social, and economic factors. The resulting dynamics reflect both similarities and differences, particularly in areas such as role complementarity, decision-making participation, economic empowerment, education, and more.

9.3.1. Similarities

Complementarity in Roles:

Islam emphasizes the complementarity of roles between men and women within the family, where roles are distributed based on the inherent nature of each gender. Men are viewed as the primary providers, while women are caretakers of the household. This distribution is central to organizing marital relations.

In Sudanese families, traditional roles mirror this complementarity, with men generally serving as the primary breadwinners and women assuming responsibility for child-rearing and household management (Sudanese Studies Journal, 1999: 72). This distribution aligns with Islamic principles encouraging gender role complementarity.

Moral Values in Marital Relationships:

Islam strengthens marital relationships by emphasizing affection, mercy, and mutual respect between spouses. The relationship is expected to be founded on cooperation and equality in rights and responsibilities.

These values are clearly evident in Sudanese families, where respect and loyalty among family members are fostered to ensure family stability, reflecting Quranic teachings that advocate for interactions based on love and mercy (El-Sayed, 2007: 32).

Economic Empowerment of Women:

Islam does not oppose women's economic empowerment but encourages their participation in work and economic life. The Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) recommended education and work for both men and women.

In some Sudanese regions, women face challenges in achieving financial independence due to cultural pressures that often confine women to the home. However, women in larger cities may have more economic opportunities, contrasting with the limited opportunities in rural areas.

Women's Participation in Education:

Islam encourages women's education in all fields, emphasizing their right to knowledge. The pursuit of education is considered an important principle for both men and women.

While Islamic law guarantees women's right to education, some Sudanese regions are influenced by customs and traditions that limit girls' educational opportunities. Often, these limitations are reflected in the focus on subjects like home economics and sewing, reinforcing stereotypical views of women's roles (Sudanese Studies Journal, 1999: 75).

Equality in Rights:

Islam provides equal rights to men and women in various fields, including work and education. Islamic law emphasizes gender justice and affirms women's rights across different domains.

Despite Islamic principles guaranteeing women's rights, some cultural practices in Sudanese society conflict with these teachings. In certain regions, men are still considered to have ultimate authority in the household, and women's rights are limited in some social contexts (El-Sayed, 2007: 32).

9.3.2. Differences

Participation in Decision-Making (Shura):

Islam encourages the principle of shura (consultation) in all matters, including family decisions. The Quran urges Muslims to deliberate and consult in their affairs, particularly on family issues, promoting shared decision-making between spouses (Quran, 3:159).

Although some Sudanese families incorporate consultation, male authority often dominates family decision-making. This disparity contrasts with Islamic principles, which promote shared decision-making and equal participation (Badri, 2008: 83).

Flexibility in Roles:

Islam promotes flexibility in roles, allowing women to participate in various social and economic fields, provided they adhere to Islamic values of modesty.

While Islam encourages role flexibility, cultural practices in Sudan can impose restrictions on women, leading to a gap between Islamic principles and their local application. In some regions, women remain confined to traditional views of their roles within the family and society (Sudanese Studies Journal, 1999: 77).

Limited Economic Opportunities in Some Areas:

Islam encourages the empowerment of women in various economic fields, including entrepreneurship and participation in the labor market.

Sudanese Families: Despite Islamic guarantees of women's economic rights, cultural realities in some regions impose limitations on women's economic opportunities, particularly in rural areas, where local customs favor women remaining at home and focusing on child-rearing and household management (El-Sayed, 2007: 32).

Perception of Family Roles:

Islam promotes the recognition of the importance of both men and women in enhancing family stability. Child-rearing and family organization are viewed as a shared partnership between spouses, each supporting the other in parenting and home care.

In some Sudanese family cultures, a stronger emphasis is placed on the man's role as the primary provider, while the woman's role is often confined to child-rearing and managing the household. This perception limits women's active participation in social and economic life outside the home (El-Sayed, 2007: 32).

The relationship between Sudanese culture and Islamic teachings regarding gender roles is complex and multifaceted. While there are clear similarities in principles such as role complementarity, mutual respect, and the encouragement of women's education and economic participation, local cultural practices often impose restrictions on women that may conflict with Islamic teachings. In rural areas, these traditions may place women in more subordinate roles, limiting their opportunities in the workforce and decision-making processes.

However, recent changes in Sudanese society, particularly in education and awareness of women's rights, have begun to address these disparities. The inclusion of prominent Sudanese women in educational curricula, for example, has raised awareness of women's historical contributions and the importance of their rights in society. These transformations hold the potential to narrow the gap between gender relations in Sudanese culture and those prescribed by Islamic law, leading to more equitable and balanced relationships.

Thus, the third research question has been answered, and the study's objective of identifying the similarities and differences between gender relations in Sudanese families and the Islamic foundations of gender relations has been achieved.

10. The Study Results:

Islam guarantees equality between men and women in terms of rights and duties, emphasizing fairness and justice in all aspects of life.

Gender relations within Sudanese families result from a complex interplay of cultural, economic, and social factors, all of which shape the roles and status of men and women.

Despite the alignment between Sudanese culture and Islamic principles regarding role integration and equality, local customs and traditions—especially in rural areas—can impact the status of women, often placing them at a disadvantage compared to men.

11. Recommendations:

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations are made:

Religious institutions should actively promote Islamic concepts of gender equality by organizing lectures, religious workshops.

Educational institutions and research centers should conduct further studies to analyze the impact of cultural and social factors on family dynamics.

The government and non-governmental organizations should collaborate to implement awareness campaigns targeting rural communities. These campaigns should focus on the importance of women's roles in society.

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